

**FRAMES, SHAPES AND SELVES:
TOWARDS THE IDEA OF SPACE
IN VIRGINIA WOOLF'S FICTION**

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ABSTRACT

The article discusses affinities between physical and mental spaces in selected works of Virginia Woolf in connection with the main philosophical and aesthetic problems posed by the changes in modernist representation of character with respect to space and place. In doing so, the argument assesses Woolf's in-human humanism in short stories like "Kew Gardens," "The Fascination of the Pool" or "A Simple Melody," assessing the interrelation between states of mind and the material universe, the way in which consciousness accommodates various material "admixtures" and how subjectivity "escapes" from subject to its own outside.

Using the post-Cartesian aspects of Henri Bergson's philosophy (pure perception, role of memory, philosophy of space and duration), Gaston Bachelard's thought on the "cogito of the dreamer," and Miroslav Petříček's theory of framing and frames, the argument examines how the instability of these newly constructed cavernous subjectivities enables interaction with space, place and materiality. This interaction challenges traditional ideas of unity of self, personal identity and autonomous agency, resulting in new, essentially modernist representations of reality. Drawing on a number of themes from visual arts, the discussion connects these psychological factors with the notions of solidity and fluidity, stability and instability of material reality and individual objects, moving bodies or things in space.

Keywords: Virginia Woolf; Henri Bergson; short stories; space; states of mind; impersonality; memory

At the beginning of the sixth chapter of her famous novel *To the Lighthouse* (1927), while harmlessly reflecting on the effect of lengthening summer evenings on human imagination, Virginia Woolf, out of the blue, formulates an unexpectedly philosophical statement about a mysterious feature which is in her opinion inherently present in the process of perception. According to Woolf's philosophical interlude, perceived images, for example images "of cliff, sea, cloud and sky [are] brought purposely together to assemble outwardly the scattered parts of the vision within. In those mirrors, the minds of men, in those pools of uneasy water, in which clouds forever turn and shadows form, dreams persisted" (1990: 116–117). However unexpected, this intriguing statement, in a manner

quite typical of Woolf's poetics, interestingly complicates, blurs and bends the supposedly clear-cut relationship between the perceiving subject and the perceived object, shattering a relationship which was taken for granted by dominant literary and philosophical movements of the time, i.e. radical empiricism, pragmatism and scientific positivism on one hand, and literary materialism of the so-called Edwardian authors on the other.

Challenging these dominant conceptualisations of reality, Woolf's fiction paints a different, rather phenomenological world-picture in which perception, which no longer equals passive reception but active (re-)composition of what is perceived, compromises the stable boundary between mind and matter, time and space, and continuity and fragmentariness. Exploring the consequences of this complication, the following article examines precisely those states of heightened imaginative intensity that illustrate these otherwise barely visible conceptual changes, and holds them to be the key to Woolf's fiction. In order to achieve this, the following analysis examines the spatial organisation of reality, and describes the way in which it becomes perceived, shaped and moulded by the consciousness of the perceiving subject. The discussion of the process of perception, however, quickly transforms itself into an analysis of the way perception transcends its epistemological quality and deviates into an inquiry into the conditions of human being-in-the-world as such.

The representation of human subjectivity in Woolf's fiction incorporates a number of closely related questions. First, it is tempting to suggest that the numerous contradictory interpretations of Woolf's fiction¹ are not primarily caused by the fact that there is no conceptual framework behind her work but rather, adhering to a more optimistic interpretation, that Woolf's fiction presents a picture of the human subject as something essentially unstable and changing in relation to time and/or to space. Challenging the traditional philosophical ideal of a stable substance, Woolf's fiction systematically implies that "people are collections of different selves" (Matz 2001: 175) that constantly vary, mingle and shuffle in relation to the environment. To put the matter differently, Woolf's fiction does not present one unified mind but different states of mind which, sometimes smoothly, sometimes suddenly and violently, pass, jump or pass from one to another, dissolve, and disappear only to emerge again. Importantly, these states of mind represent something more than mere moods or humours. Instead, they stand quite close to what might be understood as a changed ontological state of the human subject.

Though the essential changeability of human consciousness necessarily implies time, it also presupposes a very important role of space or extension. Dwelling on this aspect, the following argument focuses on the key interaction of human consciousness with extended substances, and shows how thought, memory and consciousness subsist, become mixed, and externalised into objects, places or spatial structures, and discusses the role

¹ Over the past decades Woolf scholarship has introduced a number of often contradictory theoretical as well as textual analyses of Woolf's fiction. Besides feminist, socialist or political interpretations, which are beyond the scope of this article, Woolf's fiction has been interpreted as standing philosophically close to the position of philosophical idealism, existentialism, Husserl's phenomenology, radical realism of G. E. Moore, empiricism, empiriocriticism, pragmatism or Bergsonism. For a comprehensive summary of philosophical interpretations of Woolf's fiction see esp. Rosenbaum (1971: 316); for a radical-empiricist and early-twentieth-century interpretation see Judith Ryan's *The Vanishing Subject: Early Psychology and Literary Modernism* but especially Judith Ryan (1980); for a very interesting phenomenological interpretation see the chapter on Virginia Woolf in Matz (2001).

of spatial structures, in particular of frames, rims and edges. Creation of these animated half-material objects and impersonal bodies constitutes the substrate of an intricate spatial structure that is composed of both physical and mental constituents and an ever widening and shrinking circle of the self.

The Problem of (Dis)Continuity and the “Fiction of Isolated Objects”

Despite the strong emphasis that Woolf studies often put on time and the so-called stream of consciousness, i.e. consciousness imagined in its fluidity and dynamism, Woolf’s fiction is full of stable material objects: cupboards, snails, gramophones, pieces of furniture, glass splinters, rims and frames. Their relation to consciousness and the role these objects play in the intricate spatial structure of Woolf’s texts is at the heart of the following discussion. Woolf’s classic stories such as “The Mark on the Wall” (1917, 1919, 1921) or “Kew Gardens” (1917), as well as a number of comparably less famous stories such as “The Fascination of the Pool” (1926), “The Searchlight” (1944) or “Solid Objects” (1920) primarily rely on things, objects, shapes, complex heterogeneous spaces and materials for their structure, theme and imagery. It is precisely these material objects which not only provide individual stories with structural coherence but also play a crucial role within the story by providing solid counterpoints to the fluid consciousness. These assumptions are particularly valid in the case of Woolf’s probably most popular stories: “Kew Gardens” and “The Mark on the Wall.”

At least since Bergson, the world of art and philosophy has been preoccupied with the problem of continuous and discontinuous things. The temporal but first of all spatial articulation of these issues becomes felt with increased intensity in the work of the artists and philosophers of the first half of the twentieth century. Virginia Woolf is no exception. Her early text “Kew Gardens” contains perhaps all of the most important aspects of spatial imagination: an emphasis on “that kind of life that resides in material detail,” which is at the same time an essential part of “some more essential vision” (Matz 2001: 174), a keen eye for shapes and outlines, instances of sympathetic/empathic affinity between the observer and the observed; shifting points of perspective, as well as an intricate and multiple spatio-temporal structure. As it has been suggested, the following argument relies on a number of problems that were systematically addressed in the work of one of the most influential philosophers of the period – Henri Bergson. What follows is a brief exposition of the most salient aspects of his thought which are essential for the interpretation of Woolf’s texts.

Henri Bergson and Pure Perception

The importance of the selected problems of Bergson’s thought requires a brief preliminary sketch which should represent a referential point for the following exposition. For the purposes of the discussion it is salient to introduce two connected themes: (a) Bergson’s thesis concerning human subjectivity, and (b) the thesis concerning continuity and discontinuity.

Bergson's philosophy can be seen as a philosophy of fluidity and its opposite – stability; his non-Cartesian dualism is famously based on changing degrees and gradation of these two qualities rather than on their sharp oppositions. Bergson's perhaps most fundamental philosophical innovation relies on postulating a fundamental difference between space and time. Space should, according to Bergson, be understood as homogeneous, discontinuous, allowing repetition, external, suitable for the operation of intellect and dependent on the use symbols and signs (such as language). Time, on the other hand, or more specifically – *duration*, represents the true reality, graspable by intuition, unique, continuous, inner, and directly graspable. As Bergson poetically puts it:

There is, beneath these sharply cut crystals and this frozen surface, a continuous flux which is not comparable to any flux I have ever seen. There is a succession of states, each of which announces that which follows and contains that which precedes it. [...] Whilst I was experiencing them they were so solidly organized, so profoundly animated with a common life, that I could not have said where any one of them finished or where another commenced. In reality no one of them begins or ends, but all extend into each other. (1912: 11)

With this being said, one of the key themes of Bergson's philosophy is the stipulation of the essential fluidity of our consciousness, which should be approached in its sequential continuity in time, or in duration and not in static space. In his seminal *Introduction to Metaphysics* (1903), which has been available in English thanks to T. E. Hulme's translation since 1912, Bergson states:

Now, there are no two identical moments in the life of the same conscious being. Take the simplest sensation, suppose it constant, absorb in it the entire personality: the consciousness which will accompany this sensation cannot remain identical with itself for two consecutive moments, because the second moment always contains, over and above the first, the memory that the first has bequeathed to it. A consciousness which could experience two identical moments would be a consciousness without memory. It would die and be born again continually. (1912: 12)

By ascribing memory an active part in the process of perception, Bergson introduces a new, dynamic conception of human subjectivity that is based on continual flux, or duration. This flux consists of a succession of states which, analogically to for example William James's psychology of the stream of consciousness, cannot be separated because each of these states announces what follows and contains in itself traces of that which precedes it. The successive *duration* of human subjectivity (and consequently also of human personality) in time requires a new method which would be able to grasp reality in its dynamic nature in unifying coherence. Bergson calls this method "intuition," defining it in opposition to the analytical method of science, language, habit and spaces. Intuition, which is according to Bergson the only method capable of grasping its object (for example human personality) in dynamic fluidity and temporality is by Bergson defined as "intellectual sympathy by which one places oneself within an object in order to coincide with what is unique in it and consequently inexpressible" (1912: 7).

In the earlier *Matter and Memory* (1896), Bergson further endeavours to explore human subjectivity as fluid and heterogeneous in respect to the role of personal memory

and the way it participates in perception. According to Bergson, there is no perceptive act which would not be “loaded” with memory and personal history of the subject’s memory, which continually penetrates into present perception. This memory consequently constitutes the foundation of the individuality of the perceiving subject. Every perceptive act should thus be seen as a mixture of perception with a piece of memory. Typically for Bergson’s philosophy, the ratio of these two ingredients (i.e. of memory and perception) is not *stable* or fixed but may change in time according to our “attention to life.” Accordingly to the exposition in *Matter and Memory*, the “mental life” of a healthy human individual being “oscillates” between two extreme states of existence: 1) purely “sensori-motor actions” of “pure perception,” i.e. perception *without memory*, which is oriented towards praxis and action, and 2) a “hypnotic,” dream-like existence of a pure memory, as remote from reality as possible. Bergson schematises these two extreme hypothetical positions using a cone-like sketch of human mental life, in which the bottom slab represents the world of reality and the cone the ever-widening sphere of memory. In this scheme Bergson located the limit state of “pure perception” on the apex “S” of the cone and dream-like existence of “pure memory” onto the base “AB.” These two hypothetical liminal states mark the limits within which the “tones” (1929: 221)² of human existence move.

In a hypothetical scenario, any subjectivity which would exist on the apex “S” could exist only as a subjectivity of “pure perception,” of the “now” without any admixture of personal memory. A human being endowed with such subjectivity would “remind us of some sort of a robot, whose behaviour is identical with itself” (Fulka 2003: 34). Accordingly, any such person would represent pure non-thinking and non-consciousness, and would be able to perform only actions [...] without reflection” (Fulka 2003: 34). Significantly, this type of perception would come as an un-reflected reaction to the outside world and thus could be described as taking place *outside* the perceiving mind, in objects and things. On the other hand, any consciousness that would find itself exclusively on the base “AB” would exist in “pure memory” without any excitation by the material world, dwelling in a state of continual dreaming.

This unstable and oscillatory nature of human subjectivity is of crucial importance for the presented interpretation of changed states of consciousness and exteriorisations of subjectivity in Woolf’s fiction. Returning to the problem of intuition, it is again important to stress its role as a unique Bergsonian method of reaching the dynamic and reality of the object of perception, or in other words as a way of knowing. In the *Introduction* Bergson provides us with the following definition of his intuitive-sympathetic method:

[P]hilosophers, in spite of their apparent divergences, agree in distinguishing two profoundly different ways of knowing a thing. The first implies that we move round the object; the second that we enter into it. The first depends on the point of view at which we are placed and on the symbols by which we express ourselves. The second neither depends on a point of view nor relies on any symbol. The first kind of knowledge may be said to stop at the relative; the second, in those cases where it is possible, to attain the absolute. [...] For this double reason I call such motion relative: in the one case, as in the other, I am placed outside

² For detailed explanation of the problem see Bergson (1929), Chapter III: “Different Planes of Consciousness.”

the object itself. But when I speak of an absolute movement, I am attributing to the moving object an interior and, so to speak, states of mind; I also imply that I am in sympathy with those states, and that I insert myself in them by an effort of imagination. Then, according as the object is moving or stationary, according as it adopts one movement or another, what I experience will vary. And what I experience will depend neither on the point of view I may take up in regard to the object, since I am inside the object itself, nor on the symbols by which I may translate the motion, since I have rejected all translations in order to possess the original. In short, I shall no longer grasp the movement from without, remaining where I am, but from where it is, from within, as it is in itself. I shall possess an absolute. (1912: 3)

Crucially, Bergson compares two methods of knowledge: one absolute, internal, direct, emphatic or sympathetic; the other: external, detached, partial, mediated by symbols or signs (for example by language), and relying on perspective. The first method is that of Bergsonian intuition and the second one is that of the classical method of positivist science – external observation. It is most instructive to compare the intuition as a philosophical method of exactness and absolute knowledge (Fulka 2003: 15; Deleuze 1991: 13) with the certainty offered by a classical definition, represented here by the method of Cartesian *Meditations*:

First, I know that if I have a vivid and clear thought of something, God could have created it in a way that exactly corresponds to my thought. So the fact that I can vividly and clearly think of one thing apart from another assures me that the two things are distinct from one another – that is, that they are two – since they can be separated by God. Never mind how they could be separated; that does not affect the judgment that they are distinct. So my mind is a distinct thing from my body. Furthermore, my mind is me, for the following reason. I know that I exist and that nothing else belongs to my nature or essence except that I am a thinking thing; from this it follows that my essence consists solely in my being a thinking thing, even though there may be a body that is very closely joined to me. I have a vivid and clear idea of myself as something that thinks and isn't extended, and one of body as something that is extended and does not think. So it is certain that I am really distinct from my body and can exist without it. (Descartes 1641: VI. 9)

Descartes in his epistemology famously relies on “the fact that I can vividly and clearly think of one thing apart from another [which] assures me that the two things are distinct from one another” and on the fact that the “I,” as a thinking non-extended substance, is clearly separated and *outside* of the perceived material object. The argument concerning Woolf's fiction relies precisely on different ways of transgressing these clear and distinct divisions of the Cartesian epistemology. Taking one step further, it is possible to summarize the difference between the two approaches, the classical-Cartesian and Bergsonian in terms of unity and multiplicity, or continuity and discontinuity. The classical pre-Bergsonian world is a world which relies on clarity, distinctness and isolated quality of discrete units (atoms, ideas, impressions), so typical for example for Locke's, Hume's or Hobbes's empiricism. This world is based on an analysis of these discrete units and on external observation, on keeping the boundaries between objects and subjects and not on “inserting the observer” into the object observed.

As the following pages will demonstrate, the distinction between the two approaches marks the essential difference between intuitive-internal approach, favoured by authors

such as Woolf and D. H. Lawrence, and the classical detached-external approach of the anti-romantic Wyndham Lewis or the later conservative thought of T. E. Hulme. Expressed in the spatial terms of unity, discontinuity, oneness and multiplicity, the problem becomes articulated most ostensibly on the level of material objects, their continuity in space and the discussion of the clarity, sharpness and distinctness of their outline. This being said, Woolf's texts are going to be examined for imagery that crosses, dissolves and corrodes the clear and distinct divisions between objects, and between objects and minds, using strategies that are essentially similar to the sympathetic-intuitive method that places the observer *inside* the observed object. The main achievement of this method is the unified vision of an absolute dynamism of the observed object, however, at the cost of compromising the self-integrity and destabilisation of the rational order of things that used to "stand distinct" from each other.

Akin to Worringer-Riedel's Empathy (Einfühlung), the Dionysian principle of intuitive knowledge is from the classicist perspective of the ordered, "universalist" worldview, necessarily condemned as chaotic, romantic, individualistic and subjectivist. As it will be seen, one of the reasons is that the intuitive method exposes the nominalist nature of language: its arbitrary classification, orders and categories, which are no longer granted by God or Universal laws of positivist science, but rather force reality into "moulds that always crack" (Woolf 2009: 9). When Hulme writes in his "Humanism and The Religious Attitude" about the error in the idea that "the discontinuities in nature are only apparent, and that a fuller investigation would reveal the underlying continuity," against which he sets his desire for theories which "assert the existence of absolute gaps between one region of reality and other" (Hulme 1960: 3–4), he aims at Bergson's philosophy and his *intuitive* method. The question which of the numerous gaps between objects, bodies or subjectivities are arbitrary and which are "natural" is the main focus of this essay.

Woolf's Poetics of Identification

As a natural extension of these problems, "Kew Gardens" is from the very beginning a story of movement and rest, clear-cut and discrete, outside and inside. The inherent dynamism of the story presents itself as early as in the very first sentence.

From the oval-shaped flower bed there rose perhaps a hundred stalks spreading into heart-shaped or tongue-shaped leaves half way up and unfurling at the tip red or blue or yellow petals marked with spots of colour raised upon the surface; and from the red, blue or yellow gloom of the throat emerged a straight bar, rough with gold dust and slightly clubbed at the end. (Woolf 1967: 32)

The sentence-initial preposition, together with the excess of dynamic verbs, immediately evokes a momentum of growth and vertical movement of the flowers which point away *from* the surface to the space beyond the flower bed. Due to its dynamic nature, the story quickly overflows its starting point; the narrative rapidly acquires a spatial structure typical for Woolf: a rhythmic pulsation of expansion and contraction where everything seems to be connected and smoothly passes from one thing to another. On a closer look,

it is possible to see that the rhythm of alternating expansions and contractions, which covers the whole space of the scene, comprises of two poles: a) a pole of material reality, of things that are extended and solid and often presented in a close-up, and b) a pole of abstract, fluid and immaterial reality, of memories, of words, but also of luminosity and translucence of colourful light and colour patches.

The Bergsonian dialogue between these two poles of reality, between the “granite and rainbow” (Woolf 1982: 161) of the story, is playfully expressed in the following quotation. The scene captures the moment after the focus of the narrative moves upwards from the story-central oval flower bed (first paragraph) and focuses on the periphery with a figure of a man and woman approaching it. Keeping his distance from the woman, the man remains absorbed in his day-dreaming thoughts.

“Fifteen years ago I came here with Lily,” he thought. “We sat somewhere over there by a lake and I begged her to marry me all through the hot afternoon. How the dragonfly kept cycling round us: how clearly I see the dragonfly and her shoe with the square silver bucket at the toe. All the time I spoke I saw her shoe and I knew without looking up what she was going to say: the whole of her seemed to be in her shoe. And my love, my desire, were in the dragonfly; for some reason I thought that if the dragonfly settled on the leaf she would say ‘Yes’ at once. But the dragonfly went round and round: it never settled anywhere.” (Woolf 1967: 33)

As in Lawrence’s “The Shadow in the Rose Garden” or “The Shades of Spring,” being physically present at a certain place while at the same time “mentally” occupying the same place in the past and re-living an intimate affair that once happened, there is a strange type of time travel that unites two temporal dimensions into one spatial cluster. The equivalence of the mental and physical presence allows for both the physical and mental aspects to equally contribute to an idea of reality as a sum of all possible worlds. This effect embodies a recurrent motif in Woolf’s fiction – the problem of continuity and discreteness (or dis-continuity) of the respective place. This problem can further be related to the subjectivity of the time-traveller and his Bergsonian identity in time in relation to memory and present perception which clearly imbues perceived objects with personalised significance. Meanwhile, the scene in the garden quickly evolves from the descriptive to reflective mode, further connecting the process of perception and personal memory.

Doesn’t one always think of the past, in a garden with men and women lying under the trees? Aren’t they one’s past, all that remains of it, those men and women, those ghosts lying under the trees, [...] one’s happiness, one’s reality? (1967: 33)

As a part of his analysis of a number of opening scenes from various classical novels (including Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway*, 1925, and *To the Lighthouse*), Miroslav Petříček, as if in passing, notices how an “in medias res” beginning of a book paradoxically contains simultaneous hints of continuity as well as discontinuity. Petříček develops this remark into a general observation on how this “discontinuity suddenly changes into continuity.” According to Petříček

impressionism in visual arts [...] discards painting in favour of colour and atmosphere precisely because it wants to stress the continuity of all events. However, it is precisely because of this that it finds itself in conflict with the present “moment” and its discontinuity of the pure “now.” (2009: 98–99; my translation)

The problematic nature of such “continuity in discontinuity” of a particular *now* which finds itself torn between two temporal moments while at the same time remaining united in one location or concentrated in a point in space (dragonfly, buckle, leaf) is a part of a larger cluster of spatiotemporal problems in Woolf’s fiction. These problems are connected with the need to face the (dis)continuity of not only (purely) temporal moments (if there is such a thing) but, more substantially, of objects or things, places, space and, importantly, of human subjectivity. This essentially Bergsonian question of “unity in discontinuity” is in Woolf’s story represented by its characteristic dynamism. This dynamism can be compared to the way in which the “impressionist temperament [of Woolf’s characters] thrives on dialectic movement” (Matz 2001: 177) between material and spiritual poles of reality, between “the shoe with the silver square buckle” and the dragonfly on the one hand and “my love and my desire” (Woolf 1967: 33) on the other.

The poetic naïveté of what might be described as unconscious leaning towards solid objects and material things that are momentarily at hand or close enough to provide a safe material store-house for one’s emotions, feelings and/or memories is something that might be observed on a number of occasions to follow. Expressing the irresistibility of “attaching oneself to one thing especially of the things one saw” (Woolf 1990: 54–55), “Kew Gardens” offers another instance in which mental states alight on common objects that immediately surround the thinkers, giving themselves to their sympathetic looks. The flower bed is approached by a young man and a young woman this time.

The couple stood still on the edge of the flower bed, and together pressed the end of her parasol deep down in the soft earth. The action and the fact that his hand rested on the top of hers expressed their feelings in a strange way, as [their] short insignificant words also expressed something, 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; but who knows (so they thought as they pressed the parasol into the earth) what precipices aren’t concealed in them [...]. (Woolf 1967: 37)

The concentration of meaning and emotional content that is romantically but also half-mockingly imbued into the gesture of pressing a parasol into the flower bed serves as another example of exteriorisation of the contents of one’s mind. At the same time, the downward direction of this gesture counterbalances the upward movement of the growing flowers and structurally unites the scene with the opening of the story, suggesting a complex (dis)continuous structure of horizontal layers. Each individual pair that passes the flower bed introduces its own momentum into the story and installs its own system of movement, its own interpretation of reality. Importantly, the multiplicity and heterogeneity should not be ascribed to the spatial structure of the story but also to the essentially multiple nature of human consciousness, so typical for Woolf’s psychology.

Following this trend, Woolf wrote many years later in *Orlando* (1928):

[T]hese selves of which we are built up, one on top of another, as plates are piled on a waiter's hand, have attachments elsewhere, sympathies, little constitutions and rights of their own, [...] so that one will only come if it is raining, another in a room with green curtains, another when Mrs Jones is not there, another if you can promise it a glass of wine – and so on; for everybody can multiply from his own experience the different terms which his different selves have made with him. (Woolf 2011: 294)

In respect to these newcomers, the flower bed becomes a stable centre around which their microcosms circulate and bring with them their own particular structures – the dragonfly circling around a shoe, life imbued in a buckle, a parasol pressed into the ground, and a “ponderous woman [looking] through the pattern of falling words at the flower bed standing cool, firm, and upright in the earth.”

So the heavy woman came to a standstill opposite the oval-shaped flower bed, and ceased even to pretend to listen to what the other woman was saying. She stood there letting the words slowly fall over her, swaying the top part of her body slowly backwards and forwards, looking at the flowers. (Woolf 1967: 36)

Typically, the imagery of this scene directly connects the woman with the flowers in the flower bed and temporarily disrupts the continuity of the whole space. It is easy to see how close the scene comes to a state of complete identification of the woman with the swaying flowers, underlining a significant theme that recurs in Woolf's fiction and connects early stories such as “Kew Gardens” with similar scenes from later fiction, as for example *The Waves* (1931), where the multiplicity of character-voices and human subjects finds itself very close to the situation of the woman in “Kew Gardens”: “I am green as a yew tree in the shade of the hedge. My hair is made of leaves. I am rooted to the middle of the earth. My body is a stalk” (Woolf 2008a: 8). Later on in this text, this type of disembodied perception goes even further:

So the landscape returned to me; so I saw the fields rolling in waves of colour beneath me, but now with this difference; I saw but was not seen. I walked unshadowed; I came unheralded. From me had dropped the old cloak, the old response; the hollowed hand that beats back sounds. Thin as a ghost, leaving no trace where I trod, *perceiving merely*, I walked alone in a new world, never trodden; brushing new flowers, unable to speak save in a child's words of one syllable. (Woolf 2008a: 239)

Such moments of sympathetic identification of an individual with “his” perceived objects, in which one's consciousness momentarily disappears and sees but is “not seen” and the only thing that remains is an inhuman gaze that penetrates into the depths of matter are strongly reminiscent of the problems formulated by Bergson's philosophy discussed above.

Embodying Bergsonian pure perception, i.e. perception without remembering, unheralded, untainted by the *old* cloak, *old* response, *old* memory, the narrator, *merely perceiving*, walks alone worlds that are new, worlds that were never trodden before, worlds which are not *remembered*, only perceived ever again, ever afresh. Perception without memory

leaves no traces; it sees its object always for the first time, as if it would “die and be born again continually” (Bergson 1912: 12–13). The extreme doctrine of sensation which such scenes represent shows a state in which the human subject is set free from the load of the *temps perdu* and temporarily becomes identified with the object it perceives. The inability to speak save in “child’s words” is only a natural extension of these problems precisely because human language, in its nominalist and conventionalist nature, relies on the same kind of repetition as perception that is not pure and relies on memory.

Returning to the discussion of the spatial arrangement of “Kew Gardens,” it is further possible to observe that the flower bed, besides being the centre of the story, has a structure and a story of its own. The flower bed is a place of a qualitatively diverse and more or less linear passage of time (the journey of the snail) that stands in opposition to the non-linear private temporal systems of those who walk past it. As was pointed out, individual visitors are temporarily related to the flower bed as to the natural centre of the spatial arrangement of the story. This flower bed thus constitutes a sort of planetary system around which the newcomers revolve for a while, tracing the oval-shaped orbit of the flower bed, perhaps even pausing for a while, and inevitably disappearing beyond the frame of the story. From this perspective, it is interesting to observe the extent to which the flower bed “double-frames” the space of the story.

If we imagine the flower bed as a picture that is framed and whose frame is the very condition of the existence of the story’s concentric composition, its frame not only frames what is inside it (the snail and the flowers) but also what is outside it, i.e. the movement of the passers-by and their impressionistic disappearance that is staged, in a typical fashion, as a loss of shape/outline and a merging with the colour-background.

Thus one couple after another with much the same irregular and aimless movement passed the flower-bed and were enveloped in layer after layer of green blue vapour, in which at first their bodies had substance and a dash of colour, but later both substance and colour dissolved in the green-blue atmosphere. [...] Yellow and black, pink and snow white, shapes of all these colours, men, women, and children were spotted for a second upon the horizon, and then, seeing the breadth of yellow that lay upon the grass, they wavered and sought shade beneath the trees, dissolving like drops of water in the yellow and green atmosphere, staining it faintly with red and blue. It seemed as if all gross and heavy bodies had sunk down in the heat motionless and lay huddled upon the ground, but their voices went wavering from them as if they were flames lolling from the thick waxen bodies of candles. (Woolf 1967: 38–39)

The difference between the clearly demarcated line of the oval bed and the vagueness or haziness of the colourful vapours and shadows introduces an important distinction between the solid and the fluid and calls to mind the classical distinction between line and colour in visual arts, in which the choice between line and colour expresses contradictory artistic aims:

the adherence to line was understood as a expression of the desire to make an objective statement about the reality portrayed; the predilection for colour, on the other hand, was understood as indicating the wish to reproduce the reality as it appeared to the senses, without the intermediacy of inquisitive, discriminating observation. (Barash 1998: 19)

The impressionistic quality of the mode of representation that dissolves the boundaries between objects becomes a gesture performed from a privileged position of uninterested detachment, of pure observation, without any pre-mediation of expectation, without any pre-established social, epistemological, linguistic or gender pre-classification, or, to allude to the Bergsonian formulation of the problem, without *memory*, which in this context becomes a carrier of individuality. Importantly, Bergson's thought of pure perception brings the perceiving consciousness dangerously close to the perceived object, or, literally, places the perception *within* the object as such. As Josef Fulka points out in his most instructive study on Bergson's notion of memory: "The impersonal perception, the perception in its pure state, is rather a part of the things perceived than of ourselves. Because it is deprived of all traces of its individual character, it would make us [...] see things where they find themselves rather than in us" (2006: 27).

The problem of memory in Woolf's stories is naturally connected to the problem of time. Time, as it was argued above, is in Woolf's fiction in turn closely tied to the problem of space. Shifting perspective from the microcosm of the flower bed to the macrocosm of the walking pairs, the story juxtaposes a number of mutually connected spatial systems or units that embed different time-flows. In this respect, the spatio-temporal structure of the story stands very close to Joseph Frank's discussion of the spatialization of form in modernist prose. In his *The Idea of Spatial Form*, Frank offers the following analysis of a country fair scene from Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, based on the fact that: "For the duration of the scene, at least, the time flow of the narrative is halted; attention is fixed on the interplay of relationships in the immobilized time-area" (1991: 33).

Adhering to the main points of Frank's analysis, Woolf's text analogously juxtaposes "units of meaning" (individual scenes), without halting the "interplay of relationships in the immobilized time-area," however. Instead of freezing the flow of the narrative, Woolf's text relies on *simultaneous* existence and juxtaposition of regions with a different flow of time, or "heterochronies" (Foucault 1984: n.pag.). As the attention of the story focuses on the people who pass the flower bed, the time-frame in the flower bed passes at its own (very slow) pace while, at the same time, the garden as a whole lives its life against the background of the murmuring city with its "motor omnibuses." As Woolf herself puts it some eleven years later in her biographical novel *Orlando*, the heterogeneous nature of time is for her something quite natural and represents a recurrent topic in her fiction.

[A] conclusion which, one cannot help feeling, might have been reached more quickly by simple statement that "Time passed" [...]. But Time, unfortunately, though it makes animals and vegetables bloom and fade with amazing punctuality, has no simple effect upon the mind of man. The mind of man, moreover, works with equal strangeness upon the body of time. An hour, once it lodges in the queer element of human spirit, may be stretched to fifty or a hundred times its clock length; on the other hand, an hour may be accurately represented on the mantelpiece of the mind by one second. This extraordinary discrepancy between time on the clock and time in the mind is less known than it should be and deserves fuller investigation. (Woolf 2011: 94–95)

Keeping in mind the well-known distinction between the qualitative and quantitative conceptualisation of time, it is important to point out that the heterogeneous nature of time cannot be treated separately from the analogically heterogeneous nature of space.

Going beyond the Bergsonian treatment of time and space, and drawing out the implication of Foucault's statement that "[h]eterotopias are most often linked to slices in time," it is necessary to stress that each heterotopia is also necessarily a heterochronia. Similarly for Foucault: "The heterotopia begins to function at full capacity when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time" (1984: n.pag.).

The absolute break with traditional time, which is the standardized time of the Big Ben as in *Mrs. Dalloway* or the habitual time of everyday routines and rituals, is granted in "Kew Gardens" precisely by the sketched complex spatio-temporal structure of the story in its triple-concentric heterotopic structure (London – Kew Gardens – flower bed) but also by the temporally limited halts and stops in the dynamic flow of the story. All of these moments illustrate not only the space-based multi-temporality of the story's structure but also attest to the qualitative rather than quantitative understanding of time as flowing with different pace in different places. On the background of what was demonstrated, these individual regions of qualitatively different time are centred in Woolf's texts around the axis of the flower bed and connected with some firm materiality, such as the shoe buckle. The way in which these material objects embed folded memories, emotions, feelings and other "stuff of thought," plays a crucial role in an equally famous story – "The Mark on the Wall."

Solid and Fluid

Analogically to "Kew Gardens," the spatial structure of "The Mark on the Wall" is essentially concentric, or to be more precise – double-concentric. The text likewise adheres to a loosely cosmological structure, although it differs from "Kew Gardens" in that the role of the material centre of the story, a mark on the wall, from which the story emanates and to which it returns, is much more concentrated than the flower bed. Contrary to "Kew Gardens," where the movement of the focal point shifts from the flower bed to individual visitors who pass by it and eventually "dissolve like drops of water in the yellow and green atmosphere" (Woolf 1967: 30), "The Mark on the Wall" offers a structure of two centres: the mark (a solid material pole) and the narrator, i.e., the observing subject and her "train of thought" (Woolf 1967: 46). These two poles effectively set the framework of the whole story, illustrating "[h]ow readily our thoughts swarm upon a new object, lifting it a little way, as ants carry a blade of straw so feverishly, and then leave it" (Woolf 1967: 40).

The mark itself can be interpreted as having a number of related functions. In the first place, it is a solid and fixed external reference point, a counterpart of the fluidity and instability of human consciousness. As such, it rhythmically reappears in the text and surfaces from the waves of fluid thoughts as something towards which the contemplating consciousness always clings to in order to escape from itself. The dialectics of liquid thoughts and their external reference points in material reality again echoes the key themes in Woolf's fiction – the dynamic dialectics of solid and fluid, stable and dynamic. Once again, this dialectics is in Woolf's fiction very closely related to the discussion of the problematic position of the human subject. The following extract offers more material to address these problems in context:

Indeed, now that I have fixed my eyes upon it [mark on the wall], I feel that I have grasped a plank in the sea; [...] Here is something definite, something real. Thus, waking from a midnight dream of horror, one hastily turns on the light and lies quiescent, worshipping chest of drawers, worshipping solidity, worshipping reality, worshipping the impersonal world which is a proof of some other existence than ours. That is what one wants to be sure of. [...] Wood is pleasant to think about. It comes from a tree; and trees grow, and we don't know they grow. [...] I like to think about the tree itself: first the close dry sensation of being wood; then the grinding of the storm; then the slow, delicious ooze of sap. (Woolf 1967: 47)

In Woolf's universe solid things and materials are safe to turn to. A thing as simple as a newly perceived cupboard offers an escape from the complexity of inter-subjective as well as intra-subjective relations. Paradoxically, such object is reassuring as well as, given the intricacies of Bergsonian pure perception, extremely dangerous. As Septimus in Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, experiencing his mortal fear of a dangerously real gramophone, has it: "[R]eal things – real things were too exciting. [...] Nothing could be more exact. [...] None of these things moved. All were still; all were real" (Woolf 2000: 120). These objects, for example the mark on the wall, play an important role in Woolf's conceptualization of human subjectivity and its occasional tendency to cling to material objects.

This role consists of destabilising the coherence of what in the western philosophical tradition is typically referred to as "subject" in a loosely Cartesian sense, that is, the idea of human subjectivity as a "fixed, indivisible, and permanent whole (I think, therefore I am) [which] has underpinned existing notions of consciousness and reason" (Elliott 1994: 6). As part of this effort, the following discussion focuses on specific states of heightened perceptive intensity in which the perceiving subject stumbles on the verge of collapse and mixes itself with what it perceives.

The Successive Self

In her well-known criticism of the so-called Edwardian authors, published in a thematically related series of essays "Modern Fiction" (1919), "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown" (1923), and "Character in Fiction" (1924), Woolf reproaches the old generation of authors for paying too much attention to material and social aspects of reality while neglecting various shades or tones of consciousness. As a result of this critique, Woolf utilises in her texts her own original version of materialism which overcomes the supposed materialism of her literary predecessors by systematically levelling and/or blurring the subject-object boundary. The instability which results from Woolf's innovative approach to consciousness is a recurrent motif in her fiction.

All of these motifs can be interpreted in relation to the Bergsonian position, according to which human consciousness cannot be described as a single, stable and homogeneous whole but rather as transitioning between "diverse tones of mental life" so that "our psychic life might be lived at different heights, now nearer to action, now further removed from it, according to the degree of *our attention to life*" (Bergson 1929: xiv).

A similar reading is advocated by Jesse Matz who in his *Literary Impressionism and Modernist Aesthetics* relates Woolf's deliberate choice not to provide her readers with

a conclusive treatment of human subjectivity and her reserved attitude towards philosophy to Woolf's statement that "human mind, as opposed to the critical one, varies" (Matz 1998: 175). Woolf herself formulates a very interesting statement on the dynamic nature of the unity of the human subject, or "Self" in her 1927 short story-like essay entitled "Street Haunting." In this text Woolf discusses the dynamic nature of human subjectivity based on the classical problem of unity of the self in time and the idea of the self as a heterogeneous mixture. Stopping for a while in her "quest for an ink pencil," Woolf deliberates:

But what could be more absurd? It is, in fact, on the stroke of six; it is a winter's evening; we are walking on the Strand to buy a pencil. How, then, are we also on a balcony, wearing pearls in June? What could be more absurd? Yet it is nature's folly, not ours. When she set about her chief masterpiece, the making of man, she should have thought of one thing only. Instead, turning her head, looking over her shoulder, into each one of us she let creep instincts and desires which are utterly at variance with his main being, so that we are streaked, variegated, all of mixture; the colours have run. Is the true self this which stands on the pavement in January, or that which bends over the balcony in June? Am I here, or am I there? Or is the true self neither this nor that, neither here nor there, but something so varied and wandering that it is only when we give the rein to its wishes and let it take its way unimpeded that we are indeed ourselves? Circumstances compel unity; for convenience's sake a man must be a whole. The good citizen when he opens his door in the evening must be banker, golfer, husband, father; not a nomad wandering the desert. (Woolf 2009: 182–183)

Instead of being clearly separated from the Non-I, Woolf clearly treats the self as a "mixture" of different "colours" and various *outside* influences. From the conventional unity of this aggregate, the self (in a rather postmodern gesture) radiates to its own *supplementary* outside, distracted by desires, and "choked with observations" (Woolf 2008b: 91). The idea of human subjectivity Woolf gives in her essay addresses the problems discussed so far. In Woolf's account, individual moments in the linear existence of the self are simultaneously placed next to each other and their substantial unity and belonging to "oneself" is questioned. Perhaps it is this "multiplicity in unity" of the self which motivates Woolf's occasional multiplication of sentence-subjects. The following extract from *Mrs. Dalloway* is a very good example of this strategy which translates a metaphysical principle onto the level of syntax. Each deliberately and from the stylistic perspective redundant "she" represents a slightly different "self" from the next "she" of the supposedly "identical" subject:

She reached the Park gates. She stood for a moment, looking at the omnibuses in Piccadilly. She would not say of anyone in the world now that they were this or that they were that. She felt very young; at the same time unspeakably aged. She sliced like knife through everything; at the same time was outside, looking on. (Woolf 2000: 7)

The excessive multiplication of subjects in the extract above contributes to the feeling of the successive existence of the human subject in Woolf's "Street Haunting." It is very interesting to compare this problem of the unity of a self, which is unable to accommodate the temporal multiplicity of its successive states, with Bergson's dynamic account of

consciousness. The changes that each individual “she” undergoes while perceiving things create a new, slightly modified “she.” What gives unity to these successive selves? Is it one’s personal memory? If so, what happens to the self in a state of pure perception? In *An Introduction to Metaphysics* Bergson offers a formulation that explicates Woolf’s multiplication of “shes”:

Now, there are no two identical moments in the life of the same conscious being. [...]he consciousness which will accompany this sensation cannot remain identical with itself for two consecutive moments, because the second moment always contains, over and above the first, the memory that the first has bequeathed to it. (Bergson 1912: 12–13)

Dwelling on the problems of unity and multiplicity as well as on the problem of (dis) continuity of the self, of perception, and in turn of reality as such, Woolf’s fiction relies on the cavernous duality of two terms or notions: the duality of the solid and the fluid or the continuous and discrete. The interaction between these two notions and their respective effect on the character of human subjectivity and its coherence acquires crucial importance in Woolf’s treatment of human perception.

One of the instances in which this instability manifests itself most acutely is the existence of peculiar mental states in which consciousness overcomes the Cartesian duality and mixes itself with material objects, subsists in them or becomes completely exteriorized and identified with its object, leading towards states in which “an object mixes itself so profoundly with the stuff of thought that it loses its actual form and recomposes itself a little differently in an ideal shape which haunts the brain when we least expect it” (Woolf 1967: 80).

Thought not very well known, “A Simple Melody” is a remarkable short story which Woolf began to write in early 1925. Expanding on the theme of changed states of mind related to material objects, “A Simple Melody” benefits from intricate spatial organisation, and charmingly develops the crucial dynamic of things that are continuous and at the same time discreet. It tells a story of a man who, while being bored at a high-society party, projects himself into a landscape painting that hangs on the wall of a party room. Reminiscent of Thomas Hardy’s poetics, the painting captures a Norwich heath-landscape with a pond and a nearby group of women, strolling in natural surroundings: “Like all landscapes it made one sad, because the heath would so long outlast all people; but the sadness was so elevated [...], it was beautiful, that it should endure” (Woolf 2003: 196).

The sympathetic identification of Mr Carslake, the protagonist of the story, with this painting is of a slightly different kind than those discussed so far, for example in “Kew Gardens” or in *To the Lighthouse*. Instead of straightforwardly relying on a concept of identity between the perceiver and the perceived, the sympathetic appreciation of the painting in this story takes the form of multiplication of the perceiver’s subjectivity, which temporarily finds itself in two places at once: standing in the corner of the party room while at the same time walking in the picture. It is important to note the similarity of this concept with Woolf’s Bergsonian discussion of the unity of the self in time and space in “Street Haunting.” With the party the scene continues and the narrator explains that:

It often happened to George Carslake; there was nothing strange about it – this sense of being in two places at once, with one body here in a London drawing-room, but so severed, that the peace of the country, its uncompromising bareness and hardness and spirit, affected that body. He stretched his legs. He felt the breeze on his cheek. (Woolf 2003: 199)

The scene relies on the simultaneous existence of an individual in two spaces, one physical, the other mental (or imagined), united solely by the spectator. The situation is similar to the experience of the characters physically present at a certain location while at the same time mentally occupying the same place in the past, uniting two temporal dimensions into one spatial structure, as discussed above. The action that takes place in the pseudo-idyllic setting of the picture clearly seems to be heterotopic, standing in sharp contrast to the artificial social space and the time of the ongoing party.

The two spaces, that of the picture and that of the party, are in the story contrasted at least at two points. First, both places have their own special discourse. Consistently with Woolf's mistrust of language, the main character constantly complains about the artificial, unnatural and mannerist character of the party-talk as well as the desperate behaviour of other party guests whom he imagines to be as bored and repulsed as he is. The guests are talking "silly nonsense" (Woolf 2003: 199), they are "not listening to each other" (2003: 195) or suffer silently, "standing alone lifting a paper knife in his hand and looking at it in a strange way" (2003: 196). Necessarily based on social convention and a certain code of behaviour, the criticised party discourse simply "produces dissimilarity" between people, and fails to capture the simplicity and almost scarcity of "little simple talk" that would be shared by people in a "natural condition" – for example while walking on the heath, i.e., in the picture.

All human beings were very simple underneath, he [Mr Carslake] felt. Put Queen Mary, Miss Merewether and himself on the heath; it was late in the evening; after sunset; and they had to find their way back to Norwich. Soon they would all be talking quite naturally. [...] They would be talking about the way; how far it was; and whether this was the sort of country they liked; also, if they were hungry; and what they would have for dinner. That was natural talk. (Woolf 2003: 195–196)

The Rousseauesque distinction between the two types of discourse implies the over-complicated nature of human relationships and turns to the painting, which in this respect resembles a still-life rather than a landscape painting, as a means of withdrawal from the ever-increasing demands posed by the over-complexity of human relationships, social conventions and mechanical language that fails to capture the essential aspects of human existence and traps reality "into the words" (Woolf 2003: 197). Consequently, the image of the heath is often associated with the landscapes of Thomas Hardy, whom Woolf knew very well, representing a mechanism that, as one of the greatest admirers of Hardy's work, D. H. Lawrence, has it: "sets the human consciousness within the vast, uncomprehended and incomprehensible morality of nature or life itself" (Lawrence 1970: 419). Thereby, the picture represents a contribution to what seems to be one of Woolf's cardinal topics – the difficulty or even impossibility of human communication, or, in Woolf's own spatial metaphor, of "fitting one's mind to other people's" (Woolf 2003: 198).

From this perspective, the simplification of human relationships to what is “natural” is a tendency that can be found in all of the stories concerned with the relationship of one’s subjectivity with the perceived material object. Articulating the same problem in a different way, the momentary standstill and sympathetic identification of the woman in “Kew Gardens,” and the narrator’s conscious withdrawal from the world of action by not coming to look closer in “The Mark on the Wall,”³ but also the bizarre collection of glass lumps in “Solid Objects,” represents the same escape from “the human” (i.e., the social, the articulated, the regulated, the clear-cut, the fixed) and depicts a move towards impersonal objectivity and perhaps even unification with material objects, towards transcending everyday existence in search of “some crystal of intensity, remote from the known pleasures and familiar virtues, something alien to the processes of domestic life, single, hard, bright, like a diamond in the sand, which would render the possessor secure” (Woolf 1990: 116–117).

As part of his meditation on what it would feel like to be in the painting rather than at the party, George imagines himself and other characters walking on the heath and, importantly, swimming in the pond. The pond, the central element of the landscape scenery, becomes for him a symbol of this new, simple and natural understanding – a rebirth, a recollection. As such, it becomes a sort of alternative “equal ground” on which he and other party guests can meet and which would act as a sort of topographical objective correlative.

Perhaps one was a little brutalized by the open air. Thirst brutalized; a blister on the heel. When he [George] was walking there was a hardness and freshness about things: no confusion; no wobbling; the division at least between the known and the unknown was as distinct as the rim of a pond – here was dry land, here water. Now a curious thought struck him – that the waters possessed an attraction for the people on earth. When Stuart Elton took his paper knife or Mabel Waring looked about to burst into tears, and that man with the tooth brush moustache glared, it was because they all wished to take to the water. But what was the water? Understanding, perhaps. There must be someone who is so miraculously endowed, so fitted with all the parts of human nature, that these silences and unhappinesses, which were the result of being unable to fit one’s mind to other people’s, were all rightly understood. Stuart Elton dived in: Mabel dived. Some went under and were satisfied; others came gasping to the top. He [George] was relieved to find himself thinking of death as a plunge into a pond; for he was alarmed at the mind’s instinct, when unguarded, to rise into clouds and Heaven, and rig up the old comfortable figure, the old flowing garments and mild eyes and cloud like mantle. In the pond, on the other hand, were newts, and fish and mud. The point about the pond was that one had to create it for oneself; new, brand new. (Woolf 2003: 198)

It is very interesting to observe the unexpected way in which this scene develops the theme of impersonality and a sort of transcendence of material reality, which has already been observed in the previous stories. “A Simple Melody” seems to favour the impersonal,

³ As the narrator herself puts it: “I want to think quietly, calmly, spaciouly, *never to be interrupted, never to have to rise from my chair*, to slip easily from one thing to another, without any sense of hostility or obstacle. I want to sink deeper and deeper, away from the surface, with its hard and separate facts” (Woolf 1967: 42).

down-to-earth realm of the heath landscape to the helter-skelter of human interaction. Importantly, the key to telling the two apart is the clearness and visibility of divisions, of dividing lines between things, between land and water or between the known and the unknown. The story relies on imagery and mood that echo Hardy's or Lawrence's landscape imagery rather than the impressionist representation of landscape and reality more commonly characteristic of Woolf's art, for example the park in "Kew Gardens," numerous passages in *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves*. The heavily asserted materiality of the pond becomes a symbol of death by drowning as opposed to the "mind's instinct [...] to rise to clouds [...] and there to sing and meet the dead" (Woolf 2003: 198), reminiscent again of D.H. Lawrence and his water scenes, such as "The Water Party" in *Women in Love*, the flood scene in *The Rainbow* or, perhaps most acutely, the pond-wading scene in "The Horse-dealer's Daughter." Water, however, also testifies to the inherent ability of our conscience to radiate beyond the reach of our centralized self and to multiply one's experience, following the diverse needs of the "selves" within the mind.

Similarly to John's sympathy for pieces of matter in "Solid Objects," George's sympathy for nature and his anti-social behaviour puts him into a position of a "dark horse" and a "queer fish" (Woolf 2003: 201). Ironically, both John and George can be seen as being aware of some type of exoteric, impersonal knowledge of the materiality of non-human things, objects and landscapes, which "emphasize the nonhuman realm of objects that contains and transcends complicated human activities" (Gillespie 1991: 228). As both stories clearly show, this knowledge is, or at least threatens to be, a reductive one, precisely because it grants understanding only at the cost of reducing and simplifying what is essentially human to the inhuman gaze of Bergsonian pure perception. Woolf takes the non-human nature of the affinity between the mind and matter, time and space, spirit and extension far beyond mere metaphorical account, as it is possible to observe from the following account:

He [George] thought at once of the lark, of the sky, of the view. The walker's thoughts and emotions were largely made up of these outside influences. Walking thoughts were half sky; if you could submit them to chemical analysis, you would find that they had some grains of colour in them, some gallons or quarts or pints of air attached to them. This at once made them airier, more impersonal. But in this [party] room, thoughts were jostled together like fish in a net, struggling, scraping each other's scales off, and becoming, in the effort to escape, – for all thinking is an effort to make through escape from the thinker's mind past all obstacles as completely as possible: all society is an attempt to seize and influence and coerce each thought as it appears and force it to yield to another. So he could see everyone engaged. But it was not, strictly, thought; it was being, oneself, that was here in conflict with other beings and selves. Here was no impersonal colouring mixture: here walls, lights, the houses outside, all reinforce humanity, being themselves expression of humanity. People pressed upon each other; rubbed each other's bloom off, or, for it told both ways, stimulated and called out an astonishing animation, made each other glow. Whether pleasure or pain predominated, he could not say. On the heath, there would be no doubt about it. (Woolf 2003: 200)

The influence of the heath environment goes as far as literally mixing the material particles of the air and colour with the walker's thoughts, compromising his subjectivity

when George thinks “at once of the lark, of the sky, of the view.” The walker’s mind, mixing itself with what it perceives, can be considered very problematic. One of the side-effects of Woolf’s strategy of mixtures and material influences that press upon human subjectivity and replace parts of it with “impersonal colouring mixtures” is the loss of the classical, unproblematic homogeneity and integrity of the human subject, championed not only by Edwardian authors but also by positivist science and pragmatic, radical empiricist philosophies, so prominent at that time. The title of the story, “A Simple Melody,” already suggests that the escape from the complexities of human interaction can only take place at the risk of reducing “the human” to what is in the story referred to as the simplicity or sincerity of natural thoughts. To put the matter perhaps a bit crudely, George’s walk on the heath is sincere since it reduces the over-complexity of social reality to a blister on a heel or, in other words, to yet another collection of “solid objects.” The straightforward nature of these material counterparts to the fluidity of the human mind, which Woolf describes in her fiction as moments of extreme proximity (or even identity) between the perceiving subject and the perceived objects, thus becomes both remedy and poison. The double-edged nature of these objects typically announces itself through spatial imagery and the rhetoric of solid and fluid, stable and dynamic, continuous and discrete, clear and blurred, one and many.

Similar problems are strongly present in another of Woolf’s minor short-story sketches – “The Fascination of the Pool.” Written in 1929, this appropriately named short story adheres to the material sympathy of water, depicting an unnamed character sitting in front of a pool and meditating on those who sat there and looked into the pool in the past. With symbolic clarity, the dark and seemingly limitless depth of the pond blatantly contrasts with a white placard that floats on the surface, announcing the sale of a nearby farm.

The centre of the water reflected the white placard and when the wind blew the centre of the pool seemed to flow and ripple like a piece of washing. One could trace the big red letters in which Romford Mill was printed in the water. A tinge of red was in the green that rippled from bank to bank. But if one sat down among the rushes and watched the pool – pools have some strange fascination, one knows not what. The red and black letters and the white paper seemed to lie very thinly on the surface, while beneath went some profound under-water life like the brooding, the ruminating of a mind. (Woolf 2003: 220)

The picture of the pool in this particular story once more harks back to the impressionist mood of dissolving colours, reflections, depths and surfaces. In its openly symbolic structure, the secrets of the pond are safely coiled in the underwater life, both beyond and beneath the floating signifier that sails on the surface, dissolved, dislocated, pointing towards nothing, and stressing the inadequacy of the standard forms of human communication to capture the richness of the underwater brooding. Unlike the pond in “A Simple Melody,” the scenery here is not brutalizing and impersonal, but at the same time it does not favour distinct, clear cut divisions. Being rather poetic and mellow, the scene nevertheless makes use of very similar imagery: a thin line of appearances on the surface and a profound life brooding underneath. Holding on to its poetic qualities, the prevalingly realistic description of the pond takes an unexpected esoteric turn.

Day-dreaming on a bank of the pond, the heroine, overcome by the spirit of the place, notes the following:

Many, many people must have come there alone, from time to time, from age to age, dropping their thoughts into the water, asking it some questions, as one did oneself this summer evening. Perhaps that was the reason of its fascination – that it held in its waters all kinds of fancies, complaints, confidences, not printed or spoken aloud, but in a liquid state, floating one on top of another, almost disembodied. A fish would swim through them, be cut in two by the blade of a reed; or the moon would annihilate them with its great white plate. The charm of the pool was that thoughts had been left there by the people who had gone away and without their bodies their thoughts wondered in and out freely, friendly and communicative, in the common pool. Among all these liquid thoughts some seemed to stick together and to form recognisable people – just for a moment. (Woolf 2003: 221)

What seemed to be a mere metaphorical representation of a “profound under-water life [pictured as] the brooding, the ruminating of a mind” transforms into another instance of a mixture of mind and matter, this time in a sort of reverse – not materials subsisting in thought but liquid thoughts subsisting in the water. Consistently with the well-established rhetoric of fluid and solid, the disembodied thoughts freely compose and recompose themselves, as they are “cut in two by the blade of a reed.” Although not so structurally complex as “A Simple Melody,” the story has a typical concentric structure with a material core that, similarly to “Kew Gardens” or “The Mark on the Wall,” contains within itself a compressed multiplicity of thoughts, images and memories. These fragments, the “incessant shower of innumerable atoms [and] shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday” (Woolf 1967: 88), continually form new interpretations once imbued with their imagined significance. Relying on similar tropes, the pool, like the silver shoe buckle, the dragonfly or the painting of the heath, becomes a material container or a battery within which folded thoughts, memories or emotions unfold and evolve. Containing in its depths stories of a “man who had been to the Exhibition; and the girl who had drowned herself and the boy who had seen the fish; and the voice which cried alas alas!” (Woolf 2003: 221), the pool becomes a strange node that condenses the multiplicity of temporal events in one location and replaces temporal succession with the spatial arrangement of depth. Significantly, in what might be seen as her own genuinely post-Bergsonian poetics, Woolf here systematically transcends the Bergsonian idea of space as a homogeneous, quantitative multiplicity, and ascribes to it the fluid and dynamic qualities Bergsonian metaphysics reserves for time qua duration.

The qualitative multiplicity of space that concentrates compressed or folded memories and “thoughts [that] come and cover one another” (Woolf 2003: 221), interacting with the subjectivity from the outside, is a recurring theme of Woolf’s fiction. Be it pieces of glass, snails, dragonflies, pictures, trees or ponds, all of these material and impersonal objects become “reverie companions of the dreamer” (Bachelard 1970: 162) that directly influence his *cogito*. As Gaston Bachelard poetically puts it in his analysis, in such states the “*cogito* of the dreamer”

is easy; it is sincere, it is linked very naturally to its complementary object. Good things, soft things offer themselves in complete innocence to the innocent dreamer. And the dreams

(*songes*) accumulate in front of a familiar object. [...] Easy certainties come to enrich the dreamer. A communication of being develops in both directions between the dreamer and his world. A great dreamer of objects [...] knows those hours when reverie becomes animated in an undulating ontology. An ontology with two united poles reverberates its certainties. (Bachelard 1970: 162–163)

Adhering to an interpretation that sees the numerous instances of changed states of mind in Woolf's fiction as standing very close to what might be described as a dream-state or reverie, it is possible to paraphrase with Bachelard that the idea of human existence should be understood as closely coexisting with its material pole: loving "beneath all this summer transiency, to feel the earth's spine beneath him; or [...] anything indeed, so long as it was hard" (Woolf 2011: 18–19), and expressing the impossibility to resist the "strange intimation which every gull, flower, tree, man and woman, and the white earth itself seemed to declare" (Woolf 1990: 116–117).

At the same time, however, it finds itself constantly stretched in the dialectical dynamism between itself and its object. Drawing on the last two stories, Woolf's texts indeed manifest a sort of positive or friendly naivety, openness and innocence. The way in which individual characters approach the objects of their fascination but also the way in which these objects "offer themselves" to the imagination of their dreamers can thus be seen as a trademark of Woolf's poetics. The naïveté of Woolf's fiction should not be understood in a generic, potentially derogatory sense but as a deliberate manifestation of her well-elaborated rejection of pre-established social and linguistic structures of the world, a rejection of an uncritical acceptance of the hypothesis of the world, and an attempt to stretch one's mind outside of social, linguistic and cognitive patterns, into the "world seen without a self" (Woolf 2008a: 239).

As Bachelard further points out, a process in which "[t]he reverie dreamer's diffuse cogito receives from the object of its reverie [is] a tranquil confirmation of its existence" (Bachelard 1970: 166), the mutual dependence of the dreaming consciousness and the dreamed object "equalizes the dreamer and the object" (1970: 154). Coming close to the Bergsonian line of thought, Bachelard systematically talks about a special kind of dreaming – about a "sub-human" reverie. This type of sub-humanity is closely connected with the special kind of impersonal humanity which was identified as the core of Woolf's post-Bergsonian approach to the representation of human consciousness.

Another variation on the topic of in-human or sub-human day-dreaming are stories that further complicate the simultaneous multiplication of spaces by playing with framing and reflection. Besides the already discussed "The Fascination of the Pool," it is "The Searchlight" or, more importantly, "The Lady in the Looking-Glass: A Reflection."

Reflections and Mirrors

Published in 1929, "The Lady in the Looking-Glass" depicts yet another short significant scene from the life of an individual that contains a very close relationship with material objects. Reminiscent of Septimus's gramophone anxiety, "The Lady in the Looking-Glass" introduces an analogous indoor drama of an indiscreet mirror that attempts to

freeze reality, failing to capture an anthropomorphised gang of animated house-objects. At the very beginning of the story the reader finds out that:

The house was empty, and one felt, since one was the only person in the drawing-room, like one of those naturalists, who, covered with grass and leaves, lie watching the shyest animals – badgers, otters, kingfishers – moving about freely, themselves unseen. The room that afternoon was full of such shy creatures, lights and shadows, curtains blowing, petals falling – things that never happen, so it seems, if someone is looking. [...] Nothing stayed the same for two seconds together. But outside, the looking-glass reflected the hall table, the sunflowers, the garden path so accurately and so fixedly that they seemed held there in their reality inescapably. It was a strange contrast – all changing here, all stillness there. One could not help looking from one to the other. (Woolf 1967: 87)

Playfully punning on the old idealist dilemma dealing with what happens to the world when the observer turns away or closes his eyes, Woolf's story, comparing a curtain to an otter, paradoxically attributes life and change to inanimate objects and stillness to their images fixed in the mirror. On the most obvious level, the spatial organisation of the story relies on the simultaneous existence of two heterogeneous types of space – the space in the mirror, with its fixed time and intolerance of human imagination, and, in opposition to it, the space of the room with the “transient and perishing” otter-like curtains: “there was a peaceful sighing and ceasing sound, the voice of the transient and perishing, [...] while in the looking-glass things had ceased to breathe and lay still in the trance of immortality” (Woolf 1967: 87).

Significantly, Woolf experiments in the story with a fixed linear perspective from which the narrator, uncompromisingly seated in the “depths of the sofa” (Woolf 1967: 86), looks into the mirror and sees reality through it. This strategy only increases the degree of stability of things reflected in it. The use of a fixed perspective is not a common in strategy in Woolf's texts, with one important exception – “The Mark on the Wall.” In “The Mark on the Wall,” the narrator is also comfortably seated most of the time, “surrounded by solid furniture” (1967: 41), not thinking for a moment about standing up and checking the stained wall herself, i.e., she looks at the mark from one fixed point and does not move around the perceived object. Furthermore, both “The Mark on the Wall” and “The Lady in the Looking-Glass” deal with a number of closely related epistemological issues: the nature and conditions of truth, and the contrast between dynamic and static, solid and fluid reality, objects, thoughts and imagination.

In addition to the role played by the fixed perspective, the epistemological conditions of both stories are directly affected by an intricate system of reflections. Curiously enough, the role of these reflections as well of the looking-glasses seems to be a little different in both stories. The narrator in “The Mark on the Wall,” meditating about “dressing up a figure of [herself] in [her] own mind,” observes the following:

[I]t is curious, how instinctively one protects the image of oneself. [...] It is a matter of great importance. Supposing the looking-glass smashes, the image disappears, and the romantic figure with the green of forest depths all about it is there no longer, but only that shell of a person which is seen by other people – what an airless, shallow, bald, prominent world it becomes! A world not to be lived in. (Woolf 1967: 43)

In this extract, Woolf in fact introduces two types of reflection. The first is the image in the looking-glass, in fact a self-image, which seems to be positive, something that makes the world more interesting or worthwhile to live in. This is the image set against the second type of reflection, which is a “shell of a person *seen* by other people.” Considering Woolf’s imagery and her arguments, it is tempting to say that the difference between these two types of reflection, which is at the same time a difference in representation, is analogical to Woolf’s well-known distinction between Edwardian and Georgian writers from her famous 1920s essay series:

As we face each other in omnibuses and underground railways we are looking into the mirror; that accounts for the vagueness, the gleam of glassiness, in our eyes. And the novelists in the future will realize more and more the importance of these reflections, for of course there is not one reflection but an almost infinite number; these are the depths they will explore, those the phantoms they will pursue, leaving the description of reality more and more out of their stories, taking a knowledge of it for granted. (Woolf 1967: 44)

The influence of these strange reflections which covers the clear-cut reality of standard, opaque things in “The Mark on the Wall” is a part of the more general discussion of the arbitrary nature of language and other standardised means of communication, behaviour, etc. This is connected with the way in which this dynamic series of reflections replaces the supposedly factual and “solid” truth of “leading articles and cabinet ministers,” and disintegrates the supposed “thing itself, the standard thing, the real thing, from which one could not depart save at the risk of nameless damnation” (Woolf 1967: 44).

This approach relies precisely on juxtaposing imaginative “perspectivist” interpretations of reality, based on creative reflection, with the fixed reality of the arbitrary “things themselves.” From a more general point of view, the distinction between these two orders of reality closely resembles a classical philosophical problem of choosing the criteria for the way in which we classify/divide the “myriad impressions – trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel” (Woolf 2009: 9) that fall on us every day and shape this chaos into the moulds of species and genera of positivist science, into social and linguistic systems and other arbitrarily pre-conditioned forms of our perception.

In short, the observer is choked with observations. Only to prevent us from being submerged by chaos, nature and society between them have arranged a system of classification which is simplicity itself; stalls, boxes, amphitheatre, gallery. The moulds are filled nightly. There is no need to distinguish details. But the difficulty remains – one has to choose. (Woolf 2008b: 91)

As it was demonstrated, this problem is inherent to Woolf’s fiction on a number of levels, manifesting itself by the constant fluctuation between the poles of the solid and the fluid, the structured and the loose, the discrete and the continuous, the outlined and the coloured, the artificial and the simple, the material and the immaterial, the physical and the mental. This series of dialectical pairs forms an integral part of the general discussion of the continuity and discontinuity of things, shapes and selves, and the ways

in which Woolf balances the two extremes – a stale world of “standard things” and the absurd anti-order of Foucault’s “Chinese encyclopaedia” (Foucault 2002: xvii).⁴

Returning to the discussion of “The Mark on the Wall” and “The Lady in the Looking-Glass,” it is possible to observe that contrary to the multiple reflections of ourselves in the eyes of others and contrary to the reflection of the self-image in “The Mark on the Wall,” the mirror in “The Lady in the Looking-glass,” similarly to the painting in Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, reflects or reveals a stable core of the “factual” truth, i.e., the emptiness of the main protagonist, Isabella Tyson.

Everything dropped from her – clouds, dress, basket, diamond – all that one had called the creeper and convolvulus. Here was the hard wall beneath. Here was the woman herself. She stood naked in that pitiless light. And there was nothing. Isabella was perfectly empty. She had no thoughts. She had no friends. She cared for nobody. As for her letters, they were all bills. Look, as she stood there, old and angular, veined and lined, with her high nose and her wrinkled neck [...]. (Woolf 1967: 92)

The woman herself – the hard wall beneath the imagination, the snail on the wall, the crystal in sand – represents a different, hard and solid order of reality that is juxtaposed with reflections of the imagination which are, like “the convolvulus itself [,] trembling between one’s eyes and the truth” (Woolf 1967: 87). “The fact and vision” (Woolf 1982: 298) – these two orders of reality, but also two different approaches to reality, exist simultaneously in Woolf’s texts next to each other in a relationship of mutually supportive supplementarity.

Considering the characteristic quality of Woolf’s fiction, the relationship of these two attitudes to reality that fluctuates between states of uncompromising opposition and indifferent juxtaposition, raise an important question of reality and simulacrum, or an image and its original. Woolf occasionally refers to the images in her fiction as “half phantoms” (1967: 44) or describes her characters as “will-o’-the-wisps” (2009: 35). However, in the reversed epistemology of “The Lady in the Looking-glass,” the difference between reality and image is once more decided by a very specific, yet perfectly logical means: by the golden rim or frame of the looking glass. With the “difference between reality and image being that reality is not en-framed” (Petříček 2009: 38; my translation), this golden rim introduces a clear-cut dividing line between the space of petrified facts, i.e. objects reflected in the mirror, and scenes full of imagination and visions that materialize after the heroine is no longer reflected in the mirror, and is no longer directly seen by the narrator who is still fixed in her comfortable chair.

Given the specific logic of the story, the imaginary comes to be seen as more natural than the reality reflected in the mirror: “Half an hour ago the mistress of the house [...]

⁴ To illustrate the problem of classification in his *The Order of Things*, Michel Foucault famously comes up with a bizarre fictional classificatory system that points out the arbitrary nature of our classificatory system – a “certain Chinese encyclopaedia,” according to which “animals are divided into: (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) *et cetera*, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies.’ In the wonderment of this taxonomy, the thing we apprehend in one great leap, the thing that, by means of the fable, is demonstrated as the exotic charm of another system of thinking, is the limitation of our own, the stark impossibility of thinking *in this way*” (Foucault 2002: xvii).

had gone down the grass path in her thin summer dress, carrying a basket, and had vanished, sliced off by the gilt rim of the looking-glass” (Woolf 1967: 87).

Following the logic dictated by the narrator’s perspective, Isabella is cut in half, together with “the long grass path leading between the banks of tall flowers” (Woolf 1967: 87), by the golden rim of the mirror precisely at the moment when she leaves the space of facts, i.e. the space that is reflected in the mirror and that can be seen from the narrator’s limited perspective, and enters the space of modality that is controlled by imagination rather than sight. This space transcends the mirror image and opens itself to an account of truth that favours story-telling.

Accordingly, when referring to this slice of reality, the narrator, who cannot see, inevitably “supposes” and “presumes,” or in other words places Isabelle at the centre of all sorts of different narratives. As if the play was more important than its result, the unknown, the dynamic, and the moving always seems closer to life than the known. As Woolf’s narrator confesses in “An Unwritten Novel” (1921): “[I]t’s you, unknown figures, you I adore; if I open my arms, it’s you I embrace, you I draw to me – adorable world!” (Woolf 1967: 26).

The importance of a rim or frame understood as a dividing line between two heterogeneous spaces, structures or worlds, i.e. between the “adorable world” of limitless possibilities and reflections and the dry standardized “world not to be lived in” (Woolf 1967: 43), can be observed in all the stories discussed so far. The most obvious example of a frame (rim) that divides two heterogeneous spaces is the edge of the flower bed in “Kew Gardens,” where, as was suggested, the edge creates a dividing line between two regions of different flow of time and of different degrees of detail and solidity, and functions as the oval-shaped centre of relative stability in the dissolving world of colours. Moreover, the rim, understood as a dividing line, can be traced in both stories that feature the reflection of the water surface, i.e. “The Fascination of the Pool” and “A Simple Melody.”

The complex relationships of “reality” and its image in stories like “The Fascination of the Pool,” “A Simple Melody” and “The Lady in the Looking-Glass,” enhances the ambiguity of the continuity or discontinuity between the two regions. Commenting on the ambiguity that results from the process of en-framing, Miroslav Petříček concludes that:

If the picture, the foundation of which is the frame, allows what is framed to be in some way distinguished from the external environment, and if the edge, understood as a frame, also organises that which is en-framed, it follows that every picture separates the legible from the unintelligible. However, a picture, understood more narrowly and in a more explicit sense, i.e. a picture which seems to be in an analogical relation to reality, which depicts reality, mirrors or imitates it, is in this sense remarkably ambiguous: being the other (separated by the frame) it is not reality itself (relationship of discontinuity), being analogical, i.e. representing reality, it connects to it and is related to it (continuity). And so another strange situation emerges: a frame or a framework is a barricade against the unintelligible which surrounds what we picture. This border, however, *must not be insurmountable*. (Petříček 2009: 39; my translation)

The continuous/discontinuous spatial arrangement of structures that rely on this ambiguous permeability of the edge testifies to the general ambiguity and paradoxical nature of Woolf’s cavernous, semi-interconnected universe in which individual objects and selves exist as separated but at the same time not entirely discrete entities, spaces or images.

The states in which human consciousness or the subject's thoughts contain particles of matter assert a central role in the discussion of Woolf's in-human humanism, resulting in the problem of mixing of objects with the "stuff of thought," potentially resulting in impersonality and ultimately, the problem of the coherence and unity of objects and selves. The impossibility of our introspection or self-reflection to ascertain whether the perceived object remains in its traditional location, i.e. "outside" the subject's mind or whether, perhaps under some special circumstances, some parts of the object *physically* enter *into* the perceiving consciousness or become one with it, abolishes or at least seriously weakens the ontological difference between subject and object, turning "life" into Woolf's proverbial "luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end" (Woolf 2009: 9). This in turn violates the supposedly clear-cut conception of human consciousness as en-framed *inside* the subject and spills it to the material outside. Consciousness consequently becomes a product of external forces over which it has no control. As noted above, this exteriorisation usually takes place under psychologically or perceptively intense situations. Temporary states of ontological insecurity, extreme visual sympathy, instances of object-inspired day-dreaming, moments of pure perception, all compromise the cogito of the dreamer that is "less lively than the thinker's cogito. [...] The dreamer's being is a diffused being [...] and escapes the punctualization of the *hic* and the *nunc*" (Bachelard 1970: 167).

Based on the series of arguments presented above, it is possible to conclude that Woolf's fiction relies on an intricate interplay of classical philosophical and aesthetic categories of time and space, consciousness and materiality, drawing a picture of reality as constituted by heterogeneous layers of space. This post-Cartesian but also post-Bergsonian space consists of both human and inhuman, spiritual and material constituents. Representing an equally realistic alternative to the works of her literary predecessors, the idea of mutual mirrors and reflections on one hand, and contours, rims and edges on the other, helps Woolf in creating her spatial articulation of her central philosophical theses on the aqueous dis-continuity of reality.

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RÁMY, TVARY A SUBJEKTY – K POJETÍ PROSTORU V PRÓZE VIRGINIE WOOLFOVÉ

Resumé

Článek se věnuje problematice vztahu mezi fyzickým a psychologickým prostorem v díle Virginie Woolfové v kontextu filosofie a estetiky počátku dvacátého století s ohledem na změny ve ztvárnění prostoru, místa a lidské osobnosti. Diskuse se zaměřuje na problematiku jednoty lidské subjektivity především v povídkách jako Kew Gardens, The Mark on the Wall, A Simple Melody či The Fascination of the Pool a sleduje vztah mezi změněnými stavy lidské mysli a její interakce s vnějším světem a jeho proměnlivými strukturami. Výklad se dále zaměřuje na alternativní způsoby „prostorového“ vyjádření procesu decentralizace lidské subjektivity, její prolínání s materiálním světem, hmotou a prostorem a studuje proměnlivý vztah mezi subjektem a jeho vnějškovostí, především v kontextu myšlení významného filosofa přelomu 19. a 20. století Henri Bergsona. Zkoumání prostorových struktur a jejich prolínání s lidskou subjektivitou vychází z problematického pojetí lidské subjektivity v esejích Virginie Woolfové a z jejího odmítnutí literární a filosofické tradice jejich současníků jako například Johna Galsworthyho. Ztvárnění lidské subjektivity odmítající tradiční dogmata karteziánského dualismu, tedy neproblematické rozlišení mezi dvěma základními, od sebe oddělenými *res cogitans* a *res extensa*, umožňuje Woolfové spolu s dynamickým pojetím prostoru, vzájemné prolínání těchto dvou dříve oddělených „výseků reality“, jejich vzájemné prolínání a překládání. Vzniklý obraz světa jako oduševnělé materie či materializovaného ducha, je Woolfové základním stavebním kamenem reality. Woolfová uvádí tato teoretická východiska do praxe pomocí četných formálních i obsahových experimentů, v nichž využívá obrazy vrstvení, prolínání či překládání prostorových struktur a jejich mísení (obraznému i doslovnému) se subjektivitou svých postav. Důležitou roli v těchto experimentech pak sehrávají filosofická východiska právě Bergsonovy filosofie – pojem čistého vnímání, Bergsonův nekarteziánský

dualismus, role paměti, či dynamické pojetí lidské subjektivity. Výklad se opírá právě o tyto styčné body a doplňuje je o výklad založený na čtení novějších, či současných filosofů – Gastona Bachelarda (cogito snivce) a Miroslava Petříčka (rám, rámování a problematika kontinuální diskontinuity).

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