Moments of Seeing: Woolf, Lewis, and Modernist Exteriority

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Moments of Seeing: Woolf, Lewis, and Modernist Exteriority

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty

of the

McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

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By

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Moments of Seeing: Woolf, Lewis, and Modernist Exteriority

Doctor of Philosophy in English

May 5, 2005

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Preface

The idea for this dissertation began to take shape with an essay that I wrote for a journal called *Interdisciplinary Humanities* (16.1) and that was based on my first serious exposure to Woolf, Lewis, and modernist aesthetics in the summer of 1997. I attended a seminar on British modernism at Cambridge that included an intensive study of the London art scene in the years before World War I, and I could not get the paintings and literature out of my head. This experience was followed by an NEH grant for more modernist study at Reed College in Portland, Oregon in the summer of 1999. When the opportunity of a full-year sabbatical presented itself in 2001, I jumped at it and returned to graduate school with a new focus and renewed energy.

This is where the Duquesne University English Department entered the picture. I will never be able to express adequately my gratitude for the interest in me and my work, the friendship of fellow students and faculty, and the revitalization of my career that the Duquesne English Department has given me. I am especially grateful to my dissertation director, Dr. Linda Kinnahan, for her thoughtful guidance and support, and I deeply appreciate the help and advice I received throughout the examination and dissertation process from Dr. Wallace Watson, Dr. Dan Watkins, and especially Dr. Magali Cornier Michael, who was the first to encourage me to apply for the graduate program.

I also have received much encouragement and support from my colleagues in the English Department at Shady Side Academy, my loving sister, Karen Vincent, and my wife Liz, son Chet, and daughter Leslie. I could not have completed this project without their unfailing faith in me. Finally, I would like to dedicate this project to the memory of my beloved brother, Raymond Leo Vincent, Jr., whose love for the arts was an inspiration to me and many others.
Introduction

This study investigates the role of exteriority in a reconciliation of Bergsonian subjectivity with the valorization of the object in modernism, which often seem to be at odds with one another. Such a reconciliation involves the resolution of a commonly perceived point of contention between the work of Virginia Woolf and Wyndham Lewis: the notion that Woolf’s famous “moments of being” are utterly at odds with Lewis’s famous “philosophy of the eye” and that the well-documented modernist “discovery” of the interior irrevocably divides the aesthetics and artistry of these two modernist giants. Chapter One traces the transition of the subject/object relationship from romanticism to modernism, revealing how a major perceptual shift from the romantic emphasis on sympathetic identification with the object to the modernist empathetic identification with it underscored the visual aesthetic of modernism that was central to the period as well as to the work of Woolf and Lewis. Chapter Two demonstrates how, through the influence of Bergson, Moore, and Roger Fry in particular, the early work of Woolf and Lewis shares an interest in the privileging of the visual over the verbal, the use of formalist techniques, and a deep fascination with the strangeness of the object.

Focusing on Cézanne’s concept of réalisation that was so central to Fry and his followers, Chapter Three explores the ways in which the work of Woolf and Lewis is closely connected to Cézanne’s attempt to “realize” optic awareness of the object and perceptual awareness of it at the same time. This places both writers closer to a subjective position that stresses the imagination’s powerful capacity to transform the immanent realm rather than identify with it, which Lewis felt was the worst influence of
Bergsonian subjectivity on modernity itself. Finally, Chapter Four reveals that, although both Woolf and Lewis continued to view the object as an essential restorative for the verbal, after 1913 they and the circles they moved in went their separate ways in the application of a common set of influences, adopting vastly different views on aesthetic, social, and political issues. T.E. Hulme’s version of anti-vitalism, for instance, took Lewis’s interest in the object in a different direction from Woolf, who more and more influenced by Bloomsbury pacifism and feminist issues between the Wars. And the influence of Ezra Pound, right-wing politics and WWI, not to mention misogyny, homophobia, and class resentment, definitely separate Lewis from Woolf and Bloomsbury. If it is true, then, that the visual freshens up subjective experience with the immanent realm, along with what Fredric Jameson has called the “automatic meaning-effects of the stale verbal conventions of the cultural symbolic order” (74), the final question of Chapter Four becomes, “Freshens them up to what?” The attempt to locate some common ground in the aesthetics of Woolf and Lewis provides not only a greater understanding of their respective careers but a greater understanding of the points of cooperation, collaboration, and conflict that occurred within a remarkably small collection of creative and intellectual talent associated with British modernism.

Despite the differences that distinguish the personal lives and careers of Woolf and Lewis, for both of them the object, the visual image, or what this study calls exteriority, retains the power to “make it new,” a phrase often associated with the modernist project, but with an important difference in this case. Pound’s imagism emphasizes the strict avoidance of all clichéd expressions and calls for the substitution of concrete images for verbal narrative. Woolf and Lewis, on the other hand, create and make use of a tension
between clichéd verbal narrative and the visual image that disrupts the verbal. The reader (and viewer in the case of Lewis’s visual art) is made aware of the presence of both, and the resulting effect is a dialogical relationship between visual image and verbal convention, in contrast to Pound’s attempt to use the image to move beyond earlier verbal representations. Woolf and Lewis join other modernists in their interest in the perceptual freshness to be found in the object, but they are both distinguished by what Jameson calls “the thoroughly relativized position of the painter” (126), which is located more between the verbal and visual, seeking to establish a clear and unambiguous space for itself, but always aware of the vexed nature of such a position. This aesthetic position finds much of its origins for both Woolf and Lewis in G.E. Moore’s insistence on the ontological separation of the object from consciousness and in the growing modernist opposition to turn-of-the-century idealism found in F.H. Bradley’s basic contention that the object is contained in the subject. In contrast to Bradley, Moore’s separation of object from subject had an enormous influence on the aesthetics and artistic production of Bloomsbury, and this study attempts to show that the entire period was deeply influenced by Moore’s thought, which, as Douglas Mao points out, “begins with a sense of the sheer strangeness of the object world” (53). Such strangeness serves to reinvigorate, to defamiliarize, to restore or replace the verbal conventions or cultural dead wood of an earlier era, which, for both Woolf and Lewis, was the Victorian past, even though Lewis often criticized Bloomsbury for what he believed was their continuance of it. The past, however, plays an important role in the verbal/visual relationship, since an acute awareness of the past is necessary for an understanding of how the verbal/visual relationship is reinventing it.
What distinguishes this study from other scholarly considerations is its bringing together of two such different figures as Woolf and Lewis in their deep understanding of the relationship between the visual and the verbal, thereby establishing a deeper connection between the sister arts of painting and writing that were in such great dialogue in the first three decades of the twentieth century. Scholarship concerned with this dialogue has traditionally focused primarily on 1) the influence of various painters and/or artistic movements on writers and poets, 2) comparative analysis of particular paintings and texts, and 3) the controversy over “pure” art versus “kitsch” or art that has been invaded by language. The first two can be seen in the tradition of Oskar Walzel and Heinrich Wolfflin (both born in 1864), initiators of interartistic periodization, while the third can be traced to twentieth-century critics such as Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried, whose primary aim was to erect a firewall between the arts of vision and those of language. More recent critical investigation of the textual nature of all human experience renders much of the “purity” argument futile, but such arguments are characteristic of the modernist period and are helpful in understanding that “abstract” art represents a particular strand of post-impressionism and not modern art in general, which is often assumed to be the case. Greenberg’s and Fried’s concerns over visual purity do not reflect the views of many modernists, who considered total non-representation to be a futile attempt to transcend what Alan Robinson has called the “indispensable element [of the] empathetic perceptual relationship”(133) with nature. Robinson believes that this empathetic perceptual approach underscores such diverse movements as futurism, German expressionism, imagism, vorticism, and the Bloomsbury group among others. Gertrude Stein, for instance, disliked the idealist positioning of purely abstract art, calling
it “pornographic”; and Lewis himself expressed a dislike for total abstraction, even though he produced some of the earliest abstract paintings of any English painter. This study concerns itself with the modernist aesthetic strand that positions the work of art as both a sign of the thing-world and as a part of the thing-world. As Stein maintains, following Cézanne’s and Picasso’s attempts to “preserve the picture plane,” the key tension of such an aesthetic is between the representational and non-representational features of the medium. Rather than following Apollinaire’s lead toward pure abstraction in “The Cubist Painters” (1913), this study follows Matisse’s lead toward expressive realism in “Notes of a Painter” (1908).

Gilles Deleuze has pointed out that difficulties always occur when an attempt is made to subsume a number of representations under some unified discourse. This study does not try to create such a discourse; rather, it draws from the work of a variety of recent critics who have perceived a relationship between verbal and visual texts. Such work includes Marjorie Perloff’s argument for an antisymbolist modernism that calls for the centrality of the image, and the verbal/visual explorations of Jacqueline Vaught Brogan, Henry M. Sayre, William Marling, Bram Dijkstra, Daniel Schwarz, Wendy Steiner, Glen Macleod, and Art Berman. In addition to these recent critics, a key work for this study is W.J.T. Mitchell’s *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (1994). Mitchell’s distinction between the traditional comparative method of discussing the relationship between verbal and visual texts and what he calls “image/text” is an important one, since its basic premise is that all media are mixed media. Beginning with the notion that, “[I]f it is hard to keep discourse out of a painting, it is equally hard to keep visuality out of literature” (99), Mitchell moves beyond the familiar “sister arts”
model of criticism, with what he describes as its standard dualisms of “spatial and
temporal,” “iconic and symbolic,” or “verbal and visual.” While such an approach might
reveal, as Wendy Steiner points out, the “aesthetic norms” (18) of a period, Mitchell
believes the comparative method is ultimately unexciting because it merely serves to
confirm aesthetic, conceptual, and historical models that already exist in the disciplines
undergoing comparison. Instead of asking what the differences and similarities are
between a given set of images and words, Mitchell asks what difference the differences
and similarities make (91). Rather than the site of comparison, Mitchell argues that the
“image-text relation. . . is not merely a technical question, but a site of conflict, a nexus
where political, institutional, and social antagonisms play themselves out in the
materiality of representation” (91). Mitchell’s starting point is to view all texts as entities
that are thoroughly saturated with verbal and visual representations, and the critical task
is to reveal “in the name of what values” (97) the tension between them occurs.

Mitchell’s image/text approach is particularly valuable to the verbal/visual
relationship that characterizes the work of Woolf and Lewis, both in their mutual desire
to renew the verbal with the disruptive power of the visual and to position subjectivity
between the verbal and the visual, creating a dialogical relationship that refuses to
subsume one entirely within the other. Comparing a painting by Lewis with one of his
novels is certainly interesting, but exploring the interrelationship of image/text within a
single painting or novel can be more valuable in revealing Lewis’s deep desire to use the
visual to reinvent the verbal. Similarly, when Woolf employs the perspective of a
character to paint a word picture of a familiar scene, as in the story “Mrs. Dalloway in
Bond Street,” for instance, the impulse to regard the scene as what Lewis described quite
literally as a “picture” (TWM 383) is evident as Clarissa Dalloway wanders through Picadilly Square, framing various scenes with her attention and creating what Robinson describes as an “empathetic perceptual relationship” (133) with them. Panthea Reid points out that Woolf’s artistry reveals a deep interest in an alternative to realism that Reid calls “essentialism” (469). Rather than locating a universal objective truth behind phenomenal experience, Woolf’s essentialism is partly expressive. Reid points out that for both Roger Fry and Virginia Woolf, “[a]rt expresses (Fry) spiritual and (Woolf) imaginative forms that are not imported but are created by those experiences” (469). The painter or writer intercedes between nature and art to “reshape or create essences not immediately comprehensible in nature” (469). The term “essence” in this context refers to the relationship established between the subjective consciousness and the object rather than the presence of an essential objective reality that exists independently of empathetic projection.

At first glance, the belief in a reality “beyond, behind, above, or around existence” (469) would seem to run counter to an emphasis on exteriority; but, as Reid explains, “In essentialist art, pattern (not accurate rendering of the subject) can organize a painting. And pattern (not conventional ordering mechanisms such as plot) in a novel can be appreciated independently of subject, meaning, and such emphatic emotions as pity, pleasure, and fear” (469-470). Woolf’s essentialism, like Lewis’s picture, is not realism entirely, nor is it expressionism entirely; rather, it is a combination of the two in which a visual pattern is created that organizes the subject in ways that form dynamic essences from the interaction of the subjective imagination with the object world. Woolf’s and Lewis’s writing, then, relies heavily on the exterior to express a powerful subjective
essentialism; and, in turn, this essentialism is reshaped according to an exterior that continually renews it. The idea of the essential at play here is not the Bergsonian collapse of subject into object but the conscious use of the difference between them to reshape and renew existence through acts of imaginative creation.

Following Chapter One of this study, in which I examine the broad aesthetic and philosophical background of modernism, I turn in Chapter Two to the key influence on Woolf and Lewis of Bloomsbury friend and mentor Roger Fry and an important set of experiments in visual art that Fry dubbed “post-impressionism.” Cézanne’s rejection of the “illusionary” techniques of perspective and nineteenth-century realism as well as impressionist preoccupations with the ephemeral quality of light, ushered in a new preoccupation with form that served as the basis of a series of formalist theories that Fry created to support his Mooreian fascination with the object. These included “significant form” on which he collaborated with Bloomsbury friend Clive Bell, “creative vision,” and “psychological volumes,” based on the work of French critic Charles Mauron. Central to all three of Fry’s formalist theories is Cézanne’s attempt to create visual art that “preserves the picture plane” by setting up a tension between representation and an awareness of the medium used to create it.

In England, the relationship between the verbal and visual was a topic of frequent concern among members of Bloomsbury, and a number of critics (Christopher Reed, J.K. Johnstone, David Dowling, Allen McLaurin, John Hawley Roberts) have discussed the influence of Roger Fry and Clive Bell’s development of “significant form” on Woolf’s prose. Fry’s influence on Woolf is complex but undeniable, and his influence on Lewis is even more complex, given the fact that Lewis singled out Fry for particular abuse for
years after his split with Fry and Bloomsbury. Nevertheless, Lewis was an early convert to Fry, just as he was an early convert to Bergson. Eventual opposition does not preclude the acquisition of a number of important aesthetic beliefs and practices, even though such connections with Bloomsbury and Bergson were ones, as Mao points out, that Lewis “would scarcely have cared to acknowledge” (136). Some key works examined in Chapter Two include various passages from the early fiction of Woolf and Lewis, especially Woolf’s first novel *The Voyage Out* (1915) and first collection of short stories *Monday or Tuesday* (1921) and Lewis’s first novel *Tarr* (1918) as well as his vorticist journal *Blast* (1914-1915).

In Chapter Three I provide a detailed examination of numerous texts by Woolf and Lewis that illustrate their use of supplemental mimesis (or “forceful” subjectivity) that comes closer to Cézanne’s concept of *réalisation* than it does to Bergson’s *la durée*. Calling stream-of-consciousness writing “the stream of unconsciousness” (388), Lewis warns that this flow of sensation fails to acknowledge the role of memory in giving “depth and fullness to our present” (383). Drawing directly from Cézanne’s concept of “realization” (without acknowledging it, of course), which was so important to the cubists, Lewis makes the case for what he calls the “philosophy of the eye” in which the object is both seen with the eye and perceived via memory at the same time. Both of these functions are necessary to “realize” an object. Lewis’s unacknowledged but unmistakable allusion to Cézanne’s *réalisation* is important in connecting his view of exteriority to that of Woolf. Given his dislike for Fry, one might assume that Lewis would go out of his way to distance himself from any hint of association with the painter whom Fry spent his entire career promoting--so much so, that, as Woolf recalls in her
biography of Fry, the newspapers ridiculed him for preaching the religion of “Cézannah” (*Roger Fry* 156).

For Woolf, Fry’s influence, far from destroying the object as a “spatial and static thing,” stressed instead the difference between the mind and the object. Early in his “Essay of Aesthetics” (1909), he asserts that artistic appreciation and life are separate and that the artist’s role is to “adequately discover the emotional elements in natural form” (*Vision and Design* 39). Rather than losing the spatial and static nature of the object in favor of temporal flux, Fry’s aesthetic position, as David Dowling points out, “seems to involve a struggle for the artist to mediate between us and the physical predicament rather than, in Bell’s terms, to escape the immediate for the ‘real’” (15). Even as late as his most skillful work of criticism, *Cézanne* (1927), Fry was still stressing the central quality of Cézanne’s paintings as one of realizing in objects both the presence of human memory and the mystery of the thingness of the object itself. Dowling points to three key ways in which Fry’s aesthetics deeply influenced Woolf’s artistic production: 1) it may account for her numerous trips to museums and archeological sites on the continent, 2) in her engagement with the theoretical publications of Fry and Bell, Woolf sided more with the empathetic position of Fry than with the idealist position of Bell, and 3) the many discussions of art and literature she had with Fry, especially in the key years of 1916 to 1920, parallel her movement away from the rather conventional style (with some notable exceptions) of *The Voyage Out* (1916) and *Night and Day* (1919) and toward the decidedly painterly and experimental style of the post-impressionist influenced shorter fiction collected in *Monday or Tuesday* (1921). Featured works of Woolf in this chapter include “Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street” (1922), *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), and the series of
Dalloway stories Woolf wrote between 1922 and 1927 that exemplify Woolf’s use of the visual. Featured works of Lewis include *Time and Western Man* (1927), *The Wild Body* (1927), and *The Apes of God* (1930).

Concluding this study with a discussion of Mitchell’s concept of “image/text” and its relevance to Woolf and Lewis, Chapter Four explores Woolf’s and Lewis’s work in the 1930s when what Vincent Sherry calls the modernist “aesthetic of visual privilege” (188) comes into contact with social, economic, and political forces that will plunge the world into an inferno by 1939. Chapter Four examines some of the political uses of visual privilege from the opposite vantage points of two of its most important practitioners. Woolf and Lewis, although they personally disliked each other and had little in common, shared the belief that perceptual experience contained no absolute value and the hope that the imagination still had the power to transform human existence in the face of a twentieth-century that, in spite of its social and technological advancements, had seen little but war since 1914. This study explores the vastly different directions Woolf and Lewis took in response to the social and political conflicts of the first half of the twentieth century after experiencing a remarkably similar set of philosophical, aesthetic, artistic, and social influences.
I. Chapter Overview

The problem of the relationship between the mind and the object is as longstanding and complex as it is central to the history of English criticism since the early eighteenth century, when centuries of religious dogma began to give way to naturalism and its primary instrument, empirical investigation. Rather than representing a break with traditional English criticism, modernism continued to search for a response to empiricism, which, in its function of scientific methodology, has historically not been perceived as concerning itself with humanistic issues of value and meaning. Following earlier attempts to reconcile interior longings for significance and transcendence with external empirical reality, modernists struggled to establish a valid interplay of mind and object but rejected in turn the neoclassic emphasis on “sensibility,” the romantic authorization of the “imagination,” and the Victorian valorization of realism as failed
attempts to create a sympathetic identification with the object that stressed an interior response to exterior stimuli in which the mind responded to the inspirational qualities of the object rather than imbuing the object with the qualities of the mind. The shift toward empathetic identification, in which, unlike sympathetic identification, the object contains no inherent meaning or significance other than that which the mind projects onto it, represented a psychological turn that ushered in modernism, which, along with an exponential expansion of technology and mass culture, was characterized by the notion that, as Art Berman points out, “life can no longer have meaning; it can only produce meaning” (46). Berman and other recent critics, such as Peter McCormick (1990) and Stephen Halliwell (2000), have re-examined the background of modernist aesthetics, positioning the modernist problem of representation squarely between sympathetic and empathetic identification. As McCormick points out, drawing on the work of Arthur Danto’s 1964 essay “The Art World,” representation relies on the “problems not only with the notion of interpretation but with its uses in reading history”(4). The history of modernist aesthetics, then, involves the complexities of the subject/object relationship, which as McCormick points out further, constitutes the central problem of modernist aesthetic investigation:

Whether we talk of languages, pictures, ideas, or beliefs, every representation has two sides, one as an ordinary thing in the world and the other as an icon of the world. So representations seem to be both inside the world and outside it. (3, emphasis in text)

Faced with this epistemological problem of whether the mind receives meaning or creates it, the modernist relationship with the object was complicated by the question of
whether the mind and the object maintained an intuitive symbiotic relationship as in the 
Bergsonian notion of “flux” or whether they were irreconcilably separate as in the 
Mooreian rejection of idealism. The tension between these two forms of subjectivity was 
central to the Bloomsbury aesthetic project and its circle of influence, which included, 
through the efforts of Vanessa Bell in particular, a wide array of artists, writers, and 
thinkers who embodied British modernism. This circle of influence included Wyndham 
Lewis, in spite of his many attempts to deny it and vanquish all those whom he perceived 
as artistic rivals. In a number of ways, Virginia Woolf and Wyndham Lewis represent 
opposite poles of British modernism, but a close look at their common influences, and 
their artistic and aesthetic relationship with the object, can help to establish an important 
and useful focal point for the British modernism to which they belonged before 
examining a number of their most important works in subsequent chapters.

II. The Rise of Empiricism

For many British modernists, like the romantics before them, empiricism posed a 
particular problem because, as the methodological engine of naturalism, it is not 
necessarily concerned with value and meaning. Much of the romantic project had been 
concerned with trying to reconcile naturalism with transcendentalism by searching for a 
way to respond to empiricism. Berman’s work (1989) explores the romantics’ concern 
with “meaning” over “knowledge” that dominated neoclassicism. The romantics 
tried to derive value and meaning from nature, and this was carried out through a 
preoccupation with nature and the meaning to be found in specific objects in nature.
This romantic investment in idealism on one hand, and vitality in nature on the other, grew increasingly difficult to sustain by the second half of the nineteenth century. Recent work on the roots of modernist aesthetic issues has focused on what McCormick calls the “seminal period” (34) of the eighteenth century, since it was during this period that a central question emerged concerning “just how aesthetic judgments are to be understood, whether in terms of a peculiar species of objects or of a peculiar species of perception” (McCormick 36). Halliwell’s work (2000) that explores the historical evolution of mimesis concludes with a discussion of the romantic challenge to traditional notions about “imitation of nature.” Halliwell argues that the celebrated romantic renunciation of mimesis was “reinterpretation and transformation rather than sheer repudiation” (360). Terry Eagleton (1990) underscores this point in his discussion of Hegel’s hesitation in rejecting the power of nature over subjective consciousness:

His [Hegel’s idealism] is at best a mere half-virility, able to conceive thought itself as active but then sundering it from its masterful appropriation of the object. Kant’s bounds, prohibiting that impious coupling of subject and object for which Hegel’s dialectical programme will clamour. His system is feebly androgynous, active in respect sentimentally ensnared in empiricism. (127)

As Eagleton suggests, the romantics struggled to reconcile their desire for subjective power over the object with their need to view empirical reality as separate from the mind’s creative capacity. John Fekete’s account (1977) of the mid-nineteenth century “split between the spheres of the material production and reproduction of life” (5) points to the central tension between what Fekete describes as “the social progress of empirical
‘civilization,’ and the sphere of ‘culture,’ of secondary objectifications and abilities, of cultivated values. . .”(5).

By then, empiricism had driven a deep wedge between two key ideals closely connected to the romantic synthesis of the concrete and universal. The first of these is the spirit of scientific naturalism, which found such thinkers as Darwin, Huxley, Mill, Macauley, and Spencer adhering to the material well-being, scientific development, and intellectual independence they saw as the legacy of Renaissance naturalism and Enlightenment rationalism.

The second romantic ideal closely connected to the synthesis of the concrete and universal is the spirit of classical humanism, which found such thinkers as Carlyle, Ruskin, Newman, Arnold, Pater, Symonds, and Swinburne adhering to the moral sensibility, imaginative scope, and emotional harmony they saw as the legacy of Renaissance humanism and Enlightenment individualism. With most of the romantics dead by the 1840s, the various methods by which they intended to mingle concrete particulars with universal forms had for the most part gone with them. Such concepts as Hazlitt’s “sympathetic identification,” Wordsworth’s “tranquilized emotions,” Keats’s “negative capability,” and Coleridge’s “willing suspension of disbelief” held less sway in the Victorian urban and industrial cauldron of glaring contrasts. Facile and far-reaching aesthetic solutions, no matter how brilliantly constructed, seemed to pale when faced with the seemingly irresolvable polarities of modernity, such as wealth vs. poverty, faith vs. science, authority vs. autonomy, and culture vs. philistinism. This topic has been treated
thoroughly in such works as Georg Lukacs’s discussion of the emergence of capitalism in “Class Consciousness” (1920), Horkheimer and Adorno’s discussion of industrialism and mass culture in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944), Raymond Williams’s tracing of what he calls the three modern revolutions--industrial, democratic, and cultural--in *The Long Revolution* (1961), and the more recent work of Fekete, Berman, and others. Darwin’s theory of evolution and other positive doctrines had weakened the hold of German idealism, belief in God had reached an all-time low, world economic depression in 1839 had raised doubts about industrialism, and the rise of democracy and mass culture had brought an undigestible mixture of hopes, fears, and aspirations. Some compromise between the twin claims of scientific authority and humanist autonomy seemed possible only if an acceptable middle ground could be established between these two deeply entrenched strains of thought.

Such a middle ground can clearly be seen in the romantic emphasis on impressionism, which, especially in England, stressed the importance of emotion, imaginative transport, and sympathetic reaction alongside the neoclassic emphasis on knowledge, experience, and exemplary models. By the second half of the eighteenth century, the influence of Shakespeare and other English dramatists, the patriotic liberalism of Dryden in particular, and the popularity of the Longinian concept of the “sublime” had fostered a deep interest in the psychological qualities necessary for the acquisition of “sensibilities” of particular relevance to England’s negotiation between the growth of a scientific spirit and a Platonic stress on the nature of poetic truth. Of particular value to this discussion are Joseph Wittreich’s anthologies of romantic responses to Milton and Blake (both from 1970), in which, as Wittreich points out, “[p]oetic creation, for these critics, is the fullest
activity of the mind” (Milton 9); and the romantics’ admiration for Milton, for instance, originated in their desire to counter the growing power and influence of empiricism. Robert Williams (2004) offers a current critical discussion of the importance of Platonic idealism for the romantic attempt to create a utopian rationalism that could offset scientific rationalism. The romantic interest in psychology can be seen, for instance, in the romantic preference for the only two of Longinus’s five qualities of the sublime that stress innate abilities: elevation of the mind and vehement and inspired passion. The remaining three--figurative language, noble diction, and elevated arrangement of words--stress learned behaviors and fall neatly within a neoclassical framework of tradition, balance, and proportion. The romantic shift from mimetic to subjective and expressive criticism and artistic practice, its recognition of psychological forces at work within the individual artist, and its emphasis on impressionistic experience, while failing to satisfactorily connect empiricism with idealism, did succeed in firmly establishing a home for human perception within the subjective psychological construct of the individual mind.

The use of empirical psychology to enlist the help of art in uniting naturalism and transcendentalism through various functions of the “imagination” was being adopted in England as early as Addison’s Spectator series, The Pleasures of the Imagination (1712), which expresses a deep interest in the psychology of art. W.J. Bate (1952), David Richter (1989), and others have pointed out that “[t]his use of psychology to throw light upon the nature of art was almost solely the product of England” (Bate 273). In fact, as this study will explore, English interest in descriptive psychological criticism, after a hiatus during the early Victorian preoccupation with morals, returned from the Continent
with a new concept--intuition--to usher in British modernism. For Addison, however, psychological theory focused on the primary and secondary pleasures of the imagination, whose source was found in the mind’s gratifying encounter with three key aesthetic qualities: 1) sublimity or “greatness,” 2) the new or uncommon, and 3) beauty. All three of these qualities are categorized further in terms of their pleasure-giving capacities and, significantly, both primary and secondary pleasures involve concrete objects and images. The imagination’s primary pleasure is to see objects and images directly. Optic pleasure is privileged as the most immediate, most intense, and most profound psychological reaction. The imagination’s secondary pleasure is to rethink and rearrange objects and images into new and startling combinations. Here optic pleasure is still privileged but at a remove. The mind reacts to objects based on its own biases and standards of taste, and the resultant distortions tend to dilute the immediate optic pleasure of seeing an object directly.

III. Sympathetic Identification

Despite its secondary status, however, the pleasure of rethinking and rearranging objects and images was important not only for Addison, who viewed such mental activity as a central factor in the establishment of taste, but for David Hartley’s highly influential psychological system from 1749, the “association of ideas.” As the central psychological instrument, the imagination was viewed as possessing the ability to compare an imitation with its original, which allowed for varying degrees of aesthetic judgment, based on one’s experience and/or refinement of sensibilities. But, for Hartley, the imagination was also stimulated by the power of suggestion, combining various verbal and non-verbal
elements of a delivered speech, for instance, to create a unified impression. This “creative” function of the imagination could do much more, then, than merely arrange objects and images into new combinations; it could blend such combinations in such a way that something entirely new emerged. For Addison, the imagination reacted to objects in the sense that the mind responded in rather predictable ways when confronted with greatness, beauty, etc. For Hartley and later eighteenth-century critics, such as Hazlitt, Wordsworth, and Coleridge, an intense awareness of an object arose not from a simple psychological reaction to it but from a profound psychological and emotional identification with it. This connection to concrete reality, with its attendant distrust of abstraction, celebration of the object, and preference for emotional immediacy, began to shift the neoclassical emphasis on “decorum,” “propriety,” and “judgment” toward the romantic privileging of “sympathy” as a central quality of the imagination. In fact, as the recent work of Jennifer Ford (1998) points out, Coleridge’s eventual rejection of Hartley’s associations theory was on the basis that, in merely making associations, the mind was not active enough in its encounter with the object (17).

For Hazlitt in particular, sympathy involved an intense emotional excitement, an absorption in the object that he described as the psychological state of “gusto.” When one is experiencing gusto, all the senses become unified as the imagination’s synthesizing power operates on an association of ideas or in sympathetic identification with an object, which means that the imagination goes beyond Hartley’s fusion of ideas to a fusion of the mind with the object of its consideration. For Hazlitt, the power of the object to seize the imagination kept the focus on the external but empowered the imagination more than in Hartley’s associations. W.P. Albrecht (1965), John Mahoney
(1981), and more recently Uttara Natarajan (1998), have stressed Hazlitt’s emphasis on the imagination’s sympathy with the external for the function of what Albrecht describes as a “perceptive ‘sympathy,’ or loss of self [that] extends even to inanimate objects” (78). Natarajan goes further by revealing how Hazlitt moves beyond Hartley’s association theory, in which the “associative process of the mind is utterly dependent on the sense impressions that impinge upon it, so that all mental operations. . . are given an external origin, and the mind is denied innate power. . . “(54). For Hazlitt, “[t]he imagination ‘moulds’ the works of nature, ‘informing them with life and sympathy,’ where ‘sympathy’ denotes the associative process through which the imagining mind achieves unity by drawing external nature into itself” (54). Rather than allowing the imagination merely to react to the qualities of an object, which maintains a separation between the imagination and the object, gusto involved the relinquishing of the imagination to the object, a loss of self in order to fully experience something outside the self. Despite the “impressionistic” psychological nature of the experience, both the primary and secondary pleasures of the imagination are located in objective reality. For Hazlitt, sympathy was the basis not only of aesthetic sensibility but of morality itself, since moral life begins with the ability to imagine oneself in the situation of another.

This emphasis on the exterior seems somewhat counter to Hazlitt’s reputation as perhaps the most representative critic in English romanticism. Ironically, as Natarajan suggests, the “drawing in” of external nature to the mind in sympathy with it does not mean the relinquishing of the exterior in favor of the interior, which Hazlitt viewed as the central shortcoming of romanticism. While interested in the ways in which the mind and emotions respond to objective reality, Hazlitt was opposed to mere outpourings of “self-
expression.” In his essay, “On Shakespeare and Milton” (1818), for instance, he begins by describing the central quality of Shakespeare’s genius as an ability to project himself into other times, places, and people seemingly at will:

The striking peculiarity of Shakespeare’s mind was its generic quality, its power of communication with all other minds—so that it contained a universe of thought and feeling within itself, and had no one particular bias, or exclusive excellence more than another. He was just like any other man, but that he was like all other men. He was the least of an egotist that it was possible to be. He was nothing in himself; but he was all that others were, or that they could become. (113)

This quality of sympathetic identification in Shakespeare is central to Keats’s “negative capability,” in which Shakespeare’s innate universality is expanded into a central quality of all poets: “As to the poetical character itself. . . it is not itself—it has no self—it is everything and nothing—It has no character—it enjoys light and shade; it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated—It has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen” (172).

In addition to Keats’s use of Hazlitt’s “gusto,” there are a number of recent critical discussions of Coleridge’s continuation of Hazlitt’s interest in sympathizing with the object rather than passively reorganizing external stimuli as in Hartley’s associations theory. A chapter entitled “The Struggle with Associationism” in K.M. Wheeler’s The Creative Mind in Coleridge’s Poetry (1981) thoroughly explores Coleridge’s long “reluctance to renounce Hartley” (2). Wheeler provides a full account of the difficulties Coleridge underwent before declaring in 1801 that “‘any system built on the passiveness of mind must be false, as a system. . .’” (Quoted in Wheeler 15). David Vallins’s
Coleridge and the Psychology of Romanticism (2000), especially his section called “The Inside and the Outside,” explores what Vallins describes as Coleridge’s interest in “surmounting . . . the oppositions between matter and mind. . .” (40). And Terry Eagleton’s chapter, “The Kantian Imaginary” in The Ideology of the Aesthetic (1990) offers a balanced view of the romantic desire for a sympathetic identification with the object:

It is fortunate that the world’s diversity should seem so obediently commensurate with the mind’s powers; so that in the very act of revelling in this apparent prearranged harmony, in this well-nigh miraculous doubling of the structure of the subject, we are at the same time wryly conscious of its serendipity. (89)

Eagleton’s reservations echo the modernist suspicion, which is central to this study, that the mind does much more than strongly sympathize with nature. For Hazlitt, however, whose criticism retains a strong influence of the neoclassic doctrine of “follow nature,” an adherence to the exterior is perhaps more extreme than in any other major romantic critic. In his critique of Rousseau and Wordsworth, for instance, he takes both of these romantic writers to task for locating the source of their creative inspiration too much within their own sensibilities:

Both create an interest out of nothing, or rather out of their own feelings; both weave numberless recollections into one sentiment; both wind their own being round whatever object occurs to them. (“The Character of Rousseau” 49)

For Hazlitt, both of these writers are far too self-absorbed, but at least Wordsworth “would persuade you that the most insignificant objects are interesting in themselves, because he is interested in them. . .” (49-50). Rousseau, on the other hand, represents a
worse form of self-absorption because he merely “interests you in certain objects by interesting you in himself” (49). The distinction between these displays of narcissism is minimal, but Wordsworth’s self-expression seems to place the object first, whereas Rousseau appears to place himself first, with the object relegated to a secondary, more servile position. Hazlitt’s neoclassic commitment to nature as the only legitimate source of artistic inspiration causes him again and again to see ego as “the proper object of ridicule” (“On Modern Comedy” 296); but his valorization of the concrete object, and his concomitant interest in the psychological and emotional qualities of aesthetic response, place him squarely on the fault line between exterior and interior that later will prove to be such a thorny issue for modernists. Eliot’s famous “dissociation of sensibility” argument, for instance, which views pre-Restoration poetry as an ideal balance of objective and subjective experience, can be heard in Hazlitt’s central complaint that romantic poets were leaning too far in favor of the subjective, thereby causing a split between an awareness of “nature” and what he calls, in an allusion to Wordsworth, “Moods of their own Minds” (310).

Hazlitt’s criticism contains not only an earlier argument for Eliot’s, Pound’s and especially Lewis’s classicist response to the psychological synthesis of objective and subjective experience, a response that John Kinnaird ascribes to Hazlitt’s “intersubjective” (210, emphasis in text) sense of consciousness, but also the seeds of the aesthetic of visual privilege that also include Woolf. The following extended quotation from “On Shakespeare and Milton” provides a solid base on which to carefully examine the modernist attempt to restore the authority of the object:
The great fault of a modern school of poetry is, that it is an experiment to reduce
poetry to a mere effusion of natural sensibility; or what is worse, to divest it both
of imaginary splendour and human passion, to surround the meanest objects with
the morbid feelings and devouring egotism of the writers’ own minds. Milton and
Shakespeare did not so understand poetry. They gave a more liberal
interpretation both to nature and art. They did not do all they could to get rid of
the one and the other, to fill up the dreary void with the Moods of their own
Minds. They owe their power over the human mind to their having had a deeper
sense than others of what was grand in the objects of nature, or affecting in the
events of human life. But to the men I speak of there is nothing interesting,
nothing heroical, but themselves. To them the fall of gods or of great men is the
same. They do not enter into the feeling. They cannot understand the terms.
They are even debarred from the last poor, paltry, consolation of an unmanly
triumph over fallen greatness; for their minds reject, with a convulsive effort and
intolerable loathing, the very idea that there ever was, or was thought to be,
anything superior to themselves. All that has ever excited the attention or
admiration of the world, they look upon with the most perfect indifference; and
they are surprised to find that the world repays their indifference with scorn. (Bate
310)

In the balance of external and internal, Hazlitt definitely weighs in in favor of the
external, both in nature itself and in human experience. For him, Shakespeare and Milton
both possessed an overarching sense of the grandness of objects, and they also could
single out the “affecting” events in the affairs of mankind, those events capable of
inspiring strong emotion. In both of these writers, according to Hazlitt, every sensibility on the inside was drawn toward stimuli on the outside, not the other way around. Rousseau, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, and Keats, on the other hand, were moving dangerously in the direction of drawing the grandness to be discovered in concrete reality into the “morbid feelings and devouring egotism” of their own emotional subjectivism. Sympathy required a reaching out to and not a drawing in of the object.

IV. Victorian Realism

Hazlitt’s worry that feeling would become “everything” is realized in the idealist form of romantic transcendentalism, but feeling’s ability to “reconcile” the gap between interior and exterior loses its legitimacy as the nineteenth century progresses. The influence of German idealists lessens along with confidence in metaphysics in general, including religious faith. Carlyle’s famous advice to “Close thy Byron; open thy Goethe”(Sartor Resartus 28) captures the new mood of moving beyond romantic self-absorption toward a new form of secular spirituality that draws its inspiration from the German idealism that Carlyle admired but replaces metaphysics with enlightened leadership, fulfilling work, and social realism. Gabriel Weisberg’s (ed.) collection of essays, The European Realist Tradition (1982) offers a comprehensive treatment of the background of nineteenth-century realism, and George Levin, in The Realistic Imagination (1981), points out that central to Carlyle’s work, as in that of his disciple John Ruskin, was “to reconcile empirical science with metaphysical truth (10). In Past and Present (1842), Carlyle introduces a new hero of empiricism whom he names Plugson of Undershot and endows with the moral capacity to understand (or at least
exemplify) the sacred nature of hard work and practical, communal existence. Here, empiricism can be useful--even desirable--when placed in the service of creative, personally rewarding labor. Unfortunately, far too often in the industrial cauldron of mid-century England, Carlyle saw the opposite. Empiricism had been co-opted by the utilitarianism of Mill and Bentham, and Plutus of Undershot had been enslaved by an industrial Circe whom Carlyle called “Custom” (“Sartor Resartus” 33-34). Rather than turning men into swine, this new Circe turns them into machines, mere cogs in the wheel of a mechanical age that feeds her insatiable appetite for material goods. Maurice Larkin’s chapter on the Industrial Revolution in Man and Society in Nineteenth Century Realism (1977), F.W.J. Hemmings’s (ed.) collection of essays The Age of Realism (1978), especially the chapters on romanticism and the decline of realism, and Julian Treuherz’s Hard Times: Social Realism in Victorian Art (1987) all do a thorough job of discussing the realist response to industrialism.

Drawing deeply from Carlyle’s views on society and the value of work, Ruskin created an aesthetic that was based on a sense of morality and social consciousness in art. Like his mentor, Ruskin also experienced a spiritual crisis in 1858 in which he rejected evangelical Christianity, but his particular project was to enlist art in the moral improvement of humanity, and the best way to realize this was to break with the past and deal honestly with the present. Ruskin advocated painting and writing that communicated to the new age in a language that was neither ideally beautiful nor overly subjective. He charged artists of all kinds to represent the empirical facts of nature as having an innate capacity to inspire strong feelings in and of themselves without the interpretive help of artists. This view of the natural world was quite similar to Hazlitt’s
sympathetic identification as well as the romantic view that the natural world was evidence of a divine plan in which human imagination played a key role in the realization of such a plan.

Ruskin differed from the romantics, however, in the stress he placed on the sole power of the object to excite the imagination, rather than the “gusto” that required a fusion of the interior and exterior based on the eighteenth-century “association of ideas” theory. Two key works that explore Ruskin’s visual aesthetic are Robert Hewison’s *John Ruskin: the Argument of the Eye* (1976) and Susan Phelps Gordon and Anthony L. Gully’s (eds.) *John Ruskin and the Victorian Eye* (1993). Ruskin’s influence on Victorian culture is thoroughly discussed in “A Sweet Continuance: John Ruskin’s Victorian Modernism,” Chapter Two of Jessica Feldman’s *Victorian Modernism: Pragmatism and the Varieties of Aesthetic Experience* (2002). For Ruskin, the best painters and writers rendered the natural world in all its beauty and mystery; and only the very best of these, the ones who could fully appreciate the divine plan in nature, were to be called genius:

> High art, therefore, consists neither in altering, nor in improving nature; but in seeking throughout nature for ‘whatsoever things are lovely, and whatsoever things are pure’; in loving these, in displaying to the utmost of the painter’s power such loveliness as in them, and directing the thoughts of others to them by winning art or gentle emphasis. Of the degree in which this can be done, and in which it may be permitted to gather together, without falsifying, the finest forms or thoughts, so as to create a sort of perfect vision, we shall have to speak hereafter: at present, it is enough to remember that art . . . is great in exact
proportion to the painter, provided that love of beauty forfeit no atom of truth.

(Modern Painters 168)

For Ruskin, nature and social sensibility were the perfect combination for “high art” that celebrated the beauty of the natural world and the truth of what he called the “property of statements”(165) made by humans. Unlike Keats, who famously viewed beauty and truth as interchangeable, Ruskin saw them as possible opposites and easily separated from one another. Beauty could certainly be false at times, and the truth was often ugly. High art, however, would always strive to bring beauty and truth into a close relationship, never sacrificing one for the other:

For although truth and beauty are independent of each other, it does not follow that we are at liberty to pursue whichever we please. They are indeed separable, but it is wrong to separate them; they are to be sought together in the order of their worthiness; that is to say, truth first, and beauty afterwards. High art differs from low art in possessing an excess of beauty in addition to its truth, not in possessing excess of beauty inconsistent with truth. (166)

Ruskin’s attempt to reconcile the power of the imagination with the power of empirical truth was the source of a central tension in his aesthetic between a desire for realistic representation of the object and an imaginative rendering of it. Facts themselves are realized in all their divine beauty through the descriptive and interpretive ability of the artist, and each detail must fit within some overall vision.

In Ruskin’s case, such a vision involved two key goals: 1) human beings come to understand the divine plan through an application of the right aesthetic, and 2) a deep love of, and appreciation for, empirical fact establishes a correct moral relationship
between humans and the natural world that surrounds them and is filled with object lessons for any moral or ethical issues that might arise. Unlike Arnold, who worried that the common man would run amok without the moral restraints of religious dogma, Ruskin relied on the inspirational influence of natural objects on the expressive nature of the “artisan,” who was deeply embedded in an authentic social context. His most famous example of this was the perfect synergy he saw between the unquestioning religious devotion and artistic nativism of the men who built England’s Gothic cathedrals in the Middle Ages. The particular belief system to which these men subscribed was not so important as the fact that they were true to their physical surroundings and materials as well as to the internal promptings of their collective vision. The imagination instilled empirical reality with moral and spiritual significance.

Ruskin was not alone in his shift from the romantic near dissolution of the object in favor of the interior to the re-establishment of the exterior as the true source of imaginative inspiration. The mid-nineteenth century interest in facts that underscored the positivist reaction against religion and metaphysics can clearly be seen in a number of thinkers who had a deep influence on scientific and aesthetic thought later in the century. Comte, Proudhon, Champfleury, Fromentin, Taine, Delacroix, Baudelaire, Corbet, and others followed Darwin’s lead in creating a new European intellectual and artistic environment that emphasized sense perceptions and precise logic as taking precedence over romantic notions of sensibility and expressive genius. Moshe Barasch points out, however, that the generic term “realism” that is most often used to describe this mid-century environment is extremely complicated and nearly impossible to capture in a unified statement:
One hesitates. Perhaps no other aesthetic concept is as multifaceted, and therefore as difficult to use, as is realism. In speaking of realism, one should recall, we are dealing with a general tendency, not a specific doctrine. Realism, it hardly needs stressing, means different things in different contexts. (330)

Thus, the “general tendency,” from Taine’s famous context of “race, moment, and milieu” (*History of English Literature*, 1883) to Proudhon’s context of truthfully portraying humans as they really are, “wretched, servile, ignoble, uncouth, ugly” (*Du Principe de l’art et de sa Destination Sociale*, 1865), focused on a realism that neither idealized the object nor created an object from the imagination alone; instead, the artist was viewed as particularly gifted at selecting various particulars of natural and societal reality that, when imitated just as they were, resonated both morally and aesthetically with the interior.

Rather than the romantic focus on the artist’s unique vision, then, realism tended to focus on the shared experience of a given historical period, societal trend, and/or political environment that the artist was skilled at illuminating. Such illumination involved the ability to capture the essence of the general through the evocation of it in the particular. By the late 1860s, however, a storm was brewing among a younger generation of artists and critics that would attack representational art and change the nature of the subject/object relationship (see Alison Byerly [1997] and Charles Bernheim [2002]). Sympathetic identification was giving way to the notion that the object world was inherently meaningless and that “reality” was the product of psychological projection—or empathetic identification—with the exterior. This profound shift in perception can clearly be seen in the art and criticism of Charles Baudelaire, who is often described as the father
of modernism for his relocation of the source of perception not to the imagination of the subject as in romanticism, or to the inspirational exterior as in realism, but to the actual cognition of the subject. This meant that meaning was less received from the exterior than it was projected onto it from the mind. This shift underscored the aesthetic movement from impressionism, which peaked in the 1870s and 1880s, to post-impressionism, which ushered in the aesthetics associated with modernism and its central preoccupation with the object and making it “new.”

V. Empathetic Identification and the Rise of Modernism

In Baudelaire’s poem “Epilogue,” he sees in the reality of the city the essence of beauty itself:

WITH HEART AT REST I CLIMBED the citadel’s steep height, and saw the city as from a tower, Hospital, brothel, prison, and such hells,

Where evil comes up softly like a flower.  
Thou knowest, O Satan, patron of my pain,  
Not for vain tears I went up at that hour;

But, like an old sad faithful lecher, fain  
To drink delight of that enormous trull  
Whose hellish beauty makes me young again.

Whether thou sleep, with heavy vapours full,  
Sodden with day, or, new appareled, stand  
In gold-laced veils of evening beautiful,  

I love thee, infamous city! Harlots and  
Hunted have pleasures of their own to give,  
The vulgar herd can never understand. (169)

Two key aesthetic principles are included in this poem that tend to support the widespread opinion that Baudelaire was a central figure in the establishment of
modernism. First, his preference for the “hellish beauty” of reality itself places him firmly in the mid-century camp of those who viewed unvarnished realism as a desirable perceptual goal; second, his complete reversal of what constitutes the “vulgar herd” relegates both romantic and Victorian transcendentalist theories of all kinds, and the art that accompanies them, to a herd mentality of “vulgar” escapism. Instead of transcendentalism, the mystery and wonder of stark reality alone possesses the power to refresh and renew the creative spirit. Whereas Ruskin’s selective realism was drawn to symbols of the past in such locations as Venice and Gothic cathedrals, Baudelaire selected aspects of the real that rejected lingering vestiges of spirituality in favor of an aesthetic that ignored both idealism and the need to inculcate moral beliefs and behaviors.

Following Barasch’s cautionary note about defining realism too narrowly, however, it is important to point out that Baudelaire rejected strictly representational art as “bowing down before reality” (Art in Paris 154). More than anything in his rather unsystematic criticism of literary and visual art, this position places Baudelaire at the threshold of modernism, and his investigations into the autonomous nature of art have far-reaching consequences for the future (Barasch 363). Realism is redefined as more of a relationship between the artist and the external world rather than as strict adherence to the “facts.” Barasch quotes an important article called “Philosophical Art” in which Baudelaire makes a nearly prophetic distinction between what he calls “philosophical” art and “pure” art:

What is pure art according to the modern idea? It is the creation of an evocative magic, containing at once the object and the subject, the world external to the artist
and the artist himself. What is philosophic art according to the ideas of Chenavard and the German school? It is a plastic art which sets itself up in place of books, by which I mean as a rival to the printing press in the teaching of history, morals and philosophy. (364)

In the poem “Epilogue,” evidence of Baudelaire’s notion of pure art can be seen in the deep intermingling of the internal and external that create a new reality of the city, one that contains subjective and objective elements that move beyond romantic spiritualization of the empirical as well as Victorian authorization of it to create a blend of the two that acknowledges the imagination’s role in the “evocative magic” that constitutes both art and reality itself. The narrator of “Epilogue” views the city from the “steep height” of objectivity, but he also, “like an old sad faithful lecher,” seeks immersion and loss of objectivity in order to “drink delight” of the subjectivity that “makes me young again.” The city itself is transformed into a representation of the relationship between subject and object that defines a reality that the narrator both observes and helps to create. Perceptual renewal, or being “young again,” involves the interplay of object and imagination in such a way that neither dominates the other as they do in earlier aesthetic theories in which the authority of the exterior and interior swings back and forth. Baudelaire’s particular contribution to the “modern” is his insistence that the external world is partly a product of the imagination, and this shift to “empathy” with nature instead of “sympathy” with it that had dominated aesthetic theories previously upshers in fascinating new possibilities as well as new problems and controversies.

It is significant that two such important mid-century critics--Baudelaire in France and Ruskin in England--both focused much of their energies on the art of a great romantic
painter, Delacroix for Baudelaire and Turner for Ruskin. Both painters were flattered, if slightly embarrassed, by the praise and attention heaped on them by these critics, who saw in them the seeds of a new spirit of experimentation and artistic individuality that signaled a definite break with the classicism of the past century. Ruskin was so devoted to Turner that he personally owned a total of about 300 of his paintings, and much of Ruskin’s art criticism before 1860 was written to defend Turner against attacks such as Thackeray’s, who felt that Turner’s paintings were not sufficiently representational. Much of the public felt the same way, and Ruskin made it his personal mission to change their minds. As late as the 1870s, Ruskin was still championing Turner as the greatest English painter of the century, and his famous argument with Whistler over the nature of impressionism revealed a deeper aesthetic division between two powerful critical movements and set the stage for the modernist relationship with the exterior.

Robert Williams points out that, by the 1870s, “[a] younger generation began to think that the close association of art and nature, art and morality, which was the core of Ruskin’s teaching, was just as false and oppressive as Ruskin had found the values of the Royal Academy” (167). By this time a number of new artists and critics, following Kant’s differentiation of disinterested pleasure in the beautiful from all other practical or moral concerns (Critique of Judgement, Section 1, 1790), had adopted an “art for art’s sake” position that opposes the realism and moral underpinnings of the Carlyle, Ruskin, Arnold, Newman tradition. Some of these new figures included Baudelaire, Poe in America, and Whistler, Pater, Wilde, Rossetti, and Swinburn in England. Pater’s influential Studies in the History of the Renaissance, 1873, rivals any of the heated performances of Ruskin but calls for a different relationship with the object than
Ruskin’s mid-century focus on external facts. In a lesser celebrated passage of *The Renaissance* than Pater’s histrionics about burning with a “gemlike flame” of aesthetic ecstasy, he carefully and deliberately shifts the perceptual relationship with the object away from one of sympathy toward a psychological state of empathetic identification:

At first sight experience seems to bury us under a flood of external objects, pressing upon us with a sharp and importunate reality, calling us out of ourselves in a thousand forms of action. But when reflexion begins to act upon those objects they are dissipated under its influence; the cohesive force seems suspended like a trick of magic; each object is loosed into a group of impressions—colour, odour, texture—in the mind of the observer. And if we continue to dwell in thought on this world, not of objects in the solidity with which language invests them, but of impressions unstable, flickering, inconsistent, which burn and are extinguished with our consciousness of them, it contracts still further; the whole scope of observation is dwarfed to the narrow chamber of the individual mind. Experience, already reduced to a swarm of impressions, is ringed round for each one of us by that thick wall of personality through which no real voice has ever pierced on its way to us, or from us to that which we can only conjecture to be without. Every one of those impressions is the impression of the individual in his isolation, each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream of a world.

(Bate 511)

Such “perceptual weaving and unweaving of ourselves”(511), as Pater later calls the empathetic process of the attribution of one’s reality to “unstable, flickering, inconsistent” impressions one receives from an exterior world that cannot in truth be
shared by others, recalls Baudelaire’s intermingling of the objective and subjective; but
Pater takes this a step further by reducing all experience to a “swarm of impressions” that
the mind is continually operating on to create its own “dream of a world” that in turn
creates the identity of the self within such a world. Pater’s impressionism is also
positioned in direct opposition to Ruskin’s version of impressionism, which Ruskin saw
as best exemplified in Turner’s art, in which the exterior is stable and the “impression” or
imprint it makes on the mind reaffirms the beauty, majesty, and moral compass of nature
and of the art that best represents it. Realism demanded that each object not be “loosed
into a group of impressions” but viewed in ways that “forfeit no atom of truth” (Modern
Painters 168) of observable reality. In short, impressionism was a one-way thoroughfare
from outer to inner in which the imagination was a recipient and interpreter of reality, not
a creator of it.

These two versions of impressionism came into direct confrontation when Ruskin
wrote a scathing attack on Whistler’s Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket
(1874, Plate 1). For Whistler, who had spent time in Paris and was familiar with the
symbolism of Mallarmé and Verlaine, Baudelaire’s criticism, and the impressionist
painting of Monet, Manet, Degas, and others, impressionism meant artistic autonomy and
not being tied to either naturalism or moral concerns of any kind. For Ruskin, of course,
impressionism meant an emphasis on the natural world as fundamental to human truth
and morality, which he believed should be the basis for all artistic endeavors. The
popular press, unwilling or perhaps unable to untangle the aesthetic subtleties of such
positions, billed the argument as for or against French impressionism, which was
introduced at the first impressionist exhibition in Paris in 1873. Linda Merrill points out

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that the Ruskin v. Whistler trial represented an important symbolic victory for “anti-narrative, anti-realist technique” (34). The real struggle was between various forms of realist technique, and the hegemony enjoyed by nineteenth-century strictly representational naturalism was coming to an end. Whistler’s opposition to Ruskin’s observational naturalism does not mean, then, that impressionism should be understood as non-representational art. In fact, with its emphasis on the visual “moment,” and its obsession with capturing the various qualities of light, impressionism is more accurately defined as one of a number of forms of “aspect reality” that evolved from the tendency in realism to create meaning through careful selection of subject matter. The popular view of Ruskin v. Whistler was that representation and non-representation were locked in mortal combat, but the anti-narrative, anti-realist technique of non-naturalist impressionism does not mean “abstract” art. Purely abstract, non-representational art, which is a total retreat from mimetic illusionism, is an extreme form of expressionism and pushes to its limits the anti-narrative, anti-realist notion that a visual or verbal piece of art need not be about anything other than itself (Williams 153).

In the verbal realm, the move away from strictly representational naturalism can clearly be seen in the work of Henry James, whose experiments in narrative technique, especially his distinction between “showing” and “telling” (Halliwell 168), were so important to Woolf and other modernists. James was deeply influenced by the Ruskin v. Whistler trial, which possessed some circus elements but also some serious consequences. James began work on Portrait of a Lady (1881) the following year, basing the character of Gilbert Osmond, the dilettantish painter, on some of the qualities he observed in Whistler. He also creates an arresting vision of Whistler’s sense of non-
naturalist subjectivity by telling the story largely through the filter of the consciousness of the main character, Isabel Archer, a strategy he discusses in the novel’s preface:

Trying to recover here, for recognition, the germ of my idea, I see that it must have consisted not at all in any conceit of a ‘plot’ . . . but altogether in the sense of a single character, the character and aspect of a particular engaging young woman, to which all the usual elements of a ‘subject,’ certainly of a setting, were to need to be super-added. (42, emphasis added)

Here, in James’s own account of the central idea of the novel, his use of the term “aspect” to describe his portrayal of the character of Isabel is significant, bringing together an impressionist emphasis on selective, exterior realism with an equally strong emphasis on the interior psychological subjectivity for which James is best known and credited with laying the groundwork for modernist stream-of-consciousness narrative technique.

James brings the visual and verbal even closer together four years later in *The Art of Fiction* (1885) with a close connection between visual impressionism and an impressionistic approach to the novel. James’s version of aspect realism starts to turn the impressionist painter as well as the novelist inward for the sources of subjects for the canvas and the printed page, stressing the inimitable expression of personal vision, liberated even from the demands of optical realism in visual impressionism:

Here it is especially that he [the novelist] works, step by step, like his brother of the brush, of whom we may always say that he has painted his picture on a manner best known to himself. His manner is his secret, not necessarily a jealous one. He cannot disclose it as a general thing if he would; he would be at a loss to teach it to others. (395)
For art, both visual and literary, this means that the artist is in possession of his or her own perceptions, and it is these that carry the most convincing truth, albeit subjective, that can be expressed. *The Art of Fiction* was intended by James as an extended response to a lecture, delivered by Walter Besant, defending realistic representation in works of fiction. James does not dispute the importance of what he calls the “air of reality”(399) in fiction, but he is careful to add that “reality has a myriad forms”(397) and that the novel need only to “represent life”(389). In the same essay, James goes even further, saying that the novel need only be “interesting”(394). The tension between realism and impressionism is resolved through a shift away from a narrow definition of reality as the observed nature that Ruskin so fiercely defended. The relationship between the exterior and interior is now complicated by the fact that reality has been broadened to mean all of “life,” which includes subjective as well as objective experience:

It appears to me that no one can ever have made a seriously artistic attempt without becoming conscious of an immense increase--a kind of revelation--of freedom. One perceives in that case--by the light of a heavenly ray--that the province of art is all life, all feeling, all observation, all vision. (406)

This late-Victorian expansion of the “province of art” is deeply connected to a new relationship with the object that completely reverses various forms of sympathetic identification with it, from Addison’s primary and secondary pleasures of the imagination to Hazlitt’s gusto to Ruskin’s natural impressionism. The move toward an empathetic relationship with the object in which, as Oscar Wilde points out, “Life imitates Art more than Art imitates life”(Bate 642), which began in such an influential way with Baudelaire.
through Pater, found full expression in the aesthetic movement of the late-Victorian period.

Wilde, a disciple of Pater and Whistler, takes art for art’s sake to perhaps its furthest extreme in “The Decay of Lying” (1889) in which a conversation occurs between two characters, Cyril and Vivian, over the relationship between art and nature. Wilde uses this vehicle for a direct attack on all forms of mimesis as well as the use of art to teach or reflect morality. Even Ruskin’s beloved Turner is turned on his head to exemplify not impressionism’s debt to nature but nature’s debt to impressionism as Vivian tells Cyril of a recent visit to their mutual friend, a Mrs. Arundel:

Yesterday evening Mrs. Arundel insisted on my going to the window and looking at the glorious sky, as she called it. Of course I had to look at it. She is one of those absurdly pretty Philistines to whom one can deny nothing. And what was it? It was simply a very second-rate Turner, a Turner of a bad period, with all the painter’s worst faults exaggerated and over-emphasized. (Bate 641)

Cyril concedes this point, but he then goes on to ask whether art can be effective in expressing “the temper of its age, the spirit of its time, the moral and social conditions that surround it” (641)—in short, the art-cum-morality legacy of Carlyle, Newman, Ruskin, Arnold, and Morris. Vivian’s response constitutes a virtual manifesto for the aesthetic movement, pushing beyond even Pater’s partial dependency on the object for the creation of meaning:

Art never expresses anything but itself. This is the principle of my new aesthetics; and it is this, more than that vital connection between form and substance on which Mr. Pater dwells, that makes basic the type of all the arts. (643)
With this declaration of independence of the imagination from the external object, the dominance of nineteenth-century realism, whether in the form of observational or aspect realism, is replaced by what Croce called “intuitive expression” (“Aesthetica in Nuce,” 1902), Freud called “wish-fulfillment” (“Creative Writers and Daydreaming,” 1908), Nietzsche called “perspectivism” (The Will to Power, 1906), William James called “stream of consciousness” (Principles of Psychology, 1890), and Bergson called “flux” (Creative Evolution, 1907). While each of these differs from the others in various ways, they all share the basic notion that the “vital connection between form and substance” that Wilde viewed as a Paterian retention of the dual nature of the exterior and interior, is drawing closer together and relocating within subjective experience to such an extent that empathetic intuition—-or the projecting of the interior onto the exterior—has rendered the object itself as belonging to the psychological awareness of it.

VI. The Psychological Turn

The concept of Einfühlung or “in-feeling” developed by nineteenth-century German aesthetician Herman Lotze and further refined by Lipps and Worringer, was translated in English as “empathy” by the American psychologist E.B. Titchener, whose Experimental Psychology (1901-5) and Lectures on the Elementary Psychology of Feeling and Attention (1908) explored the ways in which feelings are projected onto an object rather than sympathizing with an object in the Hazlitt tradition (Bate 563). While often regarded as similar, the difference between sympathetic and empathetic identification is essential in the psychological turn that aesthetic theory and practice took during the final two decades of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth. As pointed
out above, interest in the psychological qualities of aesthetic “sensibilities,” and recognition of psychological forces at work within the artist, can be traced as far back as Addison and beyond. The modernist period began in earnest only when the basic dualism between nature and the spirit—between the external and the internal—began to break down in the wake of a growing understanding that psychological perspectives profoundly shape the nature of the object.

In his recent discussion of the modernist period, T.J. Clark points out that the dominant intellectual and artistic currents of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries can be characterized by their preoccupation with “large questions. . . about seeing and understanding in general” (42). William Scott and Peter Rutkoff refine this broad characterization further by distinguishing between the term “modern,” which refers to a wide range of present attitudes toward the normative influences of the past, and “modernism,” which refers to a “range of European art that consciously rejected realism and historicism” (xix). Modernists created a loose but recognizable ethos that consistently replaced mimetic and objective representation with expressive perceptions of sensory and historical experience. The modernists’ profound awareness of the subjectivity of experience and perception saw rise to a cultural upheaval that laid the foundations for a crisis in representation that coincided with, and contributed to, such modern realities as secularization, mass culture, advanced technology, and global capitalism. Empiricism, which had engaged neoclassicists, romantics, and Victorians alike in their attempts either to overcome or accommodate it, had, under the influence of psychological investigation, moved inward to capture the imagination that, from the doctrine of associations to impressionism, artists, critics, and aestheticians alike had
labored to rescue from scientific materialism. This modernist--or what Roger Fry in 1910 dubbed “post-impressionist”--shift from mimetic to expressive perceptions of sensory and historical experience launched a search for a new kind of “sensibility,” a secular sensibility that acknowledged the power of empiricism but longed for a state of psychological transcendence that could replace discredited forms of metaphysics, from religion to German idealism to Ruskin-style sacralizing of the natural world. Empiricism had triumphed, and the object shifted from existing separately from the mind, as in the classic Cartesian duality, to existing simultaneously in the mind and in nature. As Art Berman points out, “psycho-physiological processes of vision cannot be distinguished from the essence of the things perceived” (34). Vision in and of itself now became a form of knowing. Form engulfed content, and individual perception of form constituted reality as such.

Artistic “sensibility,” then, shifted from a Victorian sense of psychological response to the object to a modernist sense of psychological creation of the object, at least to the assignation of meaning and significance to it that it does not--and cannot--inherently possess. This shift from deriving meaning and significance from the exterior to the projection of meaning onto it constitutes what Berman calls “transcendental realism” (22), which he defines as the modernist attempt to counter the realization that nature is meaningless with the desire to rise above such determinism through the transportive qualities of artistic production:

One’s vision of the world is a rebuttal to being passively fashioned by the world. Art is the alternative both to conformity and to madness. In painting, the movements from the fauves through cubism and futurism (the seven or eight
years preceding World War I) are attempts to control it by incarcerating it inside the artwork, by trapping the world in the paint. (Berman 39)

Art as “alternative both to conformity and to madness” alludes to the modernist search for a way to contain and control empiricism, which, unless carefully guided, can result in a mechanized existence that will merely reflect the ultimate meaninglessness of life itself. Rather than representing a total break with the past, modernism can be understood as various aesthetic concepts and practices that continued the romantic and Victorian attempts to reconcile form and substance but without the benefit of a metaphysical solution. Transcending reality, then, involved the aestheticizing of reality or “incarcerating” it in what Roger Fry and Clive Bell called “significant form,” which Bell, in his influential book on aesthetics, Art (1913), describes as “lines and colours combined in a particular way, certain forms and relations of forms [that] stir our aesthetic emotions”(17).

VII. Cézanne and the Rejection of Illusion

Gillian Naylor describes Fry’s famous discovery of Cézanne as a “revelation” that seemed to revitalize his notion that form and content are not forever separated as they are in the tradition of sympathetic identification, despite the synthesizing power of Hazlitt’s “gusto.” The need to “represent” external reality as the source of internal reflection was now being replaced by empathetic identification in which internal reflection “expresses” external reality, opening the way for a new modernist abstraction:
Fry’s discovery of the significance of form enabled him to re-evaluate his ideas about the nature of content. Content could now be divorced from narrative and the need to represent or symbolize appearances, and become an end in itself. (49)

In Cézanne’s numerous paintings of inanimate objects, such as his series of apples, a new tension is created between representation and a strong sense of form as an expression of feeling. This was a distinct break with impressionism and led the way toward cubism and other form-conscious abstract art. But Fry’s “revelation” (Naylor 49) of a major epistemological shift in relation to the object, a shift he saw so clearly in Cézanne’s art, evolved rather slowly. Fry had experienced a series of setbacks in the years prior to 1910, the year of his groundbreaking post-impressionist exhibition. These included being turned down for the Slade Professorship at Cambridge, resigning from the Metropolitan Museum in New York after becoming disillusioned with monied collectors such as Henry Clay Frick and J. Pierpont Morgan, and receiving the news that his wife, Helen, was incurably insane. She would have to be institutionalized for life, leaving Fry with two small children and a newly constructed house, which Fry had named Durbins and had decorated himself, much as Morris had done with Red House in 1858. Forced now to make money through writing, he published articles on art for The Athenaeum and the Burlington Magazine, steadily increasing his knowledge of contemporary art, especially his understanding of Cézanne’s rebellion against the illusionary techniques of representing three-dimensionality in a two-dimensional medium, techniques that had been employed with increasing facility since Giotto in the fourteenth century.

Cézanne’s basic dilemma, which became so important for modernist visual and verbal art, was how to reconcile what a painter could see with what he or she could perceive, a
concept Cézanne called *réalisation* and tried to achieve in his paintings. The gap between optic sight and perceptual “insight” could be breached perhaps by moving away from hard and fast realism, and a combination of semantic and syntactic elements could be utilized within the same picture to represent both sympathetic and empathetic aspects of the mind’s relationship with the external. Picasso and Braque, who acknowledged Cézanne’s influence, took his concerns with interior and exterior experience a bit further by inventing a number of techniques that attempted to “preserve the picture plane” by setting up a tension between representation and an awareness of the medium used to create it. Rearrangement and fracturing of physical objects, the use of planes, simultaneity, and multiple perspectives were used to create a sense of a new reality, which Picasso, Braque, and other post-impressionists believed they had accomplished. As long as the reality was valid as an artistic expression, it was as valid as any other “representation” of reality, including the realism that had always been taken for granted as the only valid “aspect” with which the artist could engage.

Such visual innovation was mirrored in verbal art first and perhaps foremost by Gertrude Stein. Her constant attention to the “picture plane” of language through the use of repetition, simultaneity, unusual sentence structures, simplicity of forms, and the continuous present was highly influential in creating the widespread experimentation with bringing a closer sense of the visual to writing but, especially, the sense of placing the reader between what is being represented and the form of the representation. This is a somewhat different position from a frequently held one that Stein collapsed content and form into one another, which, as discussed above, is attempted in purely abstract visual art. In verbal art, concrete poetry comes closest to such a collapse of content and form,
but the presence of semantic elements serves more to place the syntactic and semantic
more in dialogue with each other than to disappear into one another. Jacqueline Vaught
Bogan points out that Stein “heightens our awareness of language as an artistic medium
and complicates any naive understanding of artistic representation” (14, emphasis in
text). In Stein’s “Portrait of Mabel Dodge at the Villa Curon,” for instance, this applies
both to content and form:

There is the likeliness lying in liking likely likeness. . . . Looking is not vanishing.
Laughing is not evaporating. There can be an old dress. There can be the way
there is that way there is that which is not charging what is a regular way of
paying. . . . (Quoted in Brogan 14)

In this passage, Stein both demonstrates the tension between content and form and
discusses it. The act of “looking” does not involve the “vanishing” of either the subject
or the object, content or form. Instead, what Stein calls an “equilibration” is set up
between the various elements of a representation, as she explains in “Composition as
Explanation” as part of her reflection on what World War I had done to bring about a
general recognition of modernist literary innovations and what might occur next:

And so one finds oneself interesting oneself in an equilibration, that of course
means words as well as things and distribution as well as between themselves
between the words and themselves and the things and themselves, a distribution
as distribution. Distribution is interesting and equilibration is interesting when
a continuous present and a beginning again and again and using everything and
everything alike and everything naturally simply different has been done.
After all this, there is that, there has been that that there is a composition and that nothing changes except composition the composition and the time of and the time in the composition. (521-522)

Stein’s growing sense of “between” is the important element of her aesthetic explorations for this study. Even if one collapses “things and themselves” into each other, or “words and themselves” into each other, or “words as well as things” into each other, there is still the act of “composition” that remains present to sustain the distribution between “things and themselves” and “looking.” And, yet, the “thing” is needed to renew the composition as well. When, as Stein points out, “everything . . has been done,” it is the object, the visual, the exterior, the thing, that remains fresh when ways of looking at it have become stale. The very fact that “nothing changes” means that it retains its status as perpetual Other, and this is the source of its power to renew all forms of composition about it.

Preserving the picture plane, then, is neither entirely a sympathetic illusion of naturalistic representation nor entirely an empathetic rejection of an objective exterior. Instead, preserving the picture plane creates an “equilibration” between the object and the act of “looking” at it in which both are fully “realized,” to use Cézanne’s term.

Fry, who was friendly with Stein, and whose exposure to French art coincided with Stein’s during his years as a curator of paintings at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, was so devoted to Cézanne and to the role of “looking” in the full experience of art, that he was ridiculed by critics as “proclaiming the religion of Cézannah” (Woolf, Roger Fry 156). In his influential 1909 essay in the New Quarterly, “An Essay in Aesthetics,” Fry makes the case for what he calls the “imaginative life” as one in which “[t]he frame of the mirror, then, does to some extent turn the reflected scene from one
that belongs to our actual life into one that belongs rather to the imaginative life" (*Vision and Design* 20). Fry’s formalist aesthetics called for a strict separation of art and life. A work of art was just that—a work of art. Frames and techniques such as preserving the picture plane served to remind the viewer of the relationship between content and form. Fry places perception between these two poles, setting up a tension between them and placing the artist in charge of which one to privilege in a given piece of art:

The artist’s attitude to natural form is, therefore, infinitely various according to the emotions he wishes to arouse. He may require for his purpose the most complete representation of a figure, he may be intensely realistic, provided that his presentation, in spite of its closeness to natural appearance, disengages clearly for us the appropriate emotional elements. Or he may give us the merest suggestion of natural forms, and rely almost entirely upon the force and intent of the emotional elements involved in his presentation.

We may, then, dispense once for all with the idea of likeness to Nature, of correctness or incorrectness as a test, and consider only whether the emotional elements inherent in natural form are adequately discovered, unless, indeed, the emotional idea depends at any point upon likeness, or completeness of representation. (*Vision and Design* 37-38)

More than any other artist, Cézanne represented for Fry the embodiment of this new frame of perceptual self-awareness. One landscape from the early 1880s, *Turning Road* (illust. 1), contains a number of the aesthetic properties that interested Fry and influenced others in his circle. Rather than employing traditional devices of perspective, such as establishing a clear focal point and arranging objects in receding sizes, Cézanne “hollows
out” the canvas in a way that is similar to a woodcut. The eye wanders here and there around the scene, looking at various objects and volumes, which are more or less complete in themselves. A feeling of depth is achieved by placing planes of objects behind each other and creating a sense of separation between the planes with tree trunks, branches, rooftops, and other verticals and horizontals. The road pulls the eye inward in a traditional gesture of perspective, but it curves away in the middle distance, leaving a sense of two-dimensionality to the remaining planes of houses, forest, and sky. No perspectival principle is applied to these planes. The houses all appear to be more or less the same size, no matter where they occur in the foreground or background; and the forest and sky, other than containing various color motifs to suggest plowed fields and clouds, seem more like juxtaposed horizontal strips of color than a distant horizon. In addition, the presence of obvious brush strokes and paint smears keeps the eye at all times partly on the surface of the painting—the picture plane—and disrupts the contrastive sense of depth and naturalism. To “look” at Turning Road, then, is to be aware of it both as a composition and as a representation at the same time.

This dual nature of perception explains in part why Cézanne’s art never leaves representation fully behind, according to Clive Bell in a chapter entitled “The Debt to Cézanne” in his 1914 book on aesthetics, Art. Calling Cézanne “the Christopher Columbus of a new continent of form”(139), Bell explains that Cézanne was cloistered away in provincial Provence for much of his career and was not influenced by “the aestheticism of Paris, Baudelairism and Whistlerism”(140). Around 1880, however, Cézanne seems to have stumbled quite independently upon a startling new relationship
with the object, a relationship similar to other early modernists involving a sea-change from sympathetic to empathetic identification:

At Aix-en-Provence came to him a revelation that has set a gulf between the nineteenth century and the twentieth: for, gazing at the familiar landscape, Cézanne came to understand it, not as a mode of light, nor yet as a player in the game of human life, but as an end in itself and an object of intense emotion. . . . From that time forward Cézanne set himself to create forms that would express the emotion that he felt for what he had learnt to see. Science became as irrelevant as subject. Everything can be seen as pure form, and behind pure form lurks the mysterious significance that thrills to ecstasy. The rest of Cézanne’s life is a continuous effort to capture and express the significance of form. (140)

In Cézanne’s empathetic revelation, artistic expression had trumped both science and sympathetic identification of the subject with the exterior. Empiricism now took a back seat to the creation of forms that embodied the projection of the interior life of the artist. This would seem to lead directly to pure abstraction, but Bell points out that Cézanne “needed something concrete as a point of departure” and that he “could come at reality only through what he saw. . .”(141). The resultant tension between “what he saw” and his desire to “express the emotion that he felt” translated into an aesthetic that preserved the picture plane in an effort to capture the interior and exterior in the same act of “looking.” Bell’s privileging of the object over the subject caused him to prefer total abstraction, whereas Fry came closer to Cézanne’s vision in his preference for semi-abstract art that maintained a binary relationship between sympathy and empathy through the retention of representational elements. Fry found support for his position in Matisse’s
1908 essay, “Notes of a Painter,” which makes the case for expressive realism, while Bell found support for total abstraction in Apollinaire’s 1913 book, *The Cubist Painters*.

VIII. Fry, Bloomsbury, and Formalism

The relationship between content and form, verbal and visual, representation and expression was a frequent topic of conversation in the Bloomsbury Group, just as it was for modernist aesthetics in general. J.K. Johnstone describes the basic postulate of Bloomsbury’s complicated aesthetics as the assertion that “sensibility and intellect are equally necessary to the artist, that, as Virginia Woolf puts it, the artist must be androgynous, with the sensibility of a woman and the intellect of a man, and--this is an allied requirement so that sensibility and intellect may work freely together--with prejudices of neither”(93). Sexism aside, the point here is that the tradition of sensibility and the modernist shift to cognition combine to form a duality of sympathetic and empathetic identification that underscores the central duality that Fry saw in Cézanne’s work, in which objects “retain their abstract intelligibility, their amenity to the human mind, and regain that reality of actual things which is absent from all abstractions”(Fry, *Cézanne* 51). As mentioned above, Fry and Bell engaged in a longstanding disagreement over the worth of pure abstraction, with Fry preferring that artists “consider only whether the emotional elements in natural form are adequately discovered”(*Vision and Design* 38). Such “emotional elements” are not “discovered” in the Ruskinian sense of deriving meaning from nature; rather, they are “realized” in the artist’s attempt to infuse the object with an “idea” that the artist has discovered within his or her own subjective consciousness. Fry concludes *Vision and Design with* an explanation of his
and Bell’s celebrated concept of “significant form,” in which the modernist empathetic epistemology can clearly be seen:

I think we are all agreed that we mean by significant form something other than agreeable arrangements of form, harmonious patterns, and the like. We feel that a work which possesses it is the outcome of an endeavor to express an idea rather than to create a pleasing object. Personally, at least, I always feel that it implies the effort on the part of the artist to bend to our emotional understandings by means of his passionate conviction some intractable material which is alien to our spirit. (302)

In this defining statement of Bloomsbury aesthetics, nature possesses nothing with which “our spirit” can identify. This is a complete reversal of two centuries of trying to grasp the eternal truths of which Carlyle, for example, regarded the material world as a garment (Sartor Resartus). Using the object to “express an idea” rather than to receive an idea goes beyond arguments about objective truth to make the point that all art is expressive, regardless of subject matter, and that the best art begins with some “passionate conviction.” For Fry and Bloomsbury, the central aesthetic issue, as Allen McLaurin points out, was the “balance between representation and autonomy”(23). McLaurin disagrees with Soloman Fishman’s view that Fry’s main goal was “autonomy of form”(131). McLaurin acknowledges, however, that Fry’s formal bias stressed the primacy of the object, and that “for a large part of his career he was combating the prevailing attitude toward painting, which stressed the illustrative and literary aspects”(23). Like his mentor, Cézanne, Fry’s “stress on the formal was not so much an attack on representation as on illusionism”(McLaurin 24). Here McLaurin agrees with
Fishman that Fry “tended. . . to go to the opposite extreme and isolate art from human experience”(23).

Perhaps the most often repeated distinction Fry makes in his art criticism is between what he calls “actual life” and “imaginative life.” This distinction is the central point of “An Essay in Aesthetics,” and Fry’s valorization of the object derives in large part from his view that the imaginative life can only be achieved when objects, including art objects, are isolated from everyday, utilitarian use-value:

> In actual life the normal person really only reads the labels as it were on the objects around him and troubles no further. Almost all the things which are useful in any way put on more or less this cap of invisibility. It is only when an object exists in our lives for no other purpose than to be seen that we really look at it, as for instance at a China ornament or a precious stone, and towards such even the most normal person adapts to some extent the artistic attitude of pure vision abstracted from necessity.(*Vision and Design* 25)

Despite Fry’s “fondness for dualist formations, such as linear and plastic, order and variety, vision and design and so on”(McLaurin 23), he remained committed to the notion that the imaginative relationship with the object is transcendent, and that art, whose purpose is to “express an idea” through objects, should be free from all traces of what he calls “associated ideas”(*Vision and Design* 242) of quotidian experience: “All art depends upon cutting off the practical responses to sensations of ordinary life, thereby setting free a pure and as it were disembodied functioning of the spirit. . . “(*Vision and Design* 242). In a gesture that looks forward to the New Criticism of the 1930s, Fry’s aesthetics stresses the autonomy of art, not only visual art but verbal art as well. In a
chapter entitled “Some Questions in Esthetics” in *Transformations* (1927), Fry takes up once again the issue of the difference between art and life, and he addresses specifically his view that verbal art should aim for the same autonomy that the concept of significant form obtains in visual art:

> With regard to literature, much misunderstanding is likely to arise owing to the absence of any proper classification and nomenclature of the very various purposes which are covered by the term. We have no words to distinguish between writing used for exposition, speculation, criticism or exhortation, and writing used for the creation of a work of art. . . . It is a medium which admits the mixture of esthetic and non-esthetic treatment to an almost unlimited extent. Even in the novel, which as a rule has pretensions to being a work of art, the structure may be so loose, the esthetic effects may be produced by so vast an accumulation of items that the temptation for the artist to turn aside from his purpose and interpolate criticisms of life, of manners or morals, is very strong.

*Comparatively few novelists have ever conceived of the novel as a single perfectly organic esthetic whole.* (9, emphasis added)

Fry’s interest in the problem of formalism in literature, based in part on his difference with Bell, whose position on abstract art was the more extreme of the two, grew more pronounced in the mid-teens with his work in translating the poetry of Mallarmé and his frequent conversations on the subject of writing with Virginia Woolf.

Basic to Fry’s visual aesthetic had always been his stress on the relatedness of various formalistic elements within a painting; and the tension between optic and perceptual awareness in Cézanne’s *réalisation* remained important as a key dualism in his thinking.
But writing posed a particular problem with its “mixture of esthetic and non-esthetic” elements. David Dowling points out that, as late as 1913, Fry was expressing the opinion that “[l]iterature is usually very little to do with art; I mean, it’s so much mixed with intellectual curiosity” (Quoted in Dowling 17). During his work on Mallarmé just two years later, however, Fry acknowledged that “[i]t may be that the greatest art is not the purest, that the richest forms only emerge from a certain richness of content, however unimportant that content may be in the final result” (Quoted in Dowling 17). In fact, Fry never fully resolved the issue of form vs. content in visual or in verbal art, despite the frequent association of Bloomsbury aesthetics with the privileging of form. Even as late as 1927 (he died in 1934), in a charming confession in “Some Questions in Esthetics,” Fry admits that he has waffled on the issue throughout his career:

This has always been a crux of such a puzzling nature that I need have little shame in confessing that I have at various times put forward very different attempts at a possible solution. I have certainly varied from a position where I underlined what we may call the dramatic possibilities of painting to one where I have insisted on the pre-eminence of purely plastic aspects, and almost hinted that no others were to be taken into account. *(Transformations 13-14)*

Regarding content vs. form in verbal art, Fry received some help from a friend, the French critic Charles Mauron, whose 1926 essay, “The Nature of Beauty in Art and Literature,” Fry translated and found enormously useful, commenting in “Some Questions in Esthetics” that Mauron “enables us for the first time dimly to grasp what it is of which the relations are felt by us when we apprehend esthetically a work of literature”*(Transformations 12).* Mauron’s argues that architecture is concerned
primarily with volume, painting primarily with space, and literature primarily with two internal qualities, spirit and psychology. The problem for Fry was how to bridge the gap between the internal qualities of literature and the external qualities of volume and space. Mauron provided Fry with a new term that connected inner with outer in an empathetic identification that, as Dowling points out, seemed “to connect shape with emotion in a more precise, scientific way than Bell had in his rather mystical assertion of ‘significant form’”(16). The new term was “psychological volumes,” and, unlike “significant form,” it emphasized the “idea of effort on the spectator’s part”(Dowling 16) that was always a key element in réalisation and preserving the picture plane. Now an author could possess “an artist’s specific sense of visual values”(Quoted in Dowling 17). With the help of Mauron’s richly suggestive term, Fry could turn his attention to Bloomsbury writers Strachey, Forster, and Woolf in particular with a concept that empathetically connected the psychological content of literary art with the modernist aesthetic of the visual. In Woolf’s case, this was especially fruitful, since Fry and Woolf had engaged in intense conversations on the visual-verbal relationship since soon after Fry’s first acquaintance with Bloomsbury in the spring of 1910.

IX. Conclusion

The preoccupation with form was thus a defining feature of the Bloomsbury aesthetic, which combined a Paterian sensibility of art for art’s sake with the rejection of lingering vestiges of idealism, such as Bradley’s totalized absorption of the object into the subject, which he called “absolute idealism”(Appearance and Reality, 1893). Far more influential was Moore’s Principia Ethica (1903), which became a central topic of
discussion at the “Thursday Evening” discussions instituted by Thoby Stephen, in the spring of 1905, shortly after moving with his brother Adrian and his sisters Vanessa and Virginia to Gordon Square in the Bloomsbury district of London. Moore’s valorization of the object, along with his insistence on the value of loving relationships, left a deep and lasting impression on his Cambridge students, including Thoby and Adrian Stephen, Duncan Grant, Lytton Strachey, Maynard Keynes, Clive Bell, Leonard Woolf, and others who comprised the Cambridge/Kensington component of the Bloomsbury circle.

Along with this intellectual influence, the synergy of art, literature, and philosophical discussion at 46 Gordon Square—all set in a casual, youth-culture atmosphere—brought together three distinct artistic groups. These included 1) the conservative Royal Academy (that Vanessa Bell had attended before moving to Bloomsbury); 2) the New English Group, dominated by Henry Tonks at the Slade School of Art (that Vanessa Bell attended after moving to Bloomsbury); and 3) the London Group, formed by former Slade students Harold Gilman, David Bomberg, Wyndham Lewis, and other abstract and semi-abstract artists. Roger Fry’s profound influence on all these groups, and on Woolf and Lewis in particular, will be explored in further depth in Chapter Two. For now, it is important to place both Woolf and Lewis in the same milieu that was deeply influenced by the new association of Cambridge philosophy and aesthetics with Whistlerian impressionism taught at the Slade. The emphasis on the central importance of the object and its epistemological separation from the subject, complicated by the psychological shift from sympathetic to empathetic identification with the object, launched a new relationship with the exterior that, despite their eventual personal and political
differences, both Woolf and Lewis shared in the formative years before the outbreak of war in 1914.
Chapter Two

In the Shadow of Roger Fry: Woolf, Lewis, and Post-Impressionism

I. Chapter Overview

As discussed in Chapter One, a key figure after the turn of the century was Roger Fry, whose introduction to England of French experimental painters whom he dubbed “post-impressionists” caused a stir among the art-viewing public. Chapter Two will discuss Fry’s influence on the emerging visual aesthetics and interest in the problem of the exterior that Woolf and Lewis shared, despite their widening political differences that will be addressed in Chapters Three and Four. Fry’s aesthetics and criticism are important to this study for three reasons. First, as this chapter will address, Fry’s profound influence on a wide circle of artists and writers included Woolf, which she acknowledged on a number of occasions. But Fry’s influence also marked Lewis more profoundly and for longer than Lewis was willing to acknowledge, and Lewis’s relentless attempts to distance himself from influences and vanquish all whom he viewed as rivals has obscured the fact that his debt to Fry was greater than previously thought. Second, both Woolf and Lewis developed visual aesthetics based in large part upon Fry’s
fascination with the artistic principles of Cézanne, his interest in Mooreian subjectivity, and his longstanding commitment to formalism. A greater understanding of the different uses to which Woolf and Lewis applied their visual aesthetics in the 1920s and 1930s can be achieved by examining their early similarities. Third, for Woolf and Lewis alike, Fry’s belief in the psychological influence on the object that he saw in Cézanne and post-impressionism established a strong but problematic relationship with the exterior that constituted a central tension in their thought and work before and during the War.

Fry’s formalist aesthetics and his blend of Mooreian subjectivity and Cézannian réalisation asserted a powerful empathetic relationship with the object that he and Clive Bell called “significant form.” As Fry continued his exploration of formalism, “creative vision” and “psychological volumes” replaced significant form as Fry attempted to further refine the nature of the creative experience. This work brought him into close contact with Virginia Woolf, who developed a visual aesthetic in a number of early stories that explored Fry’s ideas and, more importantly, explored the limits of visual formalism in such stories as “Solid Objects” (1920) and “Blue and Green” (1921). During a series of visits between 1911 and 1920, Fry and Woolf discussed the possibility of combining the visual and verbal into a single aesthetic. These discussions emerged within Woolf’s writing in her vast revision of her first novel The Voyage Out (1915), and in subsequent stories, such as “The Mark on the Wall” and “Kew Gardens,” that explore the problem of the exterior and the possibility for freedom from oppressive representations that empathetic identification can provide, a topic to which she returned with great depth in the 1930s.
Like Woolf, Lewis was beginning to struggle in the teens with the duality between a modernist empathetic relationship with the exterior and the desire, as Woolf expresses later, to accurately represent “non-being” (Moments of Being 70). This struggle, which began with Fry’s Cézannian attempt to “realize” optic awareness of the object and perceptual awareness of it at the same time, would eventually carry Lewis through a number of critical positionings that drew not only from Fry but from various figures of the French reactionary aesthetics of the first decade, such as Charles Maurras and Julien Benda, who found disciples in England in Hulme, Pound, Eliot, Lewis, and others. Despite the political fear he shared with the French reactionaries that the power of empathetic identification could be used in the wrong hands to sway the masses, Lewis agreed with Fry and Woolf about the power of empathetic identification for personal perceptual freedom, and he also agreed with their growing sense of the visual over the verbal as an effective epistemological technique. Finally, through his creation of the vorticist aesthetic and his central novel of the teens, Tarr (1918), Lewis, like Woolf at the same time, explored the role of formalist art in the establishment of a middle ground between empathetic consciousness and a separate exterior.

II. The Visual Aesthetic in Virginia Woolf’s Early Fiction

Besides the first post-impressionist exhibition at the Grafton Galleries, another significant Bloomsbury event in December, 1910, involved Virginia Stephen’s (she was not yet Virginia Woolf) move to a cottage in Sussex, which she named Little Talland House after the summer home her family had owned in St. Ives when she was a child.
Judith Collins describes the importance of this event for the eventual formation of Roger Fry’s decorative arts experiment, the Omega Workshops, three years later:

The following March it was being furnished with odds and ends of furniture and splendid bright new appliquéd curtains designed and made by her sister Vanessa Bell. Virginia described her house in April 1911 as ‘done up in patches of post-impressionist colour,’ in what was probably one of the first references to the new art movement as applied to a domestic setting. (8)

Woolf’s connection between post-impressionist art and domestic decor was bolstered by Fry’s trip in 1911 to Turkey with Vanessa and Clive Bell. There he encountered Byzantine art and was most impressed by the mosaics he examined, finding similarities between Byzantine art and French post-impressionism. Like Morris before him, Fry found inspiration from Byzantine art, but he drew different conclusions about it. Morris appreciated the patterns drawn from natural objects, while Fry appreciated the geometric non-representational patterns.

Fry was also impressed by the collaborative nature of the mosaics, and his 1912 essay, “Art and Socialism,” reflects his views on the value of art as a shared endeavor: “What the history of art definitely elucidates is that the greatest art has always been communal, the expression—in highly individual ways, no doubt—of common aspirations and ideals”(Vision and Design 62). Fry had always rejected the arts and crafts interest in socialism as a political movement, but his statement that great art is (or should be) a communal experience could have been uttered by Morris himself. Virginia (whose last name became Woolf on August 10, 1912) was slow to shift credit away from the Morrisian tradition of arts and crafts to Fry’s post-impressionist version of it. In a May
1913 letter to Violet Dickenson, she seems more than a bit resentful of how her sister is spending her time and of the Omega project in general:

Nessa I believe has come back, laden with works of indisputable genius bought off peasants in the Umbrian mountains. They are beginning to paint boxes and arm chairs in Fitzroy S[quare]. Personally I dont (sic) feel in Roger Fry the inspiration of Morris, but no doubt I’m wrong. (Letters of VW 2:28)

Woolf’s evolving friendship with Fry has been explored insightfully by Christopher Reed (1993), Panthea Reid Broughton (1993), David Dowling (1985), Diane Gillespie (1988), and others; and, while some disagreement exists among the various accounts of their early relationship (Broughton disagrees with Reed that Fry devalued literature, for instance), there is general agreement that before the publication of Woolf’s first novel, The Voyage Out, Woolf had decidedly mixed feelings about him and also about visual art in general. Broughton notes that Woolf resented Vanessa’s success as a painter, her relationships with Clive Bell and Roger Fry (husband and lover, respectively), and the success of both the 1910 and 1912 post-impressionist exhibitions and that she even saw the art of painting itself as being inferior to the art of writing (Broughton 38). Typical of her attitude at the time is a March 1911 letter to Clive from Little Talland House in which she reveals a bit of her jealousy of the friendship formed between the Bells and Fry:

Your wife having given me a good snubbing, I was too proud to ask you to come down, though much tempted to. I cant (sic) help thinking that you have missed more than Roger Fry will replace--not conversation, no--but a starlight walk upon the downs, a horse nibbling and taking one for a great white sheep, a flock ringing bells, startled birds and the sea too. (Letters of VW 1:453)
Woolf goes on in the same letter to ask Clive rather pointedly, “Are you still a reader?” A month or so later, however, an emergency trip to care for Vanessa, who experienced a miscarriage during the trip with Clive, Roger, and T.J. Norton to look at Byzantine art in Turkey, provided Woolf with a personal and positive encounter with Fry that launched a series of interesting and productive conversations between them.

Upon her arrival in Broussa, she found Fry in control of the difficult situation but still finding time to sound her out concerning her views on a number of aesthetic issues that were occupying his thoughts. Central to his thinking was his rejection of strict mimesis in visual art and his belief that verbal art should “fling representation to the winds and follow suit” (Woolf, *Roger Fry* 172). Dowling points out that Fry’s continuing struggle with issues surrounding representation became central to Woolf’s first novel as well as to Woolf’s overall imaginative production:

> The relationship of the subjective consciousness to external reality, which is Rachel’s great problem in the novel, is also Woolf’s great problem as an artist. How was she to portray both the ‘solid’ setting and the ‘shadowy’ imagination of her characters. (109)

The intellectual and aesthetic focus of this issue provided Woolf with renewed energy on *Melymbrosia*, the working title of what eventually became *The Voyage Out*. Elizabeth Heine (1990) and Louise DeSalvo (1982) point out that Woolf launched what was at least her third full revision of the novel after returning from Turkey, and Broughton observes that the changes were less verbal and more visual: “Roger seems to have made her suspect that her representational aesthetic was inadequate to the task” (41). Fry’s charm and erudition proved irresistible, and as early as June Woolf was seeking more of his
company through Vanessa: “Please get Roger to settle what day he will come to Firle, and press him to”\textit{(Letters of VW 1:466)}. By early September, she was writing to Fry directly and addressing him as “My dear Roger”:

> I wonder if you could possibly come here for next week end? Adrian and Duncan are coming. It would be a great pleasure. . . . I think we have let Fitzroy Square, so I shall possibly be in London next week, and shall try to come down and see you. I hope you may come here. \textit{(Letters of VW 1:477)}

Such obvious affection for Fry counters a bit the view of Broughton and others that Woolf warmed slowly to Fry, but in Woolf’s personal relationships and overall temperament she was unpredictable, as she acknowledges in her remarkably honest response to Leonard’s marriage proposal: “I pass from hot to cold in an instant, without any reason. . . .”\textit{(Letters of VW 1:496)}. Some of the confusion over Fry’s growing influence on Woolf can be attributed to the fact that Woolf herself was very confused in the years just before and after the start of the War in 1914. In the years from 1912 to 1915 Woolf experienced two major breakdowns, the first involving a suicide attempt and the second requiring Leonard to hire four live-in nurses to care for her (Lee 352). Recalling the summer of 1915 in her diary, Woolf described her state of mind as “mad and seeing the sunlight quivering like gold water, on the wall”\textit{(Diary of VW 2:283)}. By the fall of 1915, however, with help from Leonard, a change of location from London to Richmond, and the good wishes and attentiveness of Vanessa, Fry, and other friends, Woolf recovered and began a long period of relative stability that lasted throughout the nine productive years at Hogarth House. Despite her occasional resentment at living away from London, nine years later she acknowledged that “[n]othing could have suited
better through all those years when I was creeping about, like a rat struck on the head, &
the aeroplanes were over London at night, & the streets dark, & no penny buns in the
window” (Diary of VW 2:283). By December, 1915 Woolf was corresponding with Fry
again and invited him to stay at Hogarth House while he worked on a restoration of some
frescoes at Hampton Court nearby.

During this visit and numerous others between 1916 and 1920, Woolf and Fry
explored the relationship of visual and verbal art. Fry’s study of French poetry and his
friendship with Charles Mauron began to complicate his views on formalism. Woolf
reports to Ka Cox that Fry “is now turning to literature, and says pictures only do ‘to look
at about 4 times’” (Letters of VW 2:77-78). For her part, Woolf, who “had little but
contempt for the 1910 and 1912 post-impressionist exhibits and the Omega Workshop
Fry set up in 1913” (Broughton 43), now began to take a greater interest in visual art.
Moreover, the problem of exteriority addressed in The Voyage Out took further shape
under Fry’s influence in short stories between 1917 and 1921, such as “The Mark on the
Wall,” “Kew Gardens,” “Blue & Green,” and “Solid Objects.” It is important to stress
the problem of exteriority, since Woolf did not merely follow Fry’s lead in her work
before the 1920s but thoroughly explored the strengths and weaknesses of formalism
itself and, as always, drew her own complex conclusions.

In The Voyage Out, what Dowling calls Woolf’s newly acquired “painterly
vision” (113) is evident, both in its descriptive passages as well as in its allusions and
conversations between certain characters. When Rachel (an aspiring musician) and
Terence (an aspiring writer) engage in a lengthy conversation covering gender roles,
women’s suffrage, the routine of domestic life, and the comparative quality of various
arts, they do so on the edge of a cliff above the South American island of Santa Marina, with views of the sea in one direction and the extended vista of the island in the other. On one visual level, Rachel and Terence are part of the picture itself, two objects in a vast landscape that, due to its panoramic viewpoint, suggests little movement. The exterior is presented with the simplified representational quality of Cézanne’s *Mont Sainte-Victoire*. On another visual level, however, Rachel and Terence act with conscious agency within the stillness of the scene of which they are a part. Through the symbolic act of throwing pebbles into the sea far below them, they project themselves empathetically onto an exterior that Woolf is careful to depict as indifferent to human existence:

Rachel lay down on her elbow, and parted the tall grasses which grew on the edge, so that she might have a clear view. The water was very calm; rocking up and down at the base of the cliff, and so clear that one could see the red of the stones at the bottom of it. So it had been at the birth of the world, and so it had remained ever since. Probably no human being had ever broken that water with boat or with body. Obeying some impulse, she determined to mar that eternity of peace, and threw the largest pebble she could find. It struck the water, and the ripples spread out and out. Hewet looked down too. ‘It’s wonderful,’ he said, as they widened and ceased. The freshness and the newness seemed to him wonderful. He threw a pebble next. There was scarcely any sound. (250)

Terence’s use of the singular pronoun in his statement “It’s wonderful” is immediately followed by the narrator’s dual interpretation of his exclamation. “It” is both the “freshness” and the “newness.” Terence is responding sympathetically to the freshness
of the unspoiled sea and to the newness of the widening ripples projected onto it by human agency. The fact that “there was scarcely any sound” reinforces the visual quality of the experience. This visual quality is transferred to Rachel herself as Terence watches her watch the ripples they have both created on the silent backdrop of the natural surroundings:

He could look at Rachel without her noticing it. She was still absorbed in the water and the exquisitely pleasant sensations which a little depth of sea washing over rocks suggests. He noticed that she was wearing a dress of deep blue colour, made of soft thin cotton stuff, which clung to the shape of her body. It was a body with the angles and hollows of a young woman’s body not yet developed, but in no way distorted, and thus interesting and even lovable (250-251)

Like the “freshness” of the sea she is observing, Rachel is still “in no way distorted” by being “developed” through age and experience. Woolf reinforces the metaphorical connection by describing Rachel’s dress as deep blue, the same color as the sea below.

The silent intensity of this visual passage is finally broken by a question that sets up the polarity between the visual and verbal that occupies Rachel’s thoughts as well as Woolf’s, who was engaged with Fry in trying to build a bridge between the visual and verbal with an aesthetic that could incorporate both:

‘You write novels?’ she asked.

For the moment he could not think what he was saying. He was overcome with the desire to hold her in his arms.

‘Oh yes,’ he said. ‘That is, I want to write them.’

She would not take her large grey eyes off his face.
‘Novels,’ she repeated. ‘Why do you write novels? You ought to write music. Music, you see’--she shifted her eyes and became less desirable as her brain began to work, inflicting a certain change upon her face--‘music goes straight for things. It says all there is to say at once. With writing it seems to me there’s so much’--she paused for an expression, and rubbed her fingers in the earth--‘scratching on the matchbox. . . .’ (251)

The sense of immediate unity of statement that Rachel attributes to music seems to confuse the visual/verbal duality that the passage is creating. The unity to which she alludes, however, is not so much the unity of the external object created so much as it is the unity of the expressive experience itself. In the composition of music, therefore, the representational requirement of words is not an issue, it has no need for the “scratching on the matchbox” of external reality that Rachel symbolizes by rubbing her fingers in the earth. Even though music, like writing, is linear and temporal, its purely expressive nature gives it more in common with painting’s ability to leave representation entirely behind and therefore say “all there is to say at once” without the complications of language, which is unavoidably mimetic, at least in part, since words are inherently representational.

This issue unfolds further as the aesthetic conversation continues between Rachel and Terence, who declares that he desires “to write a novel about Silence”(262). Louise DeSalvo suggests that Fry’s influence on the emerging novel was a major stylistic shift in Woolf’s “tendency to recast similes as metaphors”(71), since central to Fry’s view of verbal art was that it should jettison or suppress all “illustrative” elements. Fry’s notion of the ideal novel--“a peasant’s fear at seeing a wolf expressed without using a single
adjective” (DeSalvo 71)--can be heard in Terence’s plea for a visual aesthetic for the novel:

‘I want to write a novel about Silence,’ he said; ‘the things people don’t say. But the difficulty is immense.’ He sighed. ‘However, you don’t care,’ he continued. He looked at her almost severely. ‘Nobody cares. All you read a novel for is to see what sort of person the writer is, and, if you know him, which of his friends he’s put in. As for the novel itself, the whole conception, the way one’s seen the thing, felt about it, made it stand in relation to other things, not one in a million cares for that. And yet I sometimes wonder whether there’s anything else in the whole world worth doing. . . .’ (262)

The unmistakable Bloomsbury aesthetics represented in this passage, such as artistic autonomy and privileging the visual, have been assigned various origins by critics. Christine Froula (1993) views the entire relationship of Rachel and Terence as two sides of Woolf herself. Rachel is a musician and Terence is a writer, and the conflicts of temporal vs. spatial composition become an extremely complex aesthetic exploration in the novel, as well as the underlying issue of representation itself. Elizabeth Heine (1990), however, stresses the intense emotional relationship that Woolf and Clive Bell engaged in shortly after Bell’s marriage to Vanessa. Terence’s views do, in fact, reflect Bell’s views on significant form that eventually appeared in *Art* (1914):

For, after all what is a rose? What is a tree, a dog, a wall, a boat? What is the particular significance of anything? Certainly the essence of a boat is not that it conjures up visions of argosies with purple sails, nor yet that it carries coals to Newcastle. Imagine a boat in complete isolation, detach it from man and his
urgent activities and fabulous history, what is it that remains, what is that to
which we still react emotionally? What but pure form, and that which, lying
behind pure form, gives it its significance? (142-143)

Bell’s statement reflects the Bloomsbury re-definition of “essence” which, as pointed out
in the introduction to this study, involves the perceptual relationship between subject and
object rather than an essential objective reality behind or above subjective experience.

By the time Woolf undertook another full revision of the novel from January through
March, 1913 (DeSalvo 76), the complications of courtship and marriage to Leonard,
turning down marriage proposals from Lytton Strachey and Walter Lamb, shifting her
affections from her sister’s husband to her sister’s lover, and her own emotional “hairy
black devils”(Letters of VW 1:466) were all “incorporated into the changing design of
The Voyage Out ”(DeSalvo 73). Looking back at the personal and professional turmoil
of these years, Woolf writes in a 1918 diary entry that Fry was “the centre of a whirlwind
to me”(Diary of VW 1:134); and, in “Old Bloomsbury”(1921), Woolf describes Fry as
having had “more knowledge and experience than all of us put together”(Moments of
Being 197). As the intellectual leader of Bloomsbury, then, it was Fry above all whose
views mattered at the time, and his sense of the “internal forces” of art (Vision and
Design 9) can clearly be heard in Terence’s final statement concerning the kind of novel
he would like to write:

‘What I want to do in writing novels is very much what you want to do when you
play the piano, I expect,’ he began, turning and speaking over his shoulder. ‘We
want to find out what’s behind things, don’t we?--Look at the lights down there,’
he continued, ‘scattered about anyhow. Things I feel come to me like lights. . . . I
want to combine them. . . Have you ever seen fireworks that make figures? . . . I want to make figures. . . . Is that what you want to do?’ (266)

With this announcement of artistic purpose, the internalization of sympathetic identification--"We want to find out what’s behind things, don’t we?”--is combined with the externalization of empathetic identification in Terence’s desire to “make figures.” Terence both observes the “scattered lights” of the island villages and feels the impulse to create a pattern, not with the external lights but with his internal feelings that he projects back onto the exterior. The use of “figures” in art is maintained, but it shifts from the figurative art of representation to modernist expressionism in which the figure--or pattern--originates within the subject and alters or replaces the external object. “What’s behind things,” then, shifts from its traditional position of idealistic universality to an internal function that Fry calls “creative vision” in which the artist combines inner and outer to form patterns that rely on both but are “crystallised” in a process of empathetic identification with the exterior:

The artist’s main business in life. . . is carried on by means of [a] kind of vision, which I will call creative vision. This, I think is the furthest perversion of the gifts of nature of which man is guilty. It demands the most complete detachment from any of the meanings and implications of appearances. Almost any turn of the kaleidoscope of nature may set up in the artist this detached and impassioned vision, and, as he contemplates the particular field of vision, the (aesthetically) chaotic and accidental conjunction of forms and colours begins to crystallise into a harmony; and as this harmony becomes clear to the artist, his actual vision
becomes distorted by the emphasis of the rhythm which has been set up within him. *(Vision and Design  51)*

Fry’s search for the most evocative term for the combination of sympathetic and empathetic identification that characterized his understanding of Cézanne’s *réalisation* took him from Bell’s “significant form” to his own “creative vision” to Mauron’s “psychological volumes.”

Woolf captures the central element of all three of Fry’s concepts in her use of the ripples and the fireworks as metaphors for the creative consciousness and its active construction of the exterior, a construction that causes a “distortion” of the exterior, just as the pebbles distort the transparency of the calm and silent sea. The aesthetic conversation concludes between Rachel and Terence with Rachel’s observation that music is different from writing novels, but her action of using Terence’s walking stick to draw “figures in the thin white dust to explain how Bach wrote his fugues (266) is the same externalization of the internal “rhythm” (literally, regarding music) that is central to Fry’s creative vision as well as the ripples and the fireworks. Art forms may differ, but what they have in common, as Woolf points out years later in “A Sketch of the Past,” is that “the whole world is a work of art; we are the music; we are the thing itself”*(Moments of Being  72)*. This is not the “one-making” engaged in by Lucy Swithin that Woolf ridicules in *Between the Acts*:

She was off, they guessed, on a circular tour of the imagination—one-making.

Sheep, cows, grass, trees, ourselves—all are one. . . . Well, if the thought gave her comfort. . . . let her think it. (175)
Rather than this Zen-like harmony with nature, Woolf’s aesthetic reflects Fry’s conviction that creative vision “demands the most complete detachment” from “the gifts of nature.” Unlike the Bergsonian “flux” in which consciousness is “duration” (Time and Free Will, 1889) rather than a series of distinguishable conscious experiences or “moments” as Woolf famously describes them, Fry’s view insists on the spatial quality of experience. The mind, rather than flowing in a time-space continuum with the object, “contemplates the particular field of vision” and imposes an order on it that, like Rachel’s ripples and Terence’s fireworks, originates in the subjective consciousness in an active operation on the exterior rather than a passive relinquishing of the consciousness to it. This operation maintains Fry’s insistence on the spatial quality of experience because, unlike Bergson’s la durée, which stresses the subjective consciousness in the flow of time, Fry’s psychological volumes stress the subjective consciousness’s capture of the visual moment. Chapter Three will address in greater depth the differences between Bloomsbury’s use of expressive realism or the “forceful” subjectivity of empathetic identification and Lewis’s accusation that Bergson-influenced “time-philosophies” were threatening the imagination’s powerful capacity to transform ordinary existence.

Evidence reveals that Woolf remained far closer to Fry than Bergson, despite Lewis’s belief otherwise.

Once The Voyage Out was finally in print after such a long and painful process of creation, Woolf’s exploration of Fry’s aesthetics peaks in a series of pieces beginning with a highly experimental story, “The Mark on the Wall,” which was included in the first publication of the Hogarth Press shortly after she and Leonard obtained a handpress in March 1917 and undertook the painstaking task of learning how to set type. While no
letters from Fry to Woolf mention “The Mark on the Wall” directly, he was impressed enough with it to recommend it to André Gide (Letters of RF 2:446), who never responded about it, perhaps not sharing the same enthusiasm for Fry’s description of Woolf’s “perverted plastic sense” to which Woolf refers in a letter thanking Fry for a conversation they had about the story (Letters of VW 2:285). “The Mark on the Wall” continues the same exploration of Fry’s concept of creative vision that Woolf undertakes in The Voyage Out. As in Terence’s observation that making figures involves projecting patterns onto the random “scattered” elements of the exterior, the narrator observes an unidentified mark on a wall and begins to speculate what it might be. These speculations drift without apparent structure from thoughts about the nature of perception to historical fiction to prophetic statements about the novels of the future.

Central to these “scattered” topics, however, is the notion that reality itself has become too oppressive as it is constructed by “the masculine point of view which governs our lives. . .” (Haunted House 44. All quotations from “The Mark on the Wall” from this collection). Reality merely represents the self-interest of the powerful and, in a patriarchal society, the reality of men rules. Responding to such power involves seeing the constructed nature of reality and whose interests it serves. Recalling an earlier time (probably the Edwardian period), the narrator describes how reality operated in everyday life:

There was a rule for everything. The rule for tablecloths at that particular period was that they should be made of tapestry with little yellow compartments marked upon them, such as you may see in photographs of the carpets in the corridors of the royal palaces. Tablecloths of a different kind were not real tablecloths. How
shocking, and yet how wonderful it was to discover that these real things, Sunday luncheons, Sunday walks, country houses, and tablecloths were not entirely real, were indeed half phantoms, and the damnation which visited the disbeliever in them was only a sense of illegitimate freedom. (44)

This sense of freedom, which the narrator is beginning to sense, occurs when reality and knowledge about it are seized from the powerful and a new world is imagined:

A quiet, spacious world, with the flowers so real and blue in the open fields. A world without professors or specialists or house-keepers with the profiles of policemen, a world which one could slice with one’s thought as a fish slices the water with his fin, grazing the stems of the water-lilies, hanging suspended over nests of white sea eggs. . . . (46)

Freedom from authoritarian representations, no matter what form they take, liberates the mind to “slice with one’s thought” through a reality that has suddenly become more responsive to the empathetic imagination. Objects are now back in play for new pattern-making. The tablecloth of the exterior no longer must contain a prescribed pattern in order to be a “real” tablecloth. The narrator predicts exuberantly that novelists of the future will understand the limitless number of “phantoms” with which society creates its various realities--in other words, a single, hegemonic, male-dominated representation will no longer control the lives and imaginations of individuals.

For the time being, however, such imaginative freedom will have to wait. As the narrator reaches a nearly ecstatic state in contemplating the ability to project her own phantoms on the world, she is interrupted by an unmistakably male presence announcing that he is “going out to buy a newspaper”(48), which is not only the perfect symbol for
official representations but is literally a domestication of the trees growing wild about which the narrator has just been meditating. The intruding voice curses the war, then gives an official identity to the mark on the wall, the object that the narrator has been using in a way that Fry, who was interested in the art of children, describes as not representing nature but expressing “with a delightful freedom and sincerity, the mental images which make up their own imaginative lives” (*Vision and Design* 20). The mark is now given a name: “All the same, I don’t see why we should have a snail on our wall” (48). Once this occurs, sanctioned reality is reinstated; the object can only be one thing now—a snail. It has been placed firmly back into “Whitacker’s Table of Precedency” that Woolf ridicules in the story, and it is hard to imagine a creature much further down on this or any other chain-of-being. The narrator’s brief freedom to “make figures” is over.

Broughton points out that “The Mark on the Wall” is “not an allegory of Fry’s theories; it is an exploration of them” (45). Woolf does not merely serve as a spokesperson for Fry’s formalism, however. She also gives a hint of future use of a visual aesthetic in such novels as *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves*, and she explores her own concerns about representation and patriarchal hegemony by revealing how control of the meaning and significance of objects can translate into power to create reality itself. Fry’s constant injunctions to remove all illustrative elements from visual and verbal art is both adhered to and undermined in this story, which ultimately contains both the “detached contemplation” that Broughton sees as the point of the story (45) and a powerful theme concerning women’s need for cognitive freedom. Woolf will further develop this theme
throughout the 1930s in such works as *A Room of One’s Own*, *Three Guineas*, and *Between the Acts*, all of which will be discussed in Chapter Four of this study.

Dean Baldwin views the main point of “The Mark on the Wall” as “the relation between imagination and fact” (14), and he points out that this story takes fiction to “its essayistic limits” while her 1919 “Kew Gardens” takes fiction “to the edge of lyric poetry” (15). Woolf seems to be consciously attempting to see how far fiction can utilize a visual aesthetic to explore the pattern-making facility of the subjective consciousness as well as how far prose can invade other artistic forms. Both of these goals are discussed in “Modern Novels,” an essay Woolf wrote for the Times Literary Supplement in April, 1919 (better known in its revised 1925 version as “Modern fiction”). Perhaps her most famous essay, it contains Woolf’s description of life as “a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end” (*Collected Essays of VW* 106). Distinguishing her own generation of novelists from the previous generation of “Edwardians,” such as H.G. Wells, Arnold Bennett, and John Galsworthy, Woolf points to her contemporaries’ focus on “the dark places of psychology” (*Collected Essays of VW* 108) in an attempt to capture the patterns projected by the subjective consciousness. Recalling Terence’s artistic goals in *The Voyage Out*, as well as the narrator’s empathetic projections onto the snail in “The Mark on the Wall,” Woolf draws on Fry’s concept of creative vision in her call for a new relationship with the exterior that replaces what she calls the “materialism” of the Edwardians with a duality of inner and outer that emphasizes the role of the figuration of the material world:
Let us record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall, let us trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness. (Collected Essays of VW 107)

Woolf concludes “Modern Novels” with an additional call for experimentation in order to move fiction beyond the limits of conventional representation. Capturing life, in Woolf’s terms, means what it does for Fry: that is, basing fiction on the writer’s “own feeling and not upon convention. . . no plot, no comedy, no tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe in the accepted style, and perhaps not a single button sewn on as the Bond Street tailors would have it” (Collected Essays of VW 106).

In “Kew Gardens,” written in the same year as “Modern Novels,” Woolf follows Fry’s dictum that art is “the expression of an idea in the artist’s mind”(Vision and Design 50) to its limit, creating a point of view not from the mind of a character or omniscient narrator but from a narrative voice located in a flower bed in London’s Kew Gardens on an afternoon in the month of July as visitors stroll by. The story is virtually free of what Fry called “illustration”; instead, the narrative seems more like a camera and microphone placed among the flowers to impassively record the movements and voices of four random couples, exemplifying the empathetic process of observing disparate elements of the exterior and allowing a pattern to form in the consciousness that is projected in turn back onto the exterior. The four couples, a married pair and their two children, an elderly man and his younger companion, two working-class women, and a young man and woman, all pass by at different intervals, speaking of unrelated things. Along with these, the narrative voice observes a snail carefully negotiating its way past some obstacles in
the flower bed, white and blue butterflies, a green insect, and a dragonfly. The entire scene is saturated with various colors that Mark Hussey views as prevalent in Woolf’s stories at this time:

Throughout the sketches Woolf uses color to express mood, character, and communication. Her observation of the changing qualities of light is acute and, in a piece like ‘Kew Gardens,’ brings to mind Cézanne or Monet. She uses color in a plastic way, anticipating what Charles Mauron wrote. . . in ‘the Nature of Beauty in Art and Literature’ ... of painters’ use of color to establish ‘psychological volumes.’ (70)

Woolf’s use of Mauron’s psychological volumes to shift the locus of meaning from verbal to visual is underscored by the fact that the conversations that transpire among all the characters as they walk in the light and color of Kew Gardens have little in common except that for all of them words are problematic and memories recalled involve images.

The married couple, Simon and Eleanor, share memories, his of a long-ago lover and hers of a silent kiss on the back of her neck by an old woman. In both memories, visual stimuli take precedence over the verbal. When Simon thinks of Lily, his old lover, he pictures a dragonfly circling around them and her shoe with a square silver buckle: “the whole of her seemed to be in her shoe” (*Haunted House* 33. All quotations from “Kew Gardens” from this collection). Simon remembers waiting for Lily’s answer to his marriage proposal, and he receives his answer in a visual rather than a verbal way:

And my love, my desire, were in the dragonfly; for some reason I thought that if it settled there, on that leaf, the broad one with the red flower in the middle of it, if
the dragonfly settled on the leaf she would say ‘yes’ at once. But the dragonfly went round and round--it never settled anywhere. (33) In turn, Eleanor relates a memory of hers in which she is sitting by the side of a lake, painting water lilies. Suddenly an old woman with a wart on her nose kisses the back of her neck without a word of explanation. The kiss excites Eleanor, and she describes it to Simon as “the mother of all my kisses all my life”(34). This kiss, like Simon’s memory of the dragonfly, represents a defining moment of Eleanor’s life, a visual, spatial experience that operates as an empathetic transference of her imaginative life to the external object.

The next couple to pass by the flower bed is the elderly man and his young companion. The elderly man talks ceaselessly about the War and the spirits of the dead. In the midst of his mutterings, the younger man catches him by the sleeve and draws his attention to a flower. The old man puts his ear to the flower as if receiving a message from it. He begins to talk to the flower about “the forests of Uruguay which he had visited hundreds of years ago in company with the most beautiful woman in Europe”(35). In his confused state, he transfers his desire for a woman in a purple and black dress whom his companion prevents him from following to the object of the flower, which, like the dragonfly and the kiss, moves beyond the verbal realm to the visual. Despite his gibberish, which is confused, the visual association of his memory and the flower is emotionally accurate and runs deeper than his ability to recreate it in words.

This couple is followed by two women who gossip in a rather unflattering parody of lower-class dialogue (Woolf expressed concern in a diary entry about two friends from the Women’s Cooperative Guild reading this passage [Diary of VW 284]). In an almost
word-for-word quotation of “Modern Novels,” one of the women suddenly falls silent and “looked through the patterns of falling words at the flowers standing cool, firm, and upright in the earth. . . . She stood there letting the words fall over her, swaying the top part of her body slowly backwards and forwards, looking at the flowers. Then she suggested that they should find a seat and have their tea”(36). The woman is suddenly torn away from her everyday verbal distraction by the overwhelming power of the object. Her words literally fall away from her. The reader does not learn what imaginative transference has occurred, but the woman is silenced and noticeably sobered by it.

Finally, a young couple in love pause for a brief moment over the flower bed, struggling to find the right words to say to each other, words that the narrator compares to a bee: “words with short wings for their heavy body of meaning, inadequate to carry them far and thus alighting awkwardly upon the very common objects that surrounded them, and were to their inexperienced touch so massive. . . .”(37). Instead of expressing their love and desire in words, the young couple joins hands on the handle of her parasol and press the tip of it “deep down into the soft earth”(37). This action, with its sexual overtones, “expressed their feelings in a strange way”(37). Once again, Woolf privileges the visual over the verbal, not only in the events of the scene but in the submerged theme of the power of the visual to refresh and renew the verbal. Such renewal is evident as “Kew Gardens” concludes with couple after couple passing the flower bed and getting swept up in a “blue-green vapour” and becoming indistinguishable from their natural surroundings. This vision ends with the return of voices, but they seem cleansed of actual words, as though the voices have entered into what Woolf calls elsewhere “the voice of the beauty of the world”(To the Lighthouse 142) in which the visual nourishes
the verbal, which in turn expresses the visual in a relationship that Woolf compares to a candle and its flame:

It seemed as if all gross and heavy bodies had sunk down in the heat motionless and lay huddled on the ground, but their voices went wavering from them as if they were flames lolling from thick waxen bodies of candles. Voices. Yes, voices. Wordless voices, breaking the silence suddenly with such depth of contentment, such passion of desire, or, in the voices of children, such freshness of surprise. . . . (39)

Harvena Richter points out that “before The Voyage Out was written, no novelist had ever tried to describe exactly how the eye-mind experiences the object, or how the body participates in the experience”(viii).

“Kew Gardens” carries Woolf’s preoccupation with the verbal/visual relationship just short of its most extreme expression in the 1921 “sketch” (as Woolf called most of her short works) “Blue & Green.” The “wordless voices” of “Blue & Green“ are presented in color volumes and exteriorities without even the minimal narrative structure of “Kew Gardens.” Two brief paragraphs--one entitled “Green” and the other “Blue”--comprise the entire piece, which anticipates the “Time Passes” section of To the Lighthouse. In his 1944 republication of Monday or Tuesday, the 1921 collection of most of Woolf’s short works from before the 1920s, Leonard Woolf omitted “Blue & Green,” explaining that he was “practically certain” that Woolf would not want it included in the updated collection, which carried the title A Haunted House. Leonard’s tone suggests a bit of embarrassment over the piece, which is arguably the purest example of the visual aesthetic she developed under the influence of Fry, who had announced in a review of modern French art that
some paintings by one of the artists were a parody in paint of Woolf’s prose style (Letters of VW n.385). Woolf was highly flattered by this compliment, and the subsequent “Blue & Green” is perhaps her most concerted attempt to turn prose into a plastic art form:

The pointed fingers of glass hang downwards. The light slides down the glass, and drops a pool of green. All day long the ten fingers of the lustre drop green upon the marble. The feathers of parakeets--their harsh cries--sharp blades of palm trees--green, too; green needles glittering in the sun. . . . (Complete Shorter Fiction 142)

In this passage, which is representative of this brief piece, Woolf eschews all illustrative elements in favor of “painterly” prose that provides a visual experience involving the psychological volume of the color green. The word “green” is repeated four times in various visual contexts, creating a “theme” of sorts that is not derived from verbal meaning but from visual meaning. This word-painting is punctuated by only one sound; however, it is not the sound of the human voice but the cry of parakeets, creatures capable of imitating the human voice but here represented in their natural state, underscoring the wordless quality of the visual experience.

Despite such irrefutable evidence of Fry’s influence, however, Woolf’s aesthetics and artistic independence did not allow her to maintain an unqualified acceptance of the formalism that guided much of Fry’s criticism before the 1920s. In “Solid Objects”(1920), Woolf parodies the solipsistic side of Fry’s insistence upon a sharp distinction between art and life. Two friends--Charles and John--are strolling on the beach and engaging in a heated political discussion. John ends the argument with a sweeping, dismissive statement: “Politics be damned!” Taking a break by the wreckage
of an old boat, Charles skims flat stones over the water, while John digs his hand into the sand, where he discovers an interesting chunk of green glass. Similar to Rachel and Terence in *The Voyage Out* and the narrator in “The Mark on the Wall,” the exterior object sets in motion an empathetic projection of associations onto it:

You had only to enclose it in a rim of gold, or pierce it with a wire, and it became a jewel; part of a necklace, or a dull green light upon a finger. Perhaps after all it was really a gem; something worn by a dark princess trailing her finger in the water as she sat in the stern of the boat and listened to the slaves singing as they rowed across the bay. Or the oak sides of a sunk Elizabethan treasure-chest had split apart, and, rolled over and over, over and over, its emeralds had come at last to shore. (*Haunted House* 80. All quotations from “Solid Objects” from this collection).

Exploring Fry’s central distinction between life and art, Woolf goes on to portray the dangers of allowing an obsession with the formal properties of the object to be used as an escape from social/historical issues. John’s involvement with such issues is progressively left behind as his search for interesting objects takes over his life. His budding career as a Member of Parliament is soon ignored in favor of adding more and more worthless but aesthetically pleasing objects to his mantlepiece, objects that initially serve as paper weights for his legal papers but quickly come to occupy the mantle alone. John no longer uses the objects for an empathetic identification that expresses his own creative vision of reality; instead, they sweep him away from the meaning-creating activity of human subjective consciousness into the inherent meaninglessness of the object itself:
The finest specimens he would bring home and place upon his mantelpiece, where, however, their duty was more and more of an ornamental nature, since papers needing a weight to keep them down became scarcer and scarcer. (83)

In the end, Charles returns for one last time to discover that John’s obsession with formalism has rendered his life pointless and irrelevant: “‘Pretty stones,’ he said as cheerfully as he could; and saying that he had an appointment to keep, he left John--for ever”(85). In this and other stories from 1915 onward, Woolf explored both the attractions and the limitations of formalist aesthetics, and, as the 1920s opened, she was poised to use a visual aesthetic, not for an escape from the vicissitudes of human existence or as an answer to them but as a way of underscoring the role of human imagination in the meanings assigned to existence itself, which is meaningless without it.

V. Wyndham Lewis, Visual Aesthetics, and the Influence of Bloomsbury

Lewis’s assiduous attempts to enhance his image by distancing himself from all influences complicates the task of establishing a framework for his visual aesthetics. Nevertheless, there are two conceptual strands that constituted the central tension in his thinking from the teens until at least the mid-1930s. The first strand is the aesthetic influence of Fry’s formalism and its roots in Cézanne’s concept of réalisation, which, combined with Moore’s valorization of the object and Lipps and Worringer’s concept of einfühlung or “in-feeling,” comprised the Bloomsbury aesthetic and its commitment to empathetic identification. Lipps and Worringer are especially important because, as discussed in Chapter One, their exploration of empathetic identification played a central role in the psychological shift from sympathy to empathy as a fundamental property of
the turn that aesthetic theory and practice took at the end of the nineteenth century.

Lewis lived in Munich at least twice between 1900 and 1910 and absorbed the ideas of Lipps and Worringer as well as attending lectures given by Bergson in Paris. Lewis was so well versed in the intellectual underpinnings of Bloomsbury, in fact, that the second conceptual strand in his thinking involved the reaction against Lipps and Worringer that was organized in Paris by Charles Maurras, Julien Benda, Remy de Gourmont, and other members of the Action Française. These right-wing thinkers created the concept of *sévérité*---the strict “separation” of the self and the object--to oppose the empathetic identification that they feared could be used by clever liberal politicians to sway the masses toward a more egalitarian democracy, to which the elitist Action Française was opposed. For Lewis, then, the opposing concepts of empathy and *sévérité* served as the basis of his profoundly mixed feelings about Fry and Bloomsbury, feelings he was unable to fully reconcile, despite his professed distaste for everything and everyone Bloomsbury.

Such mixed feelings can clearly be seen in a rather mysterious unpublished letter left behind in the Lytton Strachey papers at the British Museum in which Lewis invites Strachey, whom he had ridiculed for years as possessing all the worst Bloomsbury traits, to a secret meeting either “incognito, or rather unobserved, in an unfrequented part of town. . . .” The reason given for this strange invitation, to which there is no record of Strachey’s response, was “to discuss two or three literary matters with you” (Quoted in Meyers 109). Jeffrey Meyers, whose biography of Lewis defends Lewis in the Omega incident, nevertheless suggests that the invitation to Strachey is insincere--a joke, or worse, bait to set up Strachey for an embarrassing prank (109). Insincere or not, however, the letter to Strachey underscores how well Lewis and members of the
Bloomsbury Group knew each other. Even after all the rancor following Lewis’s split with the Omega in October 1913, he and Bloomsbury had many friendships in common, including Eliot, Joyce, Mansfield, the Sitwells, Lady Ottoline Morrell (whose Garsington estate often hosted Bloomsbury members as well as Lewis), and the eminent Gertrude Stein herself. Just a few months before their famous falling-out, Fry and Lewis traveled to Paris together to visit with Stein and view her art collection. Following the Omega incident, both Fry and Lewis gave their versions of it to Stein, who commented later that the two men “told exactly the same story only it was different, very different” (*The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* 122-123). Stein never revealed which version she found more convincing, but it would not be surprising if she found the rancor surrounding the affair more indicative of Lewis’s character than Fry’s.

Lewis’s habit of alienating friends included even those closest to him, such as Pound, Eliot, Joyce, and Hulme, numberless women who were devoted to him and his career, and all five of his disowned or abandoned children from various wives and mistresses. His genius, as well as the more difficult aspects of his nature, were understood and tolerated by many, even in the face of exploitation, neglect, and abuse in return. Following the War, for instance, when Lewis assigned himself the official title of “The Enemy” and stepped up his attacks on the Sitwells and Bloomsbury, Edith Sitwell and Virginia Woolf sat for portraits by him; and, for five months during the early 1920s, a group of friends pooled their resources to provide Lewis with a sufficient monthly allowance to support himself while he wrote and painted. This generosity was repaid by a note from Lewis asking one of his oldest friends, Edward Wadsworth, “Where’s the fucking stipend?” when a monthly payment was late (Meyers 112-113). Such ingratitude
and failure to acknowledge the influence of others on his life and work, along with Lewis’s constant attempts to escape the “herd,” whether in the form of the masses, which he despised, or other artists, with whom he relentlessly competed, does not negate the fact that his life and career were heavily influenced in a number of very recognizable ways. Vincent Sherry points out that Lewis’s formative years on the Continent brought him into contact first and foremost with Lipps and Worringer, whose theories on empathetic identification were shaping the basic modernist shift away from the sympathetic tradition. Lewis was aware of this shift years before the publication of Worringer’s highly influential *Abstraktion und Einfühlung* in 1908 (91).

In Paris, what Georges Sorel on the far left and Julien Benda and Rémy de Gourmont on the far right had in common—along with social elitists such as Maurras and José Ortega y Gasset—was the fear that empathetic identification, and its underlying concept that the exterior contains no absolute value, could be easily manipulated to create realities that could be used to sway the feelings of the masses who, in the view of these thinkers, were subject to thought control even under the best of circumstances. If external reality itself is seen as created in part by empathetic projection, objective truth, both conceptual and visual, is in jeopardy. Gourmont explains:

> All those words that certain political philosophies abuse—justice, truth, equality, democracy, liberty, and a hundred others—have nothing but a sentimental value, which their users merely invest in them. Not only does the tenor of the word become a sentiment for those who use it, *but its very material form,* and the atmosphere which surrounds it. (Quoted in Sherry 31, emphasis added)
Reaction to this perceived loss of the stability of the object involved the politicization of a visual aesthetic that was sharply distinguished from empathetic identification in favor of a privileging of the object in what Ortega describes in “The Dehumanization of Art” as “a maximum of distance and a minimum of feeling intervention” (16). This aesthetic of the distanced eye, which was attributed to the social elite, came into direct opposition with empathetic identification, which was now relegated by Benda, Gourmont, Ortega, and other reactionaries to the impressionable masses. Sherry uses the French term sèvérité to describe this reactionary aesthetic:

*Sévérité, in* an unusually literal but not untrue sense, means ‘severance’ or ‘separation,’ and as such describes the twofold condition of visual perception: distance from the objects of sight and discrimination among them. Construed also as ‘aloofness’ or ‘austerity,’ moreover, sèvérité describes the virt[ue] of an aristocracy at once inherited and earned--its traditional privileges the reward for percipients gifted with this superior visual faculty. (22)

Steeped in Lipps and Worringer’s theory of *Einfühlung* and the Parisian right-wing reaction to it, this dualism would be central to Lewis’s aesthetic and political mixed feelings about Bloomsbury in the 1920s and 1930s.

Lewis first came into contact with Bloomsbury through Duncan Grant, who was attending the La Palette School of Art in Paris in 1907. Grant wrote to Strachey that year with an initial impression of Lewis that changed little over the following years:

My gorge simply rises whenever I see him. . . . I simply descend into the depths of gloom . . . and I cannot decide whether my feelings are absurd and silly . . . but
I certainly think . . . it’s very odd that anyone should have the power of making one go into such ‘hysteric.’ (Quoted in Meyers 43)

Grant’s negative reaction to Lewis— in part personal and in part class-based, was founded somewhat on Lewis’s habit of carefully constructing his own image and mystique. While tolerating similar behavior in Eliot, who re-invented himself as an English gentleman, Bloomsbury found Lewis’s relentless image-enhancing distasteful. Such behavior was noted by Helen Rowe, one of Lewis’s models before the War: “Lewis tried to do everything with great deliberation. He subjected the most commonplace actions to thorough scrutiny, and then chose a particular way to speak, laugh, gesture, sit, walk, eat” (Quoted in Meyers 40). In a 1907 letter to his mother from Paris, Lewis displays some of this self-conscious vanity that no doubt contributed to Grant’s unfavorable impression of him:

> My studio is excellent: the light, everything, is about as I wanted it.—I have bought a wonderful new hat which makes me look ever so much more handsome. I’m going to buy a fur collar as soon as I can see one cheap for this next winter. . . a long one, that buttons onto the coat. I let my hair down underneath the hat: the effect is astonishing. (Letters of WL 33)

Accompanying this letter are two sketches of Lewis in the hat, demonstrating how “astonishing” he looks in it. In the wake of the Omega affair, Fry sums up both his view of Lewis’s character and the overall impact of Lewis’s insurrection in a letter to Simon Bussy:

> I was touched by your sympathy over the Omega affair. It is really sad that these young artists understand their common interest so little. I think Lewis’s vanity
touches on insanity, and it is he who has led the others, who are not bad but only ignorant and romantic, astray. In any case the Omega carries on quite well without them. Duncan has done some wonderful designs. . . . You will find many new things when you come. (Letters of RF 2:376)

In fairness to Lewis, the Ideal Home Exhibition was an important commission, but Lewis biographer Jeffrey Meyers concludes that Fry’s refusal to bring a libel suit against Lewis for a public “Round Robin” letter in which he calls Fry a “Pecksniff-shark” (Letters of WL 50) is evidence that Lewis “was right, and Fry did not go to court because he was guilty of the charges stated in the letter”(47). Such a conclusion fails to fully consider 1) Lewis’s vanity and reactive personality, 2) the kindness and support Fry was extending to Lewis at the time, both on a personal and professional level, and 3) official Omega policy on commissions. Besides the visit to Stein, Fry included Lewis in the planning for the Omega Workshops (Letters of RF 1:355), exhibited Lewis’s work in the second post-impressionist show in 1912, and complimented Lewis on one of his paintings in the Allied Artists’ Show the same year, addressing him as “My dear Lewis”:

I hope you saw my article on the Albert Hall. I liked your thing very much, and I see The Times has been quite respectful. We must meet before long. Are you in London next week? If so, I wish you’d come down for a night, say Thursday?

(Letters of RF 1: 360)

Such cordiality was still in place in April, 1913, in a letter to Lewis in which Fry thanks Lewis for a book he has recommended and discusses it at some length, concluding the letter with an expression of interest in Lewis’s ideas and a warm invitation to continue the discussion:
I’m very much interested by what you said about the need of some big belief outside of art [the book Lewis recommended was concerned with devil worship]. I must talk it over with you. The situation of the artist becomes more and more hopelessly paradoxical the more one gets to some idea of what art is. We must talk it over. I’ve taken 33 Fitzroy Square. We’ll meet there soon. (Letters of RF 2:367)

Despite such obvious friendliness, however, Lewis’s rancorous split with Fry was represented by him and his supporters as a hostile aesthetic break from Fry’s influence and from its Cézannian origins.

On Lewis’s side of the controversy, Lewis is seen as making a clean break from London’s modern art movement. Walter Michel exemplifies this view by saying that Lewis “by this time absorbed and transformed his early influences into an independent style which. . . announced a presence very different from any in Paris, Milan or elsewhere”(74). His training at the Slade, his associations with the New English Art Club, Sickert’s Camden Town Group, and Fry’s exhibitions and Omega Workshops “provide the background for London’s modern art movement, but they had little to offer to Lewis”(74), according to Michel and others. Hugh Kenner makes the important observation, however, that “Lewis’s thought and work ran parallel to those of his time; his individuality was a matter of distinctions and inflections, which he took great pains to emphasize”(19). In other words, rather than representing “a presence very different” from other styles at the time, Lewis’s thought and work participated in the dialogue going on among a number of aesthetics seeking to dominate each other with apologies, manifestoes, and magazines of all sorts, all designed to distinguish one from another
either in the eyes of the general public or, in Lewis’s case, as Kenner points out, in the
eyes of the more elite avant-garde.

Much of Lewis’s relentless pugnaciousness with other painters and writers, then,
involved the effort to establish independence within his own artistic and intellectual
community by denying or suppressing influences while at the same time exposing the
derivative or jejune nature of his rivals’ thought and work. The first issue of *Blast*
(1914), Lewis’s most important work before the War, is filled with such maneuverings
directed not at the general public but only at those who would understand the in-joke
nature of all the “blessings” and “blasts” and either feel flattered or insulted by them. The
manifestoes contain approvals and condemnations of various qualities of England, but
they are mostly devoted to dismissals of artists and art movements that are perceived as
rivals to Lewis’s new visual aesthetic, which he and Pound called “vorticism.” Fry’s was
not the only influence that needed to be denied, as the following dismissal of Marinetti
and futurism suggests:

> The artist of the modern movement is a savage (in no sense an advanced,
> perfected, democratic, Futurist individual of Mr. Marinetti’s limited imagination):
> this enormous, jangling, journalistic, fairy desert of modern life serves him as
> Nature did more technically primitive man. (*Blast* 1 33)

Lewis’s distancing of himself and vorticism from associations with Marinetti’s futurism
typifies his attempt to carve out a niche for himself that he alone inhabited. Personal
relationships and professional collaborations were readily sacrificed in pursuit of this
goal. For example, when C.R.W. Nevinson, a fellow vorticist and longtime friend of
Lewis’s from the Slade, collaborated with Marinetti to publish a futurist manifesto in the
Observer, making an overt connection between futurism and vorticism (a connection that is more true than false), Lewis ended his friendship with Nevinson, published an angry denial in the Observer, and organized a highly-visible public demonstration of “anti-futurists”:

It started in Bond Street. I counter-putsched. I assembled in Greek Street a determined band of miscellaneous anti-futurists. Mr. Epstein was there; Gaudier-Brzeska, T.E. Hulme, Edward Wadsworth and a cousin of his called Wallace. . . . After a hearty meal we shuffled bellicosely round to the Doré Gallery. Marinetti had entrenched himself upon a high lecture platform, and he put down a tremendous barrage in French as we entered. Gaudier went into action at once. . . . He was sniping him without intermission, standing up in his place in the audience all the while. The remainder of our party maintained a confused uproar. (Blasting and Bombardiering 33)

This was the same Marinetti for whom Lewis and Nevinson had hosted a dinner the previous fall to celebrate his arrival in England; and it was the same Marinetti who, just one month before Lewis’s attack, had been invited to lecture on futurism at the Rebel Centre. Next to go during the summer of 1914 was Hulme, whose anti-humanism, anti-vitalism, 1914 translation of Georges Sorel’s treatise on the cultural necessity of violence (Reflections on Violence [1908]), and political take on Worringer’s einfühlung all were important influences on Lewis as well. In addition to the threat of intellectual exposure, Hulme’s effusive praise of the work of Epstein and Bomberg and his romance with Kate Lechmere (Meyers 53) were the last straws. In his memoir of the period, Lewis recalls how his friendship with Hulme ended: “I never see the summer house in the center [of
Soho] without remembering how I saw it upside down” (Blasting and Bombardiering 105). Hulme, who was even taller and stronger than Lewis, hung him upside down by his pants on an iron railing after Lewis attacked him in a jealous rage.

Setting aside Lewis’s constant attempts to disassociate himself from the influences of others, a tendency of his own that he praised in fellow vorticist Spencer Gore in his eulogy of him in Blast 1 (Gore died of pneumonia in March, 1914), it is interesting to observe the presence of virtually all of Lewis’s major influences in the distancing he tries to establish for vorticism in his introduction to the catalogue of the first (and only) exhibition of vorticist artists at the Doré Galleries, June 1915:

By Vorticism we mean (a) Activity as opposed to the tasteful Passivity of Picasso; (b) SIGNIFICANCE as opposed to the dull or anecdotal character to which the Naturalist is condemned; (c) ESSENTIAL MOVEMENT and ACTIVITY (such as the energy of a mind) as opposed to the imitative cinematography, the fuss and hysterics of the Futurists. (Wyndham Lewis on Art 96, emphasis in text)

Lewis’s succinct description of vorticism draws deeply on Lipps and Worringer’s concept of einfühlung (“in-feeling”), which describes empathetic identification or active “energy of a mind” over the passive contemplation of juxtaposed objects that Lewis sees in the synthetic cubism of Picasso’s collages. This is not entirely fair to Picasso, since, as Robert Williams points out, with Picasso’s art, “[w]e are forced to work our way over the surface in a manner that calls attention to our own processes of perception and thought” (175). Juxtaposition and the preservation of the picture plane that the collages represent are not designed for mere passive contemplation, and Pound drew heavily on these concepts for his imagist aesthetic as well as vorticism. Both Lewis and Pound were
interested in distinguishing vorticism from imagism, which Pound had developed with Amy Lowell but had turned away from after his own falling out with Lowell around 1912. Next, this empathetic “energy of a mind” is distinguished from the futurist form of “activity” by accusing the futurists of mimesis and--in an allusion to their Italian character--of engaging in “fuss and hysterics” as opposed to the stillness in the midst of a whirlpool character of the English-inspired vortex. Rather than the frenetic futurist movement and activity, vorticism stressed “essential” movement and activity, which Lewis explains in a way that recalls not only Lipps and Worringer but Bell’s significant form, Fry’s creative vision, and Woolf’s pattern-making:

Moods, ideas and visions have movements, associating themselves with objects or an object. An object also has an ESSENTIAL movement, an essential environment, however intimate and peculiar an object it might be--even a telephone receiver or an Alpine flower. (Wyndham Lewis on Art 97, emphasis in text)

Lewis offsets what he calls “nature-morte” or the anti-vitalist position of Hulme’s Worringer-inspired view of the object, with the empathetic, creative “energy of a mind.” His criticism of Picasso’s cubism involves his notion that Picasso’s relationship with the object relinquished too much of the power of the imagination to the decorative arrangement of the “essential” exterior realm of objects, which is merely a realm of dead material:

These tours-de-force of taste, and DEAD ARRANGEMENTS BY THE TASTEFUL HAND WITHOUT, not instinctive organisations by the living will within, are too
inactive and uninventive for our northern climates, and the same objections can be
made to them as to Matisse DECORATION. (Blast 2 41, emphasis in text)

In his zeal to make a dent in the preeminence of Fry and Picasso, Lewis lumps what he
calls “Mr. Fry’s curtain and pincushion factory in Fitzroy Square” (Blast 2 41)–and by
extension, Fry’s success in exhibiting post-impressionism–together with Picasso’s
surrender of empathetic identification to the emptiness of nature-morte. In doing so,
Lewis ironically echoes Fry in the vorticist dedication to “SIGNIFICANCE as opposed to
the dull or anecdotal character to which the Naturalist is condemned.”

As Lewis’s political views moved further to the right after the War, he increasingly
aligned himself with the French reactionary movement of the first decade that found
disciples in England in Hulme, Pound, and Eliot. Hulme, in particular, was a devoted
disciple of Charles Maurras after rejecting an initial devotion to Bergson. Lewis was
attracted to Hulme’s version of sévérité that adopted an extreme position on anti-vitalism
or the view that the external world must be perceived as dead in contrast to the privileged
creative capacity of the mind. By the final pages of Blast 2 (1915), Lewis is beginning
to struggle with the duality between a Bloomsbury empathetic and an Action Française
relationship with the exterior that would characterize a central tension in his work of the
1920s. In “Wyndham Lewis Vortex No. 1,” Lewis acknowledges this duality with the
exterior, and he valorizes it as a key virtue of an ideal perceptual stance:

There is nothing so impressive as the number TWO. . . . You must be a duet in
everything. . . . For, the individual, the single object, and the isolated, is, you will
admit, an absurdity. . . . Why try and give the impression of a consistent and
indivisible personality? . . . There is yourself: and there is the exterior world, that
fat mass you browse on. . . . You knead it into an amorphous imitation of yourself inside yourself. . . . sometimes you speak through its huskier mouth, sometimes through yours. Do not confuse yourself with it, or weaken the esoteric lines of fine original being. (Blast 2 91)

In this series of statements, Lewis aims for sévérité, but the clear separation of the self and the “fat mass” of the exterior world becomes problematic when “you knead it into an amorphous imitation of yourself inside yourself. . . .” Such kneading of external reality represents an empathetic relationship with it in which the self operates on the exterior in a way that is similar to Woolf’s characters who engage in “pattern-making” in which the self projects a cohesive reality onto the disparate and meaningless realm of the exterior.

Lewis complicates the issue of separation between the self and the exterior further by saying that “[s]ometimes you speak through its huskier mouth and sometimes through yours.” Lewis calls for a clear distinction between the voice of the exterior and the voice of the self, but, given his clear distinction between the two and his insistence on nature-morte, the question of how to speak through the “huskier mouth” of the exterior becomes a serious one that occupied the attention of Woolf as well, who was struggling with the same perceptual issues:

Often when I have been writing one of my so-called novels I have been baffled by this same problem; that is, how to describe what I call in my private shorthand--’non-being.’ (Moments of Being 70)

Such “cotton wool” of everyday existence refers to life “not lived consciously” or life given over to the exterior: “one walks, eats, sees things, deals with what has to be done; the broken vacuum cleaner; ordering dinner; writing orders to Mabel; washing; cooking
dinner; bookbinding” (*Moments of Being* 70). To this “non-being” of the experience of the exterior, Woolf opposes “moments of being” and Lewis opposes “fine original being.” Both carry the notion of empathetic involvement with the exterior in which the subjective imagination imposes order and significance on external existence, not merely surrendering to its power to absorb the conscious self into its “fat mass” of meaningless material, which is central to Woolf’s criticism of formalism in “Solid Objects” and to Lewis’s criticism of Picasso’s art.

Lewis addresses the implications for art of *sévérîté* as the sympathetic separation of self and object vs. empathetic identification in a well-known passage of *Tarr*, his 1918 novel about his Parisian years. Lewis’s alter-ego, Frederick Tarr discusses art over dinner with Anastasya Vasek, a beautiful and intelligent German woman who interests him on a number of levels. In a series of statements that recall Fry’s insistence on a separation between art and life, Tarr makes a case for formalism by connecting art to the deadness of an exterior that is “the first condition of art”(299). This deadness of the exterior on the one hand is opposed to the “naked pulsing and moving of the soft inside of life, along with infinite elasticity and consciousness of movement, on the other”(299). Unlike Hulme’s anti-vitalistic total separation of consciousness and the dead exterior or Picasso’s surrender to it, however, Tarr tells Anastasya that “life . . . only emerges and is visible in art”(299); like “[a] hippopotamus’ armoured hide, a turtle’s shell, feather or machinery”(299), art is the outgrowth, the object, the projection of the life within its creator. Once again, as in *Blast* 2, Lewis tries to establish a middle ground between Worringer’s *einfühlung* and the reaction to it that insisted on the supremacy of the eye alone. Art is part of the solid permanence of the separate and dead world, but it is that
part of the object world that has been projected onto it by empathetic consciousness. For both Woolf and Lewis, Fry’s contention that a work of art is primarily “the expression of an idea in the artist’s mind” (*Vision and Design* 50) had far-reaching implications for their work after the War as well as for their view of exteriority itself, and this will be the subject of Chapter Three.

VI. Conclusion

Underscoring and informing all of Roger Fry’s formalist aesthetics, as well as the various roles he played as mentor, publicist, critic, and entrepreneur, is the modernist shift from emphasizing what the artist produces to how the viewer or reader perceives a work of art. Starting with “significant form,” which emphasized emotions projected onto the object, then shifting to “creative vision,” which refined the meaning of “significant” further, Fry finally arrived at Mauron’s “psychological volumes,” which, as Dowling points out, emphasized the “idea of effort on the spectator’s part”(16). All three of these perceptual frameworks involve what Moshe Barasch calls “the behavior of the contemplating subject”(172). As discussed in Chapter One, the “psychological shift” that occurred in the late nineteenth-century, which combined a longstanding interest in sympathetic psychological response with more recent developments in empirical method, foregrounded the role of expression in the creation of exterior reality. Despite the differences among the bewildering array of movements and manifestoes before the War, the “big belief outside of art” that Fry and Lewis were puzzling over in the months before their falling-out, and shared even by the French reactionaries, was the belief that one’s relationship with the exterior and the function of the object dictated one’s artistic views.
and practice. Relegating naturalistic realism merely to one of many possible “aspects” of representation, rather than the only legitimate aspect, opened up a pandora’s box of competing subjective “realities” that all had in common the modernist notion of a lower-case “truth” that stressed the relativity of knowledge and the awareness that truth can never be fully separated from desire. In the wake of Nietzsche’s perspectivism, Freud’s work with the unconscious, and the general shift to empathetic identification that this study is tracing, the notion of objective truth was seriously undermined in the modernist era.

Fry’s close and longstanding connection to the psychological shift, ushered in through empiricism and manifested in empathy, underscored his visual aesthetic that combined the expressionism of Cézanne with the subjectivity of G.E. Moore, both focusing on the ability of the human mind to do two contradictory things that Douglas Mao sees as the central tension of Anglo-American visual aesthetics: “an urgent validation of production and an admiration for an object world beyond the manipulations of consciousness. . .”(11). This tension can clearly be heard in a famous statement in Moore’s *Principia Ethica* that is most closely associated with Bloomsbury:

> By far the most valuable things, which we know or can imagine, are certain states of consciousness, which may be roughly described as the pleasures of human intercourse and the enjoyment of beautiful objects. (188)

Moore’s rejection of Bradley’s idealism insisted on what Mao calls the “brute facticity of existence”(53), which remains impervious to cognitive “manipulations”; and seemingly on the other side of an unbridgeable gulf are “the pleasures of human intercourse,” which, while enjoyable, are forever trapped behind a thick Kantian pane of glass,
“knowing” things but only within a human context. Torgovnick suggests that in Woolf’s writing in particular an attempt to bridge this gulf in Moore’s subjectivity can be found in “a theory of perception and memory as originating in visual images that finds rich expression in novels like To the Lighthouse and The Waves “(23). Torgovnick admits the paucity of critical discussion of Woolf’s visual aesthetic, but her hunch about what Woolf tries to accomplish is important, given the use of Cézanne’s empathetic réalisation and the psychological volumes that Fry and Woolf drew from to begin to push beyond Moore’s appreciation for, but distance from, the object:

I have never come across a critical discussion of this aspect of Woolf’s thinking, but find it inescapable and significant. In The Waves, Bernard notes that ‘Visual impressions often communicate . . . briefly statements we shall in time come to uncover and coax into words.’ In Part III of To the Lighthouse, Lily ‘coaxes into meaning’ moments vividly remembered as pictures and even partly remembered in paint. . . . (23)

Such “coaxing” into words and meaning neither fully appropriates the object as in Bradley’s idealism, nor does it fully distance the perceptual self from the object as in Moore’s subjectivism.

Moreover, this empathetic identification with the object does not relinquish the perceptual self to the object, which Lewis believed was the greatest danger to modernity of Bergsonian subjectivity. Instead, such coaxing of the object into meaning comes much closer to Cézanne’s réalisation than it does to Bergson’s la durée. For Lewis, what he calls “the mystery of memory” is the important factor that links him to Cézanne’s attempt to “realize” optic awareness of the object and perceptual awareness of it at the same time:
That we can no longer see a ‘perceptual object’ (that is what we habitually suppose that we are looking at) than we can see a mathematical point, is true enough. But the system of the ‘percept’ has been for unnumbered years the material of our life. We have overridden time to the extent of bestowing upon objects a certain timeliness. We and they have existed in a, to some extent, timeless world, in which we possessed these objects, in our fastness of memory, like gods. . . . While we were looking at the front of a house, if we had ever seen its back we saw that back along with the front, as though we were in two places at once and hence two times. And our infinite temporal and spatial reduplication of ourselves, this long-stretched-out chain existing all at once, was our perceptual self, which to some extent was a timeless self. It is by way of the mystery of memory, of course, that we reached this timelessness. (Time and Western Man 387, emphasis in text)

Lewis’s unacknowledged but unmistakable allusion to Cézanne’s réalisation is important in connecting his visual aesthetic to that of Woolf. The importance of “perception and memory as originating in visual images” (Torgovnick 23) was just as keenly felt by Lewis as by Woolf—possibly more so, since the danger he felt from Bergson involved the fear that la durée, or seeing reality as a series of “events,” meant the disappearance of the object in favor of the succeeding “states” of an object. In other words, the mental perception of objects that gives them their reality for humans no longer exists, which actually puts at risk the solidity of the exterior world that is absolutely essential for the renewal of mental perceptions, or what Lewis describes as finding “POSSIBILITIES in the object” (Blast 2 45, emphasis in text). It is this search for the
“possibilities” of the exterior world for the empathetic creation of meaning--and the resolution of the modernist tension between expressionism and materialism--that places Woolf and Lewis within a visual aesthetic that emphasizes the role of the perceptual self in the creation of reality itself.
Chapter Three

The Painterly Eye: Woolf, Lewis, and the Perceptual Self

I. Chapter Overview

Both Wolf and Lewis developed visual aesthetics in which the empathetic perceptual self, consisting of the eye and memory, combines with the exterior to create what Lewis called the “perceptual object” (*Time and Western Man* 387) and Woolf called the “inner landscape” (*Moments of Being* 85). The key element for both artists was the mind’s ability to project the interior onto the exterior rather than to draw inferences from it. For Woolf, this meant that the exterior served as the “fertilizer” (*Moment and Other Essays* 174) of thought, which originated in the interior. Likewise, for Lewis, the exterior consisted of “much more than we immediately see” (*Time and Western Man* 383).

Chapter Three discusses a number of key implications of the perceptual freedom that empathetic identification made possible for Woolf and Lewis.

For Woolf, the new empathetic relationship between mind and object created a strategic opportunity for women to project a new perceptual self onto an exterior that had
been largely formed by what she calls “the masculine point of view” in “The Mark on the Wall,” an early short story in which she explores Fry’s notion of the centrality of the visual in verbal art (see Chapter Two). The role of the visual in constructing gender identity occupied Woolf throughout her Fry-inspired short stories before the 1920s as well as throughout her Dalloway series of stories that culminated in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925). In these stories, Woolf’s understanding of the gender gap focuses on the inability of women in a patriarchal society to project their own perceptions onto an exterior that has been constructed to serve male interests. The question that emerges--to which Woolf provides a brilliant answer--is how can women begin to position their relationship with the exterior in such a way that liberates them from the social, sometimes self-imposed limitations of gender identity? Such positioning involves the re-structuring of the relationship between the visual and verbal that disrupts the visual hegemony of male authority. Woolf’s struggles with the patriarchal societal structures that control perception are the key difference between her visual aesthetic and that of Lewis.

For Lewis, the object world was also problematic, but his interest in perceptual freedom was directed toward two issues that dominated his thinking throughout the 1920s and 1930s. The first of these was his vested interest in what he saw as the fate of the gifted artist and the avant-garde in which he (for Lewis, the artist was always “he”) could realize absolute perceptual freedom. Lewis took a decidedly dim view of mass culture, believing that bourgeois capitalism was rapidly destroying the creative energy of true artists due to the demands of the market place and the dumbing-down of society that was the inevitable result of egalitarian political structures. The perceptual freedom that should be afforded a certain caliber of artist would serve society, Lewis felt, because he
represented the only real chance that society has to experience “the great unworldly element” (The Art of Being Ruled 374) that saves human life from the mechanical deadness of animal and inanimate existence.

This Cartesian strict separation of mind and matter recalls Lewis’s interest in the French reactionary concept of sévérité, and it is related to the second issue of perceptual freedom that dominated his thinking in the 1920s and 1930s. Lewis’s Action Française-inspired aversion to Bergson involved his fear that the modernism of the 1920s had succumbed to what he described as Bergsonian “time-philosophies” in which “flux” meant that the immanent realm was rapidly absorbing perceptual freedom that could only be maintained through the strict separation (sévérîté) of mind and matter, since any relinquishing of subject to object was viewed as the surrender of human dominance over the material world. Mass culture had already succumbed, and high culture was in grave danger of going the same way. In one of Lewis’s numerous attacks on Fry and Bloomsbury contained in Lewis’s collection of essays on aesthetics, The Caliph’s Design, published by The Egoist after the War, Lewis accuses them of adopting a “[r]eceptive attitude” toward the exterior rather than an “[a]ctive and [c]hallenging one” (Caliph’s Design 123). Unwilling to acknowledge his debt to Fry and Bloomsbury-and his own aesthetic similarities to them--Lewis stepped up his attacks on Woolf and her circle.

This chapter concludes its discussion of Lewis with what is arguably the most important concept of his visual aesthetic, more important than his anti-Bergson “philosophy of the eye,” which was his version of sévérité. Lewis’s satire--his preferred genre--employed the reversal of Bergson’s view of comedy involving “people behaving
like things”(Chapman 60). Instead, Lewis viewed comedy involving things behaving like people. In fact, this reversal extended to Lewis’s basic view of empathetic identification, since, as David Ayers points out, “[t]he concession that the self has no real existence because it perceives itself only intuitively is at the root of Lewis’s rhetoric. . . throughout the 1920s and 1930s, undermining his more vociferous contention that the self is continuous and self-identical”(29). Despite his political allegiance to sévérité, then, Lewis’s aesthetic allegiance, as this chapter demonstrates, was much closer to Woolf’s visual aesthetic than previously thought.

II. Virginia Woolf’s “Painterly” Fiction

The empathetic perceptual self that Woolf and Lewis both sought to preserve through the use of the eye and memory on objects--and the central role of objects in their visual aesthetic--can still be heard late in Woolf’s recollections in “A Sketch of the Past,” which she says she is working on at the same time that she is struggling to complete her biography of Roger Fry:

May 15th 1939. The drudgery of making a coherent life of Roger has once more become intolerable, and so I turn for a few day’s [sic] respite to May 1895. The little platform of present time on which I stand is, so far as the weather is concerned, damp and chilly. I look up at my skylight--over the litter of Athenaeum articles, Fry letters--all strewn with the sand that comes from the house next door--I look up and see, as if reflecting it, a sky the colour of dirty water. And the inner landscape is much of a piece. Last night, Mark Gertler dined here and denounced the vulgarity, the inferiority of what he called
‘literature’; compared with the integrity of painting; a criticism which has its sting and its chill, like the May sky. Yet if one could give a sense of my mother’s personality one would have to be an artist. It would be as difficult to do that, as it should be done, as to paint a Cézanne. (Moments of Being 85)

Woolf’s reference to Cézanne brings together not only the memories of Fry that are occupying her thoughts, and the presence of Mark Gertler, an old artist friend from the Gordon Square days of which Fry was a part, but also an old argument between the visual and verbal that was characteristic of those days. In this passage, the exterior, optic vision is combining with the perceptual to form just the kind of “realization” that excited Fry so much about Cézanne and was so central to Woolf’s own writing. To give a sense of her mother’s personality “as it should be done,” Woolf admits, means to start with the visual. But the “inner landscape” or what Lewis calls the “perceptual object” (Time and Western Man 387) is also brilliantly captured throughout this passage that both discusses and demonstrates the influence of Cézanne and Fry.

Woolf begins the passage by establishing the moment as a “platform of present time,” which halts the temporal flow and allows her to see from this vantage point a number of other platforms, including the recent visit with Gertler, Bloomsbury before the War, and May, 1895, when she was thirteen. Opposing these vivid “moments” are Woolf’s frustration over the difficulties of connecting such moments in Fry’s life into a “coherent” whole, the return of her old insecurities over the inadequacies of language, and the obscuring forces of time itself, represented by the destruction of the house next door and the sand beginning to cover Fry’s letters and articles from a time in her life that is losing its sharp focus and vitality. The present moment is May, but the weather is
“damp and chilly,” sending Woolf’s thoughts for “respite” to the same month in her childhood and presumably a warmer, sunnier time in her life.

Looking through the skylight, Woolf projects the various emotions she is experiencing onto “a sky the colour of dirty water,” which is a visual representation of her “inner landscape.” This empathetic transference from inner to outer is reinforced by the fact that she is indoors, literally within an inner landscape of memories, words, and feelings that is “of a piece” with the exterior in a perfect demonstration of the “psychological volumes” that Fry believed in so strongly. Woolf connects verbal art to a visual memory of the house next door, which, as Lewis says, is possessed in the “fastness of memory,” the “system of the percept” that allows for the imagination’s “realization” of the exterior, which is comprised of a combination of optic awareness and perceptual awareness (Time and Western Man 383). The difficulty of realizing her mother’s personality, for Woolf as well as for her counterpart Lily Briscoe in To the Lighthouse, captures Cézanne’s notion of the complicated relationship between what is seen and what has to be imagined. The passage ends with a qualified acknowledgement of the superiority of the visual over the verbal, the same qualified acknowledgement that Woolf had given to Fry’s formalist visual aesthetic years before.

Woolf’s Mooreian “emphasis on the stubborn distance of an object world that cannot be subsumed by human knowing”(Mao 52) is mitigated in this passage, as in her visual aesthetic in general, by the imagination’s power to project itself onto the object. The “sky the colour of dirty water” reflects Woolf’s emotional state rather than a sympathetic relationship in which the sky tells her something about herself. Diane Gillespie points out that when Lily Briscoe tries to transfer her vision of a scene to her canvas, she has to
keep reassuring herself by repeating “this is what I see; this is what I see” (To the Lighthouse 19). Lily struggles to project her own version of reality onto the scene in the face of Mr. Paunceforte, who tends “to see everything pale, elegant, semitransparent” (To the Lighthouse 19). This passage recalls the difficulties encountered by the narrator in “The Mark on the Wall,” which Gillespie attributes to the need for perceptual freedom:

The ability to hold one’s view of reality and the determination to present it accurately regardless of what is fashionable is a struggle for most artists, but especially for women who are taught that they can neither paint nor write. (196)

Holding and presenting “one’s view of reality,” and the philosophical, social, and political complications of doing so, lie at the center of Woolf’s visual aesthetic, as exemplified in Woolf’s most characteristically “post-impressionist” fiction of the 1920s (Torgovnick 16).

In the 1922 short story “Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street,” for instance, Woolf’s visual aesthetic is brought to bear on post-war London, a time of intense partying, especially for the Bloomsbury Group of which she was a central member. Clive Bell describes the scene in the early 1920s:

The war was over . . . once again civilized people in England would be allowed to lead civilized lives. . . . Suddenly the arts became the preoccupation of Society (with a capital S) which twelve months earlier had been preoccupied with military and political intrigues. . . . Diaghilev, Massine, Stravinsky, Picasso and Picasso’s very beautiful wife were staying for the season. Abruptly and unexpectedly the wheels of civilization began to turn. (Quoted in Corbett 108)
With such a post-war London tugging at her, it is not surprising that Woolf chose the party as her central metaphor, and “Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street” reflects the excitement of living in the pace of big-city vitality. This story eventually became the first chapter of Mrs. Dalloway, and Clarissa’s joy in the city is depicted in both. In the short-story version, Clarissa includes more than just London in her celebration of city life:

The air stirred with energy. Messages were passing from the Fleet to the Admiralty. Piccadilly and Arlington Street and the Mall seemed to chafe the very air in the park and lift its leaves hotly, brilliantly, upon waves of that divine vitality which Clarissa loved. To ride; to dance; she had adored all that. Or going [for] long walks in the country, talking, about books, what to do with one’s life, for young people were so priggish--oh, the things one had said! (Complete Shorter Fiction 154)

Life itself--that is, the great cavalcade, the hurly-burly--holds many pleasures. The human presence in the city stirs the air with its energy, and “messages” being passed from one important human location to another are the ironic source of the “divine vitality” that Clarissa loves. The entire passage celebrates the projection of human language and activity onto the backdrop of the environment that is in turn animated by this projection.

But Clarissa also notices the dark side of this human-constructed reality, epitomized in her description of Lady Bexborough, the Countess of Clarefield, who steadfastly opened the annual bazaar with a telegram in her hand informing her of the death of a beloved
relation at the Front. Clarissa admires Lady Bexborough for carrying on even though she has “nothing to live for”:

She was in black, quite shabby, yet, thought Clarissa, how extraordinary it tells, breeding, self-respect, never saying a word too much or letting people gossip; an astonishing friend; no one can pick a hole in her after all these years, and now, there she is, thought Clarissa, passing the Countess who waited powdered, perfectly still, and Clarissa would have given anything to be like that, the mistress of Clarefield, talking politics like a man. (Complete Shorter Fiction 156)

In this passage, the phrase “there she is” anticipates the final sentence of Mrs. Dalloway. Lady Bexborough represents for Clarissa the embodiment of the qualities of perseverance, self-possession, and a queenly composure that is almost marmoreal in nature. Clarissa admires Lady Bexborough’s aristocratic bearing in the face of personal tragedy and great loss. Such Churchillian strength of character, combined with an ability to participate equally with men in the public realm, elevates Lady Bexborough to heroic stature; and, as the passage suggests in its description of her as “powdered, perfectly still,” she serves bodily as an icon for Woolf’s central issues. Holding out courageously against “the contagion of the world’s slow stain,” a line from Shelley’s poem “Adonais” running through Clarissa’s head, Lady Bexborough is unassailable; she appears to be utterly mired in human frailty and temporality but, somehow, in her great womanly dignity, to have transcended a human world in which, as Clarissa says, “[S]imply one doesn’t believe. . . any more in God” (Complete Shorter Fiction 156).

The image of Lady Bexborough serves as a good example of Woolf’s visual aesthetic, since, like the objects in her stories before 1921, Lady Bexborough, who does and says
nothing, receives the lively mental activity of Clarissa, who projects her own desires onto this silent, aristocratic image as it passes her in the street. Clarissa knows a few bare facts of Lady Bexborough’s life, but what impresses her most about the Countess is that “no one can pick a hole in her.” The Countess has not transcended the “slow stain of the world” in a metaphysical sense but in a material sense: she has risen to the distance and permanence of the object world. Woolf, who agreed with Fry about Proust’s “hyperaesthesia” as his greatest strength, points out in “Pictures” (1925) that Proust avoids a common pitfall of allowing ideas to be inferred from objects rather than the other way around:

We can say for certain that a writer whose writing appeals mostly to the eye is a bad writer; that if in describing, say, a meeting in a garden he describes roses, lilies, carnations, and shadows on the grass, so that we can see them, but allows to be inferred from them ideas, motives, impulses, and emotions, it is that he is incapable of using his medium for the purposes for which it was created, and is a writer without legs. (Moment and Other Essays 174)

In this important statement of Woolf’s visual aesthetic, the writer’s ability to project the interior onto the exterior, not draw inferences from it, is the key element of the use of the visual in a verbal art. Woolf disagrees with Fry that Proust’s work does not reflect such a projection, and she adds Hardy, Flaubert, and Conrad to the list of writers whom she believes “are using their eyes. . . as novelists have never used them before,” by reversing the traditional sympathetic relationship with the object:

Not indeed that any of these great writers stops for a moment to describe a crystal jar as if it were an end in itself; the jars on their mantelpieces are always seen
through the eyes of women in the room. The whole scene, however solidly and pictorially built up, is always dominated by an emotion which has nothing to do with the eye. But it is the eye that has fertilized their thought; it is the eye, in Proust above all, that has come to the help of the other senses, combined with them, and produced effects of extreme beauty, and of a subtlety hitherto unknown. (Moment and Other Essays 174)

Woolf stresses several times in this essay the newness of this kind of relationship with the object, a relationship that establishes the preeminence of the object as a “fertilizer” of thought but--and this is the important distinction--not the source of thought. Clarissa’s internal reflections on the objectified Countess, like those of the women viewing the crystal jar, are hers alone, and it is she who creates the “reality” of the Countess, a reality that quite literally has succumbed to the “manipulations of consciousness” from which Mooreian subjectivity believed the object to be free.

From the beginning of “Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street,” Clarissa’s consciousness is manipulating the exterior reality that surrounds her on the walk through London. Her internal thoughts and emotions are projected onto objects and people that serve as “fertilizer” for them. Big Ben strikes and Clarissa assigns two emotions to the sound: “solemn” and “deliberate.” The shuffling of feet and the murmur of wheels is assigned the emotion of “stirring.” June is “fresh” for Clarissa, and childhood is “happy” and can be rediscovered in “a leaf of mint” or a “cup with a blue ring.” For a moment the point of view is shifted to Scrope Purvis, C.B., who is hurrying to his office and sees Clarissa as a “charming woman, poised, eager, strangely white-haired for her pink cheeks.” When the point of view returns to Clarissa, she is thinking of Mrs. Foxcroft on whom she has
projected the characteristics of dignified suffering over the death of her only son: “Pride held her erect, inheriting, handling, handing on, acquainted with dignity and suffering” (Complete Shorter Fiction 152).

In this passage, as in the glove-purchasing passage later in the story, momentary confusion over whose point of view is being represented and who is being described serves to underscore the buried theme of psychological transference. Clarissa’s brief encounter with Hugh Whitbread, an old childhood friend, provides two entirely contrasting emotional projections on the same moment in London:

‘I love walking in London,’ said Mrs. Dalloway. ‘Really it’s better than walking in the country!’

‘We’ve just come up,’ said Hugh Whitbread. ‘Unfortunately to see doctors.’

‘Milly?’ said Mrs. Dalloway, instantly compassionate.

‘Out of sorts,’ said Hugh Whitbread. ‘That sort of thing. Dick all right?’

‘First rate!’ said Clarissa.

Clarissa “instantly,” if only temporarily, adjusts her relationship with the exterior to coincide with Hugh’s, which, because of his situation, differs from hers. London is much different if one is there to buy gloves or to see doctors. Milly’s illness, the loss of Mrs. Foxcroft’s and Lady Bexborough’s relations in the War, the death of Clarissa’s friend Jack Stewart, the onset of middle age, the War itself and the many young men who “had died that things might go on,” all take their turns in Clarissa’s thoughts. Rather than allowing realities such as these to crush her spirit, Clarissa holds herself “upright” and takes comfort in the line from Shelley and in a phrase from Act IV, Scene II of
Shakespeare’s *Cymbeline* in which Guiderius and Arviragus sing a dirge for their sister, Imogen, who is not dead, although they believe her to be (she is disguised as Fidele):

> Fear no more the heat o’ th’ sun,
> Nor the furious winter’s rages,
> Thou thy worldly task has done,
> Home art gone, and ta’en thy wages.
> Golden lads and girls all must,

> As chimney-sweepers, come to dust. (*Riverside Shakespeare* 1548)

Jill Morris points out that the contrast between Big Ben tolling out the moment (eleven o’clock) and this passage from *Cymbeline* “reminds Clarissa on a subconscious level that time is passing. . . . From Clarissa’s thoughts about life, she gradually shifts to the opposite swing of the emotional pendulum and thinks about death”(42-43). But, just as Imogen is not really dead and within a short while awakens from her sleep, Clarissa holds herself upright (a phrase repeated several times in the story) and makes a conscious choice to “go on,” even in the face of the tragedy of war and the loss of faith in God:

> It used, thought Clarissa, to be so simple. Down down through the air came the caw of rooks. When Sylvia died, hundreds of years ago, the yew hedges looked so lovely with the diamond webs in the mist before early church. But if Dick were to die tomorrow, as for believing in god--no, she would let the children choose, but for herself, like Lady Bexborough, who opened the bazaar, they say, with the telegram in her hand--Roden, her favourite, killed--she would go on. But why, if one doesn’t believe? For the sake of others, she thought, taking the glove in her hand. (*Complete Shorter Fiction* 158)
This passage exemplifies Woolf’s Proust-inspired use of the eye, not as an end in itself, but in combination with the thought projected through it. Clarissa’s former security within her faith transfers psychologically onto her comfort with an exterior world that was associated with religious belief. The memory of the death of her friend, Sylvia Hunt, described as “hundreds of years ago,” which is how the gulf between pre-war life and the present seems to Clarissa, returns her to the object world of the rooks, hedges, and spider webs that were suffused with metaphysical meaning and significance. The hedges and webs looked “lovely” to Clarissa because she had transferred her sense of the ultimate meaningfulness of Sylvia’s death onto the objects with which she associated it. Since the War, however, Clarissa’s loss of faith has altered her relationship with the exterior; now she transfers her thoughts and feelings onto objects--or objectified people such as Mrs. Foxcroft and Lady Bexborough--not because of their spiritual potential but because of their potential as objects. Even though Lady Bexborough has “nothing to live for,” she, like Clarissa, “would go on,” not for any meaning that life can give her, but as an object “[f]or the sake of others.” Clarissa concludes that “one doesn’t live for oneself” (Complete Shorter Fiction 158).

In the glove shop, Clarissa again projects her own psychological realities onto another customer, whose inability to find satisfactory post-war gloves and unfulfilling life as a hostess are blended almost inextricably with Clarissa’s empathetic identification with her. Clarissa then transfers her feelings onto the shop-girl, who “had her sorrows quite separate” from the dowdy existence that Clarissa imagines for her. Finally, even the gloves themselves, which are assigned a pre-war and post-war character, receive the transference of Clarissa’s anxiety over the loss she feels in post-war living. The story
ends on a complex but generally positive note as Clarissa finally finds some pre-war gloves that fit. Immediately, Clarissa’s pre-war identity is projected onto the gloves as she regains her awareness of her social status, her personal courage, and even the name of another customer who had been a friend before the War:

At last! Half an inch above the elbow; pearl buttons; five and a quarter. My dear slow coach, thought Clarissa, do you think I can sit here the whole morning? Now you’ll take twenty-five minutes to bring me my change.

There was a violent explosion on the street outside. The shop-women cowered behind the counters. But Clarissa, sitting very upright, smiled at the other lady.

‘Miss Anstruther!’ she exclaimed.

When Clarissa re-inhabits the object of the pre-war gloves, she also re-inhabits her pre-war perceptual self. Once again, the object is not the source of Clarissa’s perception; it serves as the “fertilizer” for the psychological realities of Clarissa that animate it. In “Pictures,” Woolf draws again from Fry’s beloved Cézanne to describe the aesthetic relationship between verbal and visual art that informs her fiction. Interestingly she uses the word “gaze” that alludes to Vischer’s concept of an artist’s special way of looking at objects:

As we gaze, words begin to raise their feeble limbs in the pale border-land of no man’s language, to sink down again in despair. We fling them like nets upon a rocky and inhospitable shore; they fade and disappear. It is vain, it is futile; but we can never resist the temptation. The silent painters, Cézanne and Mr. Sickert, make fools of us as often as they choose. *(Moment and Other Essays 176)*
Even though Woolf sees verbal art as a less effective medium for psychological transference to the object than visual art, she confesses that she and other writers make the attempt anyway.

Such an attempt can be seen in Woolf’s Dalloway series of stories. The Mrs. Dalloway character first appears in *The Voyage Out* and constitutes a major vehicle for Woolf’s exploration of the relationship between the perceptual self and the exterior, an exterior that is largely formed by what she calls “the masculine point of view” in “the Mark on the Wall.” Throughout the seven short stories Woolf wrote between 1922 and 1927 that pertain directly or obliquely to the 1925 novel, *Mrs. Dalloway*, her struggles with the nature of reality and the patriarchal societal structure that all but defines it are of central concern. In *Mrs. Dalloway’s Party*, Stella McNichol’s 1973 compilation of these stories, she points out in her introduction that Woolf was unusually preoccupied with the Dalloway material:

> It is particularly uncharacteristic of Virginia Woolf’s writing habits that she should have allowed her completed novel’s central concern to retain the hold on her imagination that it obviously then had. On finishing the novel she wrote out several of the short stories about Mrs. Dalloway’s party. Usually when she had finally revised a novel, Virginia Woolf was only too anxious, as it were, to shut it out of her mind. This she did by concentrating on a new novel, creating a different kind of novel, or by turning to writing of a non-fictional nature. (10)

Woolf’s growing sense of alienation from the materiality that constructed “reality” for her as a woman, and her growing awareness of the tyranny of male perceptual hegemony, form a kind of thematic nucleus for the Dalloway material, and Woolf’s use of the eye as
fertilizer for thought can be seen in her careful choice of objects that, like Clarissa’s pre-war gloves, serve as the recipients of empathetic identifications.

In the second story of the *Mrs. Dalloway ‘s Party* series (McNichol, 1973), the setting, like all the remaining six stories after “Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street,” is the party itself. Two of Clarissa’s guests, a lawyer named Prickett Ellis and a young woman named simply Miss O’Keefe, find themselves alone together in Clarissa’s garden. Prickett is bursting with pride over a clock he has received as a gift from a poor family named Brunner, whom he has recently helped to win a lawsuit against their employer, Fenner’s Brewery. He would not accept a fee, and their show of gratitude in presenting him with the clock has filled him with self-admiration that he is barely able to contain:

> He kept seeing himself as the wise and tolerant servant of humanity. And he wished he could repeat his praises aloud. It was unpleasant that the sense of his goodness should bail within him. (32)

Miss O’Keefe, on the other hand, is preoccupied with thoughts of a scene she had witnessed that afternoon. A poor woman with two children was pressing imploringly against the railings of a square to which she was denied admittance. Rather than the self-congratulatory arrogance of Prickett, Miss O’Keefe is overwhelmed with feelings of sadness and frustration over the plight of the woman:

> Can’t they be let in? she had thought, her pity rising like a wave; her indignation boiling. No; she rebuked herself the next moment, roughly, as if she boxed her own ears. The whole force of the world can’t do it, she said in a fury, and that was why she said so commandingly to the unknown man: ‘Give me an ice.’ (33)
Miss O’Keefe’s bluntness turns to disgust and resentment toward Prickett when, finally unable to contain his pride, he blurts out the story of the Brunner family and the clock. Miss O’Keefe’s reaction is a complex mixture of envy and rage against the egocentricity of even a decidedly good man like Prickett Ellis:

She had no words to specify the horror his story roused in her. First his conceit; then his indecency in talking about human feelings; it was a blasphemy; no one in the world ought to tell a story to prove that they had loved their kind. Yet as he told it--how the old man had stood up to make his speech--tears came into her eyes; ah, if any one had ever said that to her! . . . Still, this man got pleasure from his Brunners; and she was condemned to suffer for ever and ever from her poor, poor woman shut out from squares. (35)

Prickett and Miss O’Keefe quickly part company, each dissatisfied with their conversation in the garden. These two “lovers of their kind” love their fellow humans across an unbridgeable gender gap represented by men who, like Prickett, provide themselves with agency and the pleasures derived from it and women, who, like the poor woman outside the square and Miss O’Keefe, must satisfy themselves with silent entreaty and impotent rage. The two central objects in the story--the clock and the gate--are significant recipients of Miss O’Keefe’s projected feelings. As with Big Ben in “Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street,” the clock captures and defines the “moment.” Rather than this moment belonging to Miss O’Keefe the way Clarissa feels about the moment in London, the moment belongs to Prickett Ellis, who is making the most of it for himself. The gift of the clock to Prickett and the heartfelt speech by the poor old man fill Miss O’Keefe with envy, despite her contempt for the way Prickett capitalizes on his possession of the
moment. Miss O'Keefe feels “condemned” to wait outside the gate of such moments that men inhabit with a sense of entitlement and pride. Miss O’Keefe suffers for the woman at the gate, but she also suffers with her as her own feelings of exclusion are projected onto the gate. Her sharp command to “give me more ice” is a show of agency but only an impotent, symbolic one as she realizes that the “whole force of the world” cannot change the power differential between women and men that is the source of the suffering she shares with the woman at the gate.

This view of women within patriarchal society is continued in “The Introduction,” the third story in the series. Clarissa, who considers it one of her personal missions in life to bring young men and women together, introduces Lily Everit, an aspiring literary scholar, to Bob Brinsley, a supremely self-assured young man of letters. Lily is cradling a school essay she has written and would love Bob to read, but she feels a sudden loss of confidence:

Glancing at her essay; the three red stars dulled to obscurity, but peacefully, pensively, as if yielding to the pressure of unquestionable might, that is the conviction that it was not hers to dominate, or to assert; rather to air and embellish this orderly life where all was done already; high towers, solemn bells, flats built every brick of them by men’s toil, parliaments too; and even the criss-cross of telegraph wires she thought looking at the window as she walked. What had she to oppose this massive masculine achievement? An essay on the character of Dean Swift! (40)

As Lily talks to Bob, he treats her with indifference and condescension: “And I suppose you write?” he said. “Poems presumably”(42). Lily feels an overwhelming pressure to
back away from him when she notices that he has captured a fly and is calmly engaged in
tearing off its wings. Identifying with the fly, Lily tries “to crouch and cower and fold
the wings down on her back”(42). She retreats to the window, where she accepts “the
kind compliments of old Mrs. Bromley on her appearance” (43).

Lily has attempted to cross the barrier between female lack of agency and male
entitlement only to be sent back in defeat. It is her appearance, her assigned role to
“embellish” the accomplishments of men, that she is not permitted to escape. In one of
Woolf’s most direct and embittered descriptions, Lily comes to a realization of what
society has designated for her:

Perhaps that was the thing that came out, that remained, it was part of the dress,
and all the little chivalries of the drawing room; all made her feel that she had
come out of her chrysalis and was being proclaimed what in the long comfortable
darkness of childhood she had never been--this frail and beautiful creature, this
limited and circumscribed creature who could not do what she liked, this butterfly
with a thousand facets to its eyes, and delicate fine plumage, and difficulties and
sensibilities and sadnesses innumerable: a woman. (39)

Lily’s imprisonment within her prescribed gender role is projected onto two key objects
in this story, the prescribed dress of the drawing room on which Mrs. Bromley
compliments her and the most famous image, the fly from which Bob Brinsley is
removing the wings. Woolf comes very close to blatant authorial intrusion in the
narrator’s definition of a fully socialized woman whose feminine identity is projected
onto the clothing she wears rather than the interests and abilities with which she might
prefer to identify. But the most obvious projection is Lily’s empathetic identification
with the object of the fly. Lily projects her emotions so strongly onto the fly that she involuntary acts like a fly, trying to “crouch and cower and fold the wings down on her back.” Bob’s arrogance and condescension tear Lily’s desire to transcend the limitations of gender expectations, clipping her wings and sending her in retreat to the window, where Mrs. Bromley receives her back into a feminine reality.

Lily’s displeasure at failing to escape her gender identity is contrasted by Mrs. Vallance’s nostalgic recollection of the sharp gender divide of her childhood in “Ancestors,” the fourth story in the series. Mrs. Vallance listens to the superficial chatter of the other guests and contrasts it with the joy and dignity of her childhood in Scotland. She feels the bittersweet tears beginning to rise as she recalls the powerful figure of her father, and though “only a girl” how she would listen reverently to his conversations with other men. While such respect but non-participation in her father’s world of men prevails in Mrs. Vallance’s memories, she comfortably inhabits a female world in which the virtues of appearance and outward behavior are transferred to the object of her mother’s clothing:

And all of these girls--the girls might be pretty--there was not a single one of them one could call beautiful as she remembered her mother, her dear stately mother who never seemed to dress differently summer or winter, whether they had people or not, but always looked herself in some lace and a black dress or, as she grew older, a cap. (46)

Always looking “herself” whether they had company or not is a key feature of Mrs. Vallance’s memory of her mother. Her female identity was firmly established and, at least in her daughter’s memory of her, unassailable. Like Lady Bexborough’s iconic
stature in Clarissa’s mind, Mrs. Vallance’s mother’s “stately” composure makes her a visual presence on which her daughter projects the qualities she values in women: physical beauty, consistency, decorum, and silent dignity.

While Mrs. Vallance waxes nostalgic about the gender constructions of the past, another introduction from Clarissa brings Roderick Serle and Ruth Anning together for a brief conversation in the fifth story, “Together and Apart.” Ruth confesses that “it was not so much that she lacked courage, but lacked energy, especially in talking to men, who frightened her rather, and so often her talks petered out into dull commonplaces, and she had very few men friends. . . .” Ruth feels differently about Roderick, however, who puts her at ease with his description of a young woman at the party: “She’s like a fruit tree--like a flowering cherry tree”(51). Ruth likes this comment, and both she and Roderick suddenly realize they could be lovers:

Their eyes met; collided rather, for each felt that behind the eyes the secluded being, who sits in darkness while his shallow agile companion does all the tumbling and beckoning, and keeps the show going, suddenly stood erect; flung off his cloak; confronted the other. It was alarming; it was terrific. (53)

Such frankness and honesty prove to be a bit too “alarming” for Ruth and Roderick, who both withdraw to positions of safety, as Ruth drags out one of the “dull commonplaces” that protect her (and him) from an honest relationship:

‘Of course, whatever they do, they can’t spoil Canterbury.’

He smiled; he accepted it; he crossed his knees the other way about. She did her part; he his. So things came to an end. (54)
Their mutual desire for true intimacy cannot override their fear of it. As soon as another guest comes over to speak to Roderick, he and Ruth separate immediately. Although Ruth imagines a relationship “more like lightning, more intense”(54), she falls back on thoughts of marriage and the “cool peace of middle life, with its automatic devices for shielding mind and body from bruises”(53-54). The central image of the flowering cherry tree momentarily excites both Ruth and Roderick as they project their desires and emotions onto its embodiment of regeneration, freshness, beauty, and blossoming potential. Roderick’s ability to associate these qualities with the young woman makes him appealing to Ruth, and the “secluded being” within her that aspires to these feminine qualities responds by identifying with the cherry tree as well. Rather than a blossoming of a new kind of passionate, mutually appreciative relationship, however, fear keeps the genders trapped in an endless reproduction of “dull commonplaces.”

Another attempt to escape the commonplaces of gender relations occurs in “The New Dress,” the sixth and best known story in the series. A number of issues from the first five stories resurface here, and even the image of the fly from “The Introduction” returns, as Mabel Waring, a wife and mother who iscrippingly self-conscious about her dress, cannot escape her feelings of inferiority and self-loathing:

She saw herself like that--she was a fly, but the others were dragonflies, beautiful insects, dancing, fluttering, skimming, while she alone dragged herself up out of the saucer.(58)

To overcome “the sense she had had, ever since she was a child, of being inferior to other people”(56), Mabel decides that, if she can never be fashionable, at least she can be original: “Why not be herself, anyhow?”(57). She has her hairdresser create a dress for
her from an old-fashioned book of her mother’s and, as soon as she removes her outer garment at Clarissa’s party, she instantly regrets her choice. Hating herself for her own feelings of insecurity, but unable to change them, she attributes her own marriage to her need for safety and the approval of others:

For all her dreams of living in India, married to some hero like Sir Henry Lawrence, some empire builder (still the sight of a native in a turban filled her with romance), she had married Hubert, with his safe, permanent underling’s job in the Law courts, and they managed tolerabley in a smallish house, without proper maids. . . . (63)

This comparison of her husband to Sir Henry reveals her dependence on men for her sense of self, as though the choice of a husband, like the choice of a dress, can make the crucial difference in her view of her own worth. This central element of her character is underscored by her desire to receive a compliment from Charles Burt, a guest at the party:

And one word of praise, one word of affection from Charles would have made all the difference to her at that moment. If he had only said, ‘Mabel, you’re looking charming tonight!’ it would have changed her life. (60)

Like Lily Everit in “The Introduction,” Mabel remains rooted in a restrictive gender identity because she allows her own fear of humiliation to prevent her from ignoring the disapproval of men, whose central interest will always be to objectify and subordinate her. The fact that being “herself” means to inhabit the same clothing as her mother suggests that Mabel cannot break out of the socially determined relationships that define her, despite her half-hearted attempt to escape her condition by leaving the party early.
In the final story of the series, “A Summing Up,” another insecure woman, Sasha Latham, “whose majesty of presence was so great that people never credited her with feeling perfectly inadequate and gauche when she had to say something at a party”(66), has escaped to the relative safety of Clarissa’s garden. Like Miss O’Keefe in “The Man Who Loved His Kind,” Sasha finds herself in conversation with a man, but she allows her companion, Bertram Pritchard, to chatter away rather superficially while she gazes out across the garden wall at nighttime London. In a reflection that comes the closest of any of the stories to an essayistic exploration of the mind’s relationship with the exterior, Sasha wonders which scene is closer to reality, the world outside the garden wall and Mrs. Dalloway’s party, or the party itself. Rather than one or the other, the answer to her question arrives as she notices a tree in the garden:

But what answer? Well that the soul--for she was conscious of a movement in her of some creature beating its way about her and trying to escape which momentarily she called the soul--is by nature unmated, a widow bird; a bird perched aloof on that tree. (69-70)

In this perfect representation of modernist empathetic projection, Sasha concludes that neither the external world beyond the garden wall nor the socially constructed world within it reflect an essential reality. The soul, “unmated” to either, sits between both, positioning itself in a way that Sartre later described in *The Transcendence of Ego* (1937) as “non-positional consciousness”(45) or one that “becomes positional only by directing itself upon the reflected consciousness which itself was not a positional consciousness of itself before being reflected”(45). Sasha thinks of “the vast inattentive impersonal world”(68) on the one hand, and “the dry, thick Queene Anne House”(69) on
the other, and sees them as “half lit up, half unlit”(69). It is in fact her consciousness that lights one or the other of them the rest of the way, as she chooses. Sasha’s perceptual self illuminates both the external and the internal realms over which her consciousness presides, and, like Virginia Woolf herself, she positions herself strategically to project her consciousness onto them through the lens of her observations:

Shy though she was and almost incapable when suddenly presented to someone of saying anything, fundamentally humble, she cherished a profound admiration for people. To be them would be marvelous, but she was condemned to be herself and could only in this silent enthusiastic way, sitting outside in a garden, applaud the society of humanity from which she was excluded.(68)

Unlike the agony of Miss O’Keefe outside the gate of masculine entitlement, or Lily Everit retreating to the window after being excluded from Bob Brinsley’s literary society, Sasha has freed her perceptual self from entrapment within a reified consciousness by making that consciousness a positional one of her own choosing. Like the projection of her soul in the image of a bird onto the tree, Sasha is free to fly away from any particular consciousness or to revisit it as she pleases. The immanence that traps the other women in the Dalloway series is no longer inevitable or permanent. Nor is the fate of the narrator in “The Mark on the Wall” inevitable, in which her perceptual freedom is curtailed by the “reality” of her husband, who decides for both of them that the mark is a snail.

Such perceptual freedom frees women from dependence upon the approval of men and allows for greater equality and friendship between women and men. Sasha enjoys
the company of Bertram, but she no longer depends upon him for the nature and quality of her own thoughts:

How could one prove that he was a loyal friend and very sympathetic and--but here as so often happened, talking to Pritchard, she forgot his existence, and began to think of something else.(67)

Ultimately, the freedom of perception to project her own reality on the exterior without finding herself trapped within male representations of it, allows Sasha to stroll comfortably and confidently back into the party, accompanied by a man with whom she voluntarily chooses to share the moment: “[B]ut then Bertram, putting his arm through hers in his familiar way, for she had known him all her life, remarked that they were not doing their duty and must go in”(69). What a wonderful reversal of gender positions to have Bertram slip his arm through Sasha’s rather than the other way around! Such is the brilliant subtlety of Woolf’s writing. The happiness of Sasha’s triumphant return to the society of people and the strength she has found in her own ability to project her own reality(s) on existence, lies at the heart of Woolf’s visual aesthetic as well as her feminism. That an inferiority complex can hamper a woman’s freedom of perceptual choice is a central concern of Woolf’s throughout the Dalloway stories. As the title of the final story suggests, a “summing up” of the problem of inferiority involves the question of how to situate or position oneself in relation to both the external world and one’s interior response to it.

Woolf’s exploration of the role of the visual in achieving perceptual freedom from patriarchal oppression began as early as Clarissa Dalloway’s ruminations on agency and positionality in The Voyage Out. Clarissa and Richard book passage on the Euphro...
after being stranded in Lisbon during an extended holiday. On board they discuss politics and literature with Rachel Vinrace, her father, her aunt and uncle, and other members of the rather well-educated traveling party they encounter. Later that evening, Clarissa is drifting off to sleep in her cabin and reflects on her life with Richard:

‘I often wonder, Clarissa mused in bed, over the little white volume of Pascal which went with her everywhere, ‘whether it is really good for a woman to live with a man who is morally her superior as Richard is mine. It makes one so dependent. I suppose I feel for him what my mother and her generation felt for Christ. It shows that one can’t do without something.’ (55, emphasis in text)

The inclusion of Pascal here is significant. In *The Pensées*, Pascal offers his famous “wager” for believing in the existence of God. Since reason alone cannot settle the issue of whether to believe in God, one must turn to a consideration of what will be gained or lost by wagering for or against His existence. In this, as in any decision-making problem, agency and uncertainty interact to arrive at a projection of the best outcome for the agent. Pascal concludes, for instance, that rationality requires humans to believe in God, since the alternative at best leaves humans no better off and at worst makes them miserable in their cosmic loneliness. Clarissa alludes to this existential dilemma in her decision to remain dependent on men and on her husband in particular. Her Pascalesque statement that “one can’t do without something” indicates that Clarissa is dependent but also that she is a conscious agent in the decision to remain so, based on the optimum outcome for her. Pascal’s existentialism differs from Sartre and de Beauvoir’s later development of it in that Pascal seeks an existential rationale for continued belief in the supernatural, but his acknowledgement of human agency places metaphysical reality squarely within the
projections of human psychology. The fact that Clarissa appears to be interested in Pascal’s ideas suggests that she has chosen her dependence upon Richard as the wisest course of action for her. The alternative would be social isolation, something she associates with “literary people” and others whose lives are lived outside the social norms with which she strongly identifies.

Such agency can still be seen later in Clarissa’s moment of tragic self-realization upon hearing of Septimus’s suicide, but added to it now is the admission that the decision to remain with Richard has not been guided strictly by prudential reasoning. Clarissa admits that her ambiguity about the safety vs. servility of dependence remains unresolved, due to the underlying insecurity that prevents her from seizing either life or death fully on her own terms:

Then (she had felt it only this morning) there was the terror; the overwhelming incapacity, one’s parents giving it into one’s hands, this life, to be lived to the end, to be walked with serenely; there was in the depths of her heart an awful fear. Even now, quite often if Richard had not been there reading the *Times*, so that she could crouch like a bird and gradually revive, send roaring up that immeasurable delight, rubbing stick to stick, one thing with another, she must have perished. (184)

Like the husband in “The Mark on the Wall,” Richard is associated with the conventional rationality and normalcy of the *Times*, but he is not the kind of man who delights in “forcing your soul” (184) the way Dr. Bradshaw does, and Clarissa credits Richard for her happiness: “It was due to Richard; she had never been so happy”(185). Nevertheless, stability, security, and happiness come with a price, and, even though
Clarissa’s soul is not forced, she uses this term to describe the tyranny of the norm she is required to maintain in order to avoid the isolation and insanity that seal the fate of Septimus, a fate to which she is partially attracted:

Somewhere it was her disaster--her disgrace. It was her punishment to see sink and disappear here a man, there a woman, in this profound darkness, and she forced to stand here in her evening dress. (185, emphasis added)

At this point Clarissa’s dual awareness of the constructed nature of her existence and the emptiness of the “profound darkness” of the exterior world come together in a brilliant depiction of the existential anguish of modernity. Septimus’s earlier statement that “it might be possible that the world itself is without meaning”(88) now can be found in the disruption of the carefully orchestrated world that protects Clarissa from her own fears of reaching the same conclusion. Once she does, the question remains whether reinhabiting the pre-war dress that she repairs for this party--just as she earlier reinhabited the pre-war gloves--so that “things might go on” in the face of meaninglessness constitutes a projection of courage or one of cowardice, of bad faith, in Sartrean terms. Woolf allows the question to stand unanswered, and yet the final sentence of the novel--“For there she was”--echoes Clarissa’s admiration for the iconic figure of Lady Bexborough, on whom she had projected the qualities of perseverance, self- possession, and composure and about whom she had said that she “would have given anything to be like that” (“Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street” 24-25). Even though tempted, Clarissa does not choose Septimus’s answer to meaninglessness. Instead, “for the sake of others” (“Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street” 58), Clarissa consciously chooses to reinhabit the dress and the way of life of which it is a part, and she continues to project human meaning and significance.
onto what Woolf describes in “Pictures” as the “rocky and inhospitable” (*Moment and Other Essays* 176) of the exterior world. Throughout the Dalloway series, Woolf explores both the social, sometimes self-imposed limits of the perceptual self and the possibilities of liberating it through a new relationship with the exterior. This new relationship requires the freedom to project meaning onto the exterior rather than receive meaning from it, since the latter frequently involves constructed realities that constrict the perception—and by extension the lives—of women.

III. Wyndham Lewis and the “Philosophy of the Eye”

For Lewis, perceptual freedom required a new relationship with the exterior in which the exterior is regarded not only as unknowable in the Mooreian sense but utterly lifeless. Like Woolf, Lewis saw empathetic projection as the vehicle for such freedom; and, rather than opposing Woolf’s visual aesthetic, he actually took the same Moore/Fry influence to a greater extreme in his view of the artist as engaged in a monumental struggle to project meaning onto an exterior that must be regarded as dead, since only a clear separation between human consciousness and the insensate exterior could distinguish human existence from the object. Lewis was so convinced of the value of empathetic identification for perceptual freedom that he unfairly accused Woolf and Bloomsbury in general of succumbing to Bergsonian flux through what he viewed as their Moore/Fry inspired worship of the object. For Lewis, such objectivism was a grave threat to perceptual freedom, since, in his view of Bergson’s subjectivity, consciousness disappeared into the dead exterior.
In “The Object Conceived as King of the Physical World,” Chapter Three of Volume Two of Lewis’s massive philosophical undertaking in the 1920s, *Time and Western Man* (1927), Lewis addresses the most serious problem he saw at the heart of modernism—namely, that the Bergsonian relativist world of sensational flux in which reality is regarded as a stream of sense experienced in time was destroying the essential nature of the object as a “spatial and static ‘thing’” (385). Calling stream of consciousness writing “the stream of unconsciousness” (388), Lewis warns that this flow of sensation fails to sufficiently regard the role of memory in giving “depth and fullness to our present” (383). Drawing directly from Cézanne’s concept of réalisation (without acknowledging it, of course) that was so important for the cubists and Roger Fry, Lewis makes the case for what he calls the “philosophy of the eye” in which the object is both seen with the eye and perceived with memory at the same time. Both of these functions are necessary to “realize” an object:

> When we look at objects we believe that what we are perceiving is what we are seeing. In reality, of course, we are conscious of much more than we immediately see. For in looking at an orange lying before us on the table, we are more or less conscious of its contents, we apprehend it as though we could see all around it, since from experience we know it is round, of the same colour and texture, from whatever position it is examined, and so forth. In short, every time we open our eyes we envelop the world before us, and give it body, or its quality of consisting of objects, with our memory. . . . this belief. . . is in fact, a picture. And it is this picture for which the cinematograph of the physics of ‘events’ is to be substituted. (383, emphasis in text)
Remarkably, Lewis even uses a typical Cézannian subject, an orange, to illustrate his point that the integrity of the object must be preserved in the face of what he calls “time philosophies,” such as Bergson’s *la durée* and William James’s “stream of consciousness,” that relinquish the perceptual self to the “cinematograph” of time and to the deadness of the exterior world. For all of Lewis’s protestations against what he perceived to be a collapse of subject into object in Bergson and James, however, his use of Cézanne’s *réalisation* indicates a considerable ambiguity in his thinking about the extent to which subjectivity is infused into matter. Douglas Mao points out that, despite Lewis’s strict insistence upon a Mooreian separation of subject and object, his views of the perceptual self contain a strong sense of empathetic identification:

> [I]n spite of his extensive defenses of solidity, externalism, and the integrity of the object, Lewis asserts. . . that when it comes to a rigorous epistemology, the objects we encounter are not, as such, solid at all: ‘objects are the finished product of our perceptive faculty,’ he observes, ‘the result. . . of the organizing activity of our minds.’ (137)

While resisting the extent to which Bertrand Russell’s concept of logical constructivism attributed external reality to the “organizing activity of our minds,” Lewis comes closer to Sasha Latham’s positionality in Woolf’s short story “A Summing Up” in which she argues that objects are “half lit up, half unlit”(69) and the perceptual self completes the “finished product.” In fact, a close examination of Lewis’s views concerning exteriority, when seen in the light of his connection to the same intellectual and experiential background as Fry and Bloomsbury, reveals the truth of Mao’s assertion that the vast majority of Lewis’s attacks on Bloomsbury focused on its money and social status.
because “so many of its beliefs about art and art production were hardly distinguishable from his own”(114).

Lewis’s relentless attempts to distinguish his art and aesthetics from those of his contemporaries continued after the War, and, as his politics moved further to the right, his “Enemy” persona placed him at odds with what he imagined was a wide-spread capitulation to the Bergsonian subjectivism and the “eternal mongrel itch to mix, in undirected concupiscence, with everything that walks or crawls”(Time and Western Man 132, emphasis in text). Equating Bergsonian subjectivism with the surrender of human rational existence to the immanent realm and the unconscious “plunge into the sensational flux”(Time and Western Man 388), Lewis envisioned in Bergsonism a great threat to mass culture, which he felt was already largely incapable of distancing itself from the machine-like nature of the object world:

The ‘Unconscious’ is really what Plato meant by the ‘mob of the senses,’ or rather it is where they are to be found, the mother region of ‘sensational’ life. It is in ‘our Unconscious’ that we live in a state of common humanity. There are no individuals in the Unconscious; because a man is only an individual when he is conscious. (Time and Western Man 301, emphasis in text)

Drawing on the influence of Sorel, Maurras, and Action Française reactionary aesthetic politics, Lewis’s equation of Bergsonian-inspired “time-philosophies” with democracy and mass-culture also included any artist or group of artists such as Bloomsbury, who enjoyed even a modest level of popular support. David Peters Corbett points out that Lewis’s visual aesthetic forms an “irreducible oppositionism” in which only the
individual mind and the classical distancing of the aristocratic eye can be regarded as the conditions for legitimate artistic production:

*Time and Western Man* makes it clear that it is in pandering to the most worldly aspects of its audience’s taste—like the Ballet—and in abandoning the willed construction of a ‘solid,’ visual and decided world, that the modernism of the twenties has gone astray. Lewis’s theory of art in *Time and Western Man* justifies his marginality by arguing that it is only an art which is withdrawn from the world—and which is consequently unpopular with a corrupt post-war audience—that is genuine. (119)

As Corbett, Paul Edwards, and others point out, Lewis was anything but a democrat. He shared the pre-war French conservatism that viewed the masses as easily swayed by emotional appeal. Lewis’s endorsement of authoritarian governments in the 1920s will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Four. For now, it is important only to keep in mind his position that a certain caliber of artist, one who understands the central role of individual perceptual freedom and the important anti-*la-durée* quality of static spatiality, should play a key leadership role in society:

[The artist] represents. . . the great unworldly element in the world, and that is the guarantee of his usefulness. It is he. . . who supplies the contrast of this something remote and *different* that is the very stuff by which all living (not mechanical) power is composed, and without whose incessant functioning men would rapidly sink back into their mechanical origins. (*Art of Being Ruled* 374, emphasis in text)
The “great unworldly element” that the artist provides is the understanding that humans are what Lewis calls “surface creatures”(*Time and Western Man* 377).

Separating the conception of the exterior into 1) “an ultimate Unity” and 2) “a Plurality,” Lewis reaches the conclusion that there might very well be a “Oneness” that “reposes unbroken beneath” the surface of exterior reality, but this reality is not accessible to human understanding, and that attempts to “hur[1] ourselves into space--into ‘mental space,’ if you like,” results in “self-destruction”(*Time and Western Man* 377). Instead, the surface of exterior reality is the “absolute plurality, every midget existence, every speck and grain” onto which “by nature” humans are meant to project meaning, “if there is any meaning in nature”(*Time and Western Man* 377, emphasis in text). The artist, then, who is in constant battle against the “mechanical origins” and “ultimate Unity” of existence, brings an all-important sense of uniqueness and separation not only to the objects of the exterior world but to the individual human perceptual selves that project meaning onto objects while retaining a separate existence from them. Any attempt to dissolve the self into the ultimate unity of existence is tantamount to psychological suicide:

“We are surface-creatures, and the ‘truths from beneath the surface contradict our values. It is among the flowers and leaves that our lot is cast, and the roots, however ‘interesting,’ are not so ultimate for us. For us the ultimate thing is the surface, the last-comer, and that is committed to a plurality of being. (*Time and Western Man, 377, emphasis in text*)

For Lewis, then, the individual artist, or what he calls the “monad,” after Leibnitz’s concept of the highest form of human, is devoted to the aristocratic discrimination of the
eye and to independence from any aesthetic, political, or social collective consciousness—and, most importantly, collective unconsciousness. Andrew Causey points out that Lewis not only disliked but felt threatened by mass culture, particularly the popularity of American Negro culture, which was enormously influential in Europe in the 1920s. Politically, however, “in a decade of high unemployment, rapid failure of the Labour Government and an easily defeated General Strike, popular power was ineffective and hardly created a subject of debate” (Causey 89).

Lewis’s deeper concern was with other artists and members of the intelligentsia whom he felt had succumbed to the seduction of the immanent realm over the noble responsibility of the monad to “ride the phantoms of sense, as to the manner born” (*Time and Western Man* 443). Lewis rejected empiricist reality in favor of a Berkeleyan idealism that, unlike Bradley’s idealism, acknowledges the presence of the object outside of the mind, but the object is still not real in the empiricist sense; rather, it is an “unthinking thing”:

> When you look at a red-brick house, with its windows and chimney-pots. . . [i]f you go with Berkeley in the direction of common-sense, it will be for you a collection of ‘unthinking things.’ But what is so unreal as a collection of ‘unthinking things,’ of dead, inanimate matter? If you stick to that direct deliverance of common-sense, the moment you begin reflecting about it, you will be compelled to admit, that that cannot be ‘real.’ It is a thing that our minds, in cold-blood, as it were, and reflectivity, are unable to imagine. (*Time and Western Man* 444, emphasis in text)
Lewis acknowledges a close connection to Moore’s subjectivity, but he differs from Moore’s assignation of a full and separate reality to objects. Lewis also rejects Bradley’s absolute idealism in favor of Berkeley’s view of the exterior in which objects exist in some essential form but are not “real” in the sense of possessing reality outside of human perceptual awareness. Lewis’s Berkeleyan notion of the relationship of the self and the exterior involves the self in command of the visual reality of the exterior world:

“[C]amped somnolently, in a relative repose of a god-like sort, upon the surface of this nihilism, we regard ourselves as at rest, with our droves of objects--trees, houses, hills--grouped around us”(*Time and Western Man* 443). Like Woolf, Lewis acknowledges the presence of a realm of “non-being” that is highly problematic; like Woolf, Lewis rejects Mooreian subject/object separation in favor of empathetic identification and positional perceptual freedom; and, like Woolf, Lewis valorizes the visual over the verbal as a way of knowing. For all of Lewis’s attacks on Woolf, Fry, and Bloomsbury that continued in the 1920s and 1930s, Hugh Kenner’s observation that Lewis’s overall thought and work was “a matter of distinctions and inflections which he took great pains to emphasize”(19) still holds true. Lewis’s attempts to push Woolf and Bloomsbury into the Bergson camp persistently exaggerates one influence into a defining characteristic. In his self-assigned identity as “The Enemy,” Lewis was interested in polemics, even if this resulted in a fair number of distortions that accompanied the satire and parody that were his preferred genres through these years.

IV. Wyndham Lewis and Empathetic Identification
Lewis’s most famous satire, *The Apes of God* (1930), his 600-page attack on Bloomsbury and post-war culture, is filled with caricatures of people who would have no doubt found themselves “blasted” in one or both of the two issues of *Blast* in 1914 and 1915. Jonathan and Mrs. Bell are fashioned after Clive and Vanessa, Betty Bligh is the Slade painter and devoted friend to Lytton Strachey, Dora Carrington, Lord Osmond Finnian Shaw is Sir Osbert Sitwell, and so on. Bloomsbury’s formalist aesthetics as represented by Roger Fry is seen often in the novel through the character of Matthew Plunkett, an aesthete and dilettante based on Lytton Strachey. In a send-up of Woolf’s short story, “Solid Objects,” Lewis portrays Plunkett as hopelessly trivial-minded and, like John in the story, “mesmerized” by his collection of pointless objects—seashells in Lewis’s version:

> After walking about noisily between his work-tables, Matthew sat gently down in the chair before the shells and began thinking of shell-making and excretion. At random he took up the shell of the pearly Nautilus. Then he surveyed the miniature landscape. He lay down on the beach, kicking his heels, it was a midsummer holiday, he was a callow schoolboy--today was a holiday. Fixing his eyes in a big subaqueous Bloomsbury stare he soon was sufficiently mesmerized: they were directed upon the landscape, rather than upon the specimens. (79)

Plunkett goes on in this passage to engage in child-like fantasy by creating an entire miniature coastline in which a pile of books on the table becomes cliffs, the table-top becomes a valley behind the cliffs, dust-motes in the sunlight from the window become sea-fog, etc. As Plunkett’s attention is drawn to the window, he sees a drama unfold as an insect on the windowpane is about to collide with a cloud passing by outside:
Stealthily without stirring he withdrew his eyes from the cliffs of Old England, the volumes of biology; a shade of cunning entered the lowered face. He directed it upon the insect and the cumulus. The event was imminent, the cumulus had made head-way, and the insect, although it always came back, seemed moving its path in the direction of the cloud. (80)

Lewis’s satire of Bloomsbury in this passage is directed at their Mooreian fascination with the object; but he also captures the empathetic identification that projects their subjective consciousness onto the object. Plunkett inserts his perceptual self onto the objects on the table and at the window, animating them with his own imaginative scenario and taking a role in the scene. Curiously, Mao sees this as evidence that Lewis’s fear of Woolf’s Bergsonian surrender of the subject to the object in “Solid Objects” is credible:

As the tale of a man who discards a career in government in favor of the satisfactions of the scavenger hunt, Woolf’s story explicitly associates childlike attraction to the small found object with the eschewing of political life, thus supporting with quite astonishing precision Lewis’s central claim that what the child shares with the most dangerous breed of soi-disant artist is a wonder before the existing material world that modulates rapidly into passivity before the march of human events. “Solid Objects,” in short, captures perfectly what made some of Bloomsbury’s enthusiasms not merely disgusting but positively dangerous chez Lewis, an empiricist conservatism inextricable from a political indifference that might spell the end of freedom itself. (91-92)
Mao adds that Woolf also seeks with “Solid Objects” to “[counter the] commodification of the aesthetic with an appeal to the more securely aesthetic realm of discarded things with no exchange value”(30). Such a valorization of the useless object would be particularly repugnant to Lewis, who, as discussed above, not only regarded objects as dead but as unreal. What Lewis and Mao both seem to miss, however, is Woolf’s ironic positioning vis-a-vis John and his obsession. In Lewis’s zeal to connect Woolf with Bergson, he reads the story as one of support for John’s rejection of human society in favor of a formalistic preoccupation with “the existing material world.” In fact, both Woolf and Fry were beginning to question the limits of formalism by the beginning of the 1920s, and, rather than expressing a preference for John’s behavior, the story ends with Charles’s ironic parting comment: “Pretty stones. . .”(Haunted House 85). In exploring the consequences of relinquishing political and historical interests to the object world, Woolf actually shares Lewis’s concern that strict formalism can result in “a passivity before the march of human events.” Lewis also chooses to ignore the fact that a number of Bloomsbury members were directly involved in politics, such as Leonard Woolf and Bertrand Russell to name just two, and Lytton Strachey himself was a historian. Again, in the simplifications of caricature, misreadings and reductive interpretations overlook the enormous subtleties of Woolf’s artistry as well as the points on which she and Lewis share similar aesthetic and ideational ground.

Lewis’s interest in establishing another idée-fixe toward Bloomsbury lies in his satirization of the empathetic identification that lies at the heart of Woolf’s Fry-inspired visual aesthetic that projects the perceptual self onto the object in such stories as “The Mark on the Wall,” the Dalloway series (including Mrs. Dalloway), and others.
Matthew Plunkett’s projection of his childlike (or childish, if Lewis’s tone is interpreted accurately) fantasies onto the scene he is creating with the shells, books, and other objects on the table portrays him not only as a frivolous “collector” and irrelevant formalist but as a “callow schoolboy” and daydreamer. Lewis’s parody of Woolf’s exploration of the perceptual self ignores his own “allegiance to forceful subjectivity” (Mao 99). Peter Nicholls distinguishes between Lewis’s subjectivity, which “supplements” the object, and Woolf’s, which Nicholls calls a “compound identification” in which the subject is subsumed by the object (Quoted in Mao 431). There is little evidence, however, that objects in Woolf’s fiction dominate the subject except in “Solid Objects,” but in this story Woolf is expressing a concern with such domination. Lewis’s description of Plunkett’s trance-like “big subaqueous Bloomsbury stare” implies a hypnotic surrender to Bergsonian durée, since Plunkett’s stare is transfixed on “the landscape, rather than upon the specimens” themselves. The “landscape’ in this context is both a fabrication in Plunkett’s mind and a disappearance of his mind into an exterior that also absorbs the seashells. In other words, Plunkett’s Bergson-saturated consciousness is re-absorbed by the immanent world, which Lewis repeatedly proclaimed was dead, unreal, and strictly off-limits for human psychological habitation. Ironically, Lewis’s attempt to oppose Woolf’s thematic concerns in “Solid Objects” actually provides support for them.

Placing aside Lewis’s attempts to situate Bloomsbury firmly within his two major targets, the “time-mind” and the “child-cult,” both of which are represented in the character of Matthew Plunkett, a closer look at his fiction reveals a visual aesthetic that is “hardly distinguishable” (Mao 114) from Woolf’s. In The Wild Body, Lewis’s 1927
collection of seven short stories, which he revised from their original versions before the
1920s, a central character whom Lewis calls Ker-Orr wanders the Brittany countryside,
celebrating, as Giovanni Cianci points out, “the primitivism, violence and barbarism of a
range of eccentric characters--tramps, clowns, outcasts, etc.’(16). Lewis follows this
series of stories with two essays that define his use of the term “wild body” and explain
the function of his characters, which he calls “puppets” and describes as “creaking men
machines” (Complete Wild Body 149). In the first of these two essays, “Inferior
Religions,” Lewis connects a number of these puppet-people, or what he alternately calls
“moving bobbins,” to the objects onto which they all transfer their perceptual selves, an
empathetic projection which Lewis equates with religious idol worship:

These intricately moving bobbins are all subject to a set of objects or to one in
particular. Brotcotnaz is fascinated by one object, for instance; one at once
another vitality. He bangs up against it wildly at regular intervals, blackens it,
contemplates it, moves round it and dreams. He reverences it; it is his task to kill
it. All such fascination is religious. The damp napkins of the inn-keeper are the
altar-cloths of his rough illusion, as Julie’s bruises are the markings of an idol;
with the peasant, Mammon dominating the background. Zoborav and
Mademoiselle Péronnette struggle for a Pension de Famille, unequally. Zoborov
is the ‘polish’ cuckoo of a stupid and ill-managed nest. (149)

With these characters, as with Woolf’s passing couples in “Kew Gardens” or guests at
Mrs. Dalloway’s party, the object becomes “at once another vitality” that in turn
revitalizes the self that re inhabits it, as when Clarissa re inhabits the pre-war gloves or
when Mabel Waring re inhabits a dress that her mother might have worn. For Lewis, such
relationships with the object are “illusions hugged and lived in; little dead totems” (Complete Wild Body 151) that are endowed with significance in a way that recalls Fry’s formalism that places the “spectator” in an empathetic perceptual position with the exterior:

Just as all gods are a repose for humanity, the big religions an immense refuge and rest, so are these little grotesque fetishes. One reason for this is that, for the spectator or participator, it is a world within the world, full of order, even if violent. (151)

This projection of the spectator onto the object world, a projection in which the subject replaces metaphysical belief systems with a psychological creation of “order” in an empirical reality that suddenly seems to have receded to the other side of an unbridgeable divide, can be seen in the presence of Ker-Orr, Lewis’s alter-ego in the Wild Body series. Bernard Lafourcade points out that the character-narrator role played by Ker-Orr represents a “puzzled observer [just] as paralyzed as the object of his perception--and perception always seems to imply a dangerous frontier and cruel no-man’s land” (406), the same frontier of “non-being” that Woolf puzzles over how to represent (Moments of Being 70). Using a literary aesthetic that Lafourcade describes as “manifestly visual” (407), Lewis piles up “layer upon layer of externality. . . to make up for the lost identity and protect the inner void. . .” (410).

In “The Meaning of the Wild Body,” the second essay following the series of Wild Body stories, Lewis makes the case for laughter as an effective form of empathetic identification that employs the eye to allow the perceptual self to “land plump in the center of nothing” (158). Building on the Nietzschean aphoristic list of attributes of
laughter in “Inferior Religions,” Lewis sets out the basis for his use of parody and satire, pointing out that what he calls “the root of the comic” involves the detachment of the eye and the projection of the subjective onto the exterior world of objects:

The root of the Comic is to be sought in the sensations resulting from the observations of a thing behaving like a person. But from that point of view all men are necessarily comic: for they are all things, or physical bodies, behaving as persons. It is only when you come to deny that they are ‘persons,’ or that there is any ‘mind’ or ‘person’ there at all, that the world of appearance is accepted as quite natural, and not at all ridiculous. (158, emphasis in text)

Lewis’s reversal here of Bergson’s definition of the comic as a person acting like a thing (Laughter [1900]), lies at the heart of his visual and verbal valorization of the eye as the central organ of perception, since the static and spatial qualities of objects—including the human body—become the most noticeably unreal and absurd when they leave the dead world of things through the activity of empathetic identification that, like Woolf’s “wordless voices” in “Kew Gardens” that act like “flames lolling from the thick waxen bodies of candles”(Haunted House 39), turn the object world into a vital one infused with the projection of human consciousness. Such projection is responsible for what Lewis calls “autonomously and intelligently moving matter”(159), which profoundly and absurdly, includes the human body and the objects around it that it vitalizes with its consciousness.

Lewis’s famous Tyro portraits of himself, as well as his other machine-like figures, frequently reveal a leering, tooth-baring presence gazing out of an angular, metallic body, which seems to be the opposite of living flesh and blood. In the 1920-1921 self-portrait
Mr. Wyndham Lewis as a Tyro (illust. 2), for instance, Lewis glares at the viewer through a dark, monochromatic profile, in which a high, angular hat ends in a chin that looks as though two sheets of sculpted metal have been imperfectly fastened together. The stark difference between this dead, puppet-like sheath and the intelligent if rather threatening consciousness that inhabits it reveals Lewis’s visual aesthetic that stresses the projection of consciousness from the mind onto dead and unreal (because ultimately unknowable) matter. This relationship of subject and object, far from establishing an unbridgeable distance between subject and object, places the hand of consciousness inside the object the way a puppeteer places a hand into his or her puppet. The puppet becomes a simulacrum of vitalized reality, entirely dependent upon the hand of the puppeteer to bring it to “life.”

In Lewis’s series of *Wild Body* stories, whose title underscores his sense of the animating power of consciousness, Ker Orr represents a sort of grand puppeteer who observes and in some cases precipitates the relentlessly exteriorized actions of the various Breton grotesques he encounters. Each of these characters is a “thing behaving like a person,” as when Ker Orr first meets Bestre, the central character of the third story in the *Wild Body* series. Ker Orr first describes himself through the eyes of a French woman he sees on the street:

My dented *bidon* of a hat--cantankerous beard--hungarian boots, the soles like the ring of a thin melon slice, the uppers in stark calcinous segments: my cassock-like blue broadcloth coat (why was I like this--the habits of needy travel grew this composite shell), this uncouthness might have raised in her the question of defiance and offence. I glided swiftly along on my centripedal boots, dragging
my eye upon the rough walls of the houses to my right like a listless cane. Low houses faced the small vasey port. It was there I saw Bestre. (77)

Representing himself as a collection of concrete objects, Ker Orr speculates about what impression he is making on the French woman who is observing him. His own empathetic projection of the characteristics of “uncouthness. . . defiance and offence” is relocated to her point of view, and Ker Orr stresses that the impression is “raised in her,” emphasizing the role of the subject in assigning significance to objects encountered by vision. Turning to Bestre himself, Ker Orr employs this visual orientation both in Bestre’s projections and in his own. Describing Bestre’s use of the eye in creating reality, which serves as a rationale for the overwhelming exteriority of the story and for Lewis’s visual aesthetic in general, Bestre’s body, like Woolf’s candle-like bodies, is the source of the vision of his consciousness:

The Eye was really Bestre’s weapon: the ammunition with which he loaded it was drawn from all the most skunk-like provender, the most ugly mucins, fungid glands, of his physique. Excrement as well as sputum would be shot from this luminous hole, with the same certainty in its unsavory appulsion. Every resource of metonymy, bloody mind transfusion or irony were also his. What he selected as an arm in his duels, then, was the Eye. (Complete Wild Body 83)

Despite Lewis’s repeated insistence upon the strict separation of subject and object, this early statement of his philosophy of the eye comes far closer to an expression of external reality as originating deep in the interior being of the self and “shot from this luminous hole” of the eye of the beholder, not from the exterior to which the beholder responds. Bestre’s projection outward onto reality confirms Lewis’s commitment to the “unsavory
appulsion”—or empathetic projection—of the subjective consciousness from insensate
matter of the human organism onto the dead (which is what makes it real) exterior. This
literally constitutes a thing acting like a person and projecting the “unworldly element”
(Art of Being Ruled 374) of consciousness onto the external world, rendering it “unreal”
by virtue of being infused by human consciousness. For Lewis, as for Woolf,
consciousness is neither absorbed by the object nor fully separate from it; instead, the
“appulsion” of consciousness onto the exterior alters and animates it. Such vitalism
becomes moments of absurdity for Lewis and moments of being for Woolf, but they both
share the “forceful subjectivity” of empathetic identification; and, once again, Lewis’s
visual aesthetic is more a question of fine, closely guarded distinctions rather than the
polar oppositions that he was so intent on proclaiming for more than two decades.

The most important concept in Lewis’s visual aesthetic, which is often misunderstood,
is an object behaving as a person, not the other way around, which would support his
concerns over the surrender of subject to object rather than align him closer to Fry,
Woolf, and empathetic identification in general. Robert Chapman, for instance, states
that the nature of comedy for Lewis—the laugh of Lewis as Tyro—”reveals a person
behaving like a thing”(28). This reversal of Lewis’s true position leads to Chapman’s
view that Lewis’s visual aesthetic supports his distaste for Bergsonian subjectivity by
ridiculing the “Bergsonian sense of people behaving like things”(Chapman 60).
Chapman bases his analysis of Lewis’s visual and verbal art on this premise and
concludes that Lewis’s main objective is the “dehumanizing”(60) of people for comic
effect, rendering them absurd in the process. This position on Lewis, while a common
one, does not do justice to Lewis’s more profound sense of the absurd as the projection of
human consciousness from the object of the human body, casting the “unworldly”
element of consciousness onto the reality of the dead exterior, making it unreal in the
process. Chapman’s discussion of Lewis’s famous 1919 war painting, A Battery Shelled
(illus. 3), exemplifies the “dehumanization” critical approach to Lewis’s art:

Soldiers as part of the landscape, the gigantic guns and shells as alive as they--or
the soldiers as thing-like as their guns--are features of many of Lewis’s war
paintings. . . . [Soldiers] labouring to the massive totemic guns which block out
the sky, are sometimes indistinguishable from the ammunition stock-piled beside
them. Like the palm of a gigantic hand, the earth is ploughed and furrowed, far
more vital than the transmogrified humanity it grasps. (61)

Chapman’s analysis of A Battery Shelled accurately describes the “puny metallic shapes”
of the soldiers depicted, but his indecision about which elements of the scene are “alive”
or “thing-like” implies an ambiguity over subject and object that Lewis’s visual aesthetic
does not share. Rather than having become dehumanized by the horrific activities of
warfare, the labouring soldiers, as well as the officers observing them from a higher
vantage-point in the foreground, are implicated in something much worse. The inherent
absurdity of a thing acting like a person is rendered utterly tragic by virtue of the person
it chooses to be. The soldiers and officers are not persons acting “thing-like”; according
to Lewis’s aesthetic, they are things acting “person-like,” and, in the case of warfare, the
“transmogrified” unreality of nature through the human consciousness projected onto it is
grotesque and obscene.

Lewis’s visual aesthetic not only focuses on the fundamental nature of the “non-
being” that comes closer to Woolf’s aesthetic than he would care to admit, but David
Ayers argues that Lewis’s aesthetic comes closer to Bergson’s concept of the “original being” than he would care to admit:

The self cannot be known, and the ‘original being’ becomes forever soiled by its inability to separate itself from the world. The polemics of *Time and Western Man* against Bergson and his followers concede much to Bergsonism and fall frequently into paradox. The concession that the self has no real existence because it perceives itself only intuitively is at the root of Lewis’s rhetoric on the subject throughout the 1920s and 1930s, undermining his more vociferous contention that the self is continuous and self-identical. (29)

Ayers’s use of the term “paradox” to describe the differences between Lewis’s classicist separation of subject and object and his modernist empathetic identification that is deeply influenced by the very people from whom he tried most to distance himself is especially fitting as “The Enemy” stepped up his polemics after 1920. Much of the dual nature of Lewis’s thinking can be understood, however, by separating his brilliant take on the subjective through his reversal of Bergson’s sense of the comic (to establish an interesting, if not fully different, version of Fry’s formalism) from his realignment in the 1920s with the right-wing reactionism to which he was exposed in his early career. The twin strands of these influences can clearly be seen as late as 1946 in “The Art of Gwen John,” an article for *The Listener*, in which Lewis praises John for her early attempts to distance herself from Cézanne and align herself with the reactionary movement in France:

How can this woman have isolated herself from the influences of her age so successfully?—for we learn . . . that she went to Cézanne’s exhibitions, and no
doubt saw the cubists as well... Part of the answer is, however, that one of her
great friends was Jacques Maritain: that she belonged to the Catholic Revival in
France (where she principally lived—in the suburbs of Paris). She shared the life
for a time of those original intellectuals, who slipped out of the Bergsonian tide—in
which they had been deeply immersed—and constructed for themselves in the
midst a kind of island of the saints (of still somewhat Bergsonian saints).

(*Creatures* 341)

It is not surprising, of course, that Lewis praises John for precisely the same influences
that he experienced, and his mention of Jacques Maritain is especially timely, since
Lewis had met Maritain in Ontario in 1943 and had his picture taken with him (Meyers
278). The observation that John “slipped out of the Bergsonian tide” alludes both to
Bergson’s overwhelming influence before the War and to his philosophy of *la durée*
itself, which immerses human consciousness in the flow of temporal experience.
Establishing “a kind of island” in this temporal flux alludes to the visual distancing and
re-establishment of the static and spatial at the center of a politicized aesthetic to which
Lewis returned in his relentless attempts to politicize his own visual aesthetics, the
“philosophy of the eye.”

Fredric Jameson points out that, added to the complexities of Lewis’s visual aesthetic
is his attempt to renew and refresh the “visual cliché”(74) that in turn renders the
language of modernity stale and predictable in a mass culture that recycles the same
familiar visual/verbal relationships:

In such a situation, the personal language, the private thought are themselves
illusions, where conventionalized formulae dictate in advance the thought that
had seemed to choose them for its own instruments. Nor can genuine experience be readily identified any longer, when a degraded culture intervenes between us and our objects, to substitute for them, some standardized snapshot. (73)

Lewis’s distaste for mass culture is well known, but his elitism, while assigning a special social role for the artist, also anticipated the work of Marshall McLuhan (who acknowledged the influence of Lewis) in understanding that “the medium is the message” by virtue of the fact that form and content, rather than being held in Cézannian tension with each other, were collapsing into each other in the “Bergsonian tide” that could easily be manipulated by a “degraded culture” that constructed images in ways that reinscribed the symbolic order of industrial capitalism. Jameson views Lewis’s visual aesthetic as “exemplary and ingenious” (73) in its undermining of cultural coding and standardized thinking:

[Lewis’s] ‘method,’ if we can call it that, is to use the cliché against itself—or better still, to pit clichés on the level of gestural images against the verbal clichés with which the sentences themselves are hopelessly corroded. In this way, a kind of perceptual freshness is reinvented out of the unexpectedly virulent interaction of stale and faded substances. (73)

Lewis’s blend of imagistic juxtaposition, Mooreian valorization of the object, Cézannian preservation of the picture plane, Worringerian empathetic identification, and Bergsonian original being are set against the Sorelian, Maurrasian, and Maritainian fear that infusion of the exterior by subjective consciousness could lead to loss of perceptual freedom as governments and corporations gain control of images and their meanings. This paradox in Lewis’s work between an empathetic visual aesthetic and a classicist, sympathetic,
politicized aesthetic position creates a tension that he attempted to resolve by
distinguishing between what he felt was probably the unavoidable, perhaps even
necessary, control of the masses and the perceptual freedom that should be the natural
right and privilege of artists. Lewis’s increasing support for various authoritarian
regimes was deeply intertwined with his visual aesthetic, just as Woolf’s increasing
distaste for authoritarianism of all kinds was deeply intertwined with hers. That two such
similar aesthetics could ultimately take such different directions is the subject of Chapter
Four.
Chapter Four

The Site of Conflict: Woolf, Lewis, and the Politics of Visual Aesthetics

I. Chapter Overview

As discussed in previous chapters, Woolf and Lewis developed visual aesthetics that contained a number of important commonalities. It is also true, however, that their application of such commonalities to social and political issues grew increasingly distant between the Wars. While Alex Zwerdling points out that Woolf “became involved in some of the major progressive movements of her time” (3), Charles Ferrall notes that Lewis, as a prominent figure within the group that Zwerdling calls the “reactionary modernists,” turned increasingly away from “the wave of ‘progressive’ and ‘liberal’ opinion that swept through Britain following the landslide victory of the Liberal Party and its Labour allies in the general election of 1906” (14). Chapter Four discusses the consequences of this important dualism between progressive and reactionary modernism for the thought and artistic production of Woolf and Lewis. The key difference that emerged in their visual aesthetics is that Woolf sought to alter the hegemony of the visual
through the disruption of it by the verbal, while Lewis sought to preserve the hegemony of the visual through the marginalization of the verbal.

To establish a clear understanding of this central difference, this chapter opens with an overview of the longstanding modernist allegiance to “pure” visual art, or art that attempted to free itself from discursive elements. Whether progressive or reactionary, this modernist emphasis on pure art sought to establish a clear separation between the “pure” art of visual expression and the “impure” art of verbal expression. The “sister arts,” as painting and writing were known, were characterized by interartistic critical discussions in which the purity of the visual was maintained against the representational impurity of the verbal. This distinction is important because, as this chapter demonstrates. In Woolf’s work of the 1930s, such as her inclusion of actual illustrations for which she provides verbal disruptions in *Three Guineas*, Woolf’s commitment to feminism and pacifism can be found in her invasion of hegemonic patriarchal visual constructions with the “impurity” of the verbal, which can serve to disrupt the power/knowledge unity of self-serving masculine imagery, both in the private and public realms. Lewis’s commitment to misogyny and fascism, on the other hand, emerges in his insistence upon a strict separation between the “integrated” personality of the individual and the exterior, which reinforces the autonomy of the “personality,” both of an individual and of a nation, against the backdrop of an objectified exterior.

To create a useful theoretical framework for Woolf’s and Lewis’s respective views on the pure and impure in their visual aesthetics, this chapter employs W.T.J. Mitchell’s “picture theory,” which considers any text, whether visual or verbal, as what Mitchell calls “a site of conflict, a nexus where political, institutional, and social antagonisms play
themselves out in the materiality of representation”(91). For Mitchell, the “sister arts” comparative method of discussing image and word, which has been explored thoroughly by Wendy Steiner (1982), is ultimately unexciting because comparative investigation tends to reinscribe aesthetic norms instead of discovering new relationships between the visual and verbal within the same work. Starting from the basic premise that “all media are mixed media,” Mitchell uses a formulation he calls the “image/text” to explore the discursive elements of visual texts and the visual elements of verbal texts. Mitchell points out that the central critical question of the “image/text” approach, as opposed to the “sister arts” approach, is “what difference do the differences (and similarities) make” (91) between the words and images in any given work of visual or verbal art? Through a close examination of a number of key mixed media “image/texts” in Woolf’s and Lewis’s work in the 1930s, this chapter demonstrates how their visual aesthetics, while originating from many of the same influences and very similar in nature, nevertheless sought a relationship with the exterior that placed each writer on different ends of the political spectrum.

I. Mitchell’s Image/Text and the Site of Conflict

Before examining the politics of visual aesthetics in Woolf’s and Lewis’s work in the 1930s, it is important to establish a clear sense of Mitchell’s “image/text” and the modernist reactionary “purity” argument to which it responds. For Lewis, as well as other reactionary modernists such as Yeats, Pound, and Lawrence, there was an unlikely disconnect existed between “a radical aesthetic modernity [and] an almost outright rejection of even the emancipatory aspects of bourgeois modernity”(Ferrall 2). Ferrall
argues further that the strong interest in primitivism that paradoxically runs through modernism suggests, as Lewis discovered in Munich in his youth, a deep distrust of the “masses” and the validity of self-governance for the “herd mentality” that characterized bourgeois society:

[T]he reactionary modernists expressed their hostility towards what was variously called ‘liberalism,’ ‘democracy,’ ‘industrialism’ and ‘progress’ in terms of a nostalgia for the cultures of premodernity while at the same time feeling compelled, in Pound’s famous phrase, ‘to make it new.’ As Eliot maintained in his review of Lewis’s Tarr, ‘the artist . . . is more primitive, as well as more civilized than his contemporaries.’ (Ferrall 2)

For the artist to be more primitive and civilized at the same time than his (and for reactionary modernists “artist” almost always meant “his”) bourgeois contemporaries, two key qualities were stressed in opposition to mass culture: 1) the advanced artist was more in tune with primary societies that possessed a more authentic, non-commodified relationship with the exterior world, and 2) the advanced artist possessed a more developed capacity for personal expression than the bourgeois herd, which merely consumed or copied the cultural products served to them through the reproductive machinery of industrial capitalism. In Jack Flam and Miriam Deutch’s recent and comprehensive anthology of modernist writings on primitivism (2003), Flam argues that, while Maurice Vlaminck claimed to have “discovered” African art sometime in 1904 or 1905, his first purchase of African art coincided with the Cézanne-inspired interest in primitive art among young artists such as Derain, Matisse, and Picasso in 1906:
The Post-Impressionists, especially Cézanne, had played an important role in opening the eyes of the younger artists to the possibilities of non-mimetic representation and of using ‘distortions’ from naturalistic forms for expressive ends. In doing so, the younger artists saw themselves as being very modern, and also as making contact with ancient traditions—such as Egyptian, archaic Greek, and medieval European art—that not only eschewed naturalism but seemed to be involved with deeper, more spiritually compelling kinds of expression. When primitive art was first discovered by modern artists, it seemed to contain a freer sense of plastic inventiveness and a greater emphasis on pictorial structure than any other art forms they knew, and it also seemed to evoke a deeper and more universal sense of humanity. (3)

The reactionary modernists’ search for “more spiritually” and a “more universal sense of humanity” in the face of scientific empiricism, democracy, industrialism, and mass consumer culture, “insisted on the ‘autonomy’ or ‘purity’ of their art as a way of resisting many of the aspects of [the] ‘second industrial revolution’”(Ferrall 3) that was characterized by Liberalist economic policy, wage-earning urban populations, and as Eric Hobsbawm points out, the removal of “the major obstacles to continued and presumably unlimited bourgeois progress. . .”(9). As with so many other contradictory aspects of modernism, however, such attempts at autonomy for the artist and purity for the art itself was not entirely adverse to the bourgeois marketplace. Ferrall points out that “pure” art, and the reputation for autonomy of the artist, were marketable indeed:

Modernist culture was constituted through its resistance to ‘mass’ culture but this resistance also constituted, in Pierre Bourdieu’s terms, its high ‘cultural capital’
and therefore, paradoxically, the considerable ‘economic’ capital for which it could be, at least eventually, exchanged. (4)

Whether reactionary or progressive, then, the modernist emphasis on “pure” art, which began in the aesthetic movement as art for art’s sake, sought to create formalist structures in which expressionism combined with professionalism to distinguish “high art” from art which carried the taint of mass appeal.

In the realm of visual art, high art meant a clear separation between the “sister arts” of visual and verbal expression. In contrast to such separation was “kitsch” (literally “trash” in German) in which, as Roger Fry constantly argued, narrative elements crept into what should be a purely visual experience of formalist appreciation. For Fry and subsequent modernist art critics such as Alfred H. Barr and especially Clement Greenberg, kitsch was visual art that had not fully distanced itself from its sister art of literature. Constantly threatening the “purity” of high art, kitsch was characterized by its appeal to mass consumers, who, through public schooling and artistic “awareness” programs at local museums, etc., possessed an enormous appetite for sentimental pseudo-art that depicted scenes of nostalgic remembrance, patriotic fervor, or literary allusions of one kind or another. As pointed out above, total abstraction was not synonymous with “modern” art, but realism had become highly problematized, especially after Cézanne, and the relationship between “pure” expression and representation became one of tension in the “expressive realism” of the cubists and fauvists who were following Cézanne’s lead. In total abstraction, which W.T.J. Mitchell points out did not emerge as a definitive term until around 1900 (213), the rejection of all representative elements—as understood by Kandisky, the orphists, and others—was intended as “the erection of a wall between
the arts of vision and those of language” (216). Whether falling under the expressive realist or the total abstraction umbrella, Mitchell argues, “modernism in the visual arts involves a certain resistance to language, a discipline of the eye and the critical/artistic voice that seeks to acknowledge the pure, silent presence of the work” (217). Given this basic visual orientation both for art and for criticism, interartistic critical discussions of modernism have been dominated by comparative models in which the “purity” of the visual is maintained against the “contamination by language and cognated or conventionally associated media: words, sounds, time, narrativity, and arbitrary ‘allegorical’ signification. . . that must be eliminated in order for the pure, silent, illegible visuality of the visual arts to be achieved” (Mitchell 96). Consequently, visual/verbal critical formulations, both from the Cézannian aesthetic of “tension” between the visual and verbal to the Kandinskian abstract aesthetic that rejected such tension in favor of visual purity, stressed a fundamental difference between the “sister arts” of writing and painting, a difference that was best resolved by having the impurity of the verbal either move closer to the visual, or, in the case of abstract art, disappear altogether into the visual. Fry’s Mauron-inspired concept of “psychological volumes,” for instance, projected subjective content onto form, underscoring Fry’s basic aesthetic premise that the verbal should become more visual, thereby capturing the formal, unified quality of the contemplated object.

Mitchell argues that such an aesthetic premise is based on the reactionary modernist attempt to clearly distinguish between the visual and the verbal. He calls instead for a new “visual/verbal” method of reading texts that acknowledges the presence of visual and verbal elements in texts of all kinds, paintings and sculptures as well as poems and
stories. Mitchell argues that the traditional comparative method of discussing image and word is ultimately unexciting because, while some interesting new connections might be discovered between the sister arts, comparative investigation tends to reinscribe aesthetic, conceptual, and historical norms that already exist in the art forms undergoing comparison. Mitchell’s “Picture Theory” calls instead for a critical method that leaves behind the “purist” standpoint on which comparative approaches are based, and views all media as mixed media. Following Foucault’s example, Mitchell begins with the notion that visual texts contain discursive elements and discursive texts contain visual elements. Reconfirming “aesthetic norms” of a period, or working within established dualistic frameworks such as “spatial and temporal” or “iconic and symbolic,” is left behind in favor of examining canonical as well as relatively unfamiliar works to see how visual and verbal media are functioning within them. As Mitchell points out, the central critical question changes from “‘what is the difference (or similarity) between the words and images?’” to “‘what difference do the differences (and similarities) make?’” That is, why does it matter how words and images are juxtaposed, blended, or separated?”(91). This is an important shift of critical focus because it moves the visual/verbal discussion beyond technical aesthetic questions to considering a text as what Mitchell calls “a site of conflict, a nexus where political, institutional, and social antagonisms play themselves out in the materiality of representation”(91).

The central goal, then, of examining a visual/verbal text—or what Mitchell calls an “image/text”—is to determine how the “impure” nature of the text is emphasizing certain representations and de-emphasizing others. In the case of a painting, for instance:
The starting point is to see what particular form of textuality is elicited (or repressed) by the painting and in the name of what values. An obvious entry to the ‘text in painting’ is the question of the title. What sort of title does the painting have, where is it located (inside, outside, or on the frame)? What is its institutional or interpretive relation to the image? Why are so many modern paintings entitled “Untitled”? Why the vigorous, explicit verbal denial of any entitlement of language in painting, the aggressive paradox of the title which denies that it is a title? What is being resisted in the name of labels, legends, and legibility? (98)

Such attention to the verbal within the visual is not a new critical phenomenon, and Mitchell acknowledges that reading literature for “imagery” is “as old as the hills”(99). He argues, however, that the definitive move of image/text beyond comparative methods for interartistic study represents progress beyond the futility of the modernist “purity” mentality. Image/text serves effectively “as a wedge to pry open the heterogeneity of media and of specific representations”(100). The central challenge is to explore a text as a “site of conflict” without the inevitable homogenization that comparative techniques seek to create or the “scientistic rhetoric” of semiotics, which Mitchell sees as merely replacing “the unifying concept of ‘art’ with more general notions of ‘picturality,’ ‘literality,’ and ‘meaning,’ to produce a higher-level comparative method”(86) that ends in the same impasse of “aesthetic norms.”

What, then, can Mitchell’s image/text “invoke” about the visual aesthetics of Woolf and Lewis, who, as demonstrated above, shared the modernist conviction that the visual represented the purer side of the visual/verbal duality? A close look at some key
examples of their work through Mitchell’s “mixed media” lens reveals that, despite the “excitement over the object”(Steiner 197) that was shared by progressive and reactionary modernists, the social and political ends to which their visual aesthetics were applied grew increasingly oppositional as modernism matured. Cézanne’s and Worringer’s perceptual innovations and the flurry of movements and manifestoes they spawned gradually complicated the unifying feeling of having discovered a new relationship with the object and a vital new purpose for art. As the following discussion demonstrates, Woolf began to see the “impure” verbal as playing a vital role in the disruption of the reified patriarchal visual, while Lewis maintained the reified visual as essential in preserving the unified personality of the male and, by extension, the unified national identity that was so central to his fascist sympathies.

II. Woolf’s Image/Text and Her Commitment to Feminism and Pacifism

In his remarkable study of Woolf’s social and political vision, Virginia Woolf and the Real World (1986), Alex Zwerdling points out that as recently as 1972 Woolf’s reputation “seemed firmly placed: an interesting but lesser modern writer whose innovative techniques were clearly important”(1). Woolf was viewed as a true stylist but “her range was thought too narrow to put her in a class with the ‘major’ writers of her time”(1). This view of Woolf’s work was created in part by Lewis, who, in his relentless quest to minimize anything and anyone connected to Bloomsbury, worked hard to relegate Woolf to the literary minor leagues of writers with a certain axe to grind--feminism in Woolf’s case:
I am sure that certain critics will instantly object that Mrs. Woolf is extremely insignificant—that she is a purely feminist phenomenon—that she is taken seriously by no one any longer today. . . and that, anyway, feminism is a dead issue. But that will not deter me . . . for I am ready to agree that the intrinsic importance of Mrs. Woolf may be exaggerated by her friends, I cannot agree that as a symbolic landmark—a sort of party-lighthouse—she has not a real significance. And she has crystallized for us, in her critical essays, what is in fact the feminine—as distinguished from the feminist—standpoint. She is especially valuable in her ‘clash’ with what is today, in fact and in deed, a dead issue, namely nineteenth-century scientific ‘realism,’ which is the exact counterpart, of course, in letters, of French Impressionism in art (Degas, Manet, Monet). (Men Without Art 132, emphasis in text)

Lewis’s skillful combination of dismissal and patronizing faint-praise is noteworthy. Even though others have assigned “Mrs. Woolf” to the dustbin, Lewis suggests, he will take it upon himself to locate a modicum of historical merit in her feminine standpoint and in her “clash” with representation, both of which are no longer (as of 1934) relevant issues. The entire tone of Lewis’s remarks suggests a writer who had a topical niche in her day, but that day has come and gone. Goodbye, Virginia Woolf.

Woolf herself was wounded by Lewis’s critique in his chapter on her in Men Without Art, recording in her October 14, 1934 diary entry the pain she felt from his viciousness:

This morning I’ve taken the arrow of W[yndham] L[ewis] to my heart. . . . If there is truth in W.L. well, face it. . . . But for God’s sake don’t try to bend my writing
one way or the other. Not that one can. And there is the odd pleasure too of being abused: & the feeling of being dismissed into obscurity is also pleasant and salutary. (Diary of VW 4: 251-252)

Such dismissal into obscurity began to change in 1972, Zwerdling argues, with Woolf’s nephew Quentin Bell’s biography of his beloved aunt, which drew critical attention to previously unknown or unappreciated diaries, memoirs, and letters that started to find their way into print during the 1970s and 1980s:

During this time, many of her uncollected critical essays were also printed in book form. The changed sense of her achievement is both quantitative and qualitative. She is no longer simply the author of a handful of ‘experimental’ novels and some lively criticism. In fact her collected works fill a long library shelf and rival in bulk those of her energetic Victorian predecessors.(Zwerdling 2)

Bell’s oblique allusion to Ruskin, who is arguably the most “energetic” and prolific of these Victorian predecessors, is important, since Ruskin’s famous advocacy of “separate spheres” for men and women as well as his views on art and society in general served as a major target for Woolf, beginning in earnest with A Room of One’s Own in 1929. While Ruskin allowed for a wider social canvas for women to express themselves, he still suffered irredeemably from Victorian patriarchal views on the unsuitability of women for most of the male realm. Sharon Weltman argues convincingly that, in spite of Ruskin’s stated (and apparent) beliefs, his own writing, and his growing interest in myth after his rejection of evangelical Christianity in 1858, destabilized his own position with respect to strict gender boundaries—not only in societal role-playing, but in sexual identification itself (Weltman 104). Such deconstruction aside, however, all three of Ruskin’s major
texts on the “woman question”—”Of Queen’s Gardens,” *The Ethics of the Dust* (1866),
and *The Queen of the Air* (1869)—display a great number of patronizing notions
concerning women’s relations with men, their intended role in society, and their feminine
personal qualities. Feeding the hungry, cleaning the environment, comforting the sick—all
these occupations Ruskin saw as natural outlets for feminine talent and interest.
Weltman notes that at least Ruskin allowed women a greater exercise of organizational,
analytical, and interpersonal skills; but Ruskin’s unmistakable tone of condescension
throughout his writings on gender comes closer to that of his close friend Coventry
Patmore’s sequence of poems, *The Angel in the House* (1866), in which Patmore feels
authorized to make such observations as the following on the role of women in Victorian
culture:

> The true happiness and dignity of women are to be sought, not in her exaltation to
the level of man, but in a full appreciation of her inferiority and in the voluntary
honour which every manly nature instinctively pays to the weaker vessel. (Quoted
in Weltman 115)

Such sentiments found their way into thousands of households in the last third of the
nineteenth century. Mark Hussey points out that Julia Prinsep Stephen, Woolf’s mother,
owned a copy of the fourth edition of *The Angel in the House* personally inscribed to her
by Patmore himself (*Virginia Woolf A-Z* 6).

In a 1931 address to the London branch of the National Society for Women’s Service
entitled “Professions for Women,” Woolf describes this paragon of the domestic sphere
of which she believed her mother Julia to be the perfect example:
I will describe her as shortly as I can. She was intensely sympathetic. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily. If there was chicken, she took the leg; if there was a draught she sat in it--in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others.

Above all--I need not say it--she was pure. Her purity was supposed to be her chief beauty--her blushes, her great grace. In those days--the last of Queen Victoria--every house had its Angel. (*Collected Essays of VW* 285)

Woolf’s description of the Victorian ideal of womanhood--perfectly suited for her role within her domestic sphere--captures Ruskin’s and Patmore’s mixture of patronizing praise and insidious removal of power that made a virtue of institutionalized inferiority and naturalized male economic and political dominance. Every time Woolf began in her early career to review a piece of writing by a famous man, she tells her audience, she felt the presence of one of these domestic angels telling her that she was overstepping her bounds if she was not sufficiently tender and sympathetic in her appraisal of his work. In order to free herself from this imposition of narrow gender expectations, Woolf explains why she had to commit an act of intellectual violence:

I turned upon her and caught her by the throat. I did my best to kill her. My excuse, if I were to be had up in a court of law, would be that I acted in self-defence. Had I not killed her she would have killed me. She would have plucked the heart out of my writing. . . . Killing the Angel in the House was part of the occupation of a woman writer. (*Collected Essays of VW* 286).
In addition, Woolf argues that another “phantom” disrupts the imagination of the woman writer: “[t]he consciousness of what men will say of a woman who speaks the truth about her passions. . . (Collected Essays of VW 288). Woolf sees this phantom as more difficult to “kill” than the Angel in the House because even if the female self-imposed limitation is put to rest, the perceptual gaze of the male is an obstacle to perceptual freedom:

This I believe to be a very common experience with women writers--they are impeded by the extreme conventionality of the other sex. For though men sensibly allow themselves great freedom in these respects, I doubt that they realize or can control the extreme severity with which they condemn such freedom in women. (Collected Essays of VW 288)

The freedom to oppose or at least avoid the internalization of male value systems and perceptual realities occupied Woolf throughout her career, but the specific focus of “Professions for Women” evolved, as Woolf records in her diary for January 20, 1931, as a continuation of the issues discussed in A Room of One’s Own: “I have this moment, while having my bath, conceived an entire new book--a sequel to A Room of One’s Own--about the sexual life of women: to be called Professions for Women perhaps--Lord how exciting!” (Diary of VW 4: 6). Anne Olivier Bell points out that this inspiration in the bathtub led not only to four versions of the speech given to the Society for Women’s Service but to two major works in the 1930s, The Years (1937) and Three Guineas (1938) (Diary of VW 4: 6). Woolf’s assault on the “separate spheres” ideology of Ruskin, Patmore, and their Victorian audience shaped much of her writing after the post-impressionist experimentation of the 1920s, as she succinctly expresses in the
version of “Professions for Women” included in the essay/novel The Partigers (which eventually became The Years): “The future of fiction depends very much upon what extent men can be educated to stand free speech in women” (xxxx) and understand that women are more than “wives, mothers, housemaids, parlourmaids and cooks” . . . (xxxxiii). From A Room of One’s Own through Three Guineas, then, Woolf explores “questions of utmost interest” involving the newly acquired room of one’s own: “You have won rooms of your own in the house hitherto exclusively owned by men. . . . How are you going to furnish it, how are you going to share it, and upon what terms?” (Collected Essays of VW 289).

As Woolf turned away from her Fry-inspired formalism of the teens and twenties, she did not, however, leave behind her visual aesthetic, which remained central in her continued commitment to perceptual freedom for women in their capacity for empathetic identification with the object. In A Room of One’s Own, for instance, Woolf succeeds in projecting a new subjective reality onto “Oxbridge,” the English term for Oxford and Cambridge, which represent the ultimate in elite culture and knowledge. Declaring that “Oxbridge is an invention”(3), Woolf proceeds to impose a different image/text on the same exterior that has always been represented as follows:

The spirit of peace descended like a cloud from heaven, for if the spirit of peace dwells anywhere, it is in the courts and quadrangles of Oxbridge on a fine October morning. Strolling through those colleges past those ancient halls the roughness of the present seemed smoothed away; the body seemed contained in a miraculous glass cabinet through which no sound could penetrate, and the mind,
freed from any contact with facts. . . was at liberty to settle down upon whatever meditation was in harmony with the moment. (5)

This representation of peace, beauty, and intellectual transcendence seems divinely ordained and eternal. Woolf replaces it, however, with another empathetic projection, one in which the “peace” of Oxbridge is subjected to the question, peace for whom? This new image/text inserts the disruption of the “impure” verbal into the purity of the visual in which the mind is “freed from any contact with facts” and merely succumbs to the visual representation of power and confidence exuded by Oxbridge:

It was thus that I found myself walking with extreme rapidity across a grass plot. Instantly a man’s figure rose to intercept me. Nor did I at first understand that the gesticulations of a curious-looking object, in a cut-away coat and evening shirt, were aimed at me. His face expressed horror and indignation. Instinct rather than reason came to my help; he was a Beadle; I was a woman. This was the turf; there was the path. Only the Fellows and Scholars are allowed here; the gravel is the place for me. (4)

In this passage, Woolf portrays Oxbridge not as a place of balance and beauty but as a male bastion in which patriarchal privilege is jealously guarded. The Beadle, dressed in the mock evening suit of a male servant, rushes out to remind Woolf’s alter-ego Mary Beton that the masculine sphere must not be trespassed upon and that she, who until that moment is lost in thought, is transgressing her proper role as object and presuming herself to be subject. This message is reinforced when Woolf attempts to enter the door of the library:
I must have opened it, for instantly there issued, like a guardian angel barring the
way with a flutter of black gown instead of white wings, a deprecating, silvery,
kindly gentleman, who regretted in a low voice as he waived me back that ladies
are only admitted to the library if accompanied by a Fellow of the college or
furnished with a letter of introduction. (6)

Here Woolf’s image/text becomes even more pointed, since the blend of visual and
verbal quite literally represented by the library is replaced by a new visual/verbal
relationship in which the image of all the books is replaced by the language of “kindly”
but inexorable rejection of female application to the intellectual realm of men. Mitchell’s
notion of an image/text as a “site of conflict” is particularly valuable here, since Woolf’s
encounter with the “guardian” of male power/knowledge is, in the Foucauldian sense, a
struggle literally on the threshold between the self-reproducing elite and the
institutionalized disenfranchisement of the Other. By invading the “pure” image of the
library with “impure” verbal content, Woolf replaces its naturalized complacency with a
politically charged polarity:

That a famous library has been cursed by a woman is a matter of complete
indifference to a famous library. Venerable and calm, with all its treasures safe
locked within its breast, it sleeps complacently and will, so far as I am concerned,
so sleep for ever. Never will I wake those echoes, never will I ask for that
hospitality again, I vowed as I descended the steps in anger. (6)

Woolf’s complex image/text of this gender impasse is replaced later in the essay by an
image/text in which the visual and verbal collaborate to resolve the site of conflict
through a “unity of the mind” in which both genders are in dialogue within the individual
male and female mind, establishing Woolf’s famous “woman-manly or man-
womanly”(114) person.

This rapprochement between the genders is the source of Woolf’s pacifism; too much
of the “manly” leads inevitably to fascism, in politics as well as in art, since the
image/text of an artistic creation reflects the ideology that produced it:

Poetry ought to have a mother as well as a father. The Fascist poem, one may fear,
will be a horrid little abortion such as one sees in a glass jar in the museum of some
country town. Such monsters never live long, it is said; one has never seen a
prodigy of that sort cropping grass in a field. Two heads on one body do not make
for length of life. (113)

Rather than grafting male and female heads onto one body--male in the case of fascism--
Woolf places male and female bodies into one head, establishing the ideal human being
as essentially androgynous. Instead of the image/text of the gender standoff in the
doorway of the Oxbridge library, Woolf offers the image/text of a man and woman
entering the same taxi and quickly blending with the traffic of the city. This scene comes
very close to the pure visuality of the earlier image of Oxbridge, but Woolf again invades
the visual with content, going beyond symbolism’s appropriation of form for content to
the empathetic projection of content onto form, infusing it with personal, social, and
political significance that alters its position in reality. Following Woolf’s verbal invasion
of Oxbridge’s accepted cultural image, for instance, it has literally become a different
place.

Woolf continues her critique of England’s elite institutions of male education in The
Years (1937), depicting the Oxford attended by Edward Partiger in much the same way
as Oxbridge in *A Room of One’s Own*. Mitchell Leaska describes Woolf’s view of this “wealthy and powerful city of learning” as a “travesty of manhood and a mockery of humane values: a fortress against the real world outside, protective of male vanity; a citadel designed to maintain the glow and glitter of the masculine image” (*The Partigers* x). This basic hypocrisy is revealed in the “1880” chapter, the first of eleven chapters entitled by years, in which Edward is reading *Antigone* and enjoying a glass of port late on a rainy evening in his Oxford room. Here Woolf has invaded the purely visual opening of the passage with verbal content involving the challenge of Antigone’s idealism to her uncle Creon’s practical but morally reprehensible “solution” to the civil war in which both of her brothers were killed. Having discovered that Antigone has disobeyed his orders to leave her brothers unburied, Creon attempts a cover-up by ordering Antigone to return home and not tell anyone what she has done. Her refusal forces him to carry out the death sentence he has decreed, thereby exposing the true weakness of an authoritarian regime that hides behind its own power and must protect it at all costs, since power is all it has.

The disruptive nature of Antigone’s rebellion is striking in the context of Edward’s peaceful academic quarters, which Woolf paints in the most idyllic terms:

> It was raining in Oxford. The rain fell gently, persistently, making a little chuckling and burbling noise in the gutters. Edward, leaning out of the window, could still see the trees in the college garden, whitened by the falling rain. Save for the rustle of the trees and the rain falling, it was perfectly quiet. A damp, earthy smell came up from the wet ground. Lamps were being lit here and there
in the dark mass of the college; and there was a pale-yellowish mound in one corner where lamplight fell upon a flowering tree. (*The Years* 50)

Nothing could be more peaceful and lovely than this college scene, and Edward’s “dexterity” in translating *Antigone* from the Greek gives him “a thrill of excitement” (*The Years* 52). Not only is Edward not troubled by the actual situation in which Antigone is engulfed, he begins (with the help of the wine) to associate Antigone in his mind with his cousin, Kitty Malone, to whom, in spite of being a close relative, he is sexually attracted:

> He turned again to the *Antigone*. He read; then he sipped. Then he read; then he sipped again. . . . She was both of them--Antigone and Kitty. . . . For if ever a girl held herself upright, lived, laughed and breathed, it was Kitty, in the white and blue dress that she had worn last time he dined at the Lodge. (*The Years* 54)

In a subtle but unmistakable representation of male condescension, Edward views Antigone not as serious-minded and deeply principled but as spirited and full of life--just like his cousin in her attractive dress. Edward is facile in his translation skills but shallow in his understanding of the issues addressed in Sophocles’s play. Like Ruskin, Edward unconsciously diminishes the power of women while at the same time praising them for having the qualities that men find suitable for their own needs.

Edward is soon joined by two friends, Ashley and Gibbs, who are polar opposites in personality and interests but share a mutual attraction to Edward. The scene shifts from Edward’s shallow encounter with *Antigone* to a homoerotic intrigue in which Edward takes pleasure in pitting Ashley and Gibbs against each other for his affection:

> He went back with the bottle and sat down on a low stool between them. He uncorked the wine and poured it out. They both looked at him, as he sat between
them, admiringly. The vanity, which Eleanor always laughed at in her brother, was flattered. He liked to feel their eyes on him. (*The Years* 56)

The sexual tension of the scene increases as Woolf shifts the point-of-view first to Ashley, who ponders the beauty of Edward (“How beautiful he looks. . . like a Greek boy”), and then to Gibbs, who decides to annoy Ashley by making separate plans with Edward (“Very well; he had been going to go; now he would stay; he would twist his tail for him--he knew how”). Edward begins to delight in the competition and, announcing that he is “off to bed,” begins to undress in front of his two friends. Woolf raises the temperature of the scene at this point, as Ashley’s sexual desire becomes more obvious: “Ashley looked at him appealingly. Edward could torture him horribly. Edward began unbuttoning his waistcoat; he had a perfect figure, Ashley thought, looking at him, standing between them.” Fully aware of the effect his teasing is having on his friends, Edward retires to his bedroom: “‘Let ‘em fight it out together,’” he thought as he shut the bedroom door.” The scene ends with Ashley pleading with Edward to let him into the bedroom:

‘Edward’! said Ashley. His voice was low and controlled. Edward made no answer.

‘Edward’! said Ashley, rattling the handle. The voice was sharp and appealing.

‘Good-night,’ said Edward sharply. He listened. There was a pause. Then he heard the door shut. Ashley was gone. (*The Years* 59)

Woolf’s scathing portrayal of Edward reveals his emotional shallowness, not only in his superficial reading of *Antigone* but in his malicious abuse of his friends’ feelings. The image/text, or blend of “pure” visual and “impure” verbal, of this scene combines the
warm glow of Woolf’s painterly prose in her description of the campus and Edward’s room with the content of *Antigone*, which Woolf continues to suggest by exchanging the feuding brothers, Polynices and Eteocles, for the feuding friends, Ashley and Gibbs. The presence of the play resonates throughout the scene in opposition to the hypocrisy of an institution that projects an image of high-minded platonic male companionship, when in fact what actually takes place falls far short of that ideal. The visual and verbal work together to create the mixed media that allows, as in Woolf’s verbal invasion of Oxbridge, for the projection of an alternate reality onto a clichéd image that has hitherto been naturalized as a cultural given. Woolf’s aesthetic politics seeks to shatter the hegemonic power of patriarchal imagery with the corrosive power of the verbal. What begins as an idyllic vision of gentlemanly education ends as a sordid exposé of the vanity, competition, and sexual repression that Woolf exchanges for the “official” image of Oxford. Like Antigone, who exposes Creon for the small-minded tyrant he really is, Woolf refits Oxford with the intellectual and moral dimensions it really deserves.

In Woolf’s bathtub inspiration of 1931, she saw the long project that eventually became *The Years* as a continuation of *A Room of One’s Own*, but with the invasion of the visual by the verbal directed specifically at the ways in which the private-sphere oppression of the female mirrors the public-sphere violence and social inequities of patriarchal constructions, including war itself. Structurally, it also parallels the first work in that Woolf begins with an image/text of England’s elite colleges and ends with that of the taxi, which she employs in a very similar way. Rachel Blau DuPlessis calls Woolf a “cultural worker,” who, like Gertrude Stein, undertook the task of “resituating women where they have been elided, erased: in the biography that precedes production, in the
texts and their gender narrative, in the literary movements, in all areas of production, dissemination, evaluation”(11). Shifting the ‘gender narrative” that constitutes the cultural image/text of Oxford to one that does not elide the presence and equality of women results in a visual/verbal mixture that prevents the establishment of male power/knowledge structures that Woolf views as the root of fascism. The taxi scene, with which Woolf concludes The Years, contains the image of two in one, of sharing the same sphere, that projects a different “gender narrative,” one in which men and women are less alienated because they occupy an image/text together instead of separate sides of a great gender divide:

. . . Eleanor was standing with her back to [Delia and Maggie]. She was watching a taxi that was gliding slowly round the square. It stopped in front of a house two doors down.

‘Aren’t they lovely?’ said Delia, holding out the flowers.

Eleanor started.

‘The roses? Yes. . .’ she said. But she was watching the cab. A young man had got out; he paid the driver. Then a girl in a tweed traveling suit followed him. He fitted his latch-key to the door. ‘There,’ Eleanor murmured, as he opened the door and they stood for a moment on the threshold. ‘There!’ she repeated, as the door shut with a little thud behind them. (The Years 469)

Eleanor, who serves more or less as the novel’s main character, sees the same equanimity between the sexes as Mary Beton does in A Room of One’s Own when, after observing an ordinary scene of a man and a woman entering a taxi, she contemplates “the rhythmical order with which my imagination had invested it. . . (469.” Rather than being
subjected to the order with which the patriarchy invests its objects, Mary Beton selects her own significant exteriorities and, like the narrator in “The Mark on the Wall” or Sacha Latham in “A Summing Up,” frees her consciousness from the reified consciousness of male realities, replacing the reality of divided genders with one of united genders. Likewise, Eleanor’s exclamation of “There!” celebrates the “rhythmical order” of the man and woman as they move in perfect concert with each other from the taxi to the door of their home. Mary Beton’s addition of fish imagery completes the picture of the harmony between the couple: “. . . and then the cab glided off as if it were swept on by the current elsewhere” (A Room of One’s Own, 106).

In addition to the text of harmony, the taxi image also carries the text of inclusion rather than the text of exclusion at Oxbridge. In Mary’s version, the couple comes together and unifies in the cab, and in Eleanor’s version the couple issues forth together from the cab and enters the house together. In both, each gender is included, joined, brought together in a graceful set of movements in which they are complementing each other, balancing each other, and creating an image/text that combines a purely visual moment with the texts of harmony and inclusion. Laura Moss Gottlieb argues that The Years “directly attacks patriarchal society while hinting at a utopian vision of life based on ‘women’s values’” (Ginsberg and Gottlieb, vi). By contrasting the image/texts of Oxford with those of the taxi, Woolf reinforces the value of harmony and inclusion but also, as Alex Zwerdling notes, “the liberation of women from the constraints of their lives” (210).

In Three Guineas (1938), Woolf returned to non-fiction, but the book was conceived, as was the fictional The Years, as a continuation of the feminist and pacifist explorations
of *A Room of One’s Own*, the work that dominated Woolf’s thinking throughout the 1930s, just as the *Dalloway* series preoccupied her through so much of the 1920s. In a June, 1938 diary entry, Woolf acknowledges a close connection between *The Years* and *Three Guineas* and the “six years [of] floundering, striving, much agony, some ecstasy. . .” (Diary of VW 148) that began with the publication of *A Room of One’s Own* and “Professions for Women.” Woolf’s evolving argument that a close relationship exists between familial patriarchy and political fascism is developed further in *Three Guineas* with more discussion of the deleterious effects of the “separate sphere” view of gender roles that still had legitimacy in the 1930s. Woolf calls for equal pay for professions in both the public sphere and private sphere, explaining that the “unpaid professions”(*Three Guineas* 119) of the private sphere have traditionally been assigned to women, leading to a domestic tyranny in which women are forced to accept male views and attitudes in order to receive the money to buy the dresses, perfumes, and other female accouterments that help them to gain the approval of the patriarchy. This vicious circle of acquiescence and approval-seeking leads to female support for male-inspired warfare in two ways. The first is the need to “fall in with their decrees because it was only so that she could wheedle them into the means to marry or marriage itself”(Three Guineas 57), while the second involves the unconscious realization that war represents an opportunity to escape the patriarchal oppression of the private sphere:

So profound was her unconscious loathing for the education of the private house with its cruelty, its poverty, its hypocrisy, its immorality, its inanity that she would undertake any task however menial, exercise any fascination however fatal that enabled her to escape. Thus consciously she desired ‘our splendid Empire’;

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unconsciously she desired our splendid war. (*Three Guineas* 58)

Again, as in *The Years*, Woolf invades the self-serving male images of knowledge/power, here associated with patriotism and war, with content that undermines the facade presented by patriarchy, whether in the private or the public sphere. Female support for World War I, for instance, appeared on one level as support for the “boys,” but, on a deeper level, it was liberation for the “girls,” who seized the opportunity to work in war-related jobs and even on the battle-field. Woolf makes the point that English women actually have no real stake in patriotism, since they are excluded by men from the public sphere and told, as Creon tells Antigone, to go back to their homes.

Rather than being exploited to force their brothers to fight or lose the respect of their sisters, Woolf proposes that women adopt an attitude of total “indifference”(*Three Guineas* 163) toward war, neither giving men the white feather of cowardice nor the red feather of courage, as women were enjoined to do during World War I. Such indifference to war and the fascism that leads to war is the central precept of the “Outsiders’ Society” (*Three Guineas* 162), Woolf’s answer to the fascist manipulation of women that forces them to identify with the ideology of their oppressors. Once women begin to withdraw their support for male violence, alternative systems of education and socialization can find room to grow. The first lesson of this new education is that patriarchy has always excluded women from its educational, economic, and social institutions; therefore, women have no obligation to fight for the preservation of them:

She will find that she has no good reason to ask her brother to fight on her behalf to protect ‘our’ country. ‘Our country,’ she will say, ‘throughout the greater part of its history has treated me as a slave; it has denied me education or any share in
its possessions. ‘Our’ country still ceases to be mine if I marry a foreigner. ‘Our’ country denies me the means of protecting myself, forces me to pay others a very large sum annually to protect me, and is so little able, even so, to protect me that Air Raid precautions are written on the wall. Therefore, if you insist upon fighting to protect me, or ‘our’ country, let it be understood, soberly and rationally between us, that you are fighting to gratify a sex instinct which I cannot share; to procure benefits which I have not shared and probably will not share; but not to gratify my instincts, or to protect myself or my country.’ (Three Guineas 165-166)

In deciding where to devote her guineas appropriately, then, Woolf tells the barrister (to whom her response to his question “How in your opinion are we to prevent war?” constitutes the entire book) that the best way to spend money is on any individual or organized effort that seeks to destroy all that is represented by the “picture” of a man in uniform. Woolf’s visual aesthetic becomes overt in Three Guineas with her inclusion of five illustrations depicting various men in uniform. Published almost simultaneously in 1938 by the Hogarth Press in England and Harcourt, Brace & Co. in the United States, both versions contained the illustrations that were not included in subsequent editions until Hermione Lee restored them in 1984 in a combined edition of A Room of One’s Own and Three Guineas (Hogarth Press/Chatto & Windus). The illustrations present an image/text that, like Oxbridge or the taxi, Woolf invades with alternative content, changing the significance of the clichéd, naturalized original by projecting a new empathetic identification onto it and renewing both the visual and the verbal in the process.
The illustrations depict, according to the first edition, a general, heralds, a university procession, a judge, and an archbishop. Each of these features the regalia of the respective offices of these men, and the emphasis is on ritualized shows of status and power. Woolf tells the barrister that the pictures represent “the picture of evil” (Three Guineas 219) and concludes her book-length answer to his question of how to prevent war by saying that both she and the barrister must “do what we can to destroy the evil which that picture represents” and that “we can best help you to prevent war not by repeating your words and following your methods but by finding new words and creating new methods” (Three Guineas 219). Such methods involve shifting the accepted authority and dignity of a man in uniform to a visual/verbal site of conflict in which different associations are foregrounded. For Woolf these associations would include the account of oppression, destruction, and death that the verbal brings to the visual image of a man and his medals:

[A]nother picture has imposed itself upon the foreground. It is the figure of a man; some say, others deny, that he is Man himself. . . . He is a man certainly. His eyes are glazed; his eyes glare. His body, which is braced in an unnatural position is tightly cased in a uniform. Upon the breast of that uniform are sewn several medals and other mystic symbols. His hand is upon a sword. . . . And behind him lie ruined houses and dead bodies--men, women and children. (Three Guineas 217)

Instead of an icon representing courage, strength, resolve, and patriotism, the image/text now represents the atavistic passions of bloodlust and totemism associated with primitive warrior societies. Mitchell describes this method as asking “in the name of what values”
the image/text is created. By replacing one set of values with another in relation to the same image, Woolf manages to instill it with a feminist and pacifist set of values that patriarchy has tried assiduously to exclude, not only from its military image/texts but from its educational and clerical image/texts as well, as Woolf suggests in the illustrations of other men in uniform in the book. As men adorn themselves with the trappings of power, Woolf seeks to remind her readers that “the public and private worlds are inseparately connected; that the tyrannies and servilities of one are the tyrannies and servilities of the other” (*Three Guineas* 217). Freedom begins with the ability to understand the terms of one’s oppression at the hands of those who control the image/text, or what Woolf calls the “figure.” In a remarkably direct statement of her visual method, Woolf declares that “we are not passive spectators doomed to unresisting obedience but by our thoughts and actions can ourselves change that figure” (*Three Guineas* 217). Woolf’s feminism demands an intense engagement with the entrenched images that served to reinscribe male authority, and her pacifism demands a thorough exposure of the ways in which male authority led to war.

In *Between the Acts* (1841), Woolf’s final novel (published four months after her death), two central and opposing figures emerge that again, like Oxbridge and the taxi or uniforms and the photographs of Spanish Civil War victims on Woolf’s writing desk, set up a pure visual polarity to which Woolf applies the impurity of words, creating image/texts that transform the visual cliché as well as shift the source of the empathetic projection of verbal away from the exclusive possession of patriarchy. The first of these figures is the bloody shoes that Giles Oliver wears through much of the June 1939 day on which the novel is set. Following the pageant’s depiction of the Elizabethan Age, Giles
is returning to the ancient barn at Pointz Hall when he encounters a snake and a toad locked in a hideous struggle in which “[t]he toad was unable to die” (*Between the Acts* 99). Relieved for a moment from his tortured thoughts over his lust for Mrs. Manresa, his distaste for William Dodge’s homosexuality, and his disgust with himself for not acting on his feelings, Giles raises his foot and crushes both creatures into a bloody pulp:

> The mass crushed and slithered. The white canvas on his tennis shoes was bloodstained and sticky. But it was action. Action relieved him. He strode to the Barn, with blood on his shoes. (*Between the Acts* 99)

Frustrated over the complexities of his feelings about Mrs. Manresa, Dodge, and himself, Giles obliterates ambiguity with an act of blind aggression, replacing thought with action and gaining a greater sense of personal power. This private sphere behavior mirrors the greater public sphere behaviors that Woolf views as the thoughtless male aggression that is the root of fascism. Throughout the rest of the novel, Giles’s bloody shoes are a reminder of the growing gulf between what Lucio Ruotolo calls “art’s promise of wholeness” and the “absolutism of authoritarian leadership” (205). Such mirroring of the private and public spheres culminates in the literal mirroring of the audience in which actors in the pageant underscore the shattering of the promise of wholeness by turning multiple mirrors on the audience, which now sees itself represented in shattered images instead of united in the cultural traditions that the pageant has been reviewing, from the distant past, to the living memory of older members of the audience, to the present.

The message of the pageant is twofold. The first message is that contemporary society has been weakened through the fragmentation of its cultural identity; the second is that civilization, as opposed to the barbarity of fascism, involves tolerance for diversity
within the same cultural identity, just as the ancient barn has sheltered the people and
products of many generations of England, protecting their differences under one roof.
Alex Zwerdling points out that the pageant does not offer an alternative to the present but
an account of what has led to the present:

The pageant can be seen as providing us not so much with a comprehensive
vision of the past as with a prehistory of the present. It follows English culture
through its historical stages to emphasize the gradual but persistent decay of the
sense of community. Its shifts in time suggest not the idea of progress but what
intellectual historians have called ‘the theory of progressive degeneration.’ (317)
The inability of the snake to swallow the toad and Giles’s brutal destruction of both
mirror fascism’s treatment of cultural polarities of all kinds, including the gender polarity
represented by Giles and Isa, which Woolf repeatedly describes as a love-hate
relationship. Rather than resolving the complexities of their relationship with a fascist
act akin to his treatment of the snake and toad, however, Giles engages in a give and take
encounter with Isa, and Woolf ends the novel on a note of optimism that fascism is not
necessarily inevitable:

The old people had gone up to bed. Giles crumpled the newspaper and turned out
the light. Left alone together for the first time that day, they were silent. Alone,
enmity was bared; also love. Before they slept, they must fight; after they had
fought, they would embrace. From that embrace another life might be born. But
first they must fight, as the dog fox fights with the vixen, in the heart of darkness,
in the fields of night. (Between the Acts 219)
Woolf’s double allusion to Conrad and Arnold acknowledges the presence of primeval forces that Lucy Swithin’s naive “one-making” philosophy overlooks, as when Bart points out about Lucy that “[s]kimming the surface, she ignored the battle in the mud” (*Between the Acts* 203).

When Giles and Isa fight and embrace, however, they join the fox and the vixen and other creatures in nature in the sense that life is a struggle to negotiate differences. “Oneness” in nature more often than not means that--like the snake’s attempt to swallow the toad--the reality of one perspective tries to dominate another. Giles, whose fear of the loss of his vision of community causes him to display some of the same characteristics of the fascists he despises, finally “crumpled up the paper” (*Between the Acts* 218-219), which has obsessed both him and his father in their quest for official information, and reinhabits an ancient dialogue with Isa in which they appear to re-establish the domestic equality that sets history on a better course:

> Isa let her sewing drop. The great hooded chairs had become enormous. And Giles too. And Isa too against the window. The window was all sky without colour. The house had lost its shelter. It was night before roads were made, or houses. It was night that dwellers in caves had watched from some high place among rocks.

> Then the curtain rose. They spoke. (*Between the Acts* 219)

By concluding the novel with the curtain rising on a new historical pageant that includes men and women speaking to each other, Woolf invades the visual with the verbal that has struggled throughout the first pageant to play its important role in the image/text of history. Whenever the actors try to deliver their lines or sing, the wind
picks up and sweeps the words away, leaving only the image to convey meaning. When
the wind is not disrupting the verbal, words are repeatedly “dying away” as in the
following passage in which “only a few great names” of history are heard, leaving much
of the verbal half of the image/text inaudible:

The words died away. Only a few great names--Bablyon, Ninevah, Clytemestra,
Agamemnon, Troy--floated across the open space. Then the wind rose, and in the
rustle of the leaves even the great words became inaudible; and the audience sat
staring at the villagers, where mouths opened, but no sound came. (*Between theActs* 140)

Such emphasis on the loss of the ability of the verbal to disrupt the hegemony of the
visual as the major cause of the “progressive degeneration” of history is reinforced by
Miss LaTrobe’s acknowledgement of the failure of the first pageant and her immediate
effort to begin again. At first she envisions the new image she desires--“two figures, half
concealed by a rock”--but she struggles to find the words to accompany the image:
“What would the first words be? The words escaped her”(*Between the Acts* 210).

Finally, as she begins to relax over a drink at a public house, the words she desires return
in a flood, and a new historical pageant begins to take shape in her mind, one in which
the verbal has rejoined the visual, just as at the same time Giles and Isa are starting over
with the benefit of speech. In perhaps the most direct statement of the empowering
quality of empathetic identification that began as early as the cliff scene in *The Voyage
Out*, Woolf counters the image of Giles’s bloody shoes--that represent the replacement
of the verbal with unthinking violent reaction--with the image of a tree covered with
starlings, an image Miss LaTrobe associates with the projection of verbal content onto visual object:

There was the high ground at midnight; there the rock; and two scarcely perceptible figures. Suddenly the tree was pelted with starlings. She set down her glass. She heard the first words. (*Between the Acts* 212)

By opposing two image/texts--one in which Giles stamps out the verbal content that is perplexing him and the other in which Miss LaTrobe welcomes the arrival of verbal content--Woolf provides both a brilliant analysis of the roots of fascism that is a continuation of *Three Guineas* and a further development of her longstanding visual aesthetic that found its own roots in her persistent demand for perceptual freedom through empathetic identification. Jean Alexander argues that from the early sketches like “The Mark on the Wall” to *Between the Acts*, Woolf’s “method involved learning not to see from the point of view of the educated ego; so the vocabulary of her thought. . . is the primitive and universal vocabulary of image, and the conceptual world of each work is built of these images, the space in which they are contained, and the rhythm of relationships of color and space”(233). The bloody shoes and the tree covered with starlings, Oxbridge and the taxi, and many other memorable images, act as “a new mode [that] depends on a new consciousness deliberately opened rather than on reportage of automatic associational processes”(223). Lewis’s attempts to associate Woolf with stream of consciousness and other “time-theories” miss the mark, since Woolf is not engaging in reactions to the exterior but actively projecting meaning onto it. In Lucy Swithin’s single comment that escapes what Alexander calls the “suitably
conventional”(212), she echoes Woolf’s visual aesthetic in a way that could have come
directly from Roger Fry, whose biography Woolf was working on during the writing of
*Between the Acts*: “But we have other lives, I think, I hope... We live in
things”(*Between the Acts* 70). For Woolf, this does not mean that we identify with
things; it means that we invest things with our life.

III. Lewis’s Image/Text and His Commitment to Misogyny and Fascism

Lewis’s interest in art’s role in changing the “form-content of civilized life” (*Letters
of WL* 110-111) is similar to Woolf’s in its recognition that, in Mitchell’s terms, the
“image/text” of civilized life is in need of change. The key difference is that, where
Woolf’s insertion of content into form—or verbal into visual—alters the hegemony of the
visual, renewing both, Lewis’s valorization of the visual over the verbal reinstates the
dominance of the image, relegating the text to a marginal position. This is precisely the
relationship between the visual and verbal that Woolf saw as the private and public face
of fascism, suggesting that Walter Benjamin’s definition of fascism as the introduction of
aesthetics into political life overlooks that fact that the politicization of aesthetics can
also assume an anti-fascist position, since both Woolf and Lewis employed their visual
aesthetics to achieve radically different objectives.

Despite their fascist versus anti-fascist visual aesthetics, however, Lewis and Woolf
shared the modernist conviction that art could transcend what Charles Ferrall calls “the
middle-class private/public division” (145), which, as discussed above, was the legacy of
nineteenth-century culture and the separate-sphere ideology of Ruskin, Morris, and other
apologists for patriarchy. The desire to transcend the central dualism of patriarchal
culture was important to Woolf for the liberation of women, while Lewis viewed such a
transcendence as important for the unified personality that should be the sole property of
the transcendent individual. Ferrall points out that in Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*, for
instance, Lily Briscoe’s painting that is finally finished at the end of the novel
“exemplifies an aesthetic sphere which transcends the oppositions within the Ramsey’s
marriage between the public and private spheres, masculine reason and feminine
intuition”(11). This dynamic is repeated in Woolf’s attack on the public and private face
of fascism in the 1930s with her conviction, as she says in *Three Guineas*, that women
can “change that figure”(217) of patriarchal representation by using the verbal to disrupt
the entrenched knowledge/power constructions of hegemonic masculine imagery. Miss
LaTrobe, with renewed hope, hears the “first words” (*Between the Acts* 212) of a newly
conceived pageant that will better combine the visual and verbal and thereby transcend
the domestic polarities that lead to fascism in the public realm. Woolf’s interest in
aesthetic transcendence involved her desire to create more opportunities for personal
freedom for women in particular, but she also belonged to the progressive camp of
modernists who were interested in what Ferrall calls “the democratizing and generally
emancipatory aspects of bourgeois modernity”(9). These aspects would include such
things as suffrage for women, pacifism, access to education, and other liberal social
positions that accompanied the victory of the Liberal Party in 1906.

Faith in aesthetic transcendence did not automatically mean interest in an emancipated
bourgeoisie, however; and, even though reactionary modernists were committed to using
art to resolve the middle-class private/public division, their sense of what such a
resolution would entail was quite distinct from that of progressives like Woolf, Russell, Wells, Shaw, Bennett, and other “bourgeois bohemians” as Lewis liked to call them. For many reactionary modernists, aesthetic transcendence meant the power of premodern culture to resolve the private/public division by restoring the unity between thought and feeling that had been lost over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as Eliot’s famous “dissociation of sensibility” theory describes. Premodern art--for Baudelaire through the “discovery” of primitive art by Vlaminck, Derain, Matisse, Picasso, and many other modernists--seemed to recapture the totality of experience that Roger Fry, for instance, noticed in the children’s art he exhibited and wrote about. Such totality of experience could also be found in Yeats’s Celtic Ireland, Pound’s Provence in the twelfth century, Lawrence’s New Mexico, Gauguin’s Tahiti, and other peoples and places of the past in which the fusion of thought and feeling created pure and unique expressions of individual and collective experiences that, as Jack Flam points out, “appeared to confirm widely held beliefs about the immutability and universality of great art”(4).

For reactionary modernists, such universality meant the existence of a higher realm of art in which considerations of bourgeois issues such as the middle-class private/public division either did not exist or else had been aestheticized to the point that formalist issues had replaced political ones. Ferrall points out that, through this gesture, reactionary modernists attempted to re-position “aesthetic autonomy at a higher level by reconstituting the ‘world’ or ‘life’ as an aesthetic object”(6). As discussed in Chapter Three, the Action Francaise brand of reactionism involved the fear that perceptual freedom in the hands of the masses would lead to their being manipulated by
propagandists of one kind or another who would use mass media to sway the herd in the name of democracy to serve interests that would destroy high culture and authoritarian institutions, such as the Catholic Church, that keep the lower orders in line. This politicization of aesthetics in which high culture and authoritarian rule conspire to control the extent to which the masses have access to empathetic identification—a tool as powerful for art as empiricism is for science—increasingly occupied Lewis’s thinking on art and politics as he searched for ways to fulfill his own desire for artistic freedom from the marketplace and resolve his profound distaste for mass culture.

Lewis’s participation in the reactionary modernists’ version of aesthetic transcendence from middle-class private/public division can clearly be seen in an often overlooked section of *Blast 1* entitled “To Suffragettes.” In this “word of advice,” as Lewis (its most likely author) calls the piece, he elevates art from feminist attempts to destroy the separate-sphere mentality that contributes to their oppression:

In destruction, as in other things, stick to what you understand. We make you a present of our votes. Only leave works of art alone. You might some day destroy a good picture by accident. Then!—*Mais soyez bonnes filles! Nous vous aimons!* We admire your energy. You and artists are the only things (You don’t mind being called things?) left in England with a little life left in them. If you destroy a great work of art you are destroying a greater soul than if you annihilated a whole district of London. Leave art alone, brave comrades! (151-152, typography altered)

Lewis differed from most reactionary modernists in his rejection of nostalgia for the premodern and primitive (Ferrall 135); but, in this directive to suffragettes, he describes a
work of art as a “greater soul” than the souls contained in the modern city, suggesting that art has transcended the spiritual limitations of modern life. Lewis applauds the suffragist attempt to destroy one of the key barriers between the private and public spheres, but he insists that making “a present of our votes” does not extend to the realm of artistic production, which Lewis preserves for males, telling the suffragettes to “stick to what you understand.”

Reversing the private/public division, then, Lewis shifts women to the bourgeois public division, which now represents the immanent realm, and shifts male artists to the private division, which now represents the transcendent realm of individual genius. Elsewhere in Blast 1, Lewis makes this shift explicit by spelling out exactly who the audience for Blast is and is not:

Blast will be popular essentially. It will not appeal to any particular class, but to the fundamental and popular instincts in every class and description of people, TO THE INDIVIDUAL. The moment a man feels or realizes himself as an artist, he ceases to belong to any milieu or time. Blast is created for this timeless, fundamental Artist that exists in everybody. (7, emphasis in text)

The artist, then, transcends “any milieu” and becomes an individual in a universal aesthetic realm that exists in a separate sphere from temporal reality. “Fundamental and popular instincts” toward art are an inherent quality in all people, but in the artist they are “realized” to their fullest, making him an individual in a new division between the private world of the artist and what Fredric Jameson describes as Lewis’s strong sense of a “degraded world of commodity production and of the. . . cultural junk of industrial capitalism”(80). In Blast 2, Lewis combines this view of industrial capitalism with his
re-positioning of women into the public sphere in a scathing equation of the War with bourgeois materialism:

Murder and destruction is man’s fundamental occupation. Women’s function, the manufacturing of children (even more important than cartridges and khaki suits) is only important from this point of view, and they evidently realize this thoroughly. It takes the deft women we employ anything from twelve to sixteen years to fill and polish these little human cartridges, and they of course get fond of them in the process. However, all this is not our fault, and it is absolutely necessary. We only begin decaying like goods kept too long, if we are not killed or otherwise disposed of. (16)

This passage from *Blast 2*, which carries the subtitle “War Number,” reveals a shift from the total distancing of the private sphere--which was now occupied by the artist--to a new attack on the bourgeoisie that accused it not of pre-war provincialism and complacency but of collaboration with the “murder and destruction” that had engulfed England since the publication of *Blast 1* the previous year. In that edition, the vorticist manifesto clearly sets its artists apart from the public sphere with statements such as “Beyond action and reaction we would establish ourselves,” and “Our cause is NO-MAN’S”(30-31, emphasis in text).

By the following year, Lewis softened this position by acknowledging some connection between the private sphere of the artist and the public sphere of war-time England: “It is conceivable that the War may affect Art deeply, for it will have a deep effect on the mass of people, and the best art is not priggishly cut off from those masses”(*Blast 2* 24). Michael Levenson argues, however, that this shift in position
should not be construed as a shift toward pacifism. Instead, as the opening editorial of *Blast 2* suggests, Lewis attempts to close the gap between war and art, making the military struggle into a conflict between opposed aesthetics” (Levenson 141). It is at this point that Lewis’s connection to fascism began to take the shape that it would assume after the War as he struggled to carve out a niche for his brand of avant-garde existence that, in Walter Benjamin’s definition of fascism, introduced aesthetics into political life, a gesture that Benjamin views as central to futurism in general, given its tendency, which Lewis emulated, to “conflat[e] the autonomous spheres of art, morality, and science”. . . (Ferrall 6). Such a conflation can clearly be seen in Marinetti’s 1909 futurist manifesto in which the art and morality of the past are rejected in favor of a new species of creative artists who “glorify war, the world’s only hygiene--militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of freedom-bringers, beautiful ideas worth dying for, and scorn for woman” (22). While Lewis rejected the futurist glorification of war, he adopted the politicization of art, a tendency to which he had been exposed in his travels on the Continent a decade earlier, and began to call himself an “art politician” (*Letters of WL* 41). By 1919 this role appeared to have gained enough legitimacy in Lewis’s mind that, in a letter to John Quinn, his patron in New York, he offers a succinct account of his recent “pamphlet,” *The Caliph’s Design*, and his new direction for art:

As to my activities this autumn, I am bringing out in three weeks (by the end of September, I hope) a sixty-page pamphlet dealing with the art position generally. . . . It is an appeal to the better type of artist to take more interest in and more part in the general life of the world, if only in the interest of his own shop, and to attempt to change the form-content of civilized life. The artist labouring in his
studio, the absolute schism between him and life, is displayed: and I consider how this affecting painting and is likely to affect its further progress. (Letters of WL 110-111)

As this pronouncement demonstrates, for Lewis, unlike Woolf, the ideology of sévérité that called for optical separation grew more radicalized after the War, and, as Vincent Sherry points out, Lewis’s efforts “to impose a pictorial ideal on the lexical experience”(98) caused him to recycle the work of Maurras, Sorel, Benda, Gourmont in the creation of his “philosophy of the eye” in which the artist, in a perfect realization of Woolf’s portrayal of fascism, foregrounds and isolates the image in what Sherry calls “proximate vision,” the super-imposing of a dominant image on all background and alternate realities, both visual and verbal. In The Art of Being Ruled (1926), Lewis’s most developed political treatise, he offers a direct statement of his allegiance to the image and its power over verbal content, a power that begins in art and carries over to a comparison of cultures based on the presence or lack of a clear, simple, dominant image or idea:

I am an artist, and, through my eye, must confess to a tremendous bias. In my purely literary voyages my eye is always my compass. ‘The architectural simplicity’--whether of a platonic idea or a Greek temple--I far prefer to no idea at all, or no temple at all, or, for instance, to most of the complicated and too tropical structures of India. Nothing could ever convince my EYE--even if my intelligence were otherwise overcome--that anything that did not possess this simplicity, conceptual quality, hard exact outline, grand architectural proportion, was the greatest art. (Art of Being Ruled 338, emphasis in text)
For Lewis the image possessed the ability to vanquish the power of the verbal to talk back, to disrupt the desire of the ego to crush opposing narrative structures.

In two of Lewis’s most notable paintings from the 1920s, *Praxitella* (1920-1921, illust. 4) and *Bagdad* [sic] (1927, illust. 5), his shift toward the “grand architectural proportion” of proximate vision is evident, both in the simplicity of caricature and in the extreme foregrounding of the central subject. As with “a platonic idea or a Greek temple,” the imposition of an idealized reality blocks out “tropical structures” in which reality is “complicated” by what he later ridicules Woolf for calling “the half-lighted places of the mind” in “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown.” This blend of visual and verbal is what Lewis seeks to destroy with his visual aesthetic that Robert Chapman describes as supporting Lewis’s belief that “life could be firmly grasped and examined by the rational mind” (96, emphasis in text). Chapman points out further that, in Lewis’s case, this rational mind was the exclusive property of the classical and masculine world view:

> There is a great divide between Virginia Woolf’s world view and that of Lewis himself (call them Feminine/Masculine, Intuitive/Rational, Romantic/Classical, or whatever), and it is precisely upon the ‘half-lighted places’ that Lewis brings to bear his Kleig light of reason and ridicule: the result is what Ezra Pound called ‘writing akin to hyper-daylight.’ (97)

Such an attempt at the “hyper-daylight” of masculine reason can clearly be seen in *Praxitella*, Lewis’s bitter post-war portrait of Iris Barry, his wife at the time. The painting’s title alludes to Praxiteles, the fourth-century B.C.E. Greek sculptor, whose most characteristic technique was the $S$ shape of his statues, which instilled them with more of a sense of realism and vitality than the stiff, conventional quality of traditional
statuary of the day. Lewis’s ironic take on such vitality is to portray Praxiteles’s female counterpart as appearing to possess such vitality until a closer look reveals that she is neither human nor fully alive. Machine-like hands and gun-metal blue skin are combined with unconscious, half-open eyes to portray a nightmarish female personification of the machine age that was initially celebrated by vorticists and futurists as a new masculine phenomenon before the War. With the horrors of the War, and a new awareness of the destructive power of the machine so recent in his memory, Lewis shifts the machine from masculine vitality to female death and destruction, combining women and war in a single, dominant image/text that employs proximate vision to suppress the possibility of what Sherry calls “the elusive music of the verbal counter”(103). Praxitella is presented in the foreground, seated in an armchair. The floor beneath her feet pulls the viewer’s eye into the middle distance as in Cézannian technique, but the plane behind Praxitella is empty, reinforcing Lewis’s aesthetic that isolates his image/text from what Sherry sees as “the necessary play between figure and ground” that Lewis believed was “an operation of vitalist empathy and interpenetration at its Bergsonian worst”(105). By separating figure from ground, Lewis attempts to create what Sherry calls a “spatial hierarchy”(105) that, like Woolf’s uniforms and Oxbridge, places a particular (predominantly masculine-inspired) figure in a position of dominance and minimalizes the play between figure and ground.

Again, in Bagdad, Lewis’s decoration for a cupboard door in his Ossington Street studio in the late 1920s (Michel 108), he builds a fanciful architectural structure that includes a winding staircase, a cartoon-like lion’s head, an oriental garden of some kind, and various geometric shapes and volums. The viewer’s eye travels up and down the
structure, but all attempts to look into it are blocked by walls and other objects that refuse admission to the interior beyond a few steps or a partial glimpse into a courtyard or passageway. The viewer is enticed with the possibilities of the interior but ultimately remains outside, gazing at the exterior design of the structure with no textual half of the image/text other than the title, which suggests a critique of “tropical structures” in which the absence of any dominant image does not imply any greater access to the interior than a Greek temple. Lewis’s famous statement that humans are “surface creatures” in *Time and Western Man* from the same year is underscored by *Bagdad* in its appeal to the eye alone, privileging the visual over any attempt to introduce the verbal. Every inch of the foreground is filled, either with an object or with an impenetrable blankness, and every foray into the interior is quickly foiled. The interior, as Lewis insists after the War, is strictly off-limits for human perception.

Lewis’s insistence on the separation between figure and ground, in which the visual dominates the “verbal counter,” underscores his growing interest in authoritarian governance that, in his self-serving opinion, would foreground the artist in relation to the masses. His aesthetics and politics come together in earnest by the mid-1920s in direct statements such as the following in *The Art of Being Ruled*:

> [F]or anglo-saxon countries as they are constructed today some modified form of fascism would probably be best. . . . In short, to get some sort of peace to enable us to work, we should naturally seek the most powerful and stable authority that can be devised. (320-321)

The “us” to whom Lewis refers is not the anglo-saxon masses, of course, but avant-garde artists for whom, like himself, democratic capitalism had not proved to be very lucrative.
Jeffrey Meyers points out that Lewis’s interest in fascism originated both in his desire for freedom from mass culture and the marketplace and in his simultaneous identification with the lower middle-class economic stratum that fascist ideology exploits with its promise of greater financial stability (186). In fact, Lewis’s true political position involved a combination of socialism’s “desire to alleviate the lot of the poor and outcast”("Art of Being Ruled 320) and an authoritarian state, “working from top to bottom with the regularity and smoothness of a machine”("Art of Being Ruled 321).

Nevertheless, Lewis’s misguided support of Hitler in his 1931 book *Hitler*, his allegiance with the British Union of Fascists, and his radically right-wing polemics during the mid-1930s all but destroyed his reputation that had reached an all-time high in the late 1920s. Despite two major retractions of his fascist sympathies in 1939 with the publication of *The Hitler Cult* and *The Jews, Are They Human?* (Which, despite its insensitive and misleading title, is sympathetic to Jews), Lewis’s relationship with his longstanding publisher, Chatto and Windus, ended; and he had managed to alienate legions of former friends and associates, along with much of the reading public.

In the midst of all this trouble, which also included serious illness and four operations for repeated bouts of venereal disease from 1932 to 1937 (Meyers 220), Lewis produced what has been widely acknowledged as his greatest novel, *The Revenge for Love* (1937). This novel is remarkable for its complex, more balanced analysis of politics and for its sensitive portrayal of Margot Stamp, Lewis’s first female character who is fully humanized. Her love for her husband, the failed painter and communist sympathizer Victor Stamp, transcends both the internationalist loss of nationalist identity that Lewis feared would be the communist legacy and the nationalist identity that, as David Ayers
points out, was “based on fantasy, power, and the closure in false certainties” (163).

Unlike both of Lewis’s right-wing apologies of the mid-1930s—Left Wings Over Europe (1936) and Count Your Dead: They Are Alive (1937)—The Revenge for Love acknowledges the constructed character of all ideologies and seeks to create a safe haven for the self to survive in the fierce battle being waged between rival self-serving political discourses, discourses that destroy individuality, regardless from which end of the political spectrum they derive. Lewis’s recurring motif of “false bottoms,” which served as his working title for the novel, represents the falseness of totalizing discourses that pretend to underscore reality but ultimately serve the narrow interests of their creators.

In addition to the theme of individual freedom versus ideology, The Revenge for Love explores the efficacy of decisive action for the establishment of a legitimate personal identity. William Pritchard argues that The Revenge for Love “is a novel of action that is also ‘about’ action” (116) in a sense that is quite similar to Woolf’s critique of action for its own sake in Between the Acts. Action, any action, provides a sudden simplification of contradictory impulses and a silencing of conflicting narrative viewpoints, as with Giles’s stamping of the snake and toad to silence self-doubt and confusion in Between the Acts. Victor, whose last name suggests such a strategy, stamps his foot through a forged self-portrait of Van Gogh that he has unwillingly produced in a “fake-masterpiece factory” where he is forced to work after failing to sell his own work:

And throwing the picture down against the wall, he trod into the center of it, putting all his weight upon his foot, which tore through the canvas, the ragged edges of the gap gripping him about the calf. He shook the thing off his leg, and,
as it lay on the floor now, trod his heel down into an undamaged corner. (*Revenge for Love* 239-240)

Victor’s action, which he explains by saying, “I thought I’d give my feelings a break. . . . They’ve earned it”(*Revenge for Love* 240), replaces the complexities of thought and feelings with violent, decisive, and destructive action, effectively silencing the various selves that are being represented in his forgery. These selves include Victor dressed as Van Gogh with his ear bandaged, gazing at himself being Van Gogh in a mirror while pretending to be Van Gogh painting Van Gogh at the same time that the fake Van Gogh stares back at him and produces a forged version of himself. The entire experience is filled with an infinity of false bottoms in which the self is lost in what Ayers calls “a maze of reflection and imitation. His [Victor’s] earlier painting had enacted and confirmed his self: it was intuitional, abstract, willful. This painting is reflective, representational and unwillingly done”(179). For Victor, as for Giles, the eradication of ambiguity brought about through action brings relief from verbal impurity; there also is a return for Victor to an earlier expressive self in which he possessed a greater sense of perceptual freedom, a greater capacity for empathetic identification than he does in the “forgery” of a present that, as in the mirrors of Miss LaTrobe’s pageant, reflects multiple selves instead of a projected unified identity.

For Lewis, unlike Woolf, however, the disintegrated self of the present possesses different cultural implications from Woolf’s point in *Between the Acts*. England’s unified cultural heritage, which contains various literary trends and periods, is breaking up under the pressure of a fascist preference for action that crushes the cultural dialogue that constitutes a national identity. In his destruction of the forged Van Gogh, Victor
makes a point to “[plant] his heel upon Van Gogh’s ‘intelligent’ eye,” and then grinds it “round and round with gusto. . .” (*Revenge for Love* 240). This action represents the same attempt as Giles’s to destroy pluralism, both as a gesture of fascist suppression and as a gesture of individual freedom from pluralism. Woolf views selfhood as belonging to a genuine community in which diversity flourishes, while Lewis is suspicious of such cultural diversity, either within the same nation or within the same individual, fearing that the individual “personality” of each will dissolve into “nothing,” which is a term that is repeated throughout *The Revenge for Love*:

> Odd--or perhaps not!--that England should go the way of Spain. Two countries with a splendid past, of piratic achievement, of glorious blood and guts of gold--yes, two countries going rotten at the bottom and at the top, where the nation ceased to be the nation--the inferior end abutting upon the animal kingdom, the upper end merging in the international abstractness of men--where there was no longer either Spanish men or English men, but a gathering of individuals who were nothing. (*Revenge for Love* 17, emphasis in text)

Expressed through the reflections of don Alvaro, a prison guard who engages in a heated exchange with the English communist agitator Percy Hardcaster, this position is vintage Lewis with its distaste for mass culture at the “inferior end” of society and its fear of socialist internationalism that, like democracy, results in a mongrelized cultural landscape in which distinctive, localized realities, such as Lewis finds in Brittany, for instance, are sacrificed in the name of some globalizing discourse that is so inclusive that self and other become all but indistinguishable from each other. Victor crushes the eye of the forged self-portrait of Van Gogh with particular vehemence because it represents
the indistinguishable gaze of self as other--both himself and himself as other--which, as Ayers points out, threatens the unity of the self:

Both subject and object become inscrutable once the self is divided. The subject, which is now its own object, is mysterious. The object world, naturalized by Lewis as Nature, might offer a static truth and even authentic selfhood. . . . [T]he ‘not self.’ . . must be ‘established in the centre of the intellect.’ Without the ‘not-self’ there is no intelligence and therefore no self. What remains is the divided self, its own subject and object. . . which admits no externality and can therefore never achieve integration. (162)

Unlike Woolf’s visual aesthetic, in which subject and object can be reformulated in relation to each other through the subject’s freedom to invade the visual with new verbal realities, Lewis’s visual aesthetic insists on a strict separation between subject and object, leaving the subject free to remain “integrated”—that is, free to create its own image/text that regards the object as the “not-self,” “dead,” and “unreal.” In other words, the subject is integrated within itself, and its authenticity derives from its disregard for the narrative other. Lewis is aligned then, not with Woolf’s Miss LaTrobe, who seeks a new pageant based on a rapprochement between self and other, but with Giles and Victor, who seek to eradicate the other through actions that protect the narrative self, as when the Beadle rushes out to protect the sanctity of a patriarchal educational institution from seeing the female other as belonging to its totally male-integrated image/text in A Room of One’s Own.

Even though Lewis sees the constructed nature of both Victor’s internationalism and Alvaro’s nationalism, which moves The Revenge for Love beyond the right-wing bias of
much of his writing in the 1930s, his insistence on the integrated self as the only possibility for genuine identity effectively underscores the fascism, misogyny, and reactionary aesthetics that he attempts to renounce with his sympathetic portrayal of Margot Stamp and his two recantatory books of 1939. For all of his sympathy toward her, his portrayal of Margot (who is known as Margaret until her liberating encounter with Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own*, which Lewis dismisses as “that militant little treatise” [*Revenge for Love* 213]), is filled with sarcasm toward Woolf’s positioning of women as “outsider,” making light of Woolf’s attempt to establish an oppositional image/text:

Musing at the open window, as if already under the greenwood tree with her favorite author, she fancied herself back in Oxford (where she had never set foot) at the don’s lunch, by the side of her goddess, Virginia (unseen, but there all the same). Or there they both drooped discreetly, side by side, perhaps, two feminine *outsiders*, as it were, in a masculine universe of one-sided learning. And how delicious to be *an outsider* with such an one as the stately Virginia, thought she, and blushed with a little wistful happiness. (*Revenge for Love* 214)

Margot’s love for Victor, her devotion to his cause, and her death at his side in the pointless gun-smuggling attempt (they are merely decoys unknowingly carrying a load of bricks), humanizes her beyond Lewis’s usual contempt for his female characters. Such humanizing, however, does not extend to granting Margot the privilege of perceptual freedom. His sympathy for Margot depends on how completely she makes Victor’s image/text her own, not that of her “goddess,” Virginia Woolf:
Margot was his mate, Margot was his love, who had never reproached him--who was as gentle as a young wallaby, who reminded him always of that lovely and strange-plumaged bird that had floated down into the water, covered by his gun, but he could not fire on it because it seemed too mild a thing to bludgeon with a bullet. . . .\textit{(Revenge for Love 78)}

Victor (and Lewis) forgives Margot for her flirtation with Woolf’s rebelliousness because she remains passive, malleable, and reminds him of the comforts and security of his patriarchal childhood in Australia: “But men will be men. She sighed--a little Virginian echo--a catch of the breath, no more”\textit{(Revenge for Love 315)}. Lewis successfully critiques both the romantic fantasy of classless, egalitarian socialism and the romantic fantasy of bellicose nationalistic fascism, but his opposition of them with a liberation of the self from all such socio-political constructions is only partially successful, since it falls short of relinquishing a masculine image/text that views individual freedom in terms of asserting a unified identity that allows for no competing narrative realities projected towards the external. Unfortunately for Lewis, this was the only method by which an individual identity could be created at all, and this effectively precludes any chance of the dialogic relationship between self and other that Woolf believed to be the starting point for genuine freedom.
Summary

Perhaps justifiably, the reputations of Woolf and Lewis have taken much different paths since the notoriety they both experienced in the 1920s and 1930s. For Woolf, especially since the feminist revitalization of her work in the 1970s, the path has widened as her influence continues to grow. For Lewis, however, the path has continued to narrow, despite outliving Woolf by nearly twenty years and recanting nearly all of his extremist views. As this study has sought to demonstrate, the different political applications of their remarkably similar visual aesthetics resulted in a relationship with the exterior that for Woolf meant the disruption of the hegemony of the visual by the verbal and for Lewis meant the suppression of competing verbal realities projected toward the visual. This central difference not only lay behind their respective positions on the gender, societal, and governmental issues of their day, but it also is largely responsible for the successful passage of Woolf’s work into the postmodernist emphasis on textuality and the relegation of Lewis’s work to the aesthetics, politics, and personal issues of his time and place. This summary briefly traces some of the key aesthetic and political issues involved in the transition from modernism to postmodernism, a transition that embraced Woolf and left Lewis behind.
The logical place to start in tracing such a transition is with what Brian Wallis
describes as the “fundamentally modernist premise: that criticism could and should be
value-free”(xi). Wallis points out that an important component of the modernist agenda
was the attempt to suppress all social and historical contexts in favor of art that projected
its own formalist realities onto the exterior. Criticism involved the creation of formalist
maxims that rejected the intrusion of impure verbal constructions that included activism
of any sort. Wallis points out further that this modernist critical position denies the fact
that the rejection of undesired verbal constructions constitutes a political act:

This supposedly apolitical stance of traditional or modernist art criticism, then, is
in fact political in what it represses. On the other hand, in much recent writing,
the political and social function of all kinds of criticism is acknowledged, and
critics have actively explored the use of criticism as a positive means for social
critique and change. . . . This interventionist criticism, as it is often called,
represents a sharp break with the primary formalist and idealist pretensions of
modernist criticism. (xii)

This shift from the “apolitical” criticism of modernism to the “interventionist” criticism
of postmodernism, has implications with respect to the central difference that can be
seen in Lewis’s modernist adherence to apolitical formalism and Woolf’s more forward-
looking use of the verbal to disrupt or “intervene” on behalf of social and political issues
inscribed in the visual constructions of knowledge/power. As this study has examined, in
patriarchal institutions such as Oxbridge and the military, representations of patriarchal
values do indeed repress competing narratives. Woolf’s deep understanding of this
reification of male power makes her of particular value to feminist deconstructionist
criticism, from the work of Nancy Burr Evans (1974) and Berenice A. Carroll (1978) in the 1970s, to Jane Marcus (1983), Elaine K. Ginsberg and Laura Moss Gottlieb (1983), and Rachel Blau DuPlessis (1989) in the 1980s, to Margaret Homans (1993) and Diane F. Gillespie (1993) in the 1990s, and many more. What this study has sought to add to such extensive criticism is a greater understanding of Woolf’s visual aesthetics in her attack on male hegemony.

Lewis, on the other hand, not only subscribed to the modernist emphasis on formalism but, as David Peters Corbett points out, subscribed to the notion that “[a]rt’s success depends upon its private manipulation of the world, and this is the proof of its relevance—in ignoring the world of action and its illusory ‘dust and glitter’ in favour of the private world of the text, art expresses our ideal humanity and is thereby fulfilling its genuine function”(118). The first half of this statement of Lewis’s aesthetics actually comes very close to Woolf’s visual aesthetics. As this study has argued, both Woolf and Lewis operated from the position that empathetic identification, or what Douglas Mao calls “forceful subjectivity”(99), was necessary for true perceptual freedom. The second half of the statement, however, separates Lewis both from Woolf and from critical relevance beyond the modernist era. The “private world of the text” that rejects “the world of action” recalls reactionary modernism that, as pointed out in Chapter Four, insisted on “purity” in art, which implied both a clear separation between visual and verbal art as well as a clear separation between art and everyday bourgeois concerns of the masses. Postmodern “interventionist” criticism would be viewed by Lewis as the very worst outcome of “the plane of vulgarization” (Time and Western Man 36) that he feared was destroying art in the 1920s.
Ironically, however, Lewis’s critical trajectory is most robust not in his reactionary formalist art criticism but in his reactionary social criticism. He belongs in the company of a number of elitists on both extremes of the political spectrum who worried that modernity, for all its dynamism, carried a steep price tag: the diminished stature of the self in exchange for a steady wage, material comfort, and membership in a society dominated by what Kafka called “amusement seekers” (86). Lewis, Huxley, Horkheimer, Adorno, Eliot, the Frankfurt School and its disciples such as Herbert Marcuse, all tended to share the modernist belief in culture as a value as well as the view that culture could be sharply divided between high, middle, and low categories, and that allegiance to one or another of these said something rather significant about the quality of the individual. The issue for Lewis and others, as José Ortega y Gasset spells out in *The Revolt of the Masses* (1932), was that “mass-man” (Ortega y Gasset’s term) had come to resist the hegemony of ruling-class cultural values as well as its economic pre-eminence, rejecting so-called “highbrow” cultural aspirations in favor of mass culture in which, according to Marcuse, “people recognize themselves in their commodities” (9). Donald Lazere points out that most of the elitists of the 1930s—and even later American critics of the 1950s, such as Irving Howe, Mary McCarthy, Norman Mailer, Dwight Macdonald, Leslie Fiedler, and others—“tended to hold the masses themselves, rather than their capitalist manipulators, responsible for their benightedness” (7).

The important difference between Lewis and most of these thinkers is his insistence upon the institutionalized manipulation of the masses, and it is not surprising that Marshall McLuhan acknowledged a debt to Lewis, since McLuhan’s famous maxim, “the medium is the message,” echoes much of Lewis’s social criticism of the 1920s in such
works as *The Art of Being Ruled* (1926) and *Time and Western Man* (1927). Ian Patterson points out that Lewis’s theory of power involved his claim that “‘all freedom is imposed on a crowd from somewhere without itself, in opposition to its habits, and belongs to it about as much as a hired fancy-dress.’ In this optic the only salvation is through those individuals whose ‘individuality’ is informed by the mental strength and independence to resist fashion and the habits it supplants” (126, Lewis quoted in Patterson). This view of a consumer culture that has difficulty distinguishing between marketing and meaning anticipates Hannah Arendt’s intellectually sterile “society of jobholders” (322) or, better still, Huxley’s “well-fed young television watchers” (141). Arendt and Huxley are describing culture as they saw it in the late 1950s; but, since then, everyone from European post-situationists urging you to “smash your telly” (Bey 6) to “culture jammers” “defacing alcohol and tobacco billboards” (Tyler 151) to prominent critics of electronic technologies, such as Neil Postman and Jane Healy, owe something of a debt to Lewis, who possessed a deep and early understanding of three modern trends that Robert McChesney describes as “corporate concentration, conglomeration, and hypercommercialism” (15). Lewis still has a role to play among those critics of media and mass culture who view corporate globalization as the loss of a clear distinction between individual perceptual freedom and industry-based realities that blur the boundaries between authentic existence and the dissolution of the self into the maw of commonality that shifts life away from the quest for purpose and meaning to the quest for comfort and happiness.

This modernist strand of social criticism and its continuation to the present in concepts such as Jean Baudrillard’s “hyper-reality” (11), Pierre Bourdieu’s “culture capital” (31),
Don DeLillo’s 1984 novel *White Noise*, and David Shields’s novel/essay *Remote*, suggests that the modernist premise that criticism should be “value-free” does not accurately represent modernist criticism any more than the second important modernist premise for this study--that the ultimate goal of high culture is what Horkheimer and Adorno call the “negation of reification”(ix)--accurately represents modernist criticism. In fact, as this study has demonstrated, the modernist emphasis on “pure” art that separated visual from verbal representations and privileged the visual tended to reify patriarchal constructions and, in the case of Lewis in particular, alternative constructions in the name of perceptual freedom. Unlike Lewis’s social criticism, which still retains some measure of validity for postmodernism, his views on the unique identity that allows for no competing narrative realities projected towards the external confine him not only to modernist critical notions that, as Wallis points out, “marginalized the issue of artistic motivations or interests outside the art system”(xiii), but these views also align him with the aesthetic politics of fascism that, despite Lewis’s rethinking of his fascist sympathies in his work of the late 1930s, remained a central part of his devotion to the liberation of individual genius.

Woolf also subscribed to modernist ideals of “high culture” and, like Lewis and others of her generation, believed in depth and originality as the true hallmarks of a great work of art:

One line of insight would have done more than all those lines of description.

*(Collected Essays of VW 1: 329)*

In her commitment to the disruption of the purity of the visual with the impurity of the verbal, however, Woolf anticipates the postmodern shift from an emphasis on depth and
originality to an emphasis on surface and intertextuality. This profound shift underscores Woolf’s interplay of various texts of patriarchal reification with alternative texts, reshuffling them into new, more liberating combinations.

Such reshuffling and its implications were addressed again in the late 1950s in Roland Barthes’s monumental postmodern work, *Mythologies* (1957), in which Barthes employs Saussurean linguistics, which had adduced the “arbitrariness of the relation between the linguistic signifier and the conceptual signified” (Docherty 7), to reveal the “sign systems” (Barthes 9) at the heart of what he describes as “some myths of French daily life”:

> The starting point of these reflections was usually a feeling of impatience at the sight of the ‘naturalness’ with which newspapers, art, and common sense constantly dress up a reality which, even though it is the one we live in, is undoubtedly determined by history. In short, in the common account given of our contemporary circumstances, I resented seeing Nature and History confused at every turn, and I wanted to track down, in the decorative display of ‘what goes without saying,’ the ideological abuse which, in my view, is hidden there. (11)

In what Barthes calls the “unmasking” of the language-based cultural signifiers that create “decorative displays” of reality, the postmodern shift from an emphasis on depth and originality toward an emphasis on surface and intertextuality begins to take shape in a new understanding of the shared historical/cultural context that formulates much, if not all, of how postmodern society comes to know something. Barthes’s essays of such seemingly trivial subjects as “Soap-powders and Detergents” or “The World of Wrestling” recall Woolf’s demythologizations of Oxbridge or military uniforms through
the invasion of the hegemonic visual image by the verbal, turning the former into a constructed “text” that undergoes a reshuffling of its signifiers into a new, less oppressive set of signifieds. Barthes, along with postmodernism in general, shares Woolf’s displeasure with naturalized forms of institutional power or what Barthes calls the “naturalness” of accepted meanings. This desire to attack the “ideological abuse” of “what goes without saying” characterized much of Woolf’s work in the 1930s, as this study has revealed. Here, as in her brilliant feminist insights, Woolf’s value for succeeding generations of intellectuals and activists is secure.

In the final analysis, then, what is the value of examining such different people as Woolf and Lewis together as this study has done? Fredric Jameson makes an important point about Lewis that the “political unconscious” (6) in his works is a highly valuable entry point for a greater understanding of the polarities of the modernist era, polarities that in writers such as Eliot, Pound, Joyce, and Huxley to name a few, have been softened and domesticated with time. The unassimilable nature of Lewis’s contempt for the culture of his day, and his uncompromising self-assigned role as the “enemy” of virtually everything for which Woolf took a stand--especially her feminism and pacifism--shed new light on the sharp contrasts that more accurately characterize the modernist era than the convenient generalizations that inevitably accompany any backward glance at a former cultural period. The ultimate purpose of this study is to contribute to current research that seeks to revitalize modernism and learn new lessons from it.
Notes

1. After viewing Whistler’s *Nocturne in Black and Gold* at the newly opened Grosvenor Gallery in London in 1877, Ruskin accused Whistler of “flinging a pot of paint in the public’s face” in his use of what appeared to Ruskin’s eye as splotches of paint in Whistler’s depiction of fireworks in the sky over Chelsea. Never one to take criticism lightly, Whistler promptly sued Ruskin for libel, asking for 1,000 pounds in damages. During a month-long, highly publicized trial in November, 1878, each man presented his view of impressionism, creating a “tension” within impressionism, according to Henry James, who attended the trial and reported on it for the *Nation*. Whistler won the case, and Ruskin was forced to apologize; but he was only ordered to pay a symbolic settlement of one farthing in damages, which Whistler proudly displayed on his watch chain.
2. Fry’s early connection to the empiricist psychological shift toward empathy, which, in the years before and after the turn of the century, “turned into the pivot of all explanation of painting, sculpture, and the related arts” (Barasch 114), can be seen in two theorists whom Denys Sutton points out as important to Fry in his formative years, Conrad Fiedler and the Munich sculptor Adolf von Hildebrand, both of whom were influential in changing “English aesthetic appreciation” in the 1880s and 1890s (1:35-36). Barasch notes that for both of these thinkers, the central element of art was not the product but the process:

   The starting point of Hildebrand’s reflections, like those of Conrad Fiedler’s, was not the completed work of art, but the creative process. Fiedler was aware that this involved a radical departure from earlier theories of art. . . . Hildebrand seems to have taken over this thesis implicitly. Understanding art was, to him, to understand the creative process. But the attempt to understand the creative process led him back to trying to figure out what sensual perception is, and how it works for the artist. (134)

   Indeed, the problem of “sensual perception” or how to determine what is actually being seen when an object is being looked at, preoccupied a number of thinkers before Worringer who were widely influential, including Gustav Fechner, Alois Riegle, and most importantly, Robert Vischer, who coined the term *einfühlung* that became so important for Worringer. Fry’s distinction between the utilitarian seeing of an object and really “looking” at it can be heard in Vischer’s two ways of seeing: 1) without effort, and 2) gazing. Seeing “without effort” involves the everyday activity of using optic awareness to function. Objects are rarely regarded beyond their use-value. One sharpens
and writes with a pencil without examining its aesthetic properties. Children sometimes appreciate coins for their intrinsic beauty, whereas adults use them all day with hardly a glance after determining their exchange value. “Gazing” at an object, however, involves what Heinrich Woefflin, who read and was influenced by Vischer, described as “painterly” vision (Barasch 102). When a viewer “gazes” at an object, he or she takes possession of it, projecting his or her emotions onto it and thereby rendering it “significant” in Fry’s version of Vischer’s connection between visual aesthetics and empathetic identification.

3. The actual details of the Omega incident seem more an issue of miscommunication than purposeful mistreatment. The Daily Mail, which was sponsoring the Ideal Home Exhibition, left a message at the Omega—delivered either by Spencer Gore to Duncan Grant or the art critic P.G. Konody to Fry, depending on which account is being told—that Gore and Lewis should decorate the modernist room at the exhibition separate from Omega, which would do the furnishings only. Neither Fry nor Lewis was present at the Omega when the message arrived. Fry explains in a letter to Gore that a subsequent official letter from the Daily Mail, requesting the work of the Omega without mentioning Gore or Lewis, is what he acted upon and that he never “got it [the message from Gore] with sufficient clearness to make me consider it as compared with what I thought the quite authoritative full statement from the Daily Mail” (Letters of RF 2:374).

Fry goes on in the same letter to call the mix-up “a quite absurd misunderstanding produced by Lewis’s predisposition to believe himself the object of subtle antagonistic
plots” (Letters of RF 2:374). Given Fry’s overall kindness to Lewis in his letters to him, his sponsorship of Lewis’s art, his developing personal friendship with Lewis, and his employment of Lewis at the Omega, it seems extremely unlikely that Fry would knowingly, purposefully, and secretly undermine Lewis’s prospects for work. In addition, Fry reminds Gore that it is the policy of the Omega that all of its products are produced anonymously (Letters of RF 2:372). When Fry received the official Daily Mail request, which he claimed did not mention Gore or Lewis, he would not be in a position to assign individual artists credit for work completed under the Omega banner, even if the names of Gore and Lewis had come to his attention earlier in connection to the exhibition.

Despite Fry’s efforts to explain, however, Gore sided with Lewis; and, with the support of Gore and other former Slade artists as well as Pound, Epstein, and funds from Kate Lechmere, Lewis split from Fry and Omega and formed the short-lived but dynamic Rebel Art Centre in March 1914. In June, Lechmere left Lewis for Hulme and stopped paying the rent on the studio at 38 Great Ormond Street. In the four months of its existence, the Centre announced a number of exhibitions and lectures, and some were actually given, most notably a lecture by the futurist F.T. Marinetti in May. Despite its brief existence, however, the Centre produced the vorticist aesthetic and the first issue of Blast, Lewis’s most famous and influential project.

4. In a 1925 letter to Charles Mauron’s wife, Helen, Fry criticizes Proust’s preoccupation with Ruskinian aesthetics:
He [Proust] was too nearly *Action Français*, had too much of that spirit and was never really free. In fact, a second-rate man altogether and not at all a first-rate mind--only he had the power to use his hyperaesthesia as an artist--that’s *au fond* the only important or interesting thing about him. Fancy a mind that could work for three years on Ruskin! (*Letters of RF* 2:583)

Fry praises Proust for his full use of his sensitivity to exterior stimuli (hyperaesthesia) in his writing, but at the same time relegates this talent to what Fry dismisses as the “second-rate” past both of Ruskin and the reactionary aesthetics of Maurras’s *Action Française*.

5. In addition to Anne Oliver Bell’s valuable five-volume edition of Woolf’s diaries (1977), there have been a large number of important scholarly explorations of Woolf and gender issues since the late 1960s. Of particular interest for this chapter are Herbert Marder’s *Feminism and Art: A Study of Virginia Woolf* (1968); Nancy Burr Evans’s “The Political Consciousness of Virginia Woolf: *A Room of One’s Own* and *Three Guineas*” (1974); Berenice A. Carroll’s “To Crush Him in Our Own Country: The Political Thought of Virginia Woolf” (1978); Naomi Black’s, “Virginia Woolf and the Women’s Movement” (1983); Carolyn Heilbrun’s “Woolf in Her Fifties” (1983); and Georgia Johnston’s “Women’s Voice: *Three Guineas* as Autobiography” (1993).

6. For further discussion of Woolf’s view’s on androgyny, see Carolyn G. Heilbrun’s “Toward a Recognition of Androgyny” (1973); Marilyn R. Farwell’s “Virginia Woolf and
Androgyny” (1975); and Barbara Fassler’s “Theories of Homosexuality as sources of Bloomsbury’s Androgyny” (1979).

7. An important recent source for a number of insightful discussions of Woolf’s views on fascism is Mark Hussey’s anthology, *Virginia Woolf and War: Fiction, Reality, and Myth* (1991). Included in this focused and useful collection are Nancy Topping Bazin and Jane Hamovit Lauter’s “Virginia Woolf’s Keen Sensitivity to War: Its Roots and Its Impact on Her Novels,” and Mark Hussey’s “Living in a War Zone: An Introduction to Virginia Woolf as a War Novelist.” Especially important for this chapter is Alex Zwerdling’s *Virginia Woolf and the Real World* (1986), in particular Chapter Ten, “Pacifism Without Hope” and Chapter Eleven, “*Between the Acts* and the coming of War.”

8. There are a number of key critical studies that explore the various strands of modernist protofascism. Charles Ferrall’s *Modernist Writing and Reactionary Politics* (2001) offers a recent and very thorough discussion of what Ferrall calls “two competing modernities: an aesthetic modernity which attempted to marry the primitive or medieval with originality and spontaneity [reactionary modernism] and the modernity of laissez-faire economics and liberal democracy [progressive modernism]” (1). Two other important recent studies that focus on Lewis are Vincent Sherry’s *Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, and Radical Modernism* (1993) and Fredic Jameson’s *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist* (1979). Both of these works are central to current understandings of what Jameson calls “the affinities between protofascism and
Western modernism”(5), a connection that has helped modernist scholarship re-position modernism within a political framework, which it often sought to escape--especially with the advent of New Criticism in the 1930s.

What my study adds to these and other important explorations of protofascism, such as Bob Altemeyer’s *The Authoritarian Specter* (1996) and Paul Morrison’s *The Poetics of Fascism* (1996), is the role of the visual in the aesthetic politics that can be traced to the turn of the century debate concerning the relationship between consciousness and the object, the promise of perceptual freedom that empathetic identification seemed to hold, and the growing division over who should be afforded perceptual freedom. Woolf and Lewis, as this study proposes, shared many influences but adopted opposite positions on the role of the visual in the establishment of personal, social, and national identities.

9. Lewis’s exposure to the French reactionary aesthetics of the first decade is important for this study, and a number of key works create the necessary critical context for this discussion. Ernst Nolte provides a thorough background on the role of the Action Française in *Three Faces of Fascism* (1966). Nolte’s insightful connection of the Dreyfus Affair to the growth of reactionary aesthetics is informative and valuable. More recent scholarship includes David Carroll’s *French Literary Fascism: Nationalism, Anti-Semitism, and the Ideology of Culture* (1995); Melanie Hawthorne and Richard J. Golsan’s collection of essays, *Gender and Fascism in Modern France* (1997); and Robin Pickering-Iazzi’s *Politics and the Visible: Women, Culture, and Fascism* (1997). Especially important for insight into the protofascist acts of thoughtless violence engaged in by characters such as Giles in *Between the Acts* and Victor in *The Revenge for Love* is
Klaus Theweleit’s *Male Fantasies* (1987) in which Theweleit explores the fascist impulse as the “irreducible human desire”(xii) to reduce human complexity to a “bloody mass: heads with their faces blown off, bodies soaked red in their own blood, rivers clogged with bodies”(xi). My study demonstrates that Lewis’s visual aesthetic that insisted on the “unified personality” is undeniably linked to such violent impulses, since the suppression of the verbal—as Woolf reveals in the works discussed above—results in action for its own sake.
Illustrations


Block, Naomi. “Virginia Woolf and the Women’s Movement.” *Virginia Woolf: A


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