Feeling Shadows: Virginia Woolf’s Sensuous Pedagogy

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We never know in advance how someone will learn: by means of what loves someone becomes good at Latin, what encounters make them a philosopher, or in what dictionaries they learn to think. —Gilles Deleuze, Difference and Repetition (165)

"[O]ur taste, the nerve of sensation that sends shocks through us, is our chief illuminant; we learn through feeling." —Virginia Woolf, "How Should One Read a Book?" (581)

THOUGH UNFINISHED, VIRGINIA WOOLF’S MEMOIR “A SKETCH OF the Past” (1939–40) develops her most radical ontological and pedagogical insights, which are inseparably connected by her seminal concept “moments of being”—redefined in this essay as pedagogical accidents. This redefinition opens readers to an unexplored dimension of Woolf’s late thought: namely, the reorientation of learning and teaching around the creative function of accidents, the unhinged temporality of “sudden violent shock[s]” that reset their difference across one’s life span, and the prioritization of feeling (71). For Woolf, conditions of learning and teaching require the accident—understood as contingency and singularity—and its capacity to cleave and compose memorable events that commence and sustain how and what one learns to become: “I . . . suppose that the shock-receiving capacity is what makes me a writer” (72). The nonlinear, nonrealist, and nonsequential temporality of these events serves Woolf as a model not only for the memoir, but also for her essays, lectures, and other nonfiction that is inclusive, democratic, and empowering and should thus be situated in a tradition of alternative pedagogies that includes the Workers’ Educational Association and the adult education movement, as well as the work of John Dewey, Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux, and bell hooks. Daugherty asserts that Woolf’s two-year teaching stint at Morley College (1905–07) was central to the development of this style, and that Woolf plagiarizes common strategies that characterize Woolf’s teaching and writing: for instance, identifying with students and reader generally, conversing with them instead of lecturing to them, “communicat[ing] with them sense (as one student puts it) that Woolf’s student writes) “to be engaged in the business of intimacy, the business of connecting with a larger (or smaller!) community” (qtd. in 302). The emphasis of Daugherty and her students on feeling inspires my contention that problems of teaching and learning are, for Woolf, problems of feeling of touch, affect, and intensity. Though distinct from Wisely and of teaching her potential readers the shapes and intensities of their own selves and lives. My reading of Woolf’s memoir as a work of “sensuous pedagogy” attempts to account for the importance of feeling to this task. The sense of Woolf as pedagogue has been steadily expanding in Woolf studies over the past two decades and is now supported by a field of criticism including Beth Rigel Daugherty’s pioneering research (“Teaching,” “They,” and “Virginia Woolf”), Melba Cuddy-Keane’s Virginia Woolf, the Intellectual, and the Public Sphere (2003), a special issue of Virginia Woolf Miscellany (2008) edited by Madelyn Detloff (Woolf), and Rod C. Taylor’s work Woolf Studies Annual (2014) on the critical pedagogy of Three Guineas (1938). The consensus among these varied accounts is that the rhetorical style of Woolf’s essays, lectures, and other nonfiction is inclusive, democratic, and empowering and should thus be situated in a tradition of alternative pedagogies that includes the Workers’ Educational Association and the adult education movement, as well as the work of John Dewey, Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux, and bell hooks. Daugherty asserts that Woolf’s two-year teaching stint at Morley College (1905–07) was central to the development of this style, and that Woolf plagiarizes common strategies that characterize Woolf’s teaching and writing: for instance, identifying with students and reader generally, conversing with them instead of lecturing to them, “communicat[ing] with them sense (as one student puts it) that Woolf’s student writes) “to be engaged in the business of intimacy, the business of connecting with a larger (or smaller!) community” (qtd. in 302). The emphasis of Daugherty and her students on feeling inspires my contention that problems of teaching and learning are, for Woolf, problems of feeling of touch, affect, and intensity. Though distinct from the
democratically minded dialogic style that concerns Cuddy-Keano, the sensuous pedagogy I flesh out here also opposes and undermines the ["direct and efficient, linear and end-oriented, rational and serviceable modern academic discourse" with which Woolf was familiar (Cuddy-Keano 72). As an alternative to the purported mastery of "heavily farred and gowned" "authorities" (Woolf, "How 573) and lecturers who bestow institutionally validated knowledge on "passive listeners" (Cuddy-Keano 72), Woolf advocates the faculty of "taste"—the "chief illuminant"—developed and refined, at least in the case of common reading, through an intimacy with books and their authors (Woolf, "How 581). But this pedagogy extends beyond literary taste, encompassing all sensations (aural, visual, tactile, spiritual) and emotions (horror, joy, sorrow, excitement) that move, initiate, and even sustain critical and creative thought.

Woolf’s account of Roger Fry’s dynamic style of writing and lecturing demonstrates her fascination with a sensuous alternative to traditional, self-sustaining, and other-excluding modes of instruction. In his essays, the notes, "esthetic emotion seems ... of supreme importance" (Roger Fry 229); Fry rhetorically arouses sensation, stimulates curiosity, and awakens the eye; "as the colours emerge [along with the structure, learning begins easily and unconsciously to release its stores" (227); emphasis added). But in his lectures, Woolf asks, "[h]ow could contact be established" between audience and art (261)? And she answers:

He shooks his head; his stick rested on the floor. ... [Here was] a great critic, a man of profound sensibility but of exacting honesty, who, when reason could penetrate no further, broke off, but was convinced, and convinced others, that what he saw was there. (262-63)

Cuddy-Keano argues that Woolf shares Fry’s goal of "illuminating [one’s] audience the processes of [one’s] own thinking" but that her essays and reviews differ from his lectures insofar as they do not rely on a "charismatic temperament" (107, 108). I think that this distinction between Woolf’s writing and Fry’s lectures is too hasty. Both Woolf and Fry, after all, are involved in getting others to see, hear, and feel something real—a vision or design—and this requires a pedagogy attuned not only to the reader’s or auditor’s senses but also to their own. This pedagogy is also invested in the moment’s unanny and untimely capacity—so contingency, singularity—to repeat its affecting difference, thus to "spur" oneself and others to encounter "for the first time" the impact, the problem, or the idea of a unique composition—even if one (like Fry) had seen it before.

Gilless Deleeuze also shares with Woolf this triangulation of the moment of learning and feeling, especially in his early texts Pr www. and Signs (1964) and Difference and Repetition (1968). These works challenge a dominant "image of thoughts" that, among other things, presupposes learning to be the "acquisition of knowledge" (Difference 166) or the "assembling of some objective content" (Pr www. 22). Such presuppositions, which still plague philosophy and education, fail to account for the fundamental roles of contingency and the senses. "Something in the world forces us to think." Deleeuze argues. "This something is not an object of recognition but of a fundamental encounter ... [with] that which can only be sensed" (Difference 139). Thinking begins sublimely, in other words, when one reaches the limit of the recognizable, when one’s mental faculties become discordant,

when sensation alone—accompanied by a "range of affective tones: wonder, love, hatred, suffering" (139)—perplexes one, poses a problem (140), and potentially inaugurates an apprenticeship (164-65). This recontextualization of thinking and learning recalls the work of those who desire to teach and learn. "Our only teachers"—and here I think back to Woolf’s example of Fry—"are those who tell us to do with me" and who create conditions under which students might encounter (without foreknowledge) the sensuous, even "amorous" and disquieting, limit of what they recognize, know, and believe (23). For Deleeuze, as for Fry, teaching is the repetition of pedagogical encounters, events that have profoundly constituted what one has become and that can return "after" for both teacher and student (Woolf, Roger Fry 262).

Deleeuze claims that one cannot teach this way directly, for "[w]e never know how someone learns" (Pr www. 22; see also Difference 160). Rather, the teacher or learner teaches or learns by creating a field or a "space of encounter with signs, in which distinctive points" of one’s body and the field in which that body is immersed "remake themselves in each other" (Difference 23). A library, a classroom, a body of water, a walking trail, a postimpressionist slideshow: according to Deleeuze’s logic of sense, these and other spaces are potentially pedagogical. They may be homes to social and coercive codes, norms, and habits, but they also make events of escape and deconstruction possible—especially for those who learn to inhabit them with creative anticipation. It is telling that Deleeuze’s examples of such events are not just historical—the fall of the Bastille, for instance (Difference I)—but aesthetic and spiritual, musical, literary, and plastic. For early Deleeuze, "essences" (another word for "singularities") are neither identities nor determinative human qualities but profoundly nonhuman "composition[s]" of heterogeneous "moments and whole[s], which remain in perpetual formation (Pr www. 45).

"What can one do with essence ... except to repeat it, because it is irreplaceable]]" he asks. "This is why great music can only be played again, a poem learned by heart and recited" (49). When one plays great music or recites great verse or encounters Cezanne, one repeats a difference, which is to say one becomes entangled in a vibrant field. One becomes part of a differential ongoinness.

Though my reading of Woolf here does not directly apply Deleuzian theory to her memoir, Deleeze’s work has certainly influenced how I approach her life and her writing. But the philosophical pedagogy I unfold—though it resonates with Fry and Deleeze—is Woolfian. "A Sketch of the Past" helps us elucidate Woolf’s sensuous pedagogy, not only because of its vivid attention to audiovisual shocks but because it accounts—at the level of content—for solitary moments of learning that are, to some degree, free of institutional constraint and because it extends beyond the level of form, a mind teaching itself to compose with great energy and improvisation a life, its own life, late in life. Moreover, the memoir exemplifies Woolf’s tendency to task readers to take up thought experiments beyond the immediate vision she sketches. But before turning to these experiments, in the third section of this essay, I show that Woolf’s imagination of learning and feeling is warranted by an aesthetic ontology, a philosophical intuition that "the whole world is a work of art" ("Sketch" 72). This is not to say that the world has an author—there is ... no God, after all—but that the primary quality of all things—that thing material and immaterial is their capacity to be combined into singular yet repeatable compositions—that is, into moments of being. "A Sketch" is a rich account of Woolf’s learning to intuit this aesthetic ontology, to treasure its shocking moments, to respond to them with vivid compositions of her own, and to assign herself and her readers reflective tasks related to thinking of the self as a dispersion rather than a coherent identity or narrative.
Woof's pedagogical force almost always catches me off guard. While rereading one of her novels in solitude, discussing her life and work with students, or just standing at the play of cloud and sunlight as I jog beneath South Dakota skies, I sometimes feel separated from her training, transformed from a teacher-scholar into a student once again. These moments, in which I learn anew to feel love or sadness or the body, humble me and remind me of what I often forget: that the lives and oeuvres of which I am purportedly a master continue to be, in vital ways, masters of me. Is it possible to shape a critical point of departure out of this sensitivity to my favorite author?

The first section of "A Sketch" addresses a similar concern. Here, Woof affirms her lifelong susceptibility to "sudden violent shock[s]" and asserts that it has developed over time into a "shock-receiving capacity" (71, 72). This capacity empowers her to translate the sense and nonsense of these shocks into what she calls, in her "private shorthand," "moments of being" (70).

It is difficult to read Woof's term, "moments of being," in a systematic way. As Lorraine Sin points out, the term refers to "various states of feeling" and a "divers range of experiences" (137). For example, Woof uses it to refer to "scaffolding in the background"—that is, to "the invisible and silent part of [her] life as a child" ("Sketch" 73). Yet it also applies to "exceptional" foregrounded moments from her childhood that are heavily outnumbered by the potentially more important "things she does not remember" (69).

The foregrounded moments, which she calls "color-and-sound memories," are strong and vivid, and they often feel "more real than the present moment" (66, 67). They are not an invisible structure, then, but a provisable reality, not silent but supra audible. Indeed, that which is invisible and silent in her adult life at the writing table is "non-being," the "cotton wool of daily life" composed of the mandate and the role (70, 72). But she and Leonard talked about at lunch yesterday, for instance, or simply "ordering dinner; writing orders to Mabel; washing; cooking dinner, bookbinding"—is short, things that Woof knows she has done but that she cannot fully recall since they were "not lived consciously" (70).

The exemplary moments of being she identifies in her adult life, however—writing, reading, walking, noting colors, textures, and sounds—are also routines, though they are the routines of a creative life. Yet how plausible they seem beside her descriptions, on the next page, of childhood events that "happened so violently" she continues to recall them decades later: a fast flight with her brother, an arresting encounter with a flower, the haunting news of a suicide (71). Woof hypothesizes that "as one gets older one has a greater power through reason to provide an explanation" for such events. But there is still some conceptual difficulty, for the adult affirmation of such "blows[s]" involves thinking of them as "realization[s] of some order... tokens of some real thing behind appearances" (72). Woof might make "[a blow] real" by putting it into words, but she clearly retains a sense that such events—lyrically plotless and sensuous—reveal something beyond the scope of her will, consent, or intention.

As a conceptual cluster of background and foreground, structure and content, exception and routine, revelation and reason, visibility and invisibility, the moment of being remains a reading task demanding our attention and refuses to fit cleanly into the modernist trope of "epiphany."

To locate a concern with pedagogy in Woof's term, I note that the work of making real or of finding a reason means becoming the author of the moment's revision into words" (72). When Woof "suppose[s] that" her "shock-receiving capacity is what makes [her] a writer," she is naming at her occupation, preoccupation, life, and being—an emotional, social, historical, and familial vulnerability she has learned to "welcome," a sensitivity that has become a creative and critical sensibility, a passivity turned (not completely) activity. "A Sketch" enjoins its readers to hold revelation and reason in concert and to wonder about the words trailing behind "revelation"; "of some order." What order of things accounts for the link between the shocks of childhood and the capacities of adult life? The sense of a hidden "enemy" and the pleasure of composition, "putting several parts together?"

Moments of being teach Woof to compose because they are compositions, much as a body of water's undulations inspire movement that differs from the water and from one another, though they already exist in potential: the motions of a swimmer's legs and arms, the active balance of surfer and board, or the group dynamics of a school of fish. Woof learns to forge arresting combinations because she sees the memorable, exceptional accidents of her life as the sudden coming together of random components into unaccustomed, unified wholes. For Woof, a sovereign or divine teacher or composer does not coordinate these accidents. One learns to write, think, or feel not by command—there is no Shakespeare... no Beethoven... and [emphatically] no God—but only from the sensations of compositions themselves. "Humlant or a Beethoven quartet," she writes, "is the truth about this vast mass that we call the world." To find the reason for a shock and to put it into words are, for Woof, differential, creative activities that translate the world's fundamental operation into a verbal composition that acquires a sensuousness and a truth of its own. Thus, when Woof tentatively shares her "philosophy" that "the whole world is a work of art," she is pointing speculatively at a greater logic—an ontology—of an autonomous world already at work, a cosmic flux of authored compositions and complications to which "we— I mean all human beings—are connected" (72).

To flesh out this ontology, it is worth tarrying with three seemingly unrelated events that Woof weaves together. In the first event, she and her brother Thoby were pummelling each other with our fists. Just as I raised my fist to hit him, I felt: why hurt another person? I dropped my hand instantly, and stood there, and let him beat me. I remember the feeling. It was a feeling of hopeless sadness. It was as if I became aware of something terrible and of my own powerlessness. The second instance was also in the garden at St. Ives. I was looking at the flower bed by the front door; "That is the whole," I said. I was looking at a plant with a spread of leaves; and it seemed suddenly plain that the flower itself was a part of the earth; that a ring encircled what was the flower; and that was the real flower; part earth; part flower. It was a thought I put away as being likely to be very useful to me later. The third case was also at St. Ives. Some people called Valpy had been staying at St. Ives, and had left. We were waiting at dinner one night, when somehow I overheard my father or my mother say that Mr. Valpy had killed himself. The next thing I remember is being in the garden at night and walking on the path by the apple tree. It seemed to me that the apple tree was connected with the horror of Mr. Valpy's suicide. I could not pass it. I stood there looking at the grey-green crescent of the ba... in a trance of horror. It was dropped, hopelessly, into some pit of absolute despair from which I could not escape. (71)

These moments share a general structure with other moments of being in this and other Woof texts: an intense emotion or sensation combines with a seemingly random arrangement of components that poses an urgent problem ("why do another person?"; "that is the whole;" "the apple tree was connected with... [a suicide]"). Elsewhere, I pair this passage with the "spots of time" that Wordsworth recoups in the two-part Prelude of 1799 and argue that this literary pairing discloses an ethics of self-crafting learned from encounters with "new relations.
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and new collectivities" (33–43). But where do these relations and collectivities come from? I want to want and extend this earlier argument of mine, for the three moments above are meta-moments, or meta-events. The problems they pose are reflective, suggesting a fundamental consequence of Woolf's tentative

tive philosophy: the incapable radicalness of composeability. The world is a "work of art," in other words, because, as these moments demonstrate, the primary attributes of all activities, entities, intentions, creatures, plants, landscapes, emotions, memories, and perceptions is their capacity to be or become composed—folded in—with and among other things (Woolf, "Sketch" 73).

In the case of the fight with Thoby, we see the relational kernel of Woolf's pacifism: a vision that we are all threaded irrevocably together by mutual vulnerability—what Judith Butler terms "precarity" (1–32)—and that the "pommelling" of another person threatens not only that person but also a connection, a combination greater than two to which "I am responsible, in which I am implicated, and on which my being relies. In the case of the flower, this insight extends to the nonhuman, intensifying the first stirrings of an ecological sensitivity. Young Virginia intuits that "the real flower" exists in composition, composition in its (and our) mode of being—"part earth[,] part flower," part child, and now (through its repetition) part adult. Lastly, the news of Valpy's suicide and the encounter with the tree that same night illustrate another consequence of Woolf's ontology: the de- and recomposeability of things that are already in composition. Combining with the tree, the shadows, and the silence and despair of young Virginia's solitude, Valpy's suicide detaches from wherever "earth" it had been "part" of and becomes recomposed in the unfolding life and education of a child.

All these memories evince a thinking feeling, a thinking of feeling, and a learning through feeling. The young Woolf, then Virginia Stephen, "felt" the question about hurting others, sensed that her idea about the flower would be "very useful to [her] later," and imagined something her father and mother might have dismissed as nonsensical—that "the apple tree was connected with the suicide." As a withdrawal response to the consequences of these accidents do not suggest an essential, sovereign lesson plan for this passionate apprentice, but Woolf nonetheless sketches an ongoing writing training and the intimation of a developing sensitivity according to which a young mind learns to anticipate value, sustenance, and creative material in accidental, authorless aesthetic wholes. Moments of being do not illuminate the many.

Though Daugherty and Cuddy-Kean give persuasive accounts of this report—how it anticipates the inclusive style of Woolf's lectures and essays—the seriousness of these sentences has gone unexplored. Woolf's dictum indicates a concern with sensation: "concentrate," "appears," "visible," "hard," "solid," "clinging," and "feel." Woolf poses the problem of how to teach students with history, how to make the possibility of an investment in history ("the real interest of history—is it appears to me") visible and desirable to them. (This is not altogether different from Daugherty's efforts to stir a lifelong love of reading in her students.) Woolf is conscious that—to paraphrase Deleuze—she cannot know in advance how students will learn, that deepening facts "into their minds, like meteors from another sphere impinging on this planet, & dissolving in dust again," would be insufficient (211). Far from acquiescing to the impossibility of predicting what learning might occur, her pedagogy foregrounds a learning in the hope that her students will one day encounter history, develop a sensitivity to its signs, and thus become amateur historians. Her classroom practices—profiling scenes, providing time lines, showing targets—target the imaginations of students and trace, like moments of being, like Deleuzian encounters, affective contours between students and the unevenly sounded archive of the past: "the flesh & blood in these shadows." Prefiguring her writings on Fry, Woolf's pedagogy thus aims to entice the "sensates languidly stretching forth from [students'] minds" to "really grasp" something among these shadows (210), preparing the conditions under which students might learn to see something that may be useful later; that history can matter to them, that it has always mattered, since it is a "whole" of which they too are a "part" (211). Moreover, Woolf models a habit of historical use—that is, noticing, reshaping, interpreting, ordering, translating, and contributing to history (rather than simply memorizing or rehearsing the content of a lecture). She enacts her own apprenticeship as a teacher and writer in front of and with her students, moving with them through the past's many darkened contours and inviting them to assay exploratory compositions: to piece fragments together, seek reasons, and connect ideas. Here, in her classroom, history becomes an aesthetic, combinatorial activity.

Returning to "A Sketch," we sense an affirmation of the pedagogical link between feeling and composition, accident and artistry, in how it begins, finds its form, ends, and punctuates itself. Woolf begins writing the memoir not only as a response from writing Roger Fry: A Biography (1940) but because she finds an answer for this desire for reverence in a random suggestion from her sister, Vanessa Bell ("Sketch" 64). Moreover, to make this impromptu project differ from "Roger's life," Woolf begins with an affirmation of the unexpected—"So without stopping to choose my way, in the sure and certain knowledge that it will find itself... I begin" (64)—only to discover "a possible form" for the project two weeks later (75). According to the dates of her sections, a few days, weeks, and, at one point, nearly a year pass between the penning of each entry—in fact, she almost loses the manuscript, one day finding it "thrown away into my waste-paper basket" (100). These notes, despite their chronicle fragmentation, speak to, develop the rhythms of, and circle back to and diverge from each other. Indeed, Woolf creates various composite wholes throughout her memoir, many of them capturing something just as much as (if

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not more than) the exceptional, momentary senses of being pulsing in its early pages; the four caricatures with which she ends her first section (73-74) the complex, domestic atmosphere before, between, and after the losses of her mother and her half-sister, Stella (79-107); the critical and compassionate portrait of her father (107-16); the blueprint of 22 Hyde Park Gate (116); her friendship with Thoby (130-40); the sorrow and sexual frustrations of her brother-in-law, Jack Hille (140-41); a random, generalized "bad Wednesday" (143); an incisive critique of Victorian society (147-58); the atmosphere of a tea table populated by "great men" (158-59); and the juxtaposition of World War II, taking place while she wrote, with her memorial phantasies into the past (100, 107, 115, 124, 126, 131).

This miracle of a text, whose "incompleteness becomes a strength," reconstitutes moments of being and spaces of nonbeing and is held together by the broken threads of the present that Woolf weaves into its texture ( Zweigfeld 181). In addition to being defined by accidents of commenced and form, that is, "A Sketch" frequently stirs and digresses when it feels right to do so, interrupting its al- ready staggered and fragile shape to note, for instance, that "the mumur and rustle of the leaves makes me pause here, and think how many other than human forces are always at work on us" ("Sketch" 133). Here the writing of the memoir—open, hurried, interrupted, exploratory, unixed ( Zweigfeld 181)—becomes a scene in the memoir, a scene and device that Woolf receives and composes in the midst of learning, near the unexpected end of her life, how to write that life as a sketch of the past, to make her life whole by putting its severed parts together. Thus, the text's commencement, its conclusion in medias res, its unfinished surface, its biographical content, its theoretical reflections, its prolonged impressions, its impressionistic "fits and starts" (75), its flights and lags, its meditation over the difficulties of 'describing any human being' (65) express a complex, creative disposition that gives it the texture of an aesthetic life, which exercises a learned receptivity to accidents as well as an intense, improvisational reflex capable of responding to them.

III

In the sense that "A Sketch" connects ideas and finds reasons, that it feels its way through the flesh and blood of a shadowed past, that it provides vivid accounts of spaces (domestic and natural) and scenes (ecstatic and terrifying, rapturous and depressing, serene and intense, major and minor), that it expends great effort sketching the context of its purported subject ( "Adeline Virginia" 169), and that it stretches out its tentacles for something it can really grasp here and now—in all these senses and more, Woolf's memoir repeats the Morley College and essayistic strategies elucidated so well by Daubert and others. "A Sketch" is not just the record of a passionable apprenticeship, then, but a sensuous pedagogy in itself, according to which Woolf teaches herself and her unknown reader how to experiment with feeling their way along the contours and textures of a self. But what exactly does Woolf teach herself and her readers? What are the implicit tasks this sketch of the past assigns?

Assignment 1

Feel your self as something other than a story. Compose your self as a dispersion. Give an account of exceptional moments, arising sights and sounds, relations and landscapes that have stayed with you. How have you become a thinking, feeling creature?

A "Sketch" intimates this assignment in its first pages and memories. One memory is a mere glimpse of the "purple and red blue" floral pattern on Julia Stephen's dress, on which young Virginia fastes while in transit to either London or St. Ives (64). Instead of beginning her memoir as she begins her biography of Fyfe—with genealogical background, with the refrains of Quakerism and scientific research that recur throughout it (Roger Fry 11-12, 19-27)—Woolf begins with the evocation of a body that senses everything but itself, a body drawn to sights and sounds that move it laterally beside itself. The second memory, which Woolf famously calls the "most important of all [her] memories" and the "base on which the 'bowl of her life' fills and fills and fills," illustrates this sense of self more explicitly (64). This is a memory of lying half asleep, half awake, 0 bed in the nursery at St. Ives. It is of hearing the waves breaking, one, two, one, two, and sending a splash of water over the beach; and then breaking, one, two, one, two, behind a yellow blind. It is of hearing the blind draw its little acorn across the floor as the wind blew the blind out. It is of lying and hearing this splash and seeing this light, and feeling, it is almost impossible that I should be here, of feeling the purest ecstasy I can conceive. (64-65)

What do we make of a memoir—on an account of the self by the self—that begins by doubting the substantiality of the self, that begins immersed in the repetition of gathering sensations rather than in biographical exposition? And what does this ecstatic insight—"I am always spread out, composed elsewhere, not only across time but across spaces, objects, and the lives of others: in the audible rhythm of unwar words, in the sound of friction between the floor and the blind's "acorn," in the contrast between light and dark, in the motion of the wind as it stirs the waves and blinds, in Thoby's bruises and his eyes and fists, among the flowers and plants and the earth, beneath a tree and in the suicide of a stranger, in a present swelling with a vibrant, widening, quickening, and accumulating past. These two memories are the base not only of Woolf's life, but then, of her sketch's heuristic, staggered, literal evocation of a life, establishing the memoir's logic, texture, and operation as well as an aesthetic preference that refuses to plot out life—that will aim, instead, to "give the feeling" of moments and spaces and figures and shadows (65).

By approaching her self in this way, Woolf challenges the liberal democratic conception of the self as a willful, coherent individual. Yet this challenge does not completely abandon itself to disorder or incoherence. Learning to sense the self as a dispersion cultivates "A Sketch" suggests, the composer of a lookout ready to encounter whatever surprises might come (and to affirm such surprises as later creative materials). Late in the memoir, Woolf illustrates this by reimagining the self as a "sealed vessel" "woven" to "cracks" in its "sealing matter" through which "reality" "floods" (142). The self is "porous," "exposed to invisible rays" or the breath of external "voices" (153). Though this language may seem somewhat mystical, it is nonetheless concretized in the attitude with which the memoir begins. Indeed, Woolf's decision to start with her first memories is not the result of carefully weighing different approaches to memoir writing rather, she wills herself to leap, almost haphazardly, into the task: "So without stopping to choose my way, in the sure and certain knowledge that [the memoir] will find me—or if not it will not matter—I begin: the first memory" (64).

This uncertain certainty, which affirms the agency not of a centered self but of the text, resonates with the speculative language with which Woolf renders the memory of her mother's dress: "[I]t was sitting either in a train or in an omnibus; I . . . can still see purple and red blue, I think; "they must have been anemones, I suppose"; "Perhaps we were going to St Ives; more probably
... we were coming back from London" (64).

This language evinces a lookout's slow lingering among partial but powerful details that will become a way forward to other memories, persons, passions, and places, an orientation—at least in part—to an outside from which ethereal ideas and signs press themselves generatively and "epistemically" on the mind and body (65). Indeed, each time Woolf turns back to composing or editing the memory's fragments, she stresses the sensory materials that have compelled her return to it, materials for which her own writing life—rife with activities that keep her on the lookout, even during periods of rest—prepares her. Instead of piecing up or neglecting the cracks in the "sealing matter" of her self. "A Sketch" tasks her (and her readers) with exploring the potentially fruitful realities, scenes, and encounters that flood through these cracks (142). Instead of avoiding regions that maximize floods of reality; instead of casting contempt (or the "wool of daily life" or adhering exactly to "the rules of the game" of secure, serious existence (72, 150), the memory tasks its author and readers with exploring what happens when one welcomes this flooding of the self—as well as the self's subsequent dispersal.

Assignment 2
Reflect on behaviors and expectations that seem natural to you but strange to others. Also, what seems unnatural to you but commonplace to others, especially to mentors, guardians, brothers, fathers, and others who appear in control? When and where do you feel coerced or shame? How might you take a mental fight to the profoundly unrealizable? To feel the dispersal of the self, to cultivate an existence on the lookout: these are the conditions in which one might also learn a critical feeling, a faculty that combines the creative refer to store up befuddling moments that are "likely to be very useful . . . later"

...ing the thrill . . . and the oddity of social performances and beliefs (156); and (at last) the specter, in which she depicts her and Vanessa's young adult life together, Woolf names this faculty "the outsider's feeling," the sense of being "hold . . . they belong to the "momentary sharp teeth" of the patriarchal machine" yet somehow simultaneously removed, detached from its complete influence (154). The sisters together learn to fashion an "angle" of their own from which to "look out at the world" of "many men" and to become transient outsiders on the inside (143); obedient yet "observant, note taking for some future revision" while father and brother "lay down laws from their leather arm chairs" (154). This sensuous, critical training—which gives a "queer twist" to their "tea-table training" (154, 150) does not, largely because it cannot, distance them from its object of criticism. Rather, this sort of training affects the self's mental and bodily immersion in social atmospheres, encouraging an ambivalent sense of the social machine's intricate "beauty" and utility (150)—almost as if the machine were, like a moment of being at a cocktail or quartet, a composition. These apprenticeships serve thus develop "a state of divided attention" (Parkes 157), learning to stay aside certain remarks "for further inspection," to slip in things that would [otherwise] be insubstantial" (Woolf, "Sketch" 145, 150), and to keep their critical eyes trained even on themselves (153).

The text thus composes an immaculate critique in its final pages not only tangentially but perceptually and progressively by a self dispersed and multiplied across times and spaces. Woolf is simultaneously one of two "rebellious bodies" (the Stephen system) (152); the artist compelled to sketch the past, the "unclaimed" and "unpartnered" young woman standing "against a door" at a compulsory social gathering (155); the outsider (155) who could "ride the wave of a frankly fragmentary feelings" then and now, honors...
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13.3.2

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tradition" (244). In the passage above, Woolf uses it to refer to a related bodily legacy of intense aversion to sexual violence muted or protected (though less enthusiastically) "by education and tradition."

The form of the mirror-memoir—a memory that narrates experiences fully, honestly, causally, linearly—cannot capture the complex feeling that accompanies Woolf’s recognition of her historical, cultural, and experiential ties with other women across times and cultures, a feeling that she has learned to recognize, recompose, affirm, and use to sustain her writing life: "It is only by putting [a shock] into words that I make it whole; this wholeness means it has lost its power to hurt me" (272). Though Fronda argues that Woolf "could devise no genre intimate and familiar enough to convey" the truths of her body and desires (234), Woolf’s brief recollection of her rape evinces one of the most admirable lesssons of her self as the sensuousness of her pedagogy that follows from it: namely, that her aesthetic ontology, her mode of composition, and her critical and creative disposition to the world and her self and her reader: have enabled her, throughout her life, to do something with (and thus against) the ugliness of a culture that has perpetually masked the violence it commits against the queer and marginal and wounded and occluded as well as against those who have been taught to be dominant and dominiating, the men "stamped and moulded ... [and] shot into that [patricularial] machine" (Sketch) 153—and in a related context—sent into the sky to fight, "prisoned" [and] "boxed up in [their] machine[s] with a gun handy" (Thoughts) 243. In conclusion, Woolf’s sensitivity to moments of being enables her in "A Sketch" not just to write but to fight battles for which she has had to invent the necessary tools and languages. "I feel that by writing—feeling and thinking, learning and teaching, creating and criticizing—I am doing what is far more necessary than anything else" ("Sketch" 73). Disposed as she might be across St. Ives and London, families, times, sexualities, sexes, sensations, and ideas, Woolf perpetually seeks to share her invented tools and languages with others, calling them (and us) to gather among the shadows in a critically thinking and feeling collective to come.

Notes

I would like to thank Stephen M. Barfer for his generosity, friendship, and mentorship. Without him, his work on late Woolf, and the example of his pedagogy, neither this essay nor the larger project it promises would have been possible.


2 On Dewey, see Cuddy-Kane 37-39, Smart 25 on Dewey, see Chanting 11; Dickoff, "Luteciala pedagogy" 25; Smart 25; Taylor 67-74. On Giroux, see Taylor 75-76. On books, see Chanting 11.

In the pedagogical implications of Deleuze’s work has been growing. Michaillos Zembylas draws a "pedagogue of desire" from Deleuze and Guattari, this pedagogy he argues, enables "teacher and students" to become "subjects who subvert normalized representations and significations and find access to a radical self" (332). In Deleuze, Education and Becoming (2006), Ina Semotly reads Deleuze in conjunction with pragmatists like Dewey and Charles Sanders Peirce, "considered[ed] the potential implications[ of Deleuze’s philosophy for education], and addresses ‘both theoretical and practical questions, drawing from available educational research, as well as critically examining such concepts as abductive inference, complexity of meaning making, and specialization’ (15).

She has also edited two collections of essays on Deleuze and pedagogy: Nemrodological Education (2008) and, with Diana Mason, Deleuze and Education (2013). Deleuze’s emphasis on sensation, and desire are foundational to both Semotly and Zembylas’s investigations in many pedagogical programs.

On Deleuze Oesterle describes moments of "being with" "heightened experiences," "heightened moments of self-consciousness," and "sudden acts of self-awareness" (87). Woolf’s scholarship provides several other definitions that also emphasize a heightened sense of self. A moment of being, for example, "a cross-section of consciousness in which perception and feeling converge (converge) and [for] an instant something round and whole" (Richter 27), as a "vessoola arrival that "erases a moment of completion" (Bier 13) in a moment in which "self would seem to face and enhance one another" (Carnegius 158); an annunciation of the words, the child and the sublimity, "at the abyss and a sense of expansion and spacciosity" (Anderson 77); no epiphany of "sense of radical otherness impinging upon the compulsory of everyday existence" (Goehl 62); a "transitory experi- ence of perfection and wholeness" (Simmons 106); and a "qualitative state of heightened intensity ... to significa- cant that the mind stories [on my mind]" (Parsons 75). Literary history, moreover, has secured moments of being in the literary trope of "epiphany" (Hassett 257), for they share, as many scholars have noted, temporal and existential components with analogous tropes in the romances of [Joseph Conrad, James Joyce, Marcel Proust, Katherine Mansfield, Robert Musil, and others]. As Ga- briele Mazzotta has shown, going a step further, the concept belongs to a long pragmatic "tradition of separat- ing what is exceptional in terms of being excepting from that which is only habitual or unconscious" (664). Though my reading of Woolf’s moments of being does not necessarily refute these definitions, it moves away from notions of heightened self-awareness implied by the Joycean epiphany and toward Laci Mattison’s reading of their passages as evoking an "openness with the world" and operating as "potent of potentiation where ever more ethical formations of subjectivity are made possible in ever new configurations of consciousness" (177).

Works Cited


