

**Gabriella Moise**

## **“Heaven be praised for it, the problem of space remained”**

### **The Phenomenology of Pictorial Space in Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*<sup>1</sup>**

The painterly dilemma of translating reality into the language of aesthetics surfaces with a renewed difficulty for Lily Briscoe the painter of Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*. The novelty of her challenge rests in her encounter of post-Cartesian (architectural, corporeal, pictorial) spaces, above all the “hideously difficult white space” of her canvas along with the emptiness of domestic spaces left behind by the death of her primary subject, Mrs. Ramsay. This paper explores Lily’s Cézannesque formalism, which she accomplishes through establishing a phenomenological relationship with things, bodies, and spaces. The painter familiarizes herself primordially and synaesthetically with her surrounding reality in a Merleau-Pontian fashion, defying the hegemony of cognition, language, and vision. Her body becomes the locus of the chiasmic node of the visual and the tactile, she realizes her own embeddedness and homogeneous oneness with the world and transposes this relationship, that is, her vision, onto the canvas.

#### **Challenging Painterly Spaces**

Radically different painterly expressive modes characterize the two phases of Lily Briscoe’s artistic enterprise in Woolf’s novel. Her stages inevitably reflect on the respective socio-cultural milieus of pre-war gentility and audacious experimentalism, whereas the Great War as a thematic intermission coincides with the structural caesura of the novel embedded in “Time Passes,” the middle section. Nevertheless, my analysis does not aim at the exploration of the macrocosm of artistic representation but focuses on one of the most significant constitutive means of the painter, that is, the space of vision. Vision here simultaneously indicates a sight or a specta-

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cle, the entirety of the visible things to be depicted and also, in its much more obscure sense of modernist poetics, it signifies in a Cézannesque fashion “an emerging organism,”<sup>2</sup> “an emerging order,”<sup>3</sup> to adopt Merleau-Ponty’s terms here, or “the framework of steel,”<sup>4</sup> as Lily formulates the underlying structure of reality.

The reconciliation of reality with its visual equivalents of abstracted, stylized forms, the realization of the constellation of things, bodies and their receptive space, and the intertwining of one’s lived and visualized spaces are Lily’s ultimate challenges. She has to surrender her claims on stability and calculability of the Cartesian space of “The Window” section for the sake of facilitating the potentials of phenomenal spatiality and a synaesthetic experience of her painterly subject, i.e. Mrs. Ramsay. The latter’s physical absence in the closing chapter, “The Lighthouse,” forces Lily to search for an alternative signifying system, a fundamentally altered spatial and corporeal rendering, which, unlike the first part’s solidifying tendency, offers impermanence and fluidity. What engages Lily’s creative potentials is the transubstantiation of the mobility of her circumambient reality, including her own locus and proximity from bodies and/or things into the formalist order, in which “one colour melt[s] into another like the colours on a butterfly’s wing; but beneath the fabric [the painting] must be clamped together with bolts of iron” (186).

Lily’s canvas, which opens up the third dimension, a perspectival “depth” in the fabric of the narrative, functions as an interface for such notions as perception and knowability of the world, representation, human relationships, and painterly techniques. There is, however, a discernible shift of emphasis regarding Lily’s artistic dilemmas in the course of the novel. Whereas in “The Window” section she desperately wants to take hold of the quintessential visual trope of Mrs. Ramsay, and, additionally, to find the painterly equivalent of reality, in “The Lighthouse” section, her attention is split between the technical, structural, and aesthetic issues and questions of metaphysical concerns. Besides Lily’s active agency and artistic urge to complete her painting, a meditative tone and a powerful inner interrogation accompany her creative procedure, following the cataclysmic intermission of “Time Passes.” Lily expands the painterly space through transfiguring elements of reality onto the canvas by “model[ing] her way into the hollow there” (186). The challenge of modeling the “hideously difficult white space” (174) recurs with renewed forces later on when she reflects upon the same act as “tunnelling” (188). Both terms allude to the paramount difficulty of a painter, that is, the creation of the illusion of three-

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2. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Non-Sense* (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1964), p. 17.

3. Merleau-Ponty, *Sense*, p. 14.

4. All parenthesized references are to this edition: Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 54.

dimensional space on the flat surface of the canvas. Whereas “modelling” highlights plasticity, achieved not only by forms but also by the substantiality of colors, in this manner, indicating modernist painting’s kinship with sculpture, “tunnelling” emphasizes the third dimension of depth. Figuratively, the latter also reveals Lily’s psychological journey into her private past and that of the Ramsays by evoking episodes of collective memories of the summers spent with the family. She finds herself “to be on a narrow plank, perfectly alone, over the sea” (187) in a uniquely fertile solitude, a state she can afford for the first time in the narrative, accompanied solely by the silent, however, inspiring Mr. Carmichael, who signifies poetic language and artistic creativity. Mr. Carmichael’s emergence in Lily’s microcosm is not accidental at this stage of her creative process. The expressive power of the image let it be verbal or pictorial is doubled by the juxtaposition of poet and painter, and subsequently by their respective artifacts both bearing the capacity to fuse the temporal and the spatial dimensions. Lily also admits that she “felt curiously divided, as if one part of her were drawn out there [over the sea] . . . the other had fixed itself doggedly, solidly, here on the lawn” (171). Her sense of being divided is not limited exclusively to the physical duplicity of the shore and the sea as a geographically determined narrative and artistic frame. She also constrains herself to keep Mr. Carmichael “not too close . . . but close enough for his protection” (161), while she experiences a total immersion in the space of her painting and faces the compelling question of how to translate the visible sphere into the language of art. “Against her will she had come to the surface, and found herself half out of the picture, looking, a little dazedly, as if at unreal things, at Mr. Carmichael” (193). The passage reveals Lily’s unique relationship with reality, the way the painterly space occupies the actual, physical environment of the painter, and also, how entities of reality become secondary compared to the forms of the artistically generated universe.

The closing chapter abounds in Lily’s posing such paramount questions as “What is the meaning of life?” (175) or “Who knows what we are, what we feel? Who knows even at the moment of intimacy, This is knowledge?” (187). Her inquisitive tone prevails “The Lighthouse” section along with the pervasive sense of uncertainty, as well as Lily’s and Mrs. Ramsay’s (in her conjured up presence) drive to identify, to name, to define things of their reality.<sup>5</sup> This results in the intensification of the rhythm of the narrative and the urge to find a solution, a reconciliatory communicative means. Singling out things by pointing at them and offering a name apparently

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5. “‘Oh,’ she said, looking up at last at something floating in the sea, ‘is it a lobster pot? Is it an upturned boat?’” (174); “‘Is it a boat? Is it a cork?’ she [Mrs. Ramsay] would say . . . ‘Is it a boat? Is it a cask?’ Mrs. Ramsay said. . . . Aren’t things spoilt then, Mrs. Ramsay may have asked (it seemed to have happened so often, this silence by her side) by saying them?” (186, 187); “Little words that broke up the thought and dismembered it said nothing” (193).

cannot establish a satisfactory apprehensive relationship between man and reality. The inadequacy of language is tangible in “The Window” section as well,<sup>6</sup> yet towards the closure of the novel affective and aesthetic communication is becoming imperative.

Securing a clearly circumscribable creative space appears to be an essential condition for Lily to complete her painting. She draws a demarcation line between herself and Mr. Ramsay, while she secures the sight of him and his children on her horizon during the whole section. At the same time, she maintains her carefully measured proximity with Mr. Carmichael. She delineates the space of creation by “[setting] her canvas firmly upon the easel, as a barrier, frail, but she hoped sufficiently substantial to ward off Mr. Ramsay and his exactingness” (163). In this manner, Lily doubly marks the limits of creation: physically, by distancing all the other characters, the house, and the Lighthouse, metaphorically, by experimenting with an alternative space. From the first “trembling” momentum (172), the descent of her brush, Lily is preoccupied with the problem of space and the potential depth and plasticity of the momentarily resisting canvas. Her own distance, both spatial and temporal, and the gaping emptiness of Mrs. Ramsay’s formal corporeal presence call for a different mode of representation. A rationally conditioned perspective and painterly frame suggested by “The Window” section, in which Mrs. Ramsay frequently occurs in the drawing room window, as a framed beauty, as the object of admiration, is no longer inspirational, let alone, adoptable for Lily. At this decisive stage, she experiences space unlike in the first chapter. Her stance shows no signs of rigidity and fixity, she is not forced into a prescribed network of visible things any more. On the contrary, she is in a continuous, rhythmic movement, walking back and forth between “the edge of the lawn” and her easel (161, 169, 176, 185, 219, 225), exchanging glances with the distant Lighthouse and the vanishing boat of Mr. Ramsay and his company, or noticing the proximity of Mr. Carmichael (161, 173, 174, 186, 194, 195, 207, 210, 219, 225). A whole series of images engulf Lily with which she engages herself in an affective and perceptual interaction. The images vary from

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6. Cf. “for it was not knowledge but unity [Lily] desired, not inscriptions on tablets, nothing that could be written in any language known to men, but intimacy itself, which is knowledge” (57); “The words . . . sounded as if they were floating like flowers on water out there, cut off from them all, as if no one had said them, but they had come into existence of themselves. . . . [Mrs. Ramsay] did not know what they meant, but, like music, the words seemed to be spoken by her own voice, outside her self, saying quite easily and naturally what had been in her mind the whole evening while she said different things” (120). As the excerpts indicate, words and language lose their conventional function and either an extensive figurative condensation permeates them or they totally discard the one-to-one referentiality between signifier and signified.

purely visual ones as the sight of the boat, the company of Carmichael, the “puffing and blowing sea monster” (207), or “some light stuff” that whitens the window (218) to the tangible emptiness of the drawing room steps or “the heavy draperies of grief” (166),<sup>7</sup> to the aural percept of “the squeak of a hinge” of the drawing-room window (212). This relationship of things, as visible, audible, tangible entities constitutes a phenomenological space that envelops Lily, positioning her as one among the things to be perceived.

### **Beyond the Framed Vision: Cézanne’s *Réalisation***

As Maurice Merleau-Ponty observes, such a “[s]pace is no longer what it was in the *Dioptric*, a network of relations between objects such as would be seen by a witness to my vision or by a geometer looking over it and reconstructing it from outside.”<sup>8</sup> The Cartesian artistic space prescribes a mathematically calculated proximity of things and figures along with (and this, in fact, is even more significant) the position of the painter/viewer as external to, hence, estranged and disembodied from the painted dimension. As Anne Friedberg examines the function of windows, frames, and perspective itself, “the Cartesian subject [is] centered and stable, autonomous and thinking, standing outside of the world.”<sup>9</sup> This “centred and stable” position necessarily confines the subject to immobility, which relationship is supposed to be controlling and apparently assures a complete understanding and knowledge of the image or the thing being looked at.

This appears to be radically different from phenomenologically defined spatiality, which is the dominant spatial configuration of the narrative, preliminarily occurring in the introductory chapter, however, most tangibly presented in “The Lighthouse.” Not only Lily’s perseverant movement defies fixity and rigidity of the Cartesian model of representation but her surrendering of the primacy of visual perception whose essence lies predominantly in the identification of the viewed things forcing them to fall dead within their respective categories. Lily, following the method of Cézanne’s *réalisation*, that is, the transubstantiation of reality into

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7. Lily describes Mr. Ramsay’s unbearable demand for sympathy through this image. Besides the unbearable weight suggested by the image, it also alludes to the painter’s eye that detects substantiality in any possible object. Drapery appears to be a prominent painterly theme that challenges artists with the problematic of the light and shadow effect, primarily, raised by the wrinkled surface of the fabric.

8. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception* (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1964), p. 178.

9. Anne Friedberg, *The Virtual Window: from Alberti to Microsoft* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006), p. 47.

meaningful forms, “looked blankly at the canvas” (171) or, at other times, the wall, the hedge, the step, the boat, all recurrent objects of her vision. She does so not out of some paralysis but because of a conscious disruption of anchoring her artistic observation merely in the appearance of things, and opts for a reflection on the very process of seeing. On the one hand, the things she looks at are emphatically empty and devoid of their former role (e.g. the window being the frame of Mrs. Ramsay’s beauty, the step being the “stage” for Mrs. Ramsay and James functioning as the models for Lily’s painting). On the other hand, some of the objects of her vision like the sight of the boat or Mr. Ramsay and his children are withdrawing into invisibility, gradually changing their proximity from the viewer and, at the same time, their contours and shapes are indefinite. Hence seer and seen alike are in permanent movement drawing a rhythmical pattern of a constantly changing interaction. The way things lose their primarily functional identity Lily also leaves behind her social selves (“the old-maidish” [161] single, the woman who cannot paint – Tansley’s firm judgment of female artists – the one whose duty is to offer sympathy to Mr. Ramsay) for the sake of uniting herself with the metaphysical depth of surface appearances. “For what could be more formidable than that space? Hers she saw again, she thought, stepping back to look at it, drawn out of gossip, out of living, out of community with people into the presence of this formidable ancient enemy of hers – this other thing, this truth, this reality, which suddenly laid hands on her, emerged stark at the back of appearances and commanded her attention” (172–3). Lily can secure victory over her “ancient enemy” if she is ready to perform what Gottfried Boehm terms “contemplative vision”<sup>10</sup> concerning Cézanne’s mode of perceiving nature. “This necessitates a particular mode of adherence, which is capable of viewing form and its content, as well as the structure of a painting and its effect upon its viewer simultaneously.”<sup>11</sup> The conflation of these constituent parts is expressed in the concept of *réaliser* which “verb fuses the most diverse aspects into one single act: seeing and the sight of nature, reflection and painting itself.”<sup>12</sup> The idea of merging the biologically determined perception and the recognition of “the other thing . . . at the back of appearances” (172) (as Lily formulates the quintessential invisible emerging in front of her eyes), as well as the fusion of the mere procedure of displaying paint on the canvas with the distilled metaphysical revelations of ex-

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10. Gottfried Boehm, *Paul Cézanne: Montagne Sainte-Victoire, Eine Kunst-Monographie* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1988), p. 54 (“denkenden Schauens”). Hereafter, quotations from Gottfried Boehm’s *Paul Cézanne Montagne Sainte-Victoire* appear in my translation.

11. Boehm, p. 54. (“Erfordert ist eine Weise der Zuwendung, die zusammenzusehen vermag: die Form mit dem Gehalt, den Bildbau mit seinen Wirkung.”)

12. Boehm, p. 54. (“Das Verb faßt verschiedenste Aspekte in ein Tun zusammen: das Sehen und die Ansichtigkeit der Natur, reflektieren und malen.”)

istence describe Lily's very creative process, especially in its altered form of her second attempt at the portrait of Mrs. Ramsay.

The eradication of Cartesian spatiality also results in the dissolution of the hierarchy among figures and forms formerly subjected to a single viewpoint of exclusive control. The idea of proportionality prescribes a cavernous spatial order in which hollows, things, and their encompassing space are heterogeneous in nature and origin. "Along with the abolition of the mathematical perspective, Cézanne eliminates the concept of the empty space that is filled by things. This arrangement is replaced by a dense, filled-up space . . . in which things are connected to their places, hence thing and place share a common origin."<sup>13</sup> This approach also suggests the painter's personal incorporatedness in the very sphere s/he depicts. S/he ceases to be an outsider to the painterly space: the artist paints from the inside. Lily's lines and colors generate space the moment they fall upon the canvas, assisting her in the Cézannesque *réalisation*, the transposition of elements of reality into the painting.

With a curious physical sensation, as if she were urged forward and at the same time must hold herself back, she made her first quick decisive stroke. The brush descended. It flickered brown over the white canvas; it left a running mark. A second time she did it – a third time. And so pausing and so flickering, she attained a dancing rhythmical movement, as if the pauses were one part of the rhythm and the strokes another, and all were related.

(172)

Flux, continuity, oneness are doubly formulated in Lily's experience: her "running mark" is the visual equivalent of her flickering brush, which is the elongation of her bodily move, whereas the traces of paint imposed on the canvas and their rhythmical pattern of "pausing and flickering" affect Lily in return since she herself performs a conspicuously similar movement. The homogeneous co-existence of things and their places is also emphasized by the oneness of pauses and the descending brush, as well as the analogous white spots still untouched by paint and the traces of brushstrokes upon the canvas. Lily creates space and its content simultaneously, condensing places, characters, and verblativity into forms and their enveloping intersubjective space. Through the notion of memories, she does not restrict herself to the artistic transformation of spatial/visual elements but fuses spatiality with the temporal dimension, thus she recreates the totality of reality in her painting. Her focus is switching between the external and internal spheres: the object of her perception is as much the intangi-

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13. Boehm, p. 103. ("Cézanne hat mit der wissenschaftlichen Perspektive das Konzept eines leeren, mit Dingen gefüllten Raumes abgebaut. An seine Stelle tritt der dichte, erfüllte Raum, im dem sich – wie schon die Aquarelle zeigten – die Dinge mit ihrem Ort verbinden, beide gleichen Ursprungs werden.")

ble opacity of the past, her memories, through which she preserves a corporeal link (for instance by crouching at the feet of Mrs. Ramsay on the steps) as the physically rendered immediate environment of the house.

The manner in which Cézanne viewed space as being identical with its content, the things filling that space up, corresponds to Merleau-Ponty's idea concerning the relationship of the body and the world, the body being one among other objects and things inhabiting the world as such. "Things are an annex or prolongation of [the world]; they are incrustated into its flesh, they are part of its full definition; the world is made of the same stuff as the body."<sup>14</sup> Merleau-Ponty elaborates his concept of the flesh in one of his last writings "The Intertwining – The Chiasm" published posthumously in *The Visible and the Invisible*, in which he offers a new ontological perspective on the interrelatedness of the subject-object-world triad. As Elisabeth Grosz explains Merleau-Ponty's concept, "[f]or him, the notion of the flesh is no longer associated with a privileged (animate) category, but is being's most elementary level. . . . Flesh brings to the world the capacity to turn the world back on itself, to induce its reflexivity, to fold over itself, to introduce that fold in being in which subjectivity is positioned as a perceiving, perspectival frame."<sup>15</sup> This model enables the philosopher to eliminate crucial dichotomies such as the external and the internal, the visible and the invisible or the subject and the object and it also introduces a reflexivity grounded in the very chiasmic relationship of such categories.

### **"A dancing rhythmical movement"**

The realization of the body-world nexus, subsequently, my being as a subject, is optimized in visibility, since "[t]he eye lives in this texture as a man lives in his house."<sup>16</sup> Merleau-Ponty's illustrative model envisions the multiple engulfment of the perceptive organ that dwells in the house of the human body that inhabits the texture of the world as an integral tissue of its flesh. House and body become naturally analogous. In this conflation, the body's locus cannot preserve permanence and fixity, partly due to the perpetual movement of things, the pulsation of the enveloping-enveloped bodies. Lily's characteristic movement, which is reinforced by "a dancing rhythmical movement" (172) drawn by her brush, echoes both Cézanne's and Merleau-Ponty's idea concerning the mutual relationship of movement and perception. Cézanne examines the role of movement within the frames of the painterly space.

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14. Merleau-Ponty, *Primacy*, p. 163.

15. Elisabeth Grosz, "Merleau-Ponty, Bergson, and the Question of Ontology," in *Intertwinings: Interdisciplinary Encounters with Merleau-Ponty*, ed. Gail Weiss (Albany: State U of New York P, 2008), 13–29, pp. 22, 23.

16. Merleau-Ponty, *Primacy*, p. 166.



[Movement] occurs in the genesis of the painting, where one particular *tache* attains its context, where the “pre-objecthood” of elements differentiates itself into qualities of the landscape, transformed into aspects of things, into an experience of space, into the entire drama of unfolding nature. Time and movement do not occur *in* space as far as their origin is concerned; rather they *produce* space *and* things.<sup>17</sup>

This preceding phase of substantiating and solidifying the visual percept onto the canvas evokes the affective, pre-verbal communication that both Mrs. Ramsay and Lily make attempts at in “The Window” section, following the realization of their failure to grasp the essence of reality through their continual urge to define and to name. The painting provides the viewer simultaneously with the thingness of its constituents and their embedding space through phenomenal experience. Lily worked out the fundamentals of the Cézannesque color scheme during “The Window” section, which gained completion in the substantiality and solidity of form-arrangements within a composition bearing the strength of “bolts of iron” (186). “[S]he began precariously dipping among the blues and ambers, moving her brush hither and thither, but it was now heavier and went slower, as if it had fallen in with some rhythm which was dictated to her . . . by what she saw, so that while her hand quivered with life, this rhythm was strong enough to bear her along with it on its current” (173–4). Her hand and its extension, that is, the brush, perform the rhythm dictated by the energy of surrounding objects of nature, which movement J. Hillis Miller terms as “the choreographed and choreographing dance.”<sup>18</sup> Lily as an organic part of the world, assisted by the capacity of vision, can internalize this generative

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17. Boehm, p. 103. (“Die Bewegung, [die wir wahrnehmen, ist deswegen auch anderer Art]. Sie vollzieht sich in der Genese des Bildes, dort wo der einzelne Fleck in einen Kontext übergeht, das Vor-Gegenständliche der Elemente sich zu Qualitäten der Landschaft ausdifferenziert, zu Dingaspekten, Raumerfahrungen, zum ganzen Schauspiel der werdenden Natur. Zeit und Bewegung vollziehen sich nicht *im* Raum – sondern *bewirken den* Raum *und* die Dinge – ihrer Existenz nach.”)

18. J. Hillis Miller, “Mr. Carmichael and Lily Briscoe: The Rhythm of Creativity in *To the Lighthouse*,” in *Modernism Reconsidered*, ed. Robert Kiely (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1983), 167–189, p. 171. In this article, Miller elaborates what he considers the essential nature of Woolf’s creativity, which he introduces right at the beginning as “a matter of extrapolation, the projection out into the unknown of a life force, a constructive force, whether moral, collective, or artistic. . . . [An] extrapolation reaching out from what is now and here toward what is there and not yet” (pp. 167, 168). Miller explores the various representations of this “*buoyant élan*” (p. 167) on the level of essential characters, demonstrating how each of them in their own manner and with different success is driven by such energies. The focus of his essay falls on language and narration as an obvious yet elusive vehicle of creativity.

pulsation, her body emerging as one with nature. The interlacing of time and space through the act of movement defies the Cartesian fixity of the viewer and his/her corporeal distance and alienation from the world.

Movement of another nature than that of Lily's defines all essential characters of the narrative. They are all governed by different directionalities: some, in desperate search for anchorage, are drawn to Mrs. Ramsay, to her inextinguishable "capacity to surround and protect," to "the torch of her beauty" (44, 47), like bees "drawn by some sweetness or sharpness" (58). The same converging force motivates each act and movement of James, who, on the one hand, is unable to loosen his emotional and psychological attachment to his mother, and, on the other hand, longs frantically to visit the Lighthouse, a wish that comes true, naturally enough, after Mrs. Ramsay's death. Hence, a centripetal drive is completed, and James, along with Mr. Ramsay and Cam, reunite themselves with the absent Mrs. Ramsay. Mrs. Ramsay's movements, on the other hand, bear a centrifugal direction since she emanates light and creative energies continually. "[F]olding her son in her arm, braced herself, and, half turning, seemed to raise herself with an effort, and at once to pour erect into the air a rain of energy, a column of spray, looking at the same time animated and alive as if all her energies were being fused into force, burning and illuminating. . ." (42). The radiation of generative energies does not cease with her death, her absence. Lily conjures up Mrs. Ramsay's image or, it would be more precise to say that Mrs. Ramsay's phenomenal body always already filled up the Ramsays' space in an oneiric manner similarly to Lily's image of Mrs. Ramsay's presence in their life as the sensation of awakening after a dream. "For days there hung about her, as after a dream some subtle change is felt in the person one has dreamt of, more vividly than anything she said, the sound of murmuring. . ." (58). Mrs. Ramsay's phenomenal body, a space multidimensionally expanding, is summoned on Lily's perceptual screen, that is, her canvas, assisting her accomplishment of producing aesthetic depth, the space of "reflection and subjectivity."<sup>19</sup>

She saw her canvas as if it had floated up and placed itself white and uncompromising directly before her. . . . The brush descended. . . . [A]nd so, lightly and swiftly pausing, striking, she scored her canvas with brown running nervous lines which had no sooner settled there than they enclosed (she felt it looming out at her) a space. Down in the hollow of one wave she saw the next wave towering higher and higher above her. For what could be more formidable than that space? (171–172)

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19. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 128.

The moment of summoning upsurges as a continuation of Lily's "decisive stroke" – a loaded expression that functions here as a corporeal gesture, alluding to the stroke of the lighthouse and that of the painter's instrument: firstly, by the literally taken brushstroke, secondly, by evoking light, an indispensable element of painting.<sup>20</sup> We actually witness the becoming of space, the metamorphosis of the two-dimensional white surface overwhelmingly gaping in front of Lily into a multifarious spatial modulation. The painter immerses herself in a harsh duel-like interaction with the canvas, which is also indicative of the difficulty of subject formation and reflexivity. Her act is preceded by a series of hesitant inquiries concerning the proper point of entry, "the point to make the first mark" (172). She is about to depict something not primordially given, not as a mere "translation of a clearly defined thought"<sup>21</sup> but rather executes the process through which that something springs into life, into visibility.

Oppositional forces draw Lily into two different directions: firstly, as a merge with the world and its organization as it appears only to the painterly eye, and, at the same time, as a staggering movement, a moment of estrangement to enable herself to weld the experience into one single spectacle. The forceful downward strike of her brushstroke, on the other hand, recalls Mrs. Ramsay's flashing needles with which "she created drawing-room and kitchen" (43), that is, spaces of domesticity. These procreative acts highlight the identical features of Lily and Mrs. Ramsay.<sup>22</sup> Lily's most prominent tool, the ultimate generative vehicle at this particular stage of artistic expression is the line.

Figurative or not, the line is no longer a thing or an imitation of a thing. It is a certain disequilibrium kept up within the indifference of the white paper; it is a certain process of gouging within the in-itself, a certain constitu-

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20. The designating power of the stroke appears as a main thematic concern of "Time Passes," the middle section of the novel. This phase plays a crucial role in the bridging of the two spatially organized sections, the framing chapters, by its predominantly temporal setting. Its central symbol is the Lighthouse presented, ambivalently, through extinguished lights, distorted reflections, and its solitarily haunting strokes, summoning the image of the dead Mrs. Ramsay as a spectral entity.

21. Merleau-Ponty, *Sense*, p. 19.

22. John Hawley Roberts establishes the analogy between Mrs. Ramsay and Lily in his essay "Vision and Design' in Virginia Woolf" (1946) based on their inclination "to create order" (p. 845). Mrs. Ramsay tries to mend "the inadequacy of human relationships" (p. 844) and meets her end without a genuine and satisfactory solution to the problem of relationships, whereas Lily's "difficulty is to transfer . . . design to the canvas" (p. 845). She also suffers from the lack of harmony and balance, permanently struggling with the disequilibrium of the masses on her canvas.

tive emptiness. . . . The line is no longer the apparition of an entity upon a vacant background, as it was in classical geometry. It is, as in modern geometries, the restriction, segregation, or modulation of a pre-given space.<sup>23</sup>

Perhaps this indifference is what triggers Lily's "decisive stroke" and the oncoming battle she must necessarily fight against space and absence. Lily here simultaneously scores her own "in-itself" and that of the canvas that presupposes a contiguity with Mrs. Ramsay as a spatial design. The line's constitutive power enables the painter to demolish the conventionally acclaimed imitative instrumentality of the line as one of the fundamental pillars of mimetic representation. The canvas bears the imprints of the "pre-given space," i.e. Mrs. Ramsay, awaiting the generative painterly work.

Prior to shaping her way into the "white and uncompromising" (171) space of the canvas, Lily impulsively steps back to create a controlling distance. The painter, who willingly discarded the means of the mimetic mode of representation, faces a supreme hindrance, namely, the issue of how to "realize" (*réaliser* in Cézanne's sense) the world. Lily's most prominent difficulty emerging in the creative process is twofold: firstly, she has to face the challenge of the engulfing emptiness of the canvas; secondly, she is confused about the means of transforming the circumambient reality into form, turning her vision into design. This latter problem takes on a protean diversity from the moment "[Lily] took her brush in hand . . . [when] the demons set on her" (23); the struggle with the surface elusiveness of color for the sake of creating the underlying shape (23, 54, 176, 186); the difficulty of grasping the essence of Mrs. Ramsay, of finding the analogous visual metaphor through which Lily can express her the most adequately (55, 58, 59, 80, 175); "the problem of relationship, simultaneously human and formal"<sup>24</sup> (60, 80, 93, 94, 101 111, 161, 187); or the haunting empty space of the canvas (92, 171, 172 173, 186, 195, 224). The issue of form and meaning emerges in a series of subtle painterly dilemmas for Lily, echoing Fry's own notions of artistic expression.<sup>25</sup> John Hawley Roberts has made a vanguard attempt<sup>26</sup> to draw the parallel between Roger Fry's aesthetic ideals and

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23. Merleau-Ponty, *Primacy*, p. 184.

24. John Hawley Roberts, "Vision and Design' in Virginia Woolf," *PMLA* 61 (1946) 835–847, p. 844.

25. Roberts also acknowledges that Lily's "ideas about art are identical with those of Roger Fry" (p. 842).

26. Roberts's essay is the first one that explores "the question as to whether or not any of Fry's critical ideas, as expressed in such essays as those collected in *Vision and Design* (1920) and *Transformations* (1926) or in the *Cézanne* monograph (1927), were in any way incorporated in Mrs. Woolf's work" (835). He analyses two of Woolf's novels, *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and *To the Lighthouse* (1927), which he considers particularly relevant for his purposes as these "were done

Woolf's writing technique. Roberts introduces Fry's concepts partly through the art of Cézanne, who serves as an unquestionable model for the English art critic. "Realizing for [Cézanne is meant] . . . the discovery in appearances of some underlying structural unity."<sup>27</sup> Roberts goes on to claim that both Cézanne and Woolf express this unity through "a rhythm of plastic movement."<sup>28</sup> Fry's choice of words unveils two significant components of the novels explored by Roberts: first, the continual thematic and compositional pulsation of the text (the series of openings and closures or the repetitive pattern of up-and-down movement); second, the plasticity owing to this dynamism, which incorporates visual and substantial qualities alike. Lily's figure fuses the aesthetic principles of Fry's and Cézanne's artistic theories, and, she becomes a substitute for both of them manifested through her artistic conflicts of grasping reality and the ceaseless confrontation with the implacable canvas.

Christopher Reed goes beyond Roberts's claims concerning the painter's figure being a representative of formalist artistic ideals. Roberts attributes the painter's presence in the novel to the influence of Post-Impressionist aesthetics in which Woolf got immersed at the time of writing *To the Lighthouse*. Although Reed does not disregard the formalist aesthetic context of these works (more precisely of Woolf's novels till the 1920s) either, his analysis offers an alternative status for Lily's character: her being a trope for "Woolf's narrative technique."<sup>29</sup> "Woolf's technique is to mediate the narrative through layers of representation that deny traditional authorial claims to an omniscient knowledge transferable to the reader. Here the painter's rejection of seeing-as-having is translated into the author's refusal to give authoritative knowledge."<sup>30</sup> Woolf exploits the theme of painting and indirectly the potentials of visual signification for the sake of demonstrating how the conventional narrative voice, and, at the same time, language prove to be insufficient to get access to the characters and to express reality. As Patricia Joplin observes, Lily's inability to represent her subject lies in her insistence on getting to know Mrs. Ramsay in the same manner as a reader would demand the knowability

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at a time when Fry and Mrs. Woolf were most closely associated and because they [the novels] are . . . the most striking and effective results of the influence. . ." (p. 835).

27. Fry quoted in Roberts, p. 842

28. Fry quoted in Roberts, p. 842.

29. Christopher Reed, "Through Formalism: Feminism and Virginia Woolf's Relation to Bloomsbury Aesthetics," in *The Multiple Muses of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Diane F. Gillspie (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1993), 11–35, p. 22.

30. Reed, p. 22. At this stage of the essay, Reed explores the formalist characteristics of *Jacob's Room* but he hurriedly adds in the oncoming section of his work that in *To the Lighthouse* this method "is pushed to what has been widely judged a more successful level" (p. 22) than in the earlier novel.

of characters from the author, who supposedly has total command of his or her fictitious world.<sup>31</sup> Unless she approaches her theme with “a disinterested, purely aesthetic gaze”<sup>32</sup> she cannot reach fulfillment. From the beginning the traces of an alternative perception in the form of bodily and spatial “intimacy . . . which is knowledge” (57) preoccupy Lily, yet she is still too deeply rooted in the observation of the physical reality in a “seeing-as-having”<sup>33</sup> manner. The formalist representation of reality gains its completion the moment Lily “simplifies, abstracts, and adjusts her image until it attains the independence from its model that makes it neither a substitute for the unattainable Mrs. Ramsay nor a symbol of ‘universal veneration,’ but significant in itself as an arrangement of form. . .”<sup>34</sup> The condition of her “independence” is her model’s absence, which enables Lily to realize her phenomenological intimacy, hence her knowability of Mrs. Ramsay and, indirectly, her own subjectivity. “Mrs. Ramsay has faded and gone, she thought. We can over-ride her wishes, improve away her limited, old-fashioned ideas. She recedes further and further from us” (190). Lily even indulges in a somewhat malicious tone while she comments on Mrs. Ramsay’s “old-fashioned ideas,” the most hateful of those for her being marriage.

### **Vision and Design: From Primordial Perception to Lived Perspective**

Reed introduces Lily’s emblematic closing remark “I’ve had my vision” (226) “as an acknowledgement that what neither they nor the reader have had is Mrs. Ramsay.”<sup>35</sup> “Vision” is a fundamental expressive mode of the Modernists, a term adopted by Woolf as early as in her seminal essay “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” (1924) in which she terms the figure of Mrs. Brown a “vision to which [she] clings though [she] know[s] no way of imparting it to the reader. . .”<sup>36</sup> Mrs. Brown, who appears as “a mere figment of . . . imagination,”<sup>37</sup> functions as a reservoir of Modernist poetics: she is eternal (80), elusive, bearing “unlimited capacity and infinite variety” (87).

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31. Joplin quoted in Reed, p. 24. Joplin draws a parallel between Lily’s temporary failure to grasp the meaning of Mrs. Ramsay and Erich Auerbach’s similarly failed reading of Woolf and her works.

32. Reed, p. 24.

33. Reed, p. 22.

34. Reed, p. 25.

35. Reed, p. 24.

36. Virginia Woolf, “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” in *Collected Essays*, ed. Leonard Woolf (London: Chatto and Windus, 1966), 319–337, p. 332.

37. Woolf, “Mr. Bennett,” p. 333.

Lily's sigh of relief, appearing as a gesture of avowal with respect to the significance of vision, suggests the acknowledgement of something more than simply not having Mrs. Ramsay. Vision thus embodies the very impossibility of knowing the other through a possessive grip, which always already implies a hierarchical relationship of the I and the other, and within that relationship, of the I's mind and its body.

The ordinary subject, unlike the painter's I/eye, is not able to view his or her own self as a given presence, as a representation with which s/he can take up a position as a viewer and summon the visibles given to his or her sight. The subject calls for an auxiliary means that assists the visual command of the world's fabric, which vehicle Merleau-Ponty terms vision. "Vision is not a certain mode of thought or presence to self; it is the means given me for being absent from myself, for being present at the fission of Being from the inside – the fission at whose termination, and not before, I come back to myself."<sup>38</sup> He imagines vision as something primordial to cognition and language that enables the I to experience his being-in-the-world as an absence, a paradoxical self-visualization of one's presence as an absence, as an invisibility. Each individual is a constituent part of this texture, i.e. the "simultaneity" of things, and, at the same time, one is absent to himself/herself at the moment of one's dehiscence from what Merleau-Ponty calls the "flesh" (*chair*) of the world. Vision, as M. C. Dillon formulates it in his article on Merleau-Ponty's "Eye and Mind," "certainly functions as his chief metaphor or model for perception in general."<sup>39</sup> Yet things appear to perception in the Merleau-Pontian visionary mode primordially, not as the individual knows them, as one speaks about them or as consciousness reflects on them. They appear prior to the cognitive process or verballity, as pure objects of the visible. Things in their primordial state do not show themselves to the ordinary spectator since the vision of the ordinary eye is trained to view the world through representations, mediated images of reality under the manipulative control of the gaze, in the Foucauldian sense of the term. Consequently, human perception for the sake of envisaging the picture of the world needs a catalyst figure, through whom the constellation of things is developed onto the "photosensitive" surface of the canvas. The painterly vision is empowered to make the underlying structure as invisibility, the "emerging order"<sup>40</sup> implicated, "incrusted" (to adopt a Merleau-Pontian term here) in the visible realm accessible to all subjects. The structure of things, the togetherness of bodies, shapes, figures is always already there, obscured by my very embodiedness, my oneness with the world.

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38. Merleau-Ponty, *Primacy*, p. 186.

39. M. C. Dillon, " 'Eye and Mind': The Intertwining of Vision and Thought," *Man and World* 13 (1980) 155–171, p. 164.

40. Merleau-Ponty, *Sense*, p. 14.

“The painter’s vision is not a view upon the *outside*, a merely ‘physical-optical’<sup>41</sup> relation with the world. The world no longer stands before him through representation; rather, it is the painter to whom the things of the world give birth by a sort of concentration of coming-to-itself of the visible.”<sup>42</sup> Lily often encounters her circumambient reality in a visionary manner expressed through images of forceful natural appearances such as “a ponderous avalanche,” a dancing “company of gnats” or a “fountain spurting over” (29, 30, 174). These instances all depict her manner of realizing the world as a powerful moment of understanding, a mental mapping triggered by some visual impetus to produce/realize reality in a confluence of disseminated sensory experience. “All of this danced up and down, like a company of gnats, each separate, but all marvellously controlled in an invisible elastic net – danced up and down in Lily’s mind. . .” (30).

Duality characterizes the position of the painter: s/he plunges into the flesh of the world, discerns the exteriority of his/her encompassing universe from within, in accordance with Cézanne’s paradoxical observation that “[n]ature is on the inside.”<sup>43</sup> The painterly vision, thus, illuminates our shared roots with the world, our equivalence with other things and bodies. “Quality, light, color, depth, which are there before us, are there only because they awaken an echo in our body and because the body welcomes them.”<sup>44</sup> Yet, this echo is triggered only through an indirect, mediated relationship the viewer establishes with the painting. The painter, in order to take a comprehensive hold on reality, on the other hand, has to estrange himself/herself from that particular segment of the world s/he is about to transform into the artistic rendition. This estrangement initiates a stare of refreshed visual capacity, dispossessed of the falsities that representation, otherwise, bestows on the world. Lily’s primary experience on returning to the Ramsays’ summer cottage carries a sense of radical detachment.

The house, the place, the morning, all seemed strangers to her. She had no attachment here, she felt, no relations with it, anything might happen, and whatever did happen, a step outside, a voice calling . . . was a question, as if the link that usually bound things together had been cut, and they floated up here, down there, off, anyhow. How aimless it was, how chaotic, how unreal it was, she thought, looking at her empty coffee cup. (160)

The coherence that Mrs. Ramsay compulsively attempted to maintain in the introductory chapter is, by this time, utterly shattered. The loosened bonds prevail not

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41. Merleau-Ponty adopts Paul Klee’s term here.

42. Merleau-Ponty, *Primacy*, p. 181.

43. Merleau-Ponty, *Primacy*, p. 164.

44. Merleau-Ponty, *Primacy*, p. 164.



only in Lily's view of the scene but in Mr. Ramsay's and the children's experience, as well. All of them try to overcome this emotional, structural, existential, and phenomenological chaos, naturally, by different means. Mr. Ramsay recites poetry to surmount disorder, letting the words hover in the air, where they carry on the rigor of the poetic arrangement, the controlling power of language. Words of Cowper's poem (160, 161) infiltrate emptiness, fill up the nooks of the house and force Lily to turn the visible realm into a similarly cohesive model. She is urged to transplant the poetic composition into the visual one (161), to defy the overwhelming emptiness that stares back at her even from "her empty coffee cup" (160). She is challenged to "[exchange] the fluidity of life for the concentration of painting" (173), a mission she struggles with all through the narrative, most tangibly, however, in the closing phase that conveys a metaphysical imprint due to a constant interrogation of the self and a sense of existential doubt and anxiety. Lily exploits the potentials of her detachment to unveil the mask of familiarity of her surrounding, and "[s]he set[s] her clean canvas firmly upon the easel, as a barrier" (163). In his exploration of Cézanne's technique, Merleau-Ponty conditions the painterly access to the "deep structure" of the world on the process of defamiliarisation.

We live in the midst of man-made objects, among tools, in houses, streets, cities, and most of the time we see them only through the human actions which put them to use. We become used to thinking that all of this exists necessarily and unshakeably. Cézanne's painting suspends these habits of thought and reveals the base of inhuman nature upon which man has installed himself. . . . It is an unfamiliar world in which one is uncomfortable and which forbids all human effusiveness.<sup>45</sup>

The passage reflects upon the human existential framework as spatial, equating houses, streets, cities with objects and tools as extensions of the former. Considering the human body as yet another manifestation of spatial structures, our view is blocked by the corporeal proximity of fellow beings. The painter's primal encounter with the strangeness of the world and the depiction of this experience are what shake us as unfamiliar whenever we are confronted with a non-representational, non-mimetic work of art.<sup>46</sup> The spectator's astonishment originates in the crudeness of the world's primordial disposition, with which we lost our innate relationship through socialization and the employment of signifying systems like language or the perspectival pictorial tradition. "The task before him [the painter] was, first to forget

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45. Merleau-Ponty, *Sense*, p. 16.

46. Such an upsetting encounter is most conspicuously represented through the figure of Bankes, but Mr. Ramsay and Tansley bear similarly distrustful suppositions towards Lily's art and talent.

all he had ever learned from science and, second *through* these sciences to recapture the structure of the landscape as an emerging organism.”<sup>47</sup> The painter has to enable himself/herself to facilitate the energies and potentials of the physical environment, and “the rules of anatomy and design”<sup>48</sup> even if these laws would otherwise delineate different routes to his/her brushstroke. Lily activates Mrs. Ramsay’s imaginative, visionary perceptive mode as much as Mr. Ramsay’s “austere . . . bare, hard, not ornamental” (170) kitchen table, the stylized symbol of his philosophical subject matter and his rational, scientific approach, a symbol offered to her by Andrew Ramsay as an ultimate clue to grasp the essence of Mr. Ramsay’s scholarly work. Merleau-Ponty terms this fusion of the visionary imagination and the scientific bareness as “intuitive science,”<sup>49</sup> with which he characterizes Cézanne’s prime interest in nature, which he expresses through a technique very far from naturalism.

Certainly she was losing consciousness of outer things. And as she lost consciousness of outer things, and her name and her personality and her appearance, and whether Mr. Carmichael was there or not, her mind kept throwing up from its depths, scenes, and names, and sayings, and memories and ideas, like a fountain spurting over that glaring, hideously difficult white space, while she modelled it with greens and blues. (174)

Lily deprives her self of the particularities that turn one into a social entity: name, personality, appearance. She, perhaps not so drastically as Cézanne, strips herself to the extent that she, basically, becomes one with “the base of inhuman nature,” as Merleau-Ponty formulated the fundamental nature of the Cézannesque visuality. The flow of scenes, names, memories constitutes itself as “forms in the mind” (173), resurfacing from time to time on her mental canvas, awaiting transubstantiation onto the actual painterly surface. “To do this, all the partial views one catches sight of must be welded together; all the eye’s versatility disperses must be reunited. . .”<sup>50</sup> Order and unity claim ground with renewed forces in “The Lighthouse” section, naturally as substitutes for the lost referential point, i.e. Mrs. Ramsay, to compensate for the commonly experienced emptiness. Lily houses sensory scraps of her individual life and also the time spent together with the Ramsays. These continually urge her to cast them into forms of substantiality, to enable them to inhabit the artistic space. Lily’s painterly vision of reality is getting gradually blurred with her actual environment. She either moves to-

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47. Merleau-Ponty, *Sense*, p. 17.

48. Merleau-Ponty, *Sense*, p. 17.

49. Merleau-Ponty, *Sense*, p. 17.

50. Merleau-Ponty, *Sense*, p. 17.

wards the depth of the painting (“She went on tunnelling her way into her picture, into the past” [188]) or, just the other way round, emerges from its profundity. “Against her will she had come to the surface, and found herself half out of the picture, looking, a little dazedly, as if at unreal things, at Mr. Carmichael” (193). The painted sphere replaces reality, it challenges the latter as an alternative reality. The anchoring point between the two spheres is Mr. Carmichael, the most elusive, non-realistic character. The apparent stability of Lily’s physical reality, which is conditioned on Mr. Carmichael, is undermined by his very abstracted and obscure existence. This, in return, justifies the status of the painting as a legitimate surrogate for their immediate environment. Lily’s vision bears a resemblance to Mrs. Ramsay’s experience of ascending the stairs and reaching out to stabilize herself by grasping the branches of the trees outside.<sup>51</sup> Both occurrences represent the oscillation of two conventionally irreconcilable realms: the external-internal opposites, and the nature-art dichotomy.

In a conversation with Emile Bernard Cézanne straightforwardly claims that he wants to make nature and art the same, by which the two realms become interchangeable.<sup>52</sup> What lies in the centre of Cézanne’s technique of holding a perceptive grip on the world is the reconciliation of the painter’s multisensory experience of things and the apprehension of the structure that holds human vision together. A subsequent stage to this process is how he transforms his understanding of the world into visuality, with which he provides a secondary substantiality to reality. Even though this painterly vision is remodeled, it can function as primary reality for its spectators, who otherwise could not get access to the substratum of the natural scenery. In his exploration of Cézanne’s aesthetics Merleau-Ponty calls this sensitivity “primordial perception,”<sup>53</sup> which operates as a collection of the senses, an integrated simultaneity that knows no patterns of hierarchy. Primordial vision is devoid of the selectivity of our conventionally prefigured/prescribed, hence, learnt sensory experience, since the subject is exposed to an abundance of diverse perceptive modalities. Lily once complains about the difficulty of catching a full sight of Mrs. Ramsay: “One wanted fifty pairs of eyes to see with. Fifty pairs of eyes were not enough to get round that one woman with, she thought” (214). What is even more significant is, however, the amalgamation of the different sensory fields in a

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51. “So she righted herself after the shock of the event, and quite unconsciously and incongruously, used the branches of the elm trees outside to help her to stabilise her position. She must get that right and that right, she thought, insensibly approving of the dignity of the trees’ stillness, and now again of the superb upward rise . . . of the elm branches as the wind raised them. For it was windy (she stood a moment to look out)” (122–3).

52. Cézanne quoted in Merleau-Ponty, *Sense*, p. 13.

53. Merleau-Ponty, *Sense*, p. 15.

synaesthetic fusion. Although Cézanne's artistic mission flirts with the impossible due to the omnipresence necessitated by his vision, he attempts "to portray the world, to change it completely into a spectacle, to make *visible* how the world *touches* us."<sup>54</sup> By mentioning the tactile sensation, considered traditionally as an inferior sense-organ, especially in comparison to sight, Merleau-Ponty reflects upon the human subject's immanence in the world, our indwelling as being perennially embraced by other objects/bodies with which we maintain an indivisible togetherness. He views the human body as "an intertwining of vision and movement,"<sup>55</sup> regarding the motor function as a fundamental completion of visual perception, since it is not only our eye that is moving while we look at something, but in order to monitor a more extensive segment of our environment we constantly shift the position of our body, as well. Movement constitutes the image of our spatio-corporeal mode of existence, we get a comprehensive view of others and of our own multidimensionality through getting into physical contact with things/bodies. Yet, the average corporeal entity can only take a cognitive grip upon the world as his/her own exclusive revelation of the being-one-with-the-world sensation. S/he cannot get access to the fabric of the world, to the vision incorporating a universal coexistence of the seeing/seen, touching/touched bodies. In contrast, "[t]he painter lives in fascination. The actions most proper to him – those gestures, those paths which he alone can trace and which will be revelations to others. . . – to him they seem to emanate from the things themselves, like the patterns of the constellations."<sup>56</sup> The painter's fascination touches upon a certain invisible presence, something covertly obtainable within visibility. The words with which Merleau-Ponty describes the painter's manner of detecting the invisible, namely, his "gestures" and "paths," reinforce the artist's corporeal motility. The painter traces the world by getting in actual, physical touch with the constituents of the world, executing a continuous apprehending movement, arresting fellow objects, things, bodies in a comprehensive grasp. Sensory experiences of an entirely different nature distil themselves as a knot tied in Lily's mind (171) which she carries herself "involuntarily, as she walked along the Brompton Road, as she brushed her hair, she found herself painting that picture, passing her eye over it, and untying the knot in imagination" (171).

While Lily accomplishes her final vision, she recaptures Mr. Ramsay's up-and-down movement (his monotonous act accompanied by the similarly automatic recitals of poetry) with reinvigorated energies: on the one hand, by "stepping to and fro from her easel" (190), on the other hand, by repeatedly turning her scrutinizing

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54. Merleau-Ponty, *Sense*, p. 19.

55. Merleau-Ponty, *Primacy*, p. 62.

56. Merleau-Ponty, *Primacy*, p. 167.

eyes towards the shore and spotting Mr. Ramsay's boat on the sea. Additionally, the moment she reaches certain segments of the lawn, catching sight of the hedge, for instance, she evokes memories of the past holiday she spent with the Ramsays, in this sense, linking past and present as much as her own location on the shore with the distant view of the Lighthouse or the receding family. Lily's eyes, her visual perception are assisted and partially performed in her tactile-motor activity. The imaginary knot absorbs colors, light, shapes, odors, and sounds of things before it flings itself upon the perceptive membrane of Lily's mind to be transformed into a painting. The painter's body belongs to the fabric of the knot, it is condensed from identical sensory particles of the world. André Marchand<sup>57</sup> tells of a similar experience concerning the encroaching relationship of painter and world: "I think that the painter must be penetrated by the universe and not want to penetrate it. . . . I expect to be inwardly submerged, buried. Perhaps I paint to break out."<sup>58</sup> At first sight it seems that Lily penetrates Charles Tansley's interiority when she "X-rays" the young man sitting across the dinner table. "Lily Briscoe knew all that. Sitting opposite him could she not see, as in an X-ray photograph, the ribs and thigh bones of the young man's desire to impress himself lying dark in the mist of his flesh – that thin mist which convention had laid over his burning desire to break into the conversation?" (99). The passage unravels the manifold corporeal being, highlighting the opacity of one's accessibility to his own phenomenal position. Lily sees Tansley's psycho-social entanglement from a bone-deep perspective due to her own viewpoint, which is in the inside of the intercorporeal flesh (in Merleau-Ponty's sense of the term). Woolf smoothly reconciles the scientific metaphor with Lily's metaphysical stance, which blending characterizes the entirety of the novel on several levels, evoking Merleau-Ponty's "intuitive science"<sup>59</sup> with respect to Cézanne's attempt "to recapture the structure of the landscape as an emerging organism."<sup>60</sup>

The difficulty of Cézanne's artistic achievement lies in its innate paradox, the tension between an irrevocably solid composition and the constantly transforming, fluid natural and physical world. Consequently, the artistic process, the continual becoming of expressive forms is an infinite emanation, an ever-renewed centrifugal radiation,

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57. French painter (1907–97), whose words appear in Merleau-Ponty's "Eye and Mind" in which the latter quotes from Georges Charbonnier's assemblage of thirty-six radio conversations with painters of the post-war period entitled *Le monologue du peintre*. The conversations discuss impelling issues of art theory such as the question of the real and realism, or the tensions of abstraction and figuration.

58. Marchand quoted in Merleau-Ponty, *Primacy*, p. 167.

59. Merleau-Ponty, *Sense*, p. 17.

60. Merleau-Ponty, *Sense*, p. 17.

“the continual rebirth of existence.”<sup>61</sup> Lily’s mind purifies images and sensations – ranging from trivialities to the most compelling existential questions – into forms and solidities. “In the midst of chaos there was shape; this eternal passing and flowing (she [Lily] looked at the clouds going and the leaves shaking) was struck into stability. Life stands still here, Mrs. Ramsay said” (176). Mrs. Ramsay’s declaratory words, as a summation of Lily’s aesthetic objectives, reinforce their analogous relationship towards the end of the narrative, which correlation was established much earlier. Stability reaches its fulfillment in the mapping of the voluminosity of things and their arrangement in a “lived perspective,” a constructive depth not viewed from the outside as one unified spatial perspectival depth of the painting but as a depth that is bulging into all directions from within each and every object of the artistic vision. Mrs. Ramsay’s phenomenal body functions as a model for all other forms, the “triangular purple shape” as her stylized substantiation submerges as the arch form of Lily’s aesthetics. The generative color arrangements provide forms with substantiality, exceeding the potentials of shapes that spring into life as a result of a clearly distinguishable outline enclosing and demarcating one space from the other without the constitutive depth. “[F]or it was bright enough, the grass still a soft deep green, the house starred in its greenery with purple passion flowers, and rooks dropping cool cries from the high blue” (24). The novel’s introductory section produces a wide range of such complementary color schemes, not exclusively within Lily’s artistic procedure, but on almost every layer of the narrative: from the social and emotional network of characters to the emblematic centerpiece, the rich dish of fruit at Mrs. Ramsay’s ceremonious dinner party. “The razor edge of balance” (209), however, concerns different fields in the second creative phase of Lily. The emphatic distance and emptiness show reality in its misty distortion where nothing can be viewed clearly or distinctively. Life at the receding shore in Cam’s vision is designated “as if people were free to come and go like ghosts” (185). Lily has to overcome the “uncompromising white stare” (171) of the canvas, the immense gaping space that threatens her with its flatness.

Heaven be praised for it, the problem of space remained, she thought, taking up her brush again. It glared at her. The whole mass of the picture was poised upon that weight. Beautiful and bright it should be on the surface, feathery and evanescent, one colour melting into another like the colours on a butterfly’s wing; but beneath the fabric must be clamped together with bolts of iron. It was to be a thing you could ruffle with your breath; and a thing you could not dislodge with a team of horses. And she began to lay on a red, a grey, and she began to model her way into the hollow there.

(186)

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61. Merleau-Ponty, *Sense*, p. 18.

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Lily describes the surface appearance of her painting almost as an Impressionist, which is not at all foreign to Cézanne's artistic vision either. "He stated that he wanted to make of Impressionism 'something solid, like the art in the museums.'"<sup>62</sup> What turns Cézanne's and Lily's vision into something solidified rests, however, not exclusively on the voluminosity of colors but on the "bolts of iron," the underlying structure, the "emerging order"<sup>63</sup> that is the outcome of the phenomenal geometry, the "intercorporeity" that the embedded artistic subjectivity's apprehension transposes into the work of art.

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62. Cézanne quoted in Merleau-Ponty, *Sense*, p. 12.

63. Merleau-Ponty, *Sense*, p. 14.