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THE (IN)AUTHENTICITY OF BEING-WITH
Virginia Woolf and Collective Consciousness

Featuring a pageant play with its possible (mis)hearings and (mis)understandings, the narrative of the novel thematizes a human being's capacity for understanding but also the possibility and inevitability of (mis)understanding, which ensues from our finite, conditioned, and provisional being-in-the-world.

Working at the possibility of successful communal experiences, we believe that the state of unity with others is not merely an elevated idea but a feasible reality. However, the sense of our primordial and genuine unity with others is often infringed by both our internal deficiencies and external forces, such as wars and pandemics, as well as by various forms of domination and subjugation. Written in the time between the two world wars, Virginia Woolf's final novel, *Between the Acts* (1941),[1] explores the human necessity of candor and connectivity, which the deeper meaning of our human existence as *being-with* engenders. As a social and political thinker, Woolf implicitly expresses in fiction her concerns about totalitarianism that stands in opposition to the spirit of connectedness, rectitude, and social integrity. She renders those issues more directly in her non-fictional writings, such as her famous polemic *Three Guineas* (1938).[2] Accompanying the process of fictional writing and constituting a one-of-a-kind portrait of her as a writer,[3] Woolf's diaries give us invaluable insights into a broader context of her novels. As Rasheed Tazudeen notices, Woolf's meticulous documentation of events around the time of conceiving *Between the Acts* sheds light on its historical significance: "In Woolf's diary entries from the beginning of World War II, a world without human consciousness is often conceived as the terrifying limit-point of culture's collapse into barbarism with animal life functioning as a threatening, dark and violent emergence aligned

[1] See Virginia W o o l f, *Between the Acts* (London: Penguin Classics, 2019).

[2] See Virginia W o o l f, *"A Room of One's Own" and "Three Guineas"* (London: Vintage Classics, 2016).

[3] For an exploration of the intimate relationship between Woolf's fictional writings and her diaries, see, e.g., Małgorzata H o ł d a, "The (Self)portrait of a Writer: A Hermeneutic Reading of Virginia Woolf's (Auto)biographical Writings," *Analyses/Rereadings/Theories: A Journal Devoted to Literature, Film and Theatre* 6, no. 1 (2020): 52–66.

with fascism."[4] This weighty remark inspires us to investigate further Woolf's political stance and her insight into the causes of the disavowal of the univocal truth and the demise of ethics at the political and societal level.

Although Woolf's major fictional realizations that precede *Between the Acts* are viewed as mainly preoccupied with individual consciousness, they already exhibit her interest in consciousness with indistinct boundaries. For instance, in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), Septimus Warren Smith, Clarissa's double, feels unity with inanimate objects. Clarissa seems to have a peculiar sense of being at once in London and at the seaside. Her consciousness is extended beyond self, experienced across time and space: "Odd affinities she had with people she had never spoken to, some woman in the street, some man behind a counter—even trees, or barns.... The unseen part of us, which spreads wide, the unseen might survive, be recovered somehow attached to this person or that, or even haunting certain places, after death."[5] Woolf delves into the interconnectedness between inanimate objects, space, and people also in *To the Lighthouse*[6] (1927).[7] To mention but one example, Mrs. Ramsay in the novel experiences some mysterious oneness with a beam of light coming from the lighthouse. The destabilization of the clear-cut notion of selfhood is also realized to great effect in *Orlando*[8] (1928); its eponymous character has a transgenerational, male-female identity.

Undeniably, Woolf's earlier fictions investigate the blurred distinctions between self and other,[9] but it is her final novel, *Between the Acts*, that especially centralizes concerns of collective consciousness in its relationship to societal issues, and more specifically, the question of authenticity. In this text, Woolf sensitizes us to various dualisms and divides whose seeming innocuousness may lead to a devastating separateness, dispersion of individuals belonging to a community, as well as to a challenge to the truths that seemed to be the community's unifying force. Featuring a pageant play with its possible (mis)hearings and (mis)understandings, the narrative of the novel thematizes a human being's capacity for understanding but also the possibility and inevitability of (mis)understanding, which ensues from our finite, conditioned, and provisional

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[4] Rasheed T a z u d e e n, "'Discordant Syllabling': The Language of the Living World in Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts*," *Studies in the Novel* 47, no. 4 (2015): 491.

[5] Virginia W o o l f, "Mrs. Dalloway," in *Collected Novels of Virginia Woolf* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1992), 168.

[6] See Virginia W o o l f, *To the Lighthouse* (Orlando: Harcourt, 1981).

[7] See, e.g., Paul T. B r o w n, "Relativity, Quantum Physics, and Consciousness in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*," *Journal of Modern Literature* 32, no. 3 (2009): 40–43.

[8] See Virginia W o o l f, *Orlando: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

[9] On the modernist erosion of the distinction between selfhood and otherness see Omri M o s e s, *Out of the Character: Modernism, Vitalism, Psychic Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014). See, in particular, "Introduction" (1–28) and "Personhood beyond Personality" (29–72).

being-in-the-world. *Between the Acts* is often interpreted as a plea against the patriarchal system and fascist ideology.[10] Indeed, Woolf expresses her pacifist views through the deployment of an artistic performance—the play within the narrative—which explores the possibilities of art's efficacy to stave off the dire results of fragmentation in modern societies. The novel communicates a strong desire to demonstrate the importance of emancipatory action in preventing the failure of authentic communication and effective communal life.

COLLECTIVE CONSCIOUSNESS, THE UNCERTAINTY OF TRUTH AND KAIROLOGICAL TIME

Between the Acts thematizes the notion of collective engagement through the act of ritual—the annual performance. Bringing many voices together to reenact national history in a shared cultural rite underlines a sense of belongingness to a community, interdependence, similar values, and the central role of tradition. Featuring pilgrims traveling to Canterbury, the life of Queen Elizabeth I, along with a Restoration comedy, a Victorian picnic, and a final scene entitled "Ourselves," the play within the narrative captures various elements of history and establishes a true sense of national identity. The action of the novel takes place on a June day *between* the acts of a pageant play staged by a small village community in the English countryside. This *in-between* has a deeper meaning; it symbolizes the interval between the First World War and the Second World War. Although war is not often spoken about overtly, the title of the novel unmistakably alludes to the intermediary state between the wars and establishes the certitude of its gruesome presence.[11] The idyllic scenery and the tranquil lives of the characters are in the shadow of the imminent threat of war. Woolf started to draft the novel in 1938, shortly before the Second World War, and it was published posthumously in 1941.[12]

Between the Acts shifts between the past and the present, with the latter remaining pregnant with nostalgic overtones and allusions to the cultural, literary, and societal roots of the *Now.* Tradition is shown as the uniting force

[10] See, e.g., Rachel C r o s s l a n d, "'Peace Was the Third Emotion': Tripartite Balance in *Between the Acts*," in *Virginia Woolf, Europe, and Peace*, vol. 2, *Aesthetics and Theory*, ed. Peter Adkins and Derek Ryan (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020), 161–74. For further information on Woolf's attitude to fascism, see, e.g., Merry M. P a w l o w s k i, "Reassessing Modernism: Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas*, and Fascist Ideology," *Woolf Studies Annual* 1 (1995): 47–67.

[11] See, e.g., Karen S c h n e i d e r, "Of Two Minds: Woolf, the War and *Between the Acts*," *Journal of Modern Literature* 16, no. 1 (1989): 101.

[12] For an in-depth study of how the historical events preceding the Second World War are reflected in *Between the Acts*, see, e.g., Alex Z w e r d l i n g, "*Between the Acts* and the Coming of War," *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 10, no. 3 (1977): 220–36.

that provides a sense of continuity and unbrokenness in the light of the ensuing violation of the wholesomeness and truthfulness of human existence. By showing the traditional staging of English history, the novel emphasizes the stability and dependability expected of a healthy communal life. Allusions to the English pastoral tradition and to conventional Romanticism[13] in the novel's setting—the lushness of the countryside and the beauty of the grounds surrounding Pointz Hall—reveal Woolf's keen interest in fronting the value of rootedness in what is understood as constructing reliability and unity. The novel examines the exigency of oneness and the reinforcement of a system of authentic connections among individuals, but also the lack of genuineness and the danger of disunity, potently articulated through the repeated phrase "dispersed are we"[14] as the performance in the novel comes to a failure.

Whereas—both literally and metaphorically—the process of gathering individuals to act in a play evokes the pursuit to experience both the strengths of collective agency and the inherent oneness and genuineness that ensue from tradition and its restoration, the fiasco of the play symbolizes an impasse in synchronizing many individual consciousnesses. The sense of dissonance is expressed by the state of physical diffusion, when the audience of the play disperses after an unsatisfactory ending, as well as by the characters' inner uncertainty and mental dissipation. Despite the efforts of the play's director, Miss La Trobe, to activate the hidden potential of the collective consciousness and unite the actors in the common enterprise, their breaking up indicates the impossibility of an orchestral synchronicity of consciousnesses. Dispersion also relates to the characters' private tensions and personality dysfunctions. Significantly, the view of Woolf's thematizing collective consciousness through the prism of class distinctions seems to be invalid: "An analysis based around class location giving rise to collective consciousness and privileged insight into history's movement is, however, rejected: the audience is flatly told that 'The poor are as bad as the rich' ... and La Trobe's amplified voice asks how the wall of civilization is to be rebuilt by the likes of those caught in the pageants mirrors."[15] Woolf's endeavor is to investigate a deeper sense of collectivity.

On the one hand, the historical performance in the novel indicates a possibility of consonance based on an appreciation and honoring of the past. On the other hand, though, it is rife with misunderstandings that result in an experience of dissipation rather than in one of togetherness and authenticity. The

[13] See Schneider, "Of Two Minds: Woolf, the War and *Between the Acts*": 101.

[14] Woolf, *Between the Acts*, 62–63.

[15] Ben Harker, "'On Different Levels Ourselves Went Forward': Pageantry, Class Politics and Narrative Form in Virginia Woolf's Late Writing," *ELH* 78, no. 2 (2011): 448–49.

narrative is saturated with phrases that convey failed communication. The pageant participants forget words and lines or mishear what is being said: "Each declaimed some phrase or fragment from their parts.... I am not (said one) in my perfect mind."[16] This metaphorically expresses the misunderstanding that envelops history as well as reveals the potential falseness and distortion of the past due to memory limitations, imperfections, and twists. The audience of the play is also not uniform in their expectations and interpretations of the performance: "The pageant—as perplexing and as little understood as life, something to be lived through and speculated upon, interpreted (though who knows the right interpretation?), riddled with unplanned for and irritating interruptions—recounts a kind of history. But it is a metaphor for existence."[17] Drawing our attention to the characters' lack of agreeableness and to their inability to think and act out societal unity on a small scale, the narrative also points to a vaster problem with political underpinnings, since disunity is viewed as the cause of susceptibility to tyranny and totalitarianism.

The novel in its entirety, and more specifically the scenes of Miss La Trobe's directing of a performance, are permeated with a sense of fragmentation and provisionality. The three recurring words "orts, scraps, and fragments"[18] more than any other in the narrative evoke a fragmented reality. Whatever is happening imprints a sensation of disintegration. Nothing is certain, and everything gives an impression of incompleteness, falsehood, and disillusionment: "That was only *scraps and fragments* [italics mine] to all of them, excluding perhaps William Dodge, whom she called 'Bill' publicly—a sign perhaps that he knew more than they did."[19] The feeling of disappointment pervades the play, and the audience members' disjointed speeches amplify a lack of direction, the uncertainty of truth, and disintegrated existence: "The audience turned to one another and began to talk. Scraps and fragments reached Miss La Trobe where she stood, script in hand, behind the tree.... She crushed her manuscript. The actors delayed. Every moment the audience slipped the noose; split up into scraps and fragments."[20]

Equally importantly, the actors perceive themselves as disparaged and lacking in unity: "Look at ourselves, ladies and gentlemen! Then at the wall; and ask how's this wall, the great wall, which we call, perhaps miscall, civilization, to be built by (here the mirrors flicked and flashed) orts, scraps and fragments like ourselves?... All you can see of yourselves is scraps, orts and

[16] W o o l f, *Between the Acts*, 114–15.

[17] Harriet B l o d g e t t, "The Nature of *Between the Acts*," *Modern Language Studies* 13, no. 3 (1983): 27.

[18] W o o l f, *Between the Acts*, 116.

[19] Ibidem, 23.

[20] Ibidem, 75–76.

fragments?"[21] The experience of fragmentation interweaves with an astute longing for unity and authenticity. Woolf's formulaic "mantra" of scraps and fragments induces an eerie sensation that the pageant participants are continually questioning their sense of temporary oneness: "Compelled from the ends of the horizon; recalled from the edge of appalling crevasses; they crashed; solved; united. And some relaxed their fingers; and others uncrossed their legs. Was that voice ourselves? Scraps, orts and fragments, are we, also, that? The voice died away."[22] Exploring the dichotomy of unity and disunity, this and other passages invite the readers to (re)consider the necessity of trust and authentic being-with, as well as the inevitability of falling apart if individuals do not follow the principle of authenticity in communal life. Furthermore, Woolf seems to suggest that disparity inheres in the apparent oneness and in our human striving for it.

Woolf's phenomenology of unity/disunity encourages us to reflect upon the importance of temporality in her modernist aesthetics and to examine how her evocations of the fragmentariness of time are magnified by the narrative's continuous insistence on the significance of the *Now*. The present moment takes on the highest importance in revealing the crux of human existence lived in the shadow of death. Renée Watkins reminds us that Woolf uses the term "dispersal" in her diary of the period when she was writing this novel to stand for physical death.[23] Written shortly before the Second World War and suggestive of the forthcoming military conflict, *Between the Acts* is suffused with a sensation of a momentous, historical time—the *kairological* time. The novel's characters are poignantly conscious of the significance of the passage of time and the instantaneous possibility of death. Not mentioned directly, war casts its shadow on everything that happens in the story. Anticipating war and its calamities,[24] the narrative reveals that the intensified awareness of time, which manifests something crucial about a human being's participation in the absoluteness of time, can contain murky undercurrents. The thought of the immanence of something cataclysmic cuts through the flow of time and affects human Dasein.

The subtly present theme of mortality in *Between the Acts*, which expresses the author's anticipation of the impending loss, draws our attention to the historical moment when human annihilation not only belongs to the recent past, but is to be followed by another. The momentous time of the novel's creation can be described in the following way: "Woolf thus wrote *Between the*

[21] Ibidem, 116.

[22] Ibidem, 117.

[23] See Renée W a t k i n s, "Survival in Discontinuity: Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts*," *The Massachusetts Review* 10, no. 2 (1969): 367.

[24] See, e.g., S c h n e i d e r, "Of Two Minds: Woolf, the War and *Between the Acts*": 101.

Acts while torn between two increasingly irreconcilable forces: her impassioned and forceful commitment to a personal and artistic stance against tyranny as manifested in England's own patriarchal culture, and the encroaching apocalyptic demise of that culture by a fundamentally similar but far greater tyranny from abroad."[25] Woolf juxtaposes the immanence of the war and its disquiet with the longing for the steadiness and certainty of a life immersed in tradition. Providing the basis for an exploration of human consciousness, the amateurish performance in the novel shows how the apprehension of social and national instability and the menace of death impact the reliability of communal life to the highest degree.

Woolf's examination of collective consciousness accords with Émile Durkheim's line of thinking and his use of the term to explain how we, as unique individuals, are bound together into social groups and societies, and how we think in common, given our shared culture.[26] Brought together in the annual performance, the several human consciousnesses are aligned in an experience of something unprecedented. However, Woolf also goes beyond this kind of interconnection between sociality and collectivity, beyond the concept of "the shared mind." In an entry in her diary made when she was twenty one, we can read about her idea of the unity of minds across time and cultures that she would be exploring throughout her literary career: "Our minds are all threaded together.… Any live mind today is of the very same stuff as Plato's & Euripides. It is only a continuation & development of the same thing. It is this common mind that binds the whole world together; & all the world is mind."[27]

The idea of collective consciousness takes on a special tone and represents a specific modality in Woolf's reflection. Time and space feature as central categories in her understanding of consciousness. To her, human thought mysteriously branches from some center and our minds are connected across time.[28] Directing our thoughts to the time factor in relation to collective consciousness in *Between the Acts*, Woolf draws our attention to yet another aspect. At some point, while the performance is in progress, the stage is left empty, everything is suspended, and the utter significance of the present time is powerfully felt. This sudden and unexpected pause heightens the sense of living through *Kairos*.[29] *The now* that is pregnant with meaning and partakes

[25] Ibidem: 94.

[26] For a perceptive and concise explication of Durkheim's investigation of sociality and collectivity, see, e.g., Guy van de Walle, "Durkheim and Socialization," *Durkheimian Studies / Études Durkheimiennes* 14, no. 1 (2008): 35–58.

[27] Virginia Woolf, *A Passionate Apprentice: The Early Journals: 1897–1909*, ed. Mitchell A. Leaska (London: Hogarth Press, 1990), 178–79.

[28] See ibidem.

[29] *Kairos* is "a time when conditions are right for the accomplishment of a crucial action: the opportune and decisive moment," Merriam-Webster Dictionary, s.v. "kairos," https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/kairos.

of the dialectic of the individual and the collective, is *the now* that joins the performers together in an unspeakable silence suffused with a sense of something genuine and inevitable. The unsayable is felt rather than heard. Here and now, the overwhelming thought about the precariousness of life becomes central and immanent. The collective voice emerges in the visionary moment—the Heideggerian *Augenblick*.[30]

Crucially, the linear flow of time in *Between the Acts* is transcended; the ritual of the performance repeated each year suggests the cycle of time.[31] Recalling the past serves the purpose of establishing something important about the future. However, the continuous danger of destruction in the wake of the forthcoming war shatters the possibility of a coherent vision of human existence, together with the belief in the veracity of progress and one unified worldview. The imagery of the sky's "fierceness" betokens the forthcoming terror: "Did he hear some distant music?... The word was cut in two. A zoom severed it. Twelve aeroplanes in perfect formation like a flight of wild duck came overhead. That was the music. The audience gaped; the audience gazed. Then zoom became drone. The planes had passed."[32] *Between the Acts* sensitizes us to the provisional and temporal nature of human existence. As Almas Khan argues: "The contingent nature of life is encapsulated in the novel's fragmentary language, and through addressing multiple genres simultaneously, the text probes the past in an attempt to comprehend a terrifying present, and to prognosticate about humanity's capacity to endure in an uncertain future."[33] The lexical fragmentariness and the mixing of genres produce a disruptive and impressionistic narrative. Such characteristics help express the lack of

[30] In *Being and Time*, Heidegger writes: "Dasein has brought itself back from falling, and has done so precisely in order to be more authentically 'there' in the 'moment of vision' as regards the Situation which has been disclosed." Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 376. For an explication of Heidegger's notion of *Augenblick*, see, e.g., Magda King, *A Guide to Heidegger's "Being and Time"* (New York: SUNY Press, 2001). As King elucidates: "The authentic present is called by Heidegger 'Augenblick,' which is ordinarily translated by 'moment' or 'instant'.… Augenblick means 'the glance of the eye,' which instantly discloses here being's situation; it is an active 'ecstasis,'.... The authentic present may be called an 'instant attending to ...' or, briefly, an instant." Ibidem: 233.

[31] Woolf's enactment of the backward-and-forward movement accords with Gadamer's phenomenology of play, through which he explicates what happens in an aesthetic encounter. For more on the affinities between Woolf's keen interest in the back-and-forth paradigm and Gadamer's phenomenology of aesthetic encounter as predicated on the backward-and-forward movement, see, e.g., Małgorzata Hołda, *On Beauty and Being: Hans-Georg Gadamer's and Virginia Woolf's Hermeneutics of the Beautiful* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2021), 125–204.

[32] Woolf, *Between the Acts*, 193.

[33] Almas Khan, "*Between the Acts*: A Modernist Meditation on Language, Origin Narratives, and Art's Efficacy on the Cusp of the Apocalypse," *English Academy Review* 31, no. 2 (2014): 108.

existential certainty, undermine the univocity of truth, and indirectly pinpoint the ethical dilemma the experience of the void entails.

Between the Acts, like Woolf's highly experimental novel *The Waves*[34] (1931), investigates the workings of human consciousness, focusing on its composite rather than individualistic dimension. Woolf advocates for a compound, instead of completely autonomous,[35] selfhood by interrogating the dissolution of the barriers between separate selves and their co-belongingness.[36] Significantly, the form of amalgamated consciousness she espouses is one way of proclaiming and defending an anti-authoritarian, anti-oppressive approach to individuated humans, social groups, and nations. The performance embedded in the narrative, which brings together people of various social classes, ages, and talents, expresses a deeply ingrained sense of collectivity that extends beyond the specificity of human interests. It is the unheard, unspoken voice of the common, in which the unifying elements constitute the very being of human beings—the mysterious oneness reverberates in the heterogeneity of human experiences. Woolf's view of collectivity resonates here with Spinozian thought. According to Spinoza, humans conatively seek to become one mind and one body.[37]

It is commonly held that Woolf moves from the private to the common sphere of life in *Between the Acts*. However, this standpoint can be challenged by a more nuanced observation that acknowledges the complex, yet subtle configuration of the individual and the collective in the novel: "While attempting to define the collective components of the communal or national identity that

[34] See Virginia Woolf, *The Waves* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). Elsa Högberg draws our attention to the interconnections between the rendition of human individual and collective consciousness in *Between the Acts*, the imagery of the sea waves in *The Waves* and the implications of rhythm in the context of the novelist's pacifist thinking expressed in *Three Guineas*. She argues that *The Waves* raises one of the most perplexing questions of how to "distinguish between the unanimity enabling violent action and the unity, the overflow of boundaries, which, according to *Three Guineas*, makes non-violent relations possible." Elsa Högberg, *Virginia Woolf and the Ethics of Intimacy* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 171.

[35] See, e.g., Högberg, *Virginia Woolf and the Ethics of Intimacy*, 169–72. Analyzing Woolf's attempt at representing the composite nature of human subjectivity and the significance of the relationship between selfhood and violence, Högberg contends: "In *The Waves*, the dynamic in which group thinking absorbs individual thinking is imagined in terms of rhythm and movement.... The rhythms of aggression, violence, and self-contained subjectivity—the turning of the wheel and the flow of the torrent are countered and disrupted in the novel by another: the movement of waves rising and breaking." Ibidem, 169–70.

[36] As mentioned earlier, Woolf's idea of consciousness as detached from individual characters is also present in her other major novels. However, it is her later novels: *The Waves* and *Between the Acts*, that forefront group consciousness in its relationship to communal life.

[37] For a comprehensive study of Spinoza's understanding of collectivity, see, e.g., Moira Gatens and Genevieve Lloyd, *Collective Imaginings: Spinoza, Past and Present* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999).

she depicts, Woolf keeps using the figurative language and narrative patterns that pertain to the private perspective. *Between the Acts* exposes the extent to which—even in one of the most political moments in her career—Woolf can imagine and perceive collectivity only in terms of the subjective mind."[38] This, at face value, rather surprising definition of collectivity, perceived in terms of a subjective mind, brings us to the very core of Woolf's understanding of collective consciousness. She does not treat collectivity as an artificial univocity but, much more profoundly, views it as the possibility of the coexistence and creative amalgamation of individuated voices. Significantly, the individual, separate selves are not shown as subsumed, and the dissolving barriers between them do not result in subordination.

Woolf's portrayal of the small community of the villagers as representing a larger community of the English nation offers insights into her pacifist, anti-authoritarian, and anti-totalitarian ideals she upholds as the only viable possibility of understanding collectivity.[39] Interestingly, as Galia Benziman observes, "Woolf treats her English community as a subject in possession of a body as well."[40] Woolf's portrayal of the community in terms of the subject possessing its own body provides space for a more thoughtful apprehension of how the community works: "This subject's struggle to construct its own identity is metaphorically depicted as a psychological process performed within an individual consciousness that perceives itself by looking at its own body."[41] The working of the community as a unified body highlights human beings' fundamental need for an existence understood as *being-with* rather than *being-apart*. Does the novel invite us to interrogate more deeply the meaning of *being-with*?

While the pageant participants seek oneness and continually stumble against the impossibility of achieving it, the Rev. G. W. Streatfield, the charac-

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[38] Galia B e n z i m a n, "'Dispersed Are We': Mirroring and National Identity in Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts*," *Journal of Narrative Theory* 36, no. 1 (2006): 54.

[39] Woolf's veiled critique of totalitarianism in *Between the Acts* takes on a more overt form in her essay *Three Guineas* (1938), where she focuses on the personal level of human life rather than on the societal and political ones. Reflecting on the male dominance of the public sphere, she points to women's inaudibility and views the silencing of women as the plight of society, resulting in the rise of various forms of totalitarian regimes. Gender inequality, the uneven distribution of power between males and females, is the first and foremost source of militarism and totalitarianism. It is the exclusion of women from education and participation in other forms of social life, as well as their financial dependence on men that ultimately has disastrous effects. She blames the male politics of dominance for the lack of dignity and balance and the threat of militarism and totalitarianism and sees the patriarchal structures of society as the cause of social disquiet and the obstacle to peace on the international level.

[40] B e n z i m a n, "'Dispersed Are We': Mirroring and National Identity in Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts*": 54.

[41] Ibidem.

ter to whom the role of the community's spokesperson is ascribed, expresses the exigency of unity but also the ambivalence that envelops the possibility of attaining it:

> "Dare we, I asked myself, limit life to ourselves? May we not hold that there is a spirit that inspires, pervades…" (the swallows were sweeping round him. They seemed cognizant of his meaning. Then they swept out of sight.) "I leave that to you. I am not here to explain. That role has not been assigned me. I speak only as one of the audience, one of ourselves. I caught myself too reflected, as it happened in my own mirror..." (Laughter) "Scraps, orts and fragments! Surely, we should unite?"[42]

The minister pinpoints to the goal of the pageant; it is to show that the villagers are a whole, and it is believed that they truly remain in oneness:

> He continued: "Speaking merely as one of the audience, I confess I was puzzled. For what reason, I asked, were we shown these scenes? Briefly, it is true.... A few were chosen; the many passed in the background. That surely we were shown. But again, were we not given to understand—am I too presumptuous? Am I treading, like angels, where as a fool I should absent myself? To me at least it was indicated that *we are members one of another. Each is part of the whole* [italics mine]. Yes, that occurred to me, sitting among you in the audience."[43]

The artistic performance assumes a religious character, with the audience becoming reminiscent of a church congregation. This is one of the instances of Woolf's embodying her belief that modern societies reach out for art to play the role classically expected of religion.[44]

The actors and audience recognize themselves as longing for and, at the same time, unable to form a genuinely balanced community which is aware of its goals. They seem to be easily persuaded into thinking that oneness is possible. However, the feeling of discordance and disunity—"orts, scraps, and fragments"—infuses the social gathering, which leaves the reader with an open query about the workings of collective consciousness and the possibility of oneness: "'Did you feel,' she asked 'what he said: we act different parts but are the same?' 'Yes,' Isa answered. 'No,' she added. It was Yes, No. Yes,

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[42] W o o l f, *Between the Acts*, 119.

[43] Ibidem, 118–19.

[44] For an exploration of the topic of the intersecting paths of Woolf's secular mysticism and art, see, e.g., Christopher J. K n i g h t, "'The God of Love Is Full of Tricks': Virginia Woolf's Vexed Relation to the Tradition of Christianity," *Religion & Literature* 39, no. 1 (2007): 27–46; Mark G a i p a, "An Agnostic's Daughter's Apology: Materialism, Spiritualism, and Ancestry in Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*," *Journal of Modern Literature* 26, no. 2 (2003): 1–41; *Religion, Secularism, and the Spiritual Paths of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Kristina K. Groover (Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland AG and Palgrave MacMillan, 2019).

yes, yes, the tide rushed out embracing. No, no no, it contracted. The old boot appeared on the shingle. 'Orts, scraps and fragments,' she quoted what she remembered of the vanishing play."[45] The pageant represents the ever-escaping reality of human existence, which is stranded between finitude and infinity, and the impasse of sticking to one and only true worldview.

AUTHENTICITY AND THE QUANDARY OF COMMUNAL LIFE

Exploring the hermeneutic in-between in human acting, *Between the Acts* features individuals who oscillate between sympathy and suspicion as to the possible success of their artistic enterprise. However, a desire for being-with rather than being-apart prevails—the longing for being part of a whole, for belonging to a reality greater than one's individual being and acting together wins over even if a sense of belonging does not prevent precariousness and destruction. The search for wholeness in *Between the Acts* is shown as invaluable. This is aptly expressed by David Wanczyk, who notices that Woolf's characters are both "individual fragments and electrically united to one another."[46] He supports this view with a reference to Woolf's diaristic writing and notices that "In a diary entry from the time of the novel's composition, Woolf encapsulated this idea of frayed unity, writing that we are 'all waifs & strays —a rambling capricious but somehow united whole.'"[47] The pervasive sense of fragmentariness leaves an impression of no center and no truth to which the characters might hold.

Many critics have examined the problem of unity and the relationship between an individual and collective consciousness in *Between the Acts*.[48] However, as Gyllian Phillips argues: "The less explored are the mechanisms by which the 'I' expands into the 'we.'"[49] This is precisely the area of collective consciousness that Woolf investigates in this novel. Phillips contends that there is a similarity between Woolf's drawing the audience "form the limbo of suspended Being (or non-being in Woolf's terms)"[50] and her showing that they

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[45] W o o l f, *Between the Acts*, 133.

[46] David W a n c z y k, "'So They Fidgeted': The Modernist Twitch of *Between the Acts*," *Woolf Studies Annual* 17 (2011): 108.

[47] Ibidem. See also *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 5, *1936–1941*, eds. Anne Olivier Bell and Andrew McNeillie (London: Harvest, 1984), 135.

[48] See, e.g., Yaxiao C u i, "Adjacency Pairs and Interactive Consciousness in Virginia Woolf's Novels," *Style* 50, no. 2 (2016): 203–22; Gyllian P h i l l i p s, "'Vociferating through the Megaphone': Theatre, Consciousness, and the Voice from the Bushes in Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts*," *Journal of Modern Literature* 40, no. 3 (2017): 35–51.

[49] P h i l l i p s, "'Vociferating through the Megaphone'": 37.

[50] Ibidem: 38.

are called into "an understanding with the world, into a relationship of care"[51] and Heidegger's philosophy of *thrownness*.[52] As Phillips accentuates: "Dramatic performance, literature set in motion, is a call to the isolated individual; it is a deliberate attempt to startle that Being's understanding of the world."[53] The *new* understanding that follows is an understanding that involves care. In the Heideggerian terminology, it is the notion of being the shepherd of Being: "Only when the human being, as the shepherd of Being, waits upon the truth of Being, can he at all expect the arrival of another fate for Being, without being caught up in the mere wish to know."[54] The expansion into the "we" is thus an expansion that involves shepherding—caring for what is. This shepherding is an existential call for authentic being with others.

Woolf's understanding of existentiality and authenticity resonates with Heidegger's philosophy of facticity, which discloses the significance of being-with as the genuine being. Heidegger's thought in this respect can be potently presented in his own words: "By reasons of this *with-like* [*mithaften*] being-in-the-world, the world is always the one that I share with Others. The world of [human existence] is a *with-world* [*Mitwelt*]."[55] Woolf's hermeneutic thinking, which manifests itself in acknowledging the mysterious suggestiveness of the patterns of Being—our relational being is part of the structure of Being—retains an affinity with Heidegger's recognition of the primary interrelatedness of individuation and sociality: "Even Dasein's Being-alone is Being-with in the world."[56] Heidegger deepens his thought regarding being-with by adding a reflection on authenticity, which is a recurrent idea in his *Being and Time*: "On no account, however, do the terms 'inauthentic' and 'non-authentic' signify 'not really,' as if in this mode of Being, Dasein were altogether to lose its Being. 'Inauthenticity' does not mean anything like Being-no-longer-in-the-world, but amounts rather to a quite distinctive kind of Being-in-the-world-the kind which is completely fascinated by the 'world' and by the Dasein with of Others in the 'they.'"[57] Heidegger's intricate understanding of authenticity and inauthenticity stems from his revitalization of the ancient Greek word for truth (*Aletheia*). The continuous interplay of concealment and unconcealment of truth, which *Aletheia* connotes, stands at the center of Heidegger's ontological hermeneutics.

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[51] Ibidem: 37.

[52] A comprehensive analysis of the intersections between Woolf's oeuvre and Heidegger's philosophical hermeneutics is offered by Emma Simone. See Emma S i m o n e, *Virginia Woolf and Being-in-the-world: A Heideggerian Study* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017).

[53] P h i l l i p s, "'Vociferating through the Megaphone'": 37.

[54] Martin H e i d e g g e r, "Bremer und Freiburger Vorträge," in Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 79, ed. Petra Jaeger (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1994), 72.

[55] H e i d e g g e r, *Being and Time*, 118.

[56] Ibidem, 156–57.

[57] Ibidem, 220.

The authentic being is not a static entity, rather, it ensues from the dynamic of the veiling and unveiling (*Verbegung/Entbergung*)[58] of truth. We partake of the revelation of truth rather than master or control it: "It is not we who presuppose the unconcealment of beings, rather the unconcealment of beings determines us in such an essential way that we are always placed after unconcealment in our conceptions."[59] Woolf's ontologically underwritten way of addressing the issue of authenticity/inauthenticity in *Between the Acts*, which concords with Heidegger's understanding of truth as shining forth in the interplay of concealment and unconcelment, sensitizes us to see the impossibility of controlling or bending truth to our will, of overpowering it. By exposing and simultaneously questioning the verity of the universality of truth via the enactment of a historical truth (in a play), she brings to the mind the ever-elusive nature of truth. More importantly, though, she points to truth as the event of disclosure, in which the true shines forth in the back-and-forth movement of the hidden and the unconcealed, in the language (of the performance) that both presents and misrepresents.

Throughout the novel, Woolf is concerned with the flux of various forms of social conduct. She depicts the multivalence of the possibilities of human strife for unity, its unpredictability, orchestrated responses, and the rather postponed sense of finality:

> Like quicksilver sliding, filings magnetized, the distracted united. The tune began; the first note meant a second; the second a third. Then down beneath a force was borne in opposition; then another. On different levels they diverged. On different levels ourselves went forward; flower gathering some on the surface; others descending to wrestle with the meaning; but all comprehending; all enlisted. The whole population of the mind's immeasurable profundity came flocking; from the unprotected, the unskinned; and dawn rose; and azure; from chaos and cacophony measure; but not the melody of surface sound alone controlled it; but also the warring battle-plumed warriors straining asunder: *To part? No*. Compelled from the ends of the horizon; recalled from the edge of appalling crevasses; they crashed; solved; united.[60]

The yearning for unity as embodied by Woolf can be defined as the possibility for change and some important capacity for flexibility, since the final union does not materialize. Woolf identifies communion as becoming rather than being. This state of becoming allows for a multivalence of meaning and possibilities for unified forms of sociality and national identity. The sense of oneness and transgression of the limitedness of one's life is succinctly articu-

[58] See, e.g., Martin H e i d e g g e r, "The Origin of the Work of Art," in Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), 41.

[59] Ibidem.

[60] W o o l f, *Between the Acts*, 169–70.

lated in *Between the Acts* by Mrs. Swithin: "'But we have other lives, I think, I hope,' she murmured. 'We live in others.'"[61] The dispersed performers are symbolically reunited when the stage is smitten with the outpour of rain, which echoes a similar, unifying effect of the snow covering the whole of Ireland at the end of James Joyce's story *The Dead*.[62]

Woolf, who lived through the First and Second World Wars, recognized how societal unity and solidarity might prevent war. The novelist seems to imply that authenticity, togetherness, and solidarity, even if they do not arise as active and forceful, are the prerequisite for a collective struggle against military conflict. Woolf's acknowledgement of this minimal requirement for a communal pacifist activity in reference to *Between the Acts* can be put thus: "There is, on one level, the sense of dire fragmentation covered by rhetorical lies and a too transparent veil of 'tradition.' There is also a real clinging together. The village lacks any shared body of deep beliefs, but does share an emotional response to this lack."[63] Even an awareness of the lack of consonances can trigger more engaged thinking about the need for sharing and effectuate a seminal change in the long run.

Significantly, the imagery of unity coincides in the novel with that of disruption and fragmentation. And, thus, the dichotomy of oneness and disintegration is more complex than it seems to be at first sight. As Evelyn T. Chan emphasizes, unity in *Between the Acts* can be viewed as paradoxically originating from fragmentation: "Unity is often presented alongside, or even created out of, fragmentation in the novel. The literary allusions throughout, although they crop up seemingly randomly, assume a shared literary history and tradition. Pieces of language and sound are constantly recycled and repeated in different contexts. Snatches of tunes and nursery rhymes create a sense of affinity, resulting in "[m]uscles loosened; ice cracked."[64] The reiterative way of presenting literary allusions and "scraps" of history contributes to the overall impression that tradition is ever present. Tradition is not that much about preserving what has been, but more about transferring the past to the present.[65] Transmitting is about this specific kind of movement wherein the past

[61] Ibidem, 64.

[62] See James Joyce, *The Dead* (Claremont: Coyote Canyon Press, 2008). In *The Dead*, the falling of the snow effectuates the sensation that people of different social rank are united by the phenomenon that is outside of their control. See ibidem, 70.

[63] Watkins, "Survival in Discontinuity: Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts*": 359.

[64] Evelyn T. Chan, "A Balancing Act: Specialization in *Between the Acts*," *Woolf Studies Annual* 18 (2012): 29.

[65] I draw here on Hans-Georg Gadamer's understanding of tradition developed in *Truth and Method*. See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Sheed and Ward, 1975), 281–82. His notion of tradition is based on the German word *Überlieferung*, which connotes transmission and movement. See also, e.g., Chris Lawn and

meets the present, informs it, and grants it a new light. And thus, the historical pageant becomes the locus of the intimate conversation between the past and the present. By acting out historical events and expressing sentiments, the characters belong to the vastness of tradition, with its wisdom and follies, its glory and failure.

Although the whole novel is filled with both images of division and the human struggle for unity, there are two elements that more prominently illustrate Woolf's way of evoking the unity/separateness dichotomy. She uses a gramophone and a mirror to convey the duality of the human condition. First, the gramophone, in its subverted form, plays a similar role to that of the chorus in ancient Greek plays. Its repeated discordant wailing, "dispersed are we," heightens the pervasive sensation of unity's irreversible demise. Moreover, the gramophone is a symbolic object used to obscure reality and to execute authority. The audience must make an effort to interpret what is heard and to unravel the truth as the sound is unclear. As Michele Pridmore-Brown points out, Woolf intuits the role of noise used in information technology and is aware of the dangers posed by those who preach authoritarian politics via technology.[66] Second, when the play comes towards its ending, Woolf uses a mirror as an object that metaphorically represents dispersion. When Miss La Trobe puts mirrors in front of the audience, they focus the characters' attention on themselves, as well as symbolically attest to the power of collective consciousness, only to show later the powerlessness of humans when they get dispersed. Witnessing the characters' diaspora, the mirrors magnify the impact of dispersal: "The looking glasses darted, flashed, exposed.... All evaded or shaded themselves."[67] For a moment, the stunned performers see the reflection of their "togetherness" in a mirror. Unity is still lingering and ruptured only by a sudden dissipation. The mirrors do not just disclose the truth but indicate the deep sense of the violation of unity on the societal level. The uniform reaction that follows—the collective outcry—signifies regret and a wish to reunite.

The narrative features scattering and assembling not only as co-existent but in their ongoing interplay—one seems to propel the other in a circular manner: "The phrase '[d]ispersed are we' ... played continuously in the intervals and at the end of the pageant, thematically signifies fragmentation, but formally creates the backbone of the pageant. The book seems to suggest the two are different sides of the same coin: after dispersal there can be assembly again, and after assembly, dispersal, which the structure of the pageant, with its

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Niall K e a n e, *The Gadamer Dictionary*, s.v. "Transformation into Structure" (New York: Continuum, 2011), 140–42.

[66] See Michele P r i d m o r e – B r o w n, "1939–40: Of Virginia Woolf, Gramophones, and Fascism," *PMLA/Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 113, no. 3 (1998): 408.

[67] W o o l f, *Between the Acts*, 125–26.

many intervals, enacts."[68] The continued circle of destruction and construction depicts the communal longing for (be)longing and the opposite drive of retaining individuality. The two sentiments intermingle with and feed one another. Humans are continually and intrinsically enthralled by both autonomy and connection, individuality and community.[69] Woolf explores the notion of dispersal in its interconnection with collective consciousness by drawing our attention to its more nuanced meanings. Dispersion that is expressive of disunity can be understood as one possible way of being-with. She notices the more subtle form of dissipation when togetherness does not equate to a congregation of like-minded people; when being together is a task that is more demanding than the avoidance of apparent divisions: "People disperse, not only by separating but also by the way they are together."[70] Therefore, one can say that Woolf transcends the facile view of community life and touches the elusive sphere of the in-between.

Woolf's characters neither are enthusiastic about the easy forms of communication nor avoid them on grounds of the impossibility of effective exchange of ideas and transmission of what is vital: "The image is not of vice or violence, but of the condition of people who are neither in or out of communication, neither in or out of mutuality."[71] In *Between the Acts*, Woolf expresses her deep awareness that, in the face of the forthcoming war, societies are losing their sheltered worldviews and unambiguous truths. The threat of non-existence and the precariousness of daily life permeate human minds; certitudes seem to fade away and lose their vitality, verity, and relevance. The portrait of the communal life she sketches reminds us of the scattered elements of a puzzle game where each small part is disbanded and "waiting" to be put together. It is worth noting that the theme of dispersal takes on further significance when we look at the performance in the novel as an artistic event whose meaning is inherently plural and multi-perspectival. Reflecting on the Dionysian philosophy in *Between the Acts*, Katarzyna Sokołowska draws our attention to the cancellation of "the metaphysical dichotomy of surface and a hidden foundation of being,"[72] and claims that the pageant "celebrates the dispersal of meaning, defies any attempt to recover its ultimate sense and refuses to be merely a faithful image

[68] C h a n, "A Balancing Act: Specialization in *Between the Acts*," 29.

[69] This dual attraction has been potently expressed by Thomas Merton, who writes: "Every other human is a piece of myself, for I am a part and a member of humankind.... What I do is also done for them and with them and by them. What they do is done in me and by me and for me." Thomas M e r t o n, *No Man Is an Island* (Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1967), 16–17.

[70] W a t k i n s, "Survival in Discontinuity: Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts*," 367.

[71] Ibidem, 368.

[72] Katarzyna S o k o ł o w s k a, "The Dionysian in Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts*," in *Visions and Revisions: Studies in Literature and Culture*, eds. Grzegorz Czemiel, Justyna Galant, Anna Kędra-Kardela, Aleksandra Kędzierska, and Marta Komsta (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2015), 145.

of the dilemmas which threaten to throw the society into turmoil at the time of the impending war."[73] The hermeneutic uncertainty evoked by Woolf awakens us to the fundamentals of the phenomenon of dispersion—its genesis is the dispersal of "meaning" as it relates to our linguistic being-in-the-world.[74]

Between the Acts cogently invokes the ethics of community life as an individual's "participation with and responsibility towards the larger whole."[75] Ashley Forster notices the connection between Quaker spirituality and the kind of pacifism Woolf represents: "A Quaker theoretical frame, is, then, one that roots politics in deep spirituality, an immanent spirituality of living light and goodness that demands an ethics of respect for the individual while realizing humanity's existential unity and interrelatedness."[76] Woolf's pacifist outlook and its quasi-religious foundations seem to have influenced her view of the necessity of collectivity and constructive interpersonal relationships in a society context. The novelist recognizes the universal pattern of existential unity, which expresses the deeply rooted need for a *bona fide* connectivity. This is the sense of connection that does not disavow autonomy but rather seeks a reconciliation of the individual and the communal.

Woolf appears to treat the pageant as a modern, but embedded in tradition, form of a quasi-religious community, implying that art, like religion, has the power to bring people together. The text of the novel reveals the author's penchant for replacing the role played by religion with that of art. This is noticeable in her choice of lexical items. For instance, the place where the performance is about to be given is called: "A church without a roof ... an open-air cathedral."[77] In Woolf's book, the material and the spiritual not only coexist but also successfully nurture one another. Her political views of non-aggression, expressed explicitly in *Three Guineas*, take the form of a fervent advocating for the creation of "a new spiritual communion which will recover primitive Christian values."[78] In *Between the Acts*, the mystical and the symbolic seem to be on par with reason's enlightening power. As Herbert Marder notices,

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[73] Ibidem.

[74] The hermeneutic uncertainty in *Between the Acts* and Woolf's other major novels can also be understood as relating to ungendered consciousness, and this, in turn, may direct our thoughts to her subtler way of understanding impersonality—T.S. Eliot's famous notion, coined in relation to authorial consciousness. See, e.g., Paolo Bugliani, "'Facing the Monolith:' Virginia Woolf, Modernism and Impersonality," *e-Rea*, no. 15.2 (2018), e-Rea: Revue électronique d'études sur le monde anglophone, http://journals.openedition.org/erea/6232.

[75] J. Ashley Foster, "Writing in the 'White Light of Truth': History, Ethics, and Community in Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts*," *Woolf Studies Annual* 22 (2016): 52.

[76] Ibidem: 52.

[77] Woolf, *Between the Acts*, 45.

[78] Herbert Marder, "Virginia Woolf's 'Conversion': *Three Guineas*, *Pointz Hall* and *Between the Acts*," *Journal of Modern Literature* 14, no. 4 (1988): 470.

the spiritual and the natural appear as inseparable and equally prominent in Woolf's fictional world: "Lamp represents spiritual-intellectual powers that guide the devotions of the saint and the artist, a mystical center where 'the whole emerges ... all its parts now visible ... and death disappears; and the moment is forever.'"[79]

The affinity between the communal aspect of the pageant and that of a religious congregation is of no small significance for another reason. The image of the religious gathering implies the continuity of tradition. *Between the Acts*, like Woolf's other modernist narratives, discloses her attempt to unleash the imagination in the search of the new, which is, at the same time, haunted by the inevitability of retaining the conventional:

> With the slow, excruciatingly evident return of the war over the course of the 1930s, repetition rather than surprise becomes newly significant in the aesthetic landscape. Writing composed before and during the Second World War in a condition of further disenchantment ("1914 but even without the illusion of 1914") falls often under the sign of the cliched and already corrupted.[80]

Tradition and repetition feature as central themes in the novel.[81] However, the positivity and univocity of tradition is continually counterbalanced with misunderstanding, distortion of truth, disagreement, and ignorance, which causes one to not feel to the fullest the flow of consciousness as rooted in the richness of tradition. Rather, what remains is the lack of some focal point to which everyone could adhere. The discordant state of English society is not just a potential source of the war but stands as an open hermeneutic query—a dilemma in constant need to be resolved: "What she saw he didn't; what he saw she didn't—and so on, ad infinitum."[82]

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The momentous time of global calamities, wars, pandemics, and social uprisings is a period of acutely felt insecurity that calls for a rethinking of the

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[79] Ibidem, 471. See also Virginia W o o l f, *Pointz Hall: The Earlier and Later Typescripts of "Between the Acts"*, ed. Mitchell A. Leaska (New York: University Publications, 1983).

[80] John W h i t t i e r - F e r g u s o n, "Repetition, Remembering, Repetition: Virginia Woolf 's Late Fiction and the Return of War," *Modern Fiction Studies* 57, no. 2 (2011): 234.

[81] For a rich study of Woolf's unflagging search for the new in the novelistic form see, e.g. Meg J e n s e n, "Tradition and Revelation: Moments of Being in Virginia Woolf's Major Novels," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Modernist Novel*, ed. Morag Shiach (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 112–25.

[82] W o o l f, *Between the Acts*, 26.

relevance of community, solidarity, and rootedness in tradition. It is a time when the exigency of collective consciousness oriented towards values that can ensure authenticity, stability, and fruitful being-with is felt more severely. In *Between the Acts*, Woolf interrogates the frightful discordance of human actions as well as misunderstandings whose apparent innocence causes social plight. Thematizing an external diaspora, the novelist searches for its roots in the inner dispersion of individuals. Focusing on consciousness that is not restricted to separate individuals, *Between the Acts* explores the grounds for societal unity and the consequences of its violation.

Woolf evokes the state of society when things fall apart, and untruth and nothingness seem to hold their grip on individuals. Proposing a phenomenology of dispersion, she sensitizes us to human brokenness, frailty, and fallenness, whose impact is not limited to individuals, but far more importantly, extends itself to societies and nations. The dominant aura in the novel is one of tremendous tension reflecting the inter-war time. The seemingly idyllic past gets disrupted by deep anxiety caused by the prospect of conflict and the destabilization of the British Empire. The war that forces historical transformations shows that the collective well-being of society should take precedence over individual liberties, which are likely to lead to tyranny and totalitarianism. Woolf does not endorse naïve uniformity but seeks ways of cultivating oneness within diversity. Growing apart and falling apart from a sense of an authentic and unitary existence is what Woolf sees as a threat when consciousness is trapped inside the confines of the particularity of interests, but also when dualistic reasoning prevails and precludes an embracement of the distinctive kind of unity that lets go of false barriers for the sake of the well-being of communities and societies. Exclusionary thinking, inauthenticity of being-with and dispersal go side by side with the uncertainty of truth.

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ABSTRACT / ABSTRAKT

Małgorzata HOŁDA, The (In)authenticity of Being-with: Virginia Woolf and Collective Consciousness

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The body of Virginia Woolf's work is marked by a shifting interest from the nature of individual to collective consciousness. Her most preeminent novels, *To the Lighthouse* and *Mrs. Dalloway*, are mostly exemplars of the former, while *The Waves* and *Between the Acts* demonstrate a progressively deepening inquiry into the significance of collectivity. A deep dive into the dichotomies between unity and disunity, *Between the Acts* explores the intricate texture of collective consciousness. Simultaneously, Woolf encourages us to view authenticity and inauthenticity of being-with as an interweaving profoundly expressive of our human condition. At the core of the binary oppositions the novelist evokes, such as togetherness and separateness, genuineness and falsehood, stands the question of human Dasein. Proposing a hermeneutic-phenomenological investigation of the dialectic of the individual and the collective in *Between the Acts*, I draw on the affinities between Virginia Woolf's philosophy of existentiality and Martin Heidegger's hermeneutics of facticity, and more specifically on his understanding of truth as *Aletheia*. While doing so, I focus on the interlocking nature of social (outer) and personal (inner) meanings of dispersion, encapsulated in Woolf's laconic but potent statement in the novel: "Dispersed are we."

Keywords: authenticity, collectivity, consciousness, Martin Heidegger, Virginia Woolf

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Małgorzata HOŁDA, (Nie)autentyczność Bycia-z. Virginia Woolf i świadomość zbiorowa
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Twórczość Virginii Woolf charakteryzuje się przesuwaniem akcentu w zainteresowaniach powieściopisarki ze świadomości indywidualnej w kierunku świadomości zbiorowej. Najwybitniejsze powieści Woolf, *Do latarni morskiej* i *Pani Dalloway*, są przykładami jej koncentracji przede wszystkim na świadomości indywidualnej, podczas gdy późniejsze powieści pisarki, *Fale* i *Między aktami*, ukazują stopniowo pogłębiającą się eksplorację znaczenia świadomości zbiorowej. W *Między aktami*, wnikając w dychotomię jedności i wyobcowania, Woolf poddaje refleksji skomplikowaną naturę świadomości zbiorowej. Jednocześnie powieściopisarka zachęca do postrzegania autentyczności i nieautentyczności bycia-z w ich wzajemnym przenikaniu się, które głęboko wyraża kondycję ludzką. Ontologiczne pytanie o Dasein znajduje się w centrum binarnych opozycji przywoływanych przez Woolf, takich jak wspólnota i odrębność, autentyczność i nieautentyczność, prawda i fałsz. Proponując w artykule hermeneutyczno-fenomenologiczne studium dialektyki jednostkowości i zbiorowości, czerpię z podobieństw między filozofią egzystencji Virginii Woolf a filozoficzną hermeneutyką Martina Heideggera, a w szczególności jego rozumieniem prawdy (aletheia). W artykule skupiam się na zazębiającej się naturze społecznych (zewnętrznych) i osobistych (wewnętrznych) znaczeń rozproszenia, zawartych w lakonicznym, ale przemawiającym stwierdzeniu w powieści *Między aktami*: „Jesteśmy rozproszeni".

Słowa kluczowe: autentyczność, kolektywność, świadomość, Martin Heidegger, Virginia Woolf

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