

Porous Boundaries in Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*: Anticipating a Digital Composition and Subjectivity

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■ ABSTRACT ■

When turning to determining a subject position for the digital age, one may look beyond the invention of its technologies and instead begin with the development of its aesthetic of networked communities, nodal expression, and collaborative identity. Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* demonstrates this aesthetic in both form and content.

In this paper, I will examine the role of collaboration in the form of interdisciplinary composition, arguing that Woolf's use of musical form and dramatic monologue and dialogue structurally secure an investment in collaborative models of expression. Digital texts taut their inherent multimodality, but such compositions are also evident in pre-digital texts. In addition, I will decipher the subject position Woolf puts forward in *The Waves* by looking closely at how the characters determine their own identity and existence when they are alone, when they interact with one individual, and when they congregate as a group. These are exemplified more specifically in the representations of Rhoda and Bernard as equally refusing to collaborate between a self-defined identity and a group defined identity; Bernard's channeling of Lord Byron while writing a love letter; and Woolf's use of the red carnation as a repeated image of the intertwined nature of the characters' collaborative identity and mutual dependence on one another.

Key Words

Virginia Woolf, collaboration, subjectivity, baroque, interdisciplinary

Woolf's *The Waves* seems to anticipate Katie Mitchell's 2006 play *Waves*, which remixes, or offers another modal perspective, of the 1931 novel. *Waves*, is an ever-changing process of creating a play in front of the audience, introducing and fragmenting various media. Rather than writing a concrete script, Mitchell incorporated her cast of eight in all steps of the play production process. After collaboratively creating a storyboard, all cast members learned to use the video and sound equipment that would be incorporated as part of the composition (Sierz 54-6). For each performance of the play, the prop table was set on stage and a projection screen hung behind the table and actors. The actors alternate between manipulating props, filming, being filmed, and enacting and reading soliloquies. The actors rarely interact with one another directly but work separately to create a complete composition, showing both the action and the characters as more complex than dialogue and soliloquy. Instead, they form a constructed web of various and dispersed actions. The play becomes a display of the complexities of interaction, communication, and identity within an unstable environment. One actor may be seated reading text into a microphone, another filming an actor eating in a café set, another creating sound effects of rain and thunder at the props table. The audience watches all of the shuffling on stage while viewing the real time footage the actors shot on the screen hung above that very stage.

By including other media forms on the theatre stage and allowing the audience to witness the production live, Mitchell and her actors do imaginatively stretch the limits of theatre in the way Woolf's *The Waves* had done with the novel through its use of interior dialogue and thematic

organization loosely inspired by fugue-like musical structures. Similarly, the subject position that Woolf forwards at the height of modernism seems to foreshadow Mitchell's representation of the subject of a digital age. What I here call the digital subject is the subject that results from our now highly mediated and networked world amplified, but not wholly created, by digital technologies. The networked computer now makes the sharing and manipulation of text faster and easier, giving rise to the remix culture. Digital spaces like Second Life and MMORGs allow individuals to project personae via avatars. This not only distributes identity but also blatantly reveals identity as construction and not state. Further, as computers encode all media in binary code, the digital structure of a film, image, text, or sound file offers no differentiation in their treatment, at least by the computer. Multimodal composition is thus the *modus operandi* of the digital age and its subject. These internalized traits of the digital text and the digital subject appear in Woolf's *The Waves* as a precursor of the digital future to come.

In examining these foreshadowings, I will look to (1) the intermediary nature of *The Waves*' construction, (2) Woolf practice of thematic rather than chronological narrative structures, and (3) the interrelated and collaborative identities the characters of *The Waves* demonstrate. While digital texts and Woolf's work are often framed with discussions of the historical avant-garde and modernism, I will here employ concepts derived from recent critical literature on the resurgence of baroque traits in the neo-baroque movement. A recycling of baroque interest in the bodily, overabundance, repetition, and modulation, the neo-baroque looks to how these traits of being overpowered by our surroundings are standard fare in the highly mediated, information era of the digital. Genre, media, and subjectivity become saturated to the point where the boundaries between one genre and another or one subject and another are overcome and the distinctions that separated entities now blur to reveal a network of intertwined entities. In these networked environments, it becomes clearer

that all things are part of a larger collaborative where subjects and object equally affect one another. Tacitly then, the creator of an expression and that expression equally sway one another; hence, my attention to both the form of the narrative object and the subject position if forwards.

OVERREACHING GENRE BY ...

Woolf often called her novel a “play-poem” because it borrows conventions from several genres to create a density that overpowers the ordered control of a linear narrative. Woolf manages to borrow imagery and symbolism from poetry, character from the novel, and soliloquy from drama (Schlack 101). With so many stylistic and thematic elements at play and each becoming less distinguishable from its counterpart, Woolf overpowers the novel form, which, in fact, was a primary aim of *The Waves*. Placing her writing between prose and poetry, she says that she would avoid narrative conventions that often force writers into including superfluous information to progress linearly. Also, she would sidestep poetry proper that simplifies by leaving so much material out of the poem (Warner 25). Instead she writes in her diary entry dated November 28, 1928 “The idea has come to me that what I want now to do is to saturate every atom. I mean to eliminate all waste, deadness, superfluity: to give the moment whole; whatever it includes” (Woolf *A Writer's Diary* 138). Mitchell’s view that theatre’s true problem lies with a lack of imagination and the sense of insignificance the audience feels toward theatre (Sierz 59) is not far from Woolf’s own dissatisfaction with the novel’s conventional and increasingly confining form. It is not a mistake that Woolf saw *The Waves* as partly a play, and that Mitchell adapts the book as a play/film. The theatre itself is wholly dependent on collaborations, in which authorial intention becomes dispersed across multiple interpretations from the playwright, to the director, to the actors, to the set designer and so on

and so forth. Woolf's characters collaborate with one another to create identities and she places the novel form in collaboration with the poem, play, and the fugue. Mitchell continues this trend by collaborating with her actors to create the play and by merging many media, analog and digital, to represent both Woolf's novel and the 21st century audience who, no longer enslaved by the romantic illusion of individualism, are giving way to the blurring of boundaries between themselves and others as well as between distinct media or genres conventions.

While Woolf was reproached on her treatment of narrative she adamantly protested any claim that her work was purely stream of consciousness, saying in a 1926 diary entry that "Theres a good deal of shaping & composing in my books" (Woolf *The Diary of Virginia Woolf* 63). Though she disliked and avoided the "false arrangements" and superfluous information that the novel form often calls for, she equally objected to a work that was not disciplined into a form. She writes in her diary in November 18, 1924 "I think writing must be formal. The art must be respected. This struck me reading some of my notes here. For, if one lets the mind run loose, it becomes egotistic: personal, which I detest" (Woolf *A Writer's Diary* 67). This resonates with the idea of a collaborative space between objective and subjective experience. Just because the text does not comply with strict chronology and conventional spatial transitions and dialogue does not mean that *The Waves* is a chaotic downpour of unrelated images. Beyond thematic, the cyclical rather than linear nature of text in novel form arises when she speaks to the compositional process behind Roger Fry's biography stating "I did try to state them [the themes] in the first chapter, and then to bring in developments and variations, and then to make them all heard together and end by bringing back the first theme in the last chapter" (Woolf *The Letters of Virginia Woolf* 426). Woolf struggled with her biography on Roger Fry because the abundance of information overpowered the linear narrative form, warranting a different structural backbone. On ordering the text, she states: "there

was such a mass of detail that the only way I could hold it together was by abstracting it into themes” (Woolf *The Letters of Virginia Woolf* 426). We see that Woolf does have a clear concept of organization in her writing but as she shows, there is more than one way to write a novel – and one of those may be thematically.

Pressing the limits of a genre or medium and their conventions calls its audience to not only take up a position in regards to the process of representation but it also brings to light the social order those genres and media support. For instance, Dick Higgins observes that modern theatre is far from modern by largely maintaining the proscenium theatre as a frame for its work. The proscenium clearly marks a severe division between the actors and the viewers, where the viewers are subordinated and passively consume the actions of the actors. Higgins argues that this antiquated structure was relevant to the lord and serf model of social relations but does not speak to a modern audience that is more socially and imaginatively mobile (50). Depending on established grammatical forms and dividing the play from the audience by maintaining the proscenium essentially denies participation, and upholds traditional conventions that ignore the experiences of the modern audience. Their mobile, mediated, and fragmented lives are less applicable to a singularly and linearly scripted interpretation of lived experience. Boris Groys identifies two major steps that artists must take to abandon isolation for participation and collaboration. The first step is to overcome boundaries between media and genres, allowing for fellowships across disciplines and a significant widening of the audience and co-collaborator pool. Secondly, Groys suggests that artistic talents should not be used to highlight themes and positions that belong to the artist, but instead, the artist must recognize and be responsible to the audience and their desires (21-2).

This collaborative, participatory, thematic perception of artistic creation and identity plays well to Paul Brown’s own reading of Woolf’s sense of reality. Brown argues that reality for Woolf

is not contained within a single perceptual consciousness, nor does it exist as a collection of multiple but rigidly divided perceptual consciousness. [...] Reality seems to be composed of multiple interpenetrating consciousnesses interconnected with one another and loosely housed within fluid subjectivities and objectivities that interactively create, as well as observe, their environment (54).

Woolf's novel becomes more than a precursor to intermediary work and postmodernist thought that would explode after the Second World War. Her general thoughts on the interrelated nature of all fields of study, the limits placed on any system of thought that divides the subjective from the objective, and an identity and reality that is in fact contingent on sub(objective), lived experience (Westling 855-6), show her to be a relevant figure in charting our current digital environment and its corresponding subject position. By creating six characters that weave in and out of one another with internal monologues turned dialogues, Woolf shows the interdependence and permeability of community and individual.

MODULATING THEME...

Many scholars have already identified the relationships of the characters as the central organizing structure of *The Waves*. Beatrice Monaco states that the characters create a textual rhythm that continually modulates to create multiple patterns (179) and Gray Kochhar-Lindgren says: "*The Waves* is not so much the story, a developed plot that verbally mimes action in the world, of six characters named Bernard, Louis, Neville, Jinny, Rhoda, and Susan – as it is the discursive enactment of a single poetic voice in six closely related keys" (58). These conclusions represent but a few of their kind. Keeping in mind that the motive for a thematic organization comes from an overwhelming amount of information to sort, it does not seem shocking to consider musical theme, not just literary

theme. Woolf's use of music as inspiration for the structure of *The Waves* is itself associative rather than an accurate mimic of the form, seeing the divergent as analogous rather than exclusive. Though she notes several times in her diaries and letters music's role in her writing, she combined so many structural devices in each piece that crediting any single inspiration for her work is impossible (Jacobs 248). She was not a trained musician and did not read or play music (Jacobs 232) so her borrowing from music was one of looser interpretations of structural form and perhaps even more so an affective response to the feeling of the music that she wanted to recreate in her writing. While *The Waves* is neither Baroque nor fugal, comparisons to both highlight powerful qualities of the text. In music, plenitude, or an overwhelming amount of musical material, arises from textural and rhythmic saturation largely accomplished through using several musical motifs, called subjects, and overlapping those subjects in contrapuntal combinations (Hatten 249-50). The aural density represented in *The Waves* is impressive since the reader not only listens to the interior dialogues of the characters but to all the sounds they hear such as birds, waves, stamping, clocks, and trains (Cuddy-Keane 88). Bernard even argues that characters and certain scenes should have music that accompany them to more directly communicate a mood or feeling, to basically provide a soundtrack to the novel (Woolf 250-1). Clearly the environment portrayed in *The Waves* is one of density and quandary, though also linked and associative.

In music, counterpoint, which orders plenitude, is the combination and relation between two independent voices that are harmonically interrelated. Each voice is unique from others in the composition but when many voices are played at once their combination is harmonic rather than dissonant. Counterpoint, like its ultimate expression in the fugue, is not a form with a definitive set of moves. Instead, it is a process of composition whose outcomes are multiple and varied. The act of harmonically interrelating parts of a mass is essentially the motive of thematic or

associative models of organization. Counterpoint has often been revisited as an organizational structure of great importance. Even Arnold Schönberg saw counterpoint's ability to infinitely recombine into a "many-sided presentation of an idea" as its greatest virtue. Counterpoint helps structures with one correct answer and predictable progressions (Peles 122). In fact, Schönberg used counterpoint as a game for his students to find all possible solutions and then continue creating even more (Neff 128). This essentially entails taking a central idea that has been compressed into a theme and seeing how craftily it can be transposed, modulated, flipped, and reversed while weaving through several keys and interacting with other melodic lines (Neff 124-5). The ability of counterpoint and the fugue to order highly saturated and dense material could well have been what drew Beethoven to the fugue style in his late string quartets (Hatten 250) that were of such interest to Woolf. That Woolf imagines her writing as a presentation, development, variation, and convergence of themes attests to her recognition of fugal organization as an associative thematic model applicable to writing a novel that is counter to novelistic tradition.

As Woolf's use of a musical metaphor for textual organization is more approximate than it is an accurate translation of musical theories of composition, a brief description of the characteristics of a fugue will be sufficient to outline a common general impulse towards theme-based organization. The fugue is the most complex compositional use of counterpoint and must include at least a subject. The subject is a short melodic line confined to one octave that can be easily recognized and has a distinctive rhythm. The subject is often accompanied by countersubjects, though rarely more than five. A countersubject, like a subject must be unique and melodically interesting. The countersubject also must provide a rhythmic contrast to the subject to aid in distinguishing them but more importantly to add interest in their harmonic combination. If a fugue has no countersubjects, the subject is accompanied by counterpoint (Kennan 207). In well written fugues with more than one countersubject

it sometimes becomes difficult to determine where the subject is re-introduced or when the subject ends and the countersubject begins. Josephine O'Brien-Schaefer makes a similar observation of the transitions between characters' interior dialogues in *The Waves*. Because each character refers to him or herself in the first person singular and the transitions between characters are easily read over, as they are simply "said Bernard" or "said Jinny," the reader often loses his or her place and converges one character's interior dialogue with another's (159). The interweaving of subjects within the plenitude exemplifies the complexity of the relationship between the subject and his or her surroundings.

In addition to transitions from subject to countersubject, or one countersubject to another are transitions between musical keys effected by the use of an episode. Episodes in fugues are extraordinarily common because they allow the composer to show how craftily he or she can continue reintroducing the subject through key changes. An episode offers the listener a break from the dominant theme of the subject and operates by recycling portions of the subject, countersubject, counterpoint, and new material to modulate to a different key (Kennan 220). During an episode, the texture of the composition thins since modulating to a new key is emphasized over converging subject and countersubjects (Kennan 222). Woolf uses a similar structure to transition between different time periods in *The Waves*. Between the main chapters are brief descriptions of the passage of a day in a seaside scene, which she calls interludes. She repeatedly describes the sea, sun, birds, garden, and a house. There are no people in these interludes; rather the reader watches the sun rising and setting and what affect that movement has on the world below. Each interlude sets the tone for the following chapter; for instance, suggesting intensity with the sharpness of shadows and crisis with frantic bird songs and flight. With none of the characters present, the reader can focus on the tone that forms and the very passage of time through watching the movement of the sun, essentially modulating the characters to a different

time and version of themselves. The reader can recognize a basic recycling of material between the chapters and interludes – with one example being the flower that sits next to a red-trimmed curtain on the windowsill of the seaside house. Woolf writes: “*The real flower on the window-sill was attended by a phantom flower. Yet the phantom flower was part of the flower for when a bud broke free, the paler flower in the glass opened a bud too*” (Woolf 75). Not only is the flower repeated but varied in the window, it also reappears at Percival’s dinner, the dinner at Hampton Court, and Neville, Louis, and Bernard’s graduation. As with the fugal episode, during this interlude, the flower as a theme is simplified but recycled from the chapters.

... BAROQUE THE SUBJECT

In Woolf’s *The Waves*, we find a clear preference for intermediary work as a way of expanding the format, presentation, and composition of the modern novel; an unleashing of the imagination to overcome established boundaries; and a saturation and density of material that surpasses the control narrative can yield over a smaller archive of information. All of these major contributing elements are also key characteristics apparent in baroque work and its resurgence in the neo-baroque especially as it concerns cinema; a spectacular and popular medium that, like theatre, has historically been a collective effort and invested in exploiting the newest technology to mimic reality. Gregg Lambert describes the Baroque as a movement whose traits include:

- [1] an experience of temporality marked by the themes of novelty, variety and multiplicity
- [2] a loss of distinct perception of the central figure or action
- [3] the physical participation of the spectator in the presentation of the artwork through an emotional feeling of dizziness

or swooning (literally, of being overpowered by the spectacle) [4]
finally, a heightened sense of enthusiasm, delight or marvel. (23)

These generalized qualities highlight seriality and varied repetition over the linear narrative, a shifting and unstable subject, immersion and showmanship in crafting a work, and an emotional rather than logical motive to both create and consume. Unpacking these traits exposes a thought process unlike rational logic but very appropriate to the mediated environment with which the subject of digital culture interfaces. The prolific use of extended allegories and varied repetitions of a trait stems from an overabundance of material. Angela Ndalianis employs the repeated use of the figure of Apollo in the gardens of Versailles as an example of an extended allegory of kingship. Because the gardens are so extensive, many varied repetitions in the form of carvings and statues need to be dispersed throughout the space in order to solidify the comparison between Apollo and Louis XIV. Concentrating on a repeated trait rather than a narrative trajectory lends itself to blurring boundaries between media. Being able to represent Apollo through a marble statue, stone carving in a fountain, or a painting only allows the trait to spread more widely. Baroque systems in fact “tend to invade space in every direction, to perforate it to become as one with all its possibilities” as Angela Ndalianis argues (25). In fact, the project of Angela Ndalianis’ *Neo-Baroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment* looks to how mass media continue such extended and spectacular theme clusters that began in Baroque theatre. Such methods of theming masses touch Woolf’s own struggles with the novel and biography.

But beyond form, she even considers the collaborative nature of subjectivity. She is skilled at including very personal scenes from her life into *The Waves* without slipping into a purely personal narrative that has less affective potential to a wide audience. Woolf capitalizes on the potentialities of multiple interpretations of self by abstracting and using

many of her personal experiences as keystones of various characters' sets of imagery. We thus read her characters as multiple interpretations of Woolf herself. In commenting on *The Waves*, Woolf states: "I did mean that in some vague way we are the same person, and not separate people. The six characters were supposed to be one....I come to feel more and more how difficult it is to collect oneself into one Virginia; even though the special Virginia in whose body I live for the moment is violently susceptible to all sorts of separate feeling" (Nicolson & Trautmann 397). What each character signifies of Woolf as a person and how accurate each representation is to her life is less important than the idea of dispersing identity across several persona and the complementary impulse to draw together relationships between scattered parts. The accuracy of an individual experience is not what is emphasized but rather the affective response shared across a group of subjects. This attention to inexpressible traits even provides a point of commonality between Woolf's literary work and her sister's visual artwork. Vanessa Bell's "aesthetic principle is what, in painting, her husband called significant form; it shares an affinity with her sister's aspirations for biography in her well-known desire for life-writing to go beyond the granite of mere facts and seek the rainbow of personality" (Benton 109).

It is in this recognition of the difference between the personal and the persona that we find Woolf's understanding of the subject as a process. Woolf presents the six friends in *The Waves* – Bernard, Neville, Louis, Rhoda, Jinny, and Susan – as separate people. She names them and gives them unique, specific images and qualities. However, the reader clearly understands that each character's identity is closely tied to what he or she sees and does, how the characters interact with the one another, and what they say and think of their friends. Each character must collaborate with the others to find their identity that is increasingly understood to be contingent, shifting, and unrepresentable in any single story.

Kresimir Purgar explains a subject's vulnerability in his book, *The*

Neo-Baroque Subject. He argues that the observer can become the subject of a painting by taking up the role of a mediator between the inside and outside of a scene. The painting is not just consumed by the viewer but alters the viewer through a confrontation. For instance, Purgar examines Lovro Artuković's 2004 painting *Little Red Riding Hood (evil?)* arguing that the viewer is confronted by the gaze of Little Red Riding Hood for whom the audience feels responsible. She is depicted alone on a canvas but the viewer can see that on another canvas out of her line of vision, the wolf lies in wait. The viewer becomes folded into the message of impending doom, disempowerment, and responsibility for others. Similarly, Gregg Lambert looks to Caravaggio's *The Conversion of St. Paul* and notes that the support or center of the painting is not present on the canvas but rests on "the position of the spectator – the affective surface produced in the emotional perception" (27). The idea of the observer as mediator that fills the blank between the subject and object places that spectator as the interpreter of a scene's possibilities rather than a consumer of one set scene. Omar Calabrese takes the act of interpretation as the basis of all critical activity. He argues that interpretation restores freedom and independence in the subject who builds a point of view towards his or her world through these interpretations.

Of the many Neo-Baroque qualities Calabrese explicates, that of the approximate and inexpressible is taken up again by Purgar as a primary motive for actions of the neo-baroque subject. He summarizes Calabrese's discussion of the approximate and inexpressible saying "a subject *knows* that there exists the remainder of a content or meaning which eludes description, but is *unable to express it*" (Purgar 20, 22). This feeling of being pressed upon by a remainder shows the influence the other, the object supposedly external to the subject, has over that subject. Because the subject cannot make a unity of meaning, he or she cannot be seen as wholly separate from the objects he or she manipulates. Woolf exemplifies this blurring between a self and its other in the very format of *The Waves*.

As each character speaks, the speeches are presented as interior monologues, as though – at least momentarily – there was a unified self that can recede from his or her surroundings and reflect on a scene without being impressed upon by others. However, the reader discovers with the first pages of the novel that the speeches are not pure interior monologues since characters seem to respond to what the others are thinking. In addition, similar images appear in the thoughts of several different characters, including a blue ring that unites the world and an interest in mirrors and reflective surfaces. Gabriele Schwab calls these exchanges “interior dialogues” because of their denial of a purely external or purely internal space for the subject who cannot directly speak to another character or him or herself but must skew each with the other at all times (83).

THE DEFICIENCIES OF SINGULARITY

Woolf takes as given the idea of an interdependent subject inherently defined as a part divided but dependent on what he or she is not. The severity of this type of identity construction is most clearly evident in the characters of Rhoda and Bernard. These characters form the two extremes of representing the relationship between subject and object. For Woolf's literary practice and the Baroque/Neo-Baroque there is no pure subject or object but only the in-between space of the mediator or interpreter. Rhoda and Bernard struggle to find peace in their interactions with their surroundings because they cannot find the in-between and instead invest themselves in one extremity of the spectrum. Rhoda views herself as a pure interior and Bernard a pure exterior and thus they are unable to determine themselves as subjects enfolded in the objects. Their inability to collaborate, to successfully relate the subject and object, marks both as divided from the social whole.

Rhoda denies any interaction with the outside world and the people

in it. One of her most powerful recurring images is her denial of a face and her fear of her own reflection. When she sees her face in a mirror she recognizes it as her own but quickly ducks behind Susan to hide that she is present in the world (Woolf 43). Rhoda does not know how to interact with others and hence denies that she has a face to confront or present to the other. Any interaction requires the presence of at least two differentiated interlocutors, but since Rhoda will not even draw the basic boundary of her own body or face she removes herself from any possibility of interacting with another person.

Because she struggles to integrate herself with others, she passes her time daydreaming. Those very dreams reveal her anguish and frustration with being unable to relate to and collaborate with other people. She hides in the school library and reads poetry, imagining herself gathering flowers and tying them together—of essentially ordering the world around her. Despite all her feelings that she wishes to express through her creations, she finds that she has no one with which to share herself. She cries out:

To whom shall I give all that now flows through me, from my warm, my porous body? I will gather my flowers and present them – Oh! to whom? Sailors loiter on the parade, and amorous couples; the omnibuses rattle along the sea front to the town. I will give; I will enrich; I will return to the world this beauty. I will bind my flowers in one garland and advancing with my hand outstretched will present them— Oh! to whom? (Woolf 57)

Woolf's use of loving couples and a returning sailor is quite purposeful since a romantic relationship depends highly on trusting the other person to treat you well and compromise selfish desire for the better of the relationship. The very idea that a personal completeness relies on unity with the other is what Grady Smith calls the risk of love (39) hence the wording of wedding vows such as "the two shall become one" or

“I give myself to thee.”

Rhoda feels inherently divided from the world and the other characters take note of the separation. Even while the characters are still in grammar school, Rhoda is disconnected from the others. During recess she stays in the classroom to finish her mathematics assignment. She does not understand any of the figures, saying they have no meaning. She is disabled by her lack of understanding a common language that punishes her twice. Rhoda is estranged from an answer that the mathematical symbols yield to all the other characters and she is physically separated from her friends that play just outside the window of the classroom. Her isolation from established fields of knowledge and lived experiences with the world around her leave her nothing tangible that she can manipulate, create, and share with others. Instead her severe individualism swallows her whole.

Bernard faces quite the opposite problem of being able to craft stories and insert himself in any circumstance and situation but never finding a personal relevance that brings meaning to him. When he and his five friends meet as mature adults at Hampton Court, Bernard cannot describe himself without folding in the experiences of his friends into his own identity. He says, “what I call ‘my life’, it is not one life that I look back upon; I am not one person; I am many people; I do not altogether know who I am – Jinny, Susan, Neville, Rhoda, or Louis; or how to distinguish my life from theirs” (Woolf 276). Shortly afterwards as Bernard tries to recount the story of his life to a stranger in a café, he takes this unity of identity a step further by marking his own body with the experiences of his friends rather than himself. He says with all conviction: “Here on my brow is the blow I got when Percival fell. Here on the nape of my neck is the kiss Jinny gave Louis. My eyes fill with Susan’s tears. I see far away, quivering like a gold thread, the pillar Rhoda saw, and feel the rush of the wind of her flight when she leapt” (Woolf 289). While Rhoda eradicates her entire body in order to refuse all relations and collaborations, Bernard takes all external experiences he can recall

and pastes them onto his body, mapping the events of the other as intimately his own. Unlike Rhoda, who is only of consequence when she is alone in her daydreams, Bernard needs all the others present in order to illuminate his own significance as the storyteller.

Despite all the stories that he spins, he does not find *the* meaning of the universe. Instead, he discovers that the very stories he relied on to expose meaning defy a singular meaning in favor of the multiple interpretations of reality. In order to come to a sense of meaning, Bernard finds that he has to tap into an emotional and personal aspect of what he observes in the external world. After he drops his book of phrases to be swept up with the garbage, he says:

What is the phrase for the moon? And the phrase for love? By what name are we to call death? I do not know. I need a little language such as lovers use, words of one syllable such as children speak when they come into the room and find their mother sewing and pick up some scrap of bright wool, a feather, or a shred of chintz. I need a howl; a cry. When the storm crosses the marsh and sweeps over me where I lie in the ditch unregarded I need no words. Nothing neat. (Woolf 295)

He finally recognizes that the answer to the universe and to understanding his place in that universe is not to be found in objectivity or plot but in emotion, the risk of confrontation or rejection, and the dependence or attachment of a relationship. Bernard realizes at the end of the novel that each story or description is a mark of the individual's interpretation of the world rather than a purely objective or even singular, subjective representation of the world as a whole.

The state of the individual is highly unstable. Rhoda exists purely in the present and has no way of linking the moment with a history, a social significance, or another subject. She is entirely immersed in a moment and cannot see beyond the emotional and sensational elements of that

chink in time. Bernard is only constituted by careful twistings of language that attempt to bind everything together to produce an ultimate truth of the universe. While he is observant and often carried away by the crowd or chaos, he divorces his personal feelings and life experiences from his observations becoming purely contemplative. Both are unable to come to terms with their environment because they cannot fully collaborate; an action that requires both converging with and diverging from the other.

POROUS BOUNDARIES OF THE SUBJECT

With any sense of an integral and distinct self a mere illusion, we return to the need for collaboration with others. These collaborations reveal the porosity of our identity. What brings the separated individuals together to form a community is a common recognition of the inherent lack of identity proper to each. Even Virginia Woolf states that “I” is just a term used for a person with “no real being” (Woolf *A Room of One's Own* 4). The idea of self gives way to a shifting “series of moving oppositions” as Lisa Lucenti recalls Friedrich Nietzsche’s thoughts on the modern subject. She points out that Nietzsche believes that the subject is a spell of language masking that reality is not based on the subject but on a constant action. Along similar lines of thought, Nicholas Davey overturns René Descartes’s self-aware subject by reshaping the interpretation of the use of the word “I”. For Davey, “I” does not symbolize the self-aware subject but the linguistic existence of the other from which “I” is differentiated (55). The “I” is not a singular point but a hinge between the “I” the reader imagines and the “I” the author imagined. In its function as hinge, the “I” allows an opening and interrelationship between two separate imaginations. “I” then is the very paradox of dividing something to make a unity. Each time a subject divides him or herself as an “I,” they only build another hinge to relate and connect themselves

to the other.

Viewing the “I” as a function to create relationships rather than a statement that solidifies a singular identity shows the basic human instinct to collaborate. This does not make it any easier for people to be comfortable sharing themselves with others. As Josephine O’Brien-Schaefer points out, human relations operate in a basic paradox of “the fear that this private life will be violated, and the desire to share it with others” (25). Woolf seems deeply interested in this divide of any human mind between the social or collective and the personal and so she plays up the human skill of thinking about oneself as a part of a crowd (immersed) or to separate oneself from the crowd in order to watch over others (contemplative) (Peach 157). Viewing collaboration as a division of the workload, as a multiplication of singular authors undermines the true importance and potential of collaborating. Collaboration is “a dispersal of author/ity, rather than a simple doubling of it” as Jeffrey Masten argues (Hirschfeld 616).

Apparently the most productive and enlightening atmospheres for interacting with others is one that is not strictly or hierarchically ordered but one that allows for a degree of chaos. Evan Rosen describes this productive chaos as a place for unstructured exchange of ideas not one of total anarchy or disorganization (12). This unstructured organization mimics the space of play and allows for the spontaneous association and the unexpected to come and enrich the topic at hand. When faced with writing a letter to a girl that Bernard loves, he leaves himself room to play by not taking the task too seriously. Bernard begins the writing process with role-playing. He states:

Now, as a proof of my susceptibility to atmosphere, here, as I come into my room, and turn on the light, and see the sheet of paper, the table, my gown lying negligently over the back of the chair, I feel that I am that dashing yet reflective man, that bold and deleterious

figure, who, lightly throwing off his cloak, seizes his pen and at once flings off the following letter to the girl with whom he is passionately in love. (Woolf 79)

Though Bernard has attempted to write the letter several times and has been unable to finish, he believes that taking up Lord Byron's persona will motivate him to approach the project afresh. Bernard admits that he is using Byron to launch himself by picking up on Byron's rhythm. He thinks to himself: "I am, in some ways, like Byron. Perhaps a sip of Byron will help to put me in the vein. Let me read a page. No; this is dull; this is scrappy. This is rather too formal. Now I am getting the hang of it. Now I am getting his beat into my brain" (Woolf 79). Though he is able to begin a draft, he fears that he was not able to converge himself and Byron satisfactorily, resulting in a mediocre impersonation of the great Byron. He has not quite joined himself with Byron and abandons the draft for the time being.

Instead of laboring over Byron's poetry or his own love letter, Bernard daydreams. He is soon interrupted by Neville's voice recounting his own vision of Percival under the willows alongside a river with several other attractive men. During this vision Neville seems to unwittingly take up the thread of Byron that Bernard introduces. Neville feels gripped by a familiar rhythm that rises up again because it has some inherent similarity with his daydream. He feels instantly inspired and takes himself to be a poet (Woolf 82). Neville's inspiration is an unconscious surging of familiarity between the riverbank scene and some already existing image. Woolf takes the string of associations even farther by having Bernard enter into Neville's scene. Upon Bernard's entrance, Neville states: "Yet how painful to be recalled, to be mitigated, to have one's self adulterated, mixed up, become part of another. As he approaches I become not myself but Neville mixed with somebody – with whom? – with Bernard? Yes, it is Bernard, and it is to Bernard that I shall put the question, Who

am I?" (Woolf 83). Bernard only confirms this merging of their two separate identities and daydreams by claiming Neville's moment of inspiration as equally his own. The willow tree that Neville sees above Percival's head is what reminds Bernard of Byron.

This inspiration takes Bernard off to imagining Byron hovering over him, disapproving of his work. Perhaps we can view this as tradition resisting or turning its nose down on renditions and remakes, a view that Neville would probably support given his negative opinion of Bernard's willingness to borrow heavily from Byron. It is Neville's nearsightedness that leads to his failure to see that his own moment of inspiration was due to a strange familiarity with the scene (Perhaps Byron's "By the Rivers of Babylon," or further Psalm 137), not that he found something new and unique to that moment. Bernard instead embraces the idea of identity being a collective project and any artistic creation to be necessarily a rendition of the material already filling the cultural and historical archive that human history has amassed over the millennia. He recognizes his multiplicity saying, "I am Bernard; I am Byron; I am this, that and the other. They [past literary figures] darken the air and enrich me, as of old, with their antics, their comments, and cloud the fine simplicity of my moment of emotion. For I am more selves than Neville thinks. We are not simple as our friends would have us to meet their needs" (Woolf 89). Rather than revering the past and literary tradition as a sacred and separate object, Bernard breathes life into the past by showing its continued relevance in how he thinks of himself and even writes. Bernard's writing is not conceived to become a pure object divorced from the world but a remix of what he finds significant and convergent. He enacts his power over his environment not by disciplining and categorizing it but by affectively gathering what he associates with himself. As Lauryl Tucker posits "Bernard the writer reveals that he, in literary terms, is more the product of composition, the language itself, than the subject or poet who composes it" (297).

ENTANGLED IDENTITIES

With individual identity being a careful remix of personal experience and one's surroundings and traditions, how do we best proceed to use this model of collaboration and intersubjective dependence to make meaning of our world? Woolf's characters find the answer to this question in Percival while they dine with him before his departure to India. Percival is in one way a central character since the other six characters adore him and congregate around him. However, he is also a non-existent character since unlike Rhoda, Jinny, Susan, Neville, Louis, and Bernard, he never speaks but is only observed as a shared inspiration between all six friends. Despite his silence, Percival does impart a lesson to the six friends that they all recognize. Louis translates the message rather clearly saying that Percival "makes us aware that these attempts to say, 'I am this, I am that,' which we make, coming together, like separated parts of one body and soul, are false" (Woolf 137). Perhaps since Percival does not have his own voice and because of his role as a soldier, he inspires in the others a sense of unity that transcends any differences each will try to champion as his or her individualism. Neville expands on this point when he describes raging waters as more stable than any assertion of "I am this, I am that." Louis does not leave us with such a precarious circumstance but goes on to say that beyond our difference lies "a chain whirling round, round, in a steel-blue circle beneath" (Woolf 137). Though he does not explicate what this chain that binds all the "I's" is, Jinny and Susan quickly follow with an interpretation. They each call this circle love and hate marking this chain as one of common emotion or instinct. Bringing all these "I's" together creates a community through common feeling but what kind of community does Woolf imagine for her characters?

Galia Benziman and Craig Gordon take up representations of community in Woolf's writings and come to similar conclusions as to the quality of that community. Benziman argues that because the characters view

themselves as unique “I’s” whose identities are determined by a shifting whole, the community that is created by their union is open, fragmented, and dissonant. Such a community maintains the differences between each “I” while gathering them by a base commonality unlike corporate or totalitarian communities that eradicate difference to enforce identity as purely a group function (Benziman 69). Gordon also dissociates this corporate/totalitarian model from Woolf’s work. Woolf does not mark one character as central to which all others fall behind as Percival is clearly disempowered without a voice and Bernard, though the final long chapter is told in his voice alone, still recognizes his full dependence on the other characters. She equally does not erase the differences between the characters, maintaining their signature images and colors, attitudes and fears. Gordon argues that Woolf’s sense of community is similar to Jean-Luc Nancy’s organic community which forms out of “sharing, diffusion, or impregnation” of one identity across the collective until each “I” sees him or herself as a part of a living and shifting community (Gordon 35-6).

Woolf provides a powerful and recurring image to recreate and depict this organic community with the red carnation that appears when the characters gather together. The most enthusiastic carnation scene arises during Percival’s farewell dinner as the friends talk on their shared memories of their past at school days. Bernard points out that despite their different interpretations of the past and their very different lives in the present, they have all come together on that night for some reason. While he first attributes it to a common love for Percival, Bernard pushes that idea aside as too small a motive to gather together old friends. Instead he settles on the idea that what brought them all together was a common desire to create, saying:

We have come together (from the North, from the South, from Susan's farm, from Louis' house of business) to make one thing, not enduring—for

what endures? – but seen by many eyes simultaneously. There is a red carnation in that vase. A single flower as we sat here waiting, but now a seven-sided flower, many-petalled, red, puce, purple-shaded, stiff with silver-tinted leaves – a whole flower to which every eye brings its own contribution. (Woolf 127)

They have all congregated in order to harvest a common but individual vision of their world with the carnation as a small example of how that process of interpreting one object as infinitely many and many interpretations as one concretely one. Quiet individual contemplation will provide only one view while moving around it and listening to other perspectives will allow for an infinite number of views.

Gilles Deleuze takes up this type of motion around a point in his *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* when he describes his idea of the objectile. Taking up a mathematical model, Deleuze explains that rather than look for *the one* straight tangent that will intersect a curve at its vertex, we should find the infinite number of curves that touch that vertex resulting in many curves touching many curves rather than one line touching one curve (Deleuze 18). This infinite curve on curve process creates an objectile, an object based on fluctuation and a continuous modulation over time (Deleuze 19). With an objectile there is not one correct answer or ultimate truth but neither is truth purely relative since there is still only one base curve just as there is only one physical carnation on the dinner table. Rather, variation, relativity, and modulation is the truth that appears to Deleuze and Woolf. Both consider interpretation and mediation to be the domain of lived experience.

When the six friends convene around yet another flower decades later, variation and modulation are directly referenced as the substance of that common flower. While the gathering of friends is far less convivial and weighted by the concerns and regrets of mature characters, the convergence of the different “I’s” is viewed as a triumph. Bernard mentions the carnation

from Percival's farewell dinner, identifying the new flower at Hampton Court as a continued variation on the long dead carnation of their past. Louis still sees the flower at Hampton Court as an illumination against the undifferentiated surroundings and Jinny notes how painful and how long it took to create this six-sided flower from their own experiences. Bernard describes this flower of their mature adulthood saying, "Marriage, death, travel, friendship, town and country; children and all that; a many-sided substance cut out of this dark; a many-faceted flower. Let us stop for a moment; let us behold what we have made. Let it blaze against the yew trees. One life. There. It is over. Gone out." (Woolf 229) All of the trials that each character has weathered alone come together in that flower, uniting their varied perspectives and experiences into one common place and time, one gathering around their desire to be together.

When the perspectives are brought together they do not appear as pieces glued into a configuration. Each piece is intimately a part of the other. Once again we can turn to Deleuze to explain this sense of unity in separate identities in his definition of Gottfried Leibniz's monad. The monad corresponds to the soul and the soul is the highest point of nature, the point of view that one particular person will take in understanding his or her universe (Deleuze 23). Each monad contains the multiplicity of all possible outcomes but retains one irreducible point of view, making it both everything imaginable and one particular impression of everything all at once (Deleuze 23-5). Imagining the universe as a series of multiple interpretations of an archive of infinite information removes the idea of searching for the meaning of the universe outside the individual. Everything is already in each individual but configured at different ratios. The only meaning each person, each soul, each monad will have is filtered by its point of view that makes it a unique interpretation of its surroundings. What is enlightening about the flower in both dinner scenes is its role in reminding all the characters how intricate and separate each view of the flower is, while still being the pivot point that joins the seemingly

disassociated lives of Jinny and Louis or of Susan and Neville. Their understandings of themselves are purely interior where each character sees what he or she desires and interprets their individual and shared lives that way, Louis converting himself to a stalk, Jinny a dancing scarf, Susan her milk cows and doves. However, when they look inside themselves what they find is their relationship to the whole, to all other characters and their divergent perspectives on life. Here we are not far from Deleuze's assertion that the subject does not work from a "divine understanding" but from "tiny perceptions as representative of the world in the finite self" (89).

Woolf draws her carnation image into supporting this idea of a relevance that brings together a community. The bee that flies around the scene of Neville, Louis, and Bernard's graduation ceremony shows community is the process of connecting varied perspectives of a shared experience. While Louis is reverent and thankful, Bernard distracted, and Neville annoyed and impatient with the pompous nature of the ceremony, each remarks that their graduation is the beginning of an era that will disperse one from the others. Louis emphasizes that despite physical and temporal distance, he will remain close to Bernard, Neville, and Percival because, as he says, "we have forged certain links. Above all, we have inherited traditions" (Woolf 58). Because their paths have crossed and in a particular shared social context, they cannot separate the others from themselves. As Bernard tries to gather the right words of farewell, he sees a bee moving from the flowers in Lady Hampton's bouquet, distracting the young men from the gravity of the ceremony with its casual flight. The bee lands on a carnation while Bernard notes that he may not see his friends again. While Bernard remains somber, the bee has already done the work of connecting the young men. As it moves from place to place, they each follow. The bee's path defines a gentle unity that is not forced or announced. This may be why the headmaster giving the graduation speech does not even notice the bee. He is busy determining the magnitude

of the moment in a neatly composed utterance, the opposite of the bee's nonchalant and impromptu journey within the scene.

The bee as a marker of an instinctual, unrefined, unity between the characters returns towards the end of the novel. Bernard compares himself to a bee that is brushed away from a sunflower. Just as the bee seeks the sweetness of the sunflower's pollen, Bernard is collecting phrases and waiting for them to be of use, for *the* true story to come to him. Just as the significant link between the young men was their shared experiences in school and not the headmaster's prepared speech, so too are the snippets and phrases Bernard harvests more representative of his interpretation of the world than any complete story he can imagine. Even when something like a single red flower in a vase inspires a phrase, Bernard only sees a constant repetition with each of his friends' faces reoccurring, detaching, and coming together again as if each were a musical instrument in a symphony creating consonance and dissonance (Woolf 256). He cannot complete a story and close reality because he sees in his world a series in place of a plot. Because there is no end or resolution, Bernard cannot order the world as such. He equally cannot lay down his desire to come to a meaning considering how his life has revolved around an obsession to spin phrases. Instead he has to replicate the response of the Baroque viewer of any of the great ceiling paintings: not to stand back and analyze the scene or fall into the perfectly dramatic perspectival space represented, but to realize something in that space (Ndalianis 209). For the Baroque viewer of the ceiling painting that realization comes from stepping away from the vanishing point until the perspective is exposed and the difference between the painting and the architecture becomes evident. Bernard realizes that the phrases he spins are not what distinguish the real from the unreal but expose a field of potentials and relationships that lie in the perspective of each character. These perspectives meet to collaboratively imply the infinite interpretations of the world that are both individual and collective at once.

In being composed of all possible experiences, the monadic subject expresses him or herself as one interpretation of the in-between space of subjects and objects. As Deleuze points out, Leibniz provides such a philosophy of the world that begins with a figure that is inscribed over a field, allowing for points of view to form expressions of that field. According to Peter Abbs *The Waves* follows such a model by working from a character's impulse, which manifests itself into an image, which repeats over the field of the novel, which is finally received by the other characters and readers. For Woolf, this sentiment goes beyond the page to a veritable network of all things – of connected subjects, texts, concepts, objects.

It is the rapture I get when in writing I seem to be discovering what belongs to what; making a scheme come right; making a character come together. From this I reach what I might call a philosophy; at any rate it is a constant idea of mine; that behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern; that we—I mean all human beings—are connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of the work of art. *Hamlet* or a Beethoven quartet is the truth about this vast mass that we call the world. But there is no Shakespeare, there is no Beethoven; certainly and emphatically there is no God; we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself. And I see this when I have a shock. (Woolf *Moments of Being* 72)

This monadic subject that is as much a part of a collective as it is a creator, hints to the future digital subject. The digital subject is predicated then on an interconnectedness that stems from varied repetition, one conceptually foregrounded by Woolf and other authors and artists like her perhaps as much as it relies on mobile phones in its current function. We are engrossed in relationships and associations that challenge us not to analyze or answer but to spin more possible combinations, to push one more contrapuntal composition out of the same subject, imagine one

more faceted side to a carnation, put on one more performance of *Waves* to continue yet build onto a theme. These additive, associative, and intersubjective clusters form networks of meaning that brings out the desire to collaborate, combine, reconfigure, or modulate a subject over and again while pushing genre boundaries. This flexibility and willingness to see what was a boundary as collaborative potential continues to figure in multimodal composition and subjectivity in the networked environment of the digital. The seeds of such developments were cultural and artistic as much as they were technologic.

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