

**THE NOTION OF THE PRESENT  
IN  
LESLIE SCALAPINO'S AND VIRGINIA WOOLF'S  
WORKS**

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Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of the  
University of Tübingen for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy by

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## **Introduction**

### **The Notion of Time in Physics and Philosophy**

The starting point of my thesis is marked by the notion(s) of time. I will discuss how and when the notion of time is perceived differently from the conventional classical linear notion of time; how the notion of time is related to and intertwined with epistemological and ontological notions; and whether a different perception of time subverts and transgresses existing established epistemological and ontological boundaries. Although the notion of time is obviously related to physics, I do not have even the slightest intention to intervene in this realm; rather, I am going to focus on it by merging theories of physics and philosophy.

Since St. Augustine (AD 354-430), the notion of time has posed itself as a profound question or even as a puzzle. St. Augustine was one of the pioneers who uncovered how complicated the notion of time is, which his famous quotation reveals:

What, then, is time? I know well enough what it is, provided that nobody asks me; but if I am asked what it is and try to explain, I am perplexed. (qtd. in De Warren 2009, 3)

After surmounting his preliminary confusion, Augustine comes to the point that time does not actually exist outside the mind. Augustine is not alone in his bewilderment about the nature of time and related questions such as whether the division of time as past, present and future is valid (Callender / Edney 2010, 3-10). Some ancient cultures such as those of the Incas, Mayas, Hopi, Native American Tribes, the Babylonians, Ancient Greeks, Hindus, Buddhists and Jainists had the notion of a wheel of time which considers time as “cyclical” and “quantic”<sup>1</sup> (Layton 1994, 7). With Judeo-Christianity, the notion of time changed and it is perceived as linear. In this view, time begins with the act of creation by God and it will end with the end of the world once again as the act of God (Jones 2005, 287).

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<sup>1</sup>“Quantic: A homogeneous function of two or more variables having rational or integral coefficients.” (Oxford Dictionary)

Later, the discussion of the notion of time became one of the major concerns of philosophers, scientist and particularly physicists. Throughout the history of physics, scholars have developed different and contrasting viewpoints. One of the main views of time was formulated by Isaac Newton (1642-1727). In this view, time is considered to be an absolute part of the universe, a dimension which is independent from events which occur in sequence (Callender & Edney 18, 19). Newton's notion of time is called "realist" and, in this notion, time is measurable. Newton's notion of time was refuted by Leibniz (1646-1716) and Kant (1724-1804). Kant claimed that time is just an intellectual or mental construct such as space. He also asserted that time is not an event or a thing, and it cannot be measured (Allison 1983, 12).

Kant's view evidently initiated a new discussion among physicists and philosophers. One of these philosophers was Henri Bergson, who argued against Kant's view. As a response to Kant's concept, in 1903 Bergson introduced the notion of "duration" as a theory of time. He asserted that "duration" is transcendent and can only be displayed indirectly through images which can never give a complete picture. Bergson claimed that "duration" is varied and it flows. It is irretrievable and always points to the future. It incessantly generates newness. It is not predictable and it is the source of infinite freedom. It holds absolute reality in it and communication with this reality is possible through "intuition" (Bergson 1999, 11-13).

In 1908, in his work "The Unreality of Time," J.M.E. Mc Taggart asserted that the perception of time is an illusion and a self-contradictory idea. He pointed out that events can be arranged in two different ways in time, which he called "A series" and "B series." The "A series," he suggested, is in accord with our everyday notions of time with its division into past, present and future. The "A series" is "the series of positions running from the far past through the near past to the present, and then from the present to the near future and the far future" (458). However, in the "B series" events are ordered according to the series of earlier to later moments. According to Mc Taggart, an event has a distinctive quality of being both not present and present. As an example, he puts the death of Queen Anne at the center of his argument:



It began by being a future event. It became every moment an event in the nearer future. At last it was a present event. Then it became past, and will always remain so, though every moment it becomes further and further past. Thus we seem forced to the conclusion that all change is only a change in the characteristics imparted to events by their presence in the A series. (460)

Later the arguments about time often centered on the question of timelessness and on the “now.” For example, Julian Barbour, who wrote his Ph.D. on Einstein’s general theory of relativity and is the writer of *The End of Time*, argued that time does not exist as we perceive it. It is no more than an illusion. He claims that there is no evidence of the past other than our memory of it, and no evidence of the future other than our belief in it. According to Barbour, what creates the illusion of time is change. Time includes individual moments each of which exists in its own right, complete and whole. He calls these moments “Nows” (Barbour 1999, 33). Barbour disputes not only the passage of time, but the existence of an external dimension of time. This (timeless) realm, he argues, is formed by quantum equations that contain every possible now or momentary configuration of the universe. Barbour's rejection of the notion of time has its epistemological consequences. He questions the division of time and is doubtful about the records of history based on the time division. He remarks that the existing history fosters illusion and past records make no sense unless they are overviewed from the present:

But what is the past? Strictly, it is never anything more than we can infer from present records. The word 'record' prejudices the issue. If we came to suspect that the past is a conjecture, we might replace 'records' by some more neutral expression like 'structures that seem to tell a consistent story.' (33)

Until Einstein introduced his theory of relativity, the physical notions associated with time and space were explained through non-relativistic classical mechanics based on the Newtonian idea of time. According to the Newtonian approach, as Schwartz remarks in *Introduction to Special Relativity* (1977), time was believed to be the same everywhere in the universe, measuring the same time interval for any event (10-13). Einstein was the first who questioned whether this proposal can be tested empirically. His inquiry led to a new description of simultaneity which introduced the relativization of the notion of time. According to this new notion of simultaneity, “two events at different places are not in themselves simultaneous; they

may be so for one observer, but not for another who is in motion relative to the first observer” (Born 1969, 20). As mentioned in *The Principle of Relativity* (Lorentz 2000), Einstein claimed that intervals appear lengthened because events are related with objects in motion relative to an inertial observer (37-65). In the relativistic description of time, the notion of Newton’s *absolute time* is no longer valid. Events move up and down, depending on the acceleration of the observer. Through Einstein’s theory of relativity, and later through the contributions of quantum physics, it is acknowledged that the concept of time depends on the spatial reference frame of the observer, and on human perception as well as the measurement by instruments such as clocks, which are different for observers in relative motion. With these new views, the classical division of past, present and future has become invalid. Einstein noted in one of his last letters that:

People like us, who believe in physics, know that the distinction between past, present and future is only a stubborn, persistent illusion. (qtd. in Swahn / Svahn 2008, 31)

On the other hand, time has been and is still considered to be a fundamental means of ordering events as past, present and future, and it is also used as a means of comparing the durations of events as well as the intervals between them and of quantifying the motions of objects (Davies 1996, 31).

### **The Notion of Time and the Notion of Reality**

Classical Newtonian physics assumes that there is a clear understanding of what reality is and it is based on an absolute, true and mathematical notion of time and space. The Newtonian view also assumes a three dimensional space and one dimensional time and it considers absolute time and space to be independent aspects of objective reality. In this view, reality at a certain time is the collection of all that is actual at this time. Yet, as Diederik Aerts remarks in his article “Relativity Theory: What is reality?,” according to Einstein’s theory of relativity, reality

changes constantly in time. The general theory of relativity coalesces the distribution of matter and energy with the curve of space and time. In this theory, space-time is considered as an entity which both affects matter and energy and is also affected by what exists in it. Space and time are entities based on extension and changes. This makes reality and knowledge relational. Later, Einstein's approach to relational aspect of reality and knowledge was developed by the philosophy of quantum physics, which also has a skeptical approach to the classical notion of reality, or hard facts (Aerts 1996, 5).

As noted in "Relativity Theory: What is reality?," from Einstein's standpoint and later to the philosophy of quantum physics, reality has to be related to our experiences and is empirically constructed. The basic concept of the framework of reality is that of an experience. An experience is the communication between a participator and a piece of the world. When the participator lives an experience, this experience is called the present experience of the participator. The one who has the present experience is in the situation of an experimenter together with being the participator. In this sense, the experiment is the experience. Furthermore, while one is experiencing one happening, one also experiences other happenings. However, one can choose to live an experience including one of the other happenings in replacement of one's present experience. Aerts explains this with an example:

I am inside my house in Brussels. It is night, the windows are shut. I sit in a chair, reading a novel. I have a basket filled with walnuts at my side, and from time to time I take one of them, crack it and eat it. My son is in bed and already asleep. New York exists and is busy. Let us enumerate the experiences that are considered in such a situation:

- (1) E1(I read a novel)
- (2) E2(I experience the inside of my house in Brussels)
- (3) E3(I experience that it is night)
- (4) E4(I take a walnut, crack it and eat it)
- (5) E5(I see that my son is in bed and asleep)
- (6) E6(I experience that New York is busy)

The first important remark [...] is that obviously I do not experience all these experiences at once. On the contrary, in principle, I only experience one experience at once, namely my present experience. Let us suppose that my present experience is E1 (I read a novel). Then a lot of other things happen while I am living this present experience. These things happen in my present reality. While 'I am reading the novel'

some of the happenings that happen are the following: H1 (the novel exists), H2 (the inside of my house in Brussels exists), H3 (it is night), H4 (the basket and the walnuts exist, and are at my side), H5 (my son is in bed and is sleeping), H6 (New York exists and is busy). All the happenings, and much more, happen while I live the present experience E1 (I read a novel). Certainly it is not because I experience also these other happenings. My only present experience is the experience of reading the novel. But, and this is the reason for this type of construction, I could have chosen to live an experience including one of the other happenings in replacement of my present experience. Let me put down the list of these experiences that I could have chosen to experience in replacement of my present experience: E2 (I observe that I am inside my house in Brussels), E3 (I see that it is night), E4 (I take a walnut, crack it and eat it), E5 (I go and look in the bedroom to see that my son is asleep), E6 (I go to New York and see that it is busy). This example indicates how we have started to construct reality. First of all we have tried to identify two main aspects of an experience. The aspect that is controlled and created by me, and the aspect that just happens to me and can only be known by me. (Aerts 1996, 6)

Aerts' example illustrates that an experience has two main aspects; the aspect that is controlled and created by the participator, and the aspect that just happens to the participator and can only be known by the participator. At a time, more than one happening can happen and the participator can be aware of them all. However, the participator can choose one or more than one happening as her/his experience. The other events stay at the recognition level. Happenings that can happen at once do not have to be part of the participator's present experience. It is sufficient that they are available at once. Thus, although the participator's present experience is only one or two, the participator's present personal reality consists of an enormous number of happenings that all happen at once. This indicates how we start to build reality.

As mentioned in *Decoding Reality* (Vedral, 2010), since very early times, inquisitive minds have been trying to find out reality. In order to understand what reality is, according to Vedral, the first thing we should do is to decode what we see around us. That is, we should search and try to see behind and beyond the surface. From this point of view, only in this way can we access and develop a possible picture of reality. The knowledge of reality evolves through a series of conjectures and refutations. He also claims that every aspect of reality is marked by either randomness, indeterminism or determinism, and randomness and indeterminism are more reliable when it comes to understanding the aspects of reality. He

supports his view through the philosophy of quantum physics which opens a genuine door to the notion of randomness in attempt to understand what reality is, claiming that “events [...], at their most fundamental level, have no underlying cause” (Verdal 2010, 1, 2).

### **The Revelations of Quantum Physics and Phenomena**

In the classical approach, the physical phenomena are separated from measuring instruments and the observer and so the impact of the measuring tools was neglected. On the other hand, the introduction of quantum physics showed that the measurement of space coordinates and instance of time require rigid measuring rods and clocks, and they have an impact on the object that is observed. With this discovery, the absolute notion of phenomena was replaced by the relative notion of phenomena. Einstein’s notion of space-time coordination in his theory of relativity, as stated by Niels Bohr in his article “Causality and Complementarity,” clarified the presuppositions about phenomena, space-time concepts and causal connection. Einstein obtained his discovery about phenomena through experiments with light which showed that “the finite velocity of light appears in different forms depending on the choice of the frame of reference” (Bohr 1937, 291). This revelation led to the recognition that the behavior of a physical phenomenon is relative to the frame of reference. That is, it is no longer possible to separate the physical phenomena from measuring instruments and the observer. Bohr explains this idea in his article “On the Notions of Causality and Complementarity”:

The very fact that quantum phenomena cannot be analyzed on classical lines thus implies the impossibility of separating a behavior of atomic objects from the interaction of these objects with the measuring instruments which serve to specify the conditions under which the phenomena appear. In particular, the individuality of the typical quantum effects finds proper expression in the circumstance that any attempt at subdividing the phenomena will demand a change in the experimental arrangements, introducing new sources of uncontrollable interaction between objects and measuring instruments. (Bohr 1950, 52)

The theory of relativity altered the notion of mechanical matter, by fusing it with that of

energy. It was the result of the discovery of the connection between the structure of matter and radiation. This was followed by the discovery of electrons and the discrete energy quanta (Born 1969, 21, 24). With these discoveries, in opposition to the previous approaches to light which claimed that it is either wave or particle, it is seen that the light contains both particles and waves. The notion of a particle, which is a light quantum, refers to energy - that is, something of small extent. The concept of a wave, which occupies the whole of space, stands for the notion of frequency. Although the simultaneous existence of particle and waves is quite incompatible, quantum mechanics fuse them in a higher unity, while in the classical approach they mutually exclude each other (Born 1969, 25-29).

As stated in “On the Notions of Causality and Complementarity,” the casual description of phenomena relies on the acceptance that “the knowledge of the state of a material system at a given time allows the prediction of its state at any subsequent time” (Bohr 1950, 51). The development in atomic physics showed that a satisfactory description of the phenomena requires not only their location at a given time, but also their velocities. In classical physics, the transitory positions and velocities were taken into consideration as for the forces between the bodies, but force fields such as electromagnetic effects, which have a retardation effect, were not taken into consideration because then it was not known. The discovery of the retardation effect of electromagnetic effects made it possible to describe the phenomena in a more complete analogy, but not with an absolute content (Bohr 1950, 51).

### **The Notion of Complementarity, Indeterminacy and Epistemology**

The quantum mechanical description of the phenomena does not offer a fixed description of phenomena because any attempt to locate atomic objects in space and time requires an experimental arrangement between the objects and measuring tools, which includes an exchange of momentum and energy that is uncontrollable in principle. For instance, the electrons and photons exhibit different properties as a particle or a wave under different

arrangements of experiment. Thus, the old notion of the “ultimate determinacy of natural phenomena” loses its basis (Bohr 1950, 53), leaving its place to a novel view of complementarity.

Bohr explains the notion of complementarity in his article “Natural Philosophy and Human Cultures,” saying that the information of the behavior of an atomic object maintained under definite experimental circumstances can be identified to be “*complementary* to any information about the same object obtained by some other experimental arrangement” (Bohr 1939, 269). He claims that the recognition of the complementary character of the information gives an entirely adequate explanation to phenomena such as the riddles of the properties of light and matter, which perplexed physicists so much (Bohr 1939, 269). In his article “Causality and Complementarity,” Bohr states that the complementarity view presupposes a relationship or a position in which two or more different findings improve or emphasize qualities of each other (Bohr 1937, 291).

The notion of complementarity also implies that subject and object have a reciprocal relationship and are interconnected because there is no object free from the subject and vice-versa (Bohr 1950, 51-55). The idea of reciprocal relation between subject and object gave rise to the notions of ambiguity and indeterminacy concerning attributes of the phenomena. As stated by Born, in the previous centuries and in Newtonian physics, there was a strong tendency to make final conclusions based on so-called absolutely precise measurement. The introduction of the notion of probability in the 18<sup>th</sup> century maintained the establishment of the molecular theory of gases. This was followed by the development of the kinetic theory of gases in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and statistical mechanics which could be appropriate to all substances; gaseous, liquid and solid. These discoveries allowed the notion of probability to be applied systematically and into the system of physics. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the discovery of quantum mechanics and Heisenberg’s researches displayed that probability spreads in space multidimensionally. This revelation pointed out the impossibility of exact measuring of all data of a state and all the

conditions such as causes (Born 1969, 27, 28).

Gradually, the notion of probability became stronger. As denoted by Born, determinism was replaced by statistical laws of quantum mechanics, which removed “absolute certainty, absolute precision, final truth” from science (Born 1969, 142). Statistical approach showed that from the limited knowledge of the present circumstances, to make assumptions and have expectations about future can be considered to be probabilities because any indicator or change that might appear in any time affects process, making these assumptions right, wrong or indeterminate. In this sense, the probability approach brought a great freedom in the methods of thinking (Born 1969, 142, 143). The notion of indeterminacy provided us with a deeper and richer understanding of the universe and life (Bohr 1937, 294).

As Bohr proposes, the notion of complementarity recognizes the complementary relationship in all fields. For instance, in psychology the complementary approach eliminates the separation between concepts such as “thoughts” and “feelings” or “instinct” and “reason,” which are considered to be contrary to each other in the classical approach. With the notion of complementarity, they are considered to be equally indispensable and crucial in order to understand and explain the different aspects of experience and the fragile line between subject and object. He also claims that similar to space-time coordination there is a dynamic conversation between these notions (Bohr 1950, 54). The notion of complementarity suggests a new aspect of analysis and synthesis which calls into question generalizations, inherent limitations of space-time co-ordination and causal connection of experience and human thinking (Bohr 1949, 25 - 26).

The notions of complementary and indeterminacy created a new domain of experience. The introduction of these notions showed that the experiences in daily life and the observation of phenomena require introspection based on the mutual interconnectedness of the phenomena and the measuring tools. In this regard, the possible description of phenomena requires all various experimental arrangements and analogies which should be considered to be



complementary, but still be open to new views based on new experiments. This new approach to phenomena gave rise to a new epistemology which puts forward relational, complementary and nonessential relations and necessitates the renunciation of the conventional, determinate, essential and consistent relations in the visualization of the universe and phenomena.

Since we have reflective minds and form the picture of the world through innumerable sensations, experiences, communications, memories and perceptions, the picture of the world does not correspond exactly in every respect in two different minds and there is no way to ascertain what another person perceives. At this point, Einstein's theory of relativity, Bohr's complementary approach and Heisenberg's proposal of indeterminacy gain importance. Altogether they suggest a world-view that embraces a corresponding relationship of subject and object by accepting and valuing the differences because each one is complementary to the other. As mentioned in "On the Notions of Causality and Complementarity," from a complementary point of view, we, as conscious beings, are both "actors and spectators" in our story of existence, in which we arrange our experiences and communicate from mind to mind through language which provides us with numerous fashions of expression. In language words also function complementarily and help to avoid strict definitions (Bohr 1950, 54).

Despite the human desire for something firm and absolute or immutable, we are living in a moving and ever-changing universe. Life is infinitely rich and manifold, but it is chaotic and involved with the experiences of us as well. We assemble our impressions about it through the multitude of experiences. In addition to our experiences and impressions, science is an indispensable part of human culture and civilization. The advancement in science altered the previous assumptions about the most elementary concepts which subsidized our whole world-view, leading to new epistemological concepts. New epistemological approaches which are based on the notions of relativity, complementarity, indeterminacy and so the alternative mode of description of phenomena imply unlimited richness and variety to deal with humanitarian problems by removing the notion of the absolute, separation and exclusion. According to the

new epistemological approach, each domain of human life has unrealized potentials that can unfold themselves every moment and reveal to us new aspects of their infinite possibilities.

### **The Notion of Time and its Impacts on the Notion of Ontology**

In the 20th century, schools of subjectivism, objectivism and relativism, as well as the postmodernists and body philosophers tried to reframe the question related to the *self* and the *other*. Their arguments relied, to a great degree, on insights derived from scientific research into animals' taking instinctive action in natural and artificial settings—as studied by biologists and ecologists. During these processes of investigation, the self has become difficult to really define. Some linguists have even suggested dropping the verb *to be* from the English language to avoid bad abstractions (Smith 2001, 79, 97).

In a longstanding philosophical tradition there are two major understandings of the self. One is based on the classical Newtonian notion of time, in which the self is considered as an undivided, invariable, unchanging and trans-temporal entity. In this view, the self is regarded to be a principle of identity, and it is that which persists and resists temporal change; thus, it is atemporal. It is also considered to be a unified being which is the source of consciousness. Moreover, this self is the *agent* that is *responsible* for the thoughts and actions of an individual to which they are ascribed. It is a *substance*; thus, it endures through time. As a result, the thoughts and actions at different moments may pertain to the same self. In such an account, self is taken to be something that has explanatory powers, rather than something that itself is in need of an explanation (Zahavi 2012, 149).

According to Zahavi, contrary to the classical notion of self, there is another philosophical practice based on Einstein's theory of relativity, which is called relationalism. The relational aspect points out a very tight link between temporality and selfhood. One rather obvious and quite venerable suggestion of this approach is that the relation between time and selfhood depends on experiences. It is also claimed that experiences never occur in isolation,

but they are interrelated, and all experiences are subjective in the sense that they present themselves to the subject or self in a distinctive way. Consequently, anyone who denies the importance of experience in the formation of self simply fails to recognize an essential constitutive aspect of experience (Zahavi 2012, 149). In brief, in this view, the self is defined as the very subjectivity of experience. Here, the self doesn't exist independently of or in separation from the experiential flow.

### **The Notion of Time and Literary Works**

The radical change in the notion of time in physics with its apparent impacts on epistemology and ontology can also be seen in literary works. We cannot afford to neglect the role of time and its epistemological and ontological concerns while analyzing literary works. In order to illustrate this, I am going to close read and analyze a selection of works by Virginia Woolf and Leslie Scalapino in my dissertation in order to show why Virginia Woolf and Leslie Scalapino refused and negated the conventional classical linear notion of time; instead they developed their view points based on the present-centered notion of time which they insistently exhibit in their works. My central intention is to explore this question in single works and between the works by the same authors. Here, my focus is firstly to analyze how Woolf and Scalapino take up the notion of time and its connection with epistemological and ontological notions. Secondly, I will discuss how far they transform these notions authentically and that different approaches to time lead to different perceptions of epistemological and ontological notions, which include experience, perception, mind, knowledge, reality and self. I will explain this in detail in the coming sections in this chapter.

The reason why I have chosen Woolf and Scalapino is that they are two of the most original and sophisticated writers in terms of their view points. Although Woolf's and

Scalapino's approaches do not overlap completely, and although, except for once<sup>2</sup>, there is no apparent reference to Woolf's philosophy and works in Scalapino's works, I will argue that they share similar notions of time and epistemological as well as ontological concerns and Scalapino follows in the footsteps of Woolf. I will also argue that their notions of time, epistemology and ontology are closely related to the productive debates of these notions in physics and philosophy of their times. Woolf's and Scalapino's view points of time interact with the notion of time posed by the dynamic theory of relativity and quantum physics. Similar to the debates in the philosophy of quantum physics, Woolf and Scalapino illustrate how the conventional notions of time, epistemology and ontology need to be reviewed. Yet, the idea that Woolf's and Scalapino's *present-centered* notion of time leads to epistemological and ontological consequences is not original with me; both authors have comprehensively discussed this issue not only in their fiction but also in their articles and autobiographies.

I will develop my dissertation unchronologically with Leslie Scalapino because her vision is singular and she is one of the most important writers of the notion of the present. Being very contemporary, Leslie Scalapino may not be known much. Thus, first I would like to give some biographical information about her. As mentioned in *Contemporary American Women Poets*, she was born on July 25, 1947, in Santa Barbara, California, to Robert Scalapino, who was a professor of Political Science, and Dee Scalapino, who was a singer. Scalapino grew up in Berkeley, California. She graduated from Berkeley High School and attended Reed College in Portland, Oregon. She did her master degree in University of California. Her first poetry book, *O and Other Poems*, was published in 1975. This book was followed by *The Woman Who Could Read the Minds of Dogs*, 1976, and *Instead of Animal*, 1977. In 1976, Scalapino was awarded by National Endowment for the Arts Literature Fellowships. In 1979, Scalapino co-

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<sup>2</sup>“Nov. 14, 19977. I was of course reading constantly; in addition to the works of most of the contemporary poets, I had read as background Stein, Virginia Woolf, H.D., Proust, Shakespeare, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century English, French, and Japanese novels, picaresque structures, etc.” (*Zither & Autobiography* 7, emphasis in original)

edited the journal *Foot*. Her experience with *Foot* led her to establish her own press in 1986, which is called O Books, and which is dedicated to publishing young and emerging experimental poets. The 1980s were the years in which Scalapino wrote and published four of her major books: *Considering How Exaggerated Music Is* (1982), *That They Were at the Beach—Aelotropic Series* (1985), *Way* (1988) and *How Phenomena Appear to Unfold* (1990). These works brought her “substantial awards.” For instance, in 1988 the Before Columbus Foundation Award, the Lawrence Lipton Award, San Francisco State University Poetry Center Award and Woodrow Wilson Fellowship. Meanwhile, she gave lectures at different colleges and universities such as the New College of California, the San Francisco State University, University of California, San Diego and the Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York (Cucinella, ed.2002, 325, 326).

In the first chapter, I analyze Scalapino's poetics, her notion of time and its epistemological and ontological impacts. Among the contemporary writers, Scalapino is probably one of the most radical investigators of a non-classical notion of time and its epistemological and ontological impacts. She can, hence, be seen in a way as Woolf's successor. As an effect of her notion of time, she also clears the boundaries between prose and poetry, fiction and fact and private and public. She asserts that these divisions are arbitrary and artificial because everything is related to everything else. She considers life to be a realm in which everything is interrelated in a “continual series of action” (*Front Matter, Dead Souls* 1). As Lyn Hejinian remarks in “*Leslie Scalapino Remembered*,” Scalapino is:

a writer whose visionary thinking provided her with a range of intensely experienced themes and images. It also informed the syntax of her language, which one might readily term experimental but which, more to the point, was a manifestation of the incessant vigilance she imposed on her mind and its articulations. The effort that her writing entailed was motivated by her conviction that action (e.g. writing, but also teaching, editing, publishing, insisting) and being (the present of anything or everything) are inseparable. One is one with the present. Everything is creative. (Hejinian 2010, n. pag.)

Since Scalapino perceives time as always the present, reality as it is asserted by classical Newtonian approach loses its ground for her. She rejects fixed notions of reality and life. As

she mentions in an interview with Edward Foster, her approach to time and reality is influenced by the philosophy of quantum physics and Zen Buddhism, both of which also question and reject any fixity (Foster 1992, 118, 119). In Scalapino's notion of reality, it is hard to see things as they really are because things do not reveal themselves fully on the surface and our perception and mind are modified by various cultural and social prejudices as well as structures which lead to misinterpretations of reality. Scalapino commits herself to struggling for truth in her works. Her notion of truth, as Hejinian notes in "Leslie Scalapino Remembered," is not a "transcendent truth," but it is "particular and specific to the instant." In this sense, Scalapino's works are a manifestation of "continual conceptual rebellion." As Hejinian puts it in "Leslie Scalapino Remembered", for Scalapino, "continual conceptual rebellion is a means of outrunning the forces that would re-form (conventionalize) one" (Hejinian 2010, n. pag.). Scalapino believes that if one stays in one place too long, that is, if one keeps doing the same things, and not chase the new and change, eventually one will get stuck with the same ideas of one's own or by of others. For Scalapino, one should always be "outrunning." This is one of the reasons why Scalapino gives so much importance to the notion of "traveling" in her works (Hejinian 2010, n. pag.).

She regards the notion of "travelling" as "motions" and uses it to dispute the traditional notions of "occurrence," "experience," "memory," "mind," "authority and hierarchy," "reality" and "self." She urges that one continuously split oneself from fixed occurrences, even the occurrences themselves because they lead to fixed experience, memory and a mind-set. In order to save authentic experience and reality, Scalapino proposes her notion of "the comic book," which erases the linear and teleological notion of time and creates neutrality and flatness. For her, reality requires one to be a "seeing-being," who can develop original perception and arrange her/his experience. In this way, s/he can disassociate oneself from fixed notions and obtain ability to access what is the hidden or denied. In order to access reality, Scalapino refuses the division between external and internal, but suggests their interconnectedness. She argues that

there is no phenomenon that appears independent from interrelated webs of circumstances. Therefore, it does not have an intrinsic existence.

Similar to her notion of reality, her notion of self requires avoiding fixed notions, cultural enforcement and remaining the same, but change continually, which necessitates one to split oneself from conventional language. For Scalapino, self is an “absent marginalia” and one can be reborn with a new moment which provides infinite opportunities to start something new. In this way, one can create one’s authentic self. The first chapter concludes with the remark that Scalapino’s poetics is based on transformation. In the process of transformation, as her works testify, art operates to be one of the major indicators. Art functions to deny and break up the rigid barriers in all senses.

The second chapter is a detailed examination of Scalapino’s book *Way* (1988). The reason I have chosen *Way* is because it is a good sample of Scalapino’s writing both syntactically and semantically and reflects Scalapino’s focus on action and revealing the action itself. She constantly eradicates the boundaries in all senses. There is no specific temporal or spatial orientation. She shows that there is nothing fixed and permanent, but everything is liable to change. She considers phenomena to be empty and transitory, which disturbs the notion of conventional reality. She frees the reality from the conventional linguistic structure and descriptive narrative by employing an interlaced narration. In *Way*, Scalapino also displays how “interior” and “exterior” exist interrelatedly and flow simultaneously through events that happen randomly. In this context, she replaces the notion of “exclusion” with the notion of “interrelatedness.” The self Scalapino depicts in *Way* also exists through interrelatedness. It simultaneously embraces inner and outer, public and private, and subject and object. It is not dominated by temporary qualities. The chapter concludes that in *Way* Scalapino tries to create a change in the mind-set of readers and take their attention to the exigency of the existing epistemological and ontological notions.

Chapter three begins with Woolf’s life and “life-writing.” It proceeds to explain her

notion of time according to which we are obliged and governed by a hypothetical chronology despite our private inner experimental time. Her notion of time is composed of “exceptional moments,” which makes the time always the present. This notion of time abolishes any fixed notion. For Woolf, there is no settled reality and no settled history because the present is active in an interaction with an infinite collection of possibilities resonating with the past. History that claims to represent the past is not possible because the past exists through the present. Woolf keeps questioning if time and history are what we experience, or if they are what we are told we experience. She asserts that one’s own emotional and intellectual experience and perception of time, events and reality might be far more dramatic and exciting than that which is ordinarily supposed. For instance, from early childhood to adulthood, one might go through such personal transitions that one might feel time not in terms of years but in terms of centuries, or the years feel like some moments. As it is seen in this case, perception of time is arbitrary.

Similar to the individual case, in *Orlando* (1928) Woolf suggests that the traditionally defined historical eras, like the “Elizabethan,” the “Romantic,” the “Victorian” and the “modern” are arbitrary as well (Woolf 1928, 184). She asserts that it is not sufficient to explain and describe time, events and reality through simplistic labels and categories such as sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth century and so on as traditional historians do. The notion of time, history and reality is far more complicated than the traditional biographers, historians and some scientists acknowledge. Woolf’s concern with time, history and reality recalls Giorgio Agamben’s and Walter Benjamin’s discussions on the same issues. They both reject a conventional linear notion of time and the fixity it causes in the notions of reality and history. Having examined these issues, the chapter proceeds to examine and show the parallels between Woolf’s approach and the approach of quantum physics in the same notions. Finally, chapter three concludes with an examination of Woolf’s argument about the interconnectedness of substantial and unsubstantial qualities of life and matter through the images of “granite and rainbow.”



Subsequently, chapter four launches into a close examination of Woolf's book, *The Waves* (1992). Chapter four begins with an exploration of Woolf's notion of life. It suggests that in *The Waves* Woolf tries to show that life is composed of both substantial and unsubstantial realms, that life is a flux and that it has its own rhythm. In this way, she points out the inadequacy of the conventional notion of epistemology and disrupts it. The next section of chapter four is about Woolf's notion of self. Similar to her notion of life, her notion of self is made up of a flux of permanently changing feelings, thoughts and behavior. The formation of the self is a process that requires continuous reforming of both inner and outer worlds. It is disintegrated and has an ability to change and (re)forms itself at the moments of contemplation. It holds thousands of years of experiences. It rebels against the authority and power represented by the hierarchical social system and religion. With all these characteristics, the self that Woolf suggests necessitates disrupting the traditional notion of a fixed self that is described in conventional ontology.

Chapter four concludes with the role of art in Woolf's philosophy. For her, art has the potential to resist the conventional notions. It enables one to avoid becoming a replica who adopts the conventional notion of time and so conventional epistemological and ontological notions. Art enables one to see and understand reality and oneself from both inside and outside. With its diverse range of activities, art functions as an endless source and as a vehicle to express and communicate emotions and ideas. For Woolf, art, especially literature serves to carry us to the present and makes us dwell there. By actuating all our senses, art and especially literature allows us to experience all sorts of different feelings. Finally, art enables us to develop insights and enhance our perspectives and expand our horizon. In this context, it serves as a technique for consolation.

## Chapter One: Leslie Scalapino and Her Poetics

We do not live to experience death. If we take  
eternity to mean not infinite temporal duration  
but timelessness, then eternal life belongs to those  
who live in the present. Our life has no end in  
the way in which our visual field has no limits.  
(Wittgenstein, Tractatus 6.431)

Although Scalapino is an author from across the Atlantic, it would not be possible to write this dissertation without including her works, for which the very center is the present time. As mentioned in *The Literary Encyclopedia* (2002), her ceaseless attempts to emphasize the importance of a present-oriented notion of time in order to understand life and self are indisputably unique. In her works, every moment of experience is interrupted by introspections of the moment, accompanied by a distinctive poetic voice anchored in a fragmentary language. Her writing never lets an image or a moment as such hold still, but always subjects the image to a shift through analysis, refraction and interaction with other images, thoughts and other experiences (Hinton 2002, n. pag.). In her article “The Cannon: Political/Social Demonstration of the Time of Writing” published in her book *The Public World Syntactically Impermanence* (1999), Scalapino states that the normative language itself must be destroyed in order to move us beyond false representational modes. She considers normative language to be a set of symbols through which meaning is assigned in accordance with conventional notions and it represents the perspective of dominants, namely, a conservative governing and controlling perspective which is “hierarchical” in nature:

The conception of a normative language as being dominant perspective (conception that there is such a dominant perspective; and that such is or should be determining) is hierarchical conception *per se*. (Scalapino 1999, 17, emphasis in original)

Scalapino also asserts that conventional language filters the domination of power and colonialism. She makes use of a writing style which pushes the boundaries and goes beyond the norms of standard North American academic language. This makes her writing experimental. She employs experimentation in the sense of searching (Lauterbach 1996, 145).

Although her experimental writing makes it very hard to read her works, they are not hermetic. As stated by Robert Creeley on the back cover of *Selected Poems* (2008), they are deeply committed to understanding and articulating:

what life might be, what life might be said, factually, to be. But not a defined subject, nor even a defining one - but as one being one. That is an heroic undertaking, or rather, place in which to work/write/live. (n. pag.)

Scalapino's writing is not a replica of events. Her mind remains perfectly lucid observing events. She does not allow the external world, any *doctrine* or any *interpretation* suggested by dominant perspective to have primacy over of her own world because she considers them to be arbitrary and/or false. She remarks that she is not interested in *myth* which is created by doctrines and dominant perspectives, but she deals with life itself. She adds that she does not confuse writing events with actual events. In her writing the events find their existence through an ephemeral and fleeting structure. For her, this writing style describes the reality and self *per se*. She considers writing to be inquiry of how we create images and present them as if they were real. In this context, she links her writing technique to the Surrealists. She notes in *The Front Matter; Dead Souls* that similar to the Surrealists, she exaggerates images in order to let the real present itself:

*This is a plot in continual series of actions. The writing of events is not a representation of these events; actions are not submitted to being made peaceful by doctrine or interpretation, that is, in a fake manner, but artificially by finding their own movement and a dual balance in an impermanence of the structure.*

*The form is to bring (actually to be) [...] contemplation to an actual 'light life'—rather than 'myth,' as this is 'structure' per se defining 'one' and phenomena.*

*This writing is scrutiny of our 'one's' image-making, to produce extreme and vivid images in order for them to be real. It's as if an 'addition' to the Surrealists, as if also in reverse 'beauty as completely realistic.'*

(Scalapino 1996, 1, 2, emphasis in original)

In her article “Fiction's Present without Basis” (2004), Scalapino states that using language for the purpose of a particular propaganda has nothing to do with expressing reality. She argues that propaganda destroys language and clarifies her opinion by giving an example

from the invasion of Iraq in the Second Persian Gulf War in 2003. During the invasion of Iraq, the American politicians said that they were “liberating them [Iraqi people].” Yet, for Scalapino, what they did was to “mow down the[se] people” (49). In this respect, “They (those saying they’re liberating) have destroyed language” (49). In order to deal with this “destroyed language,” Scalapino suggests destroying it through “poetry or fiction” which is “the only language that *can* destroy language in that sense (to make it)” (49, emphasis in original). In the same essay, she explains what she means:

Fiction's present is the act of changing language *then*. The present *is* (phenomenally) a form of fiction, is being created ahead of us unknown. The present isn't engaged in this sense, however, in MLA Style Manual language. Critical, explanatory language (intentionally regularized) is removed from the present as its space (is not the present of that language)—meaning, the intent of critical language is not that of being: the act of changing the present as real-time space (as language, itself a form of real-time space, which can change space outside not mimicking it—conceptual as also *physical* change). Critical language is to be shared terms, what has become that already. My argument is that language of poetry and fiction can be a new space [for critical language] by being (in the text) as given there. (Scalapino 2004, 35, 36, emphasis in original)

Scalapino employs language as a means and a material carrier in itself in order to develop and exhibit her ideas and point of view. Due to her specific emphasis on language, some critics, for instance, Nicky Marsh indicates that Scalapino’s writing can be placed within the language writers' tradition. Marsh comments that similar to the language writers, Scalapino’s writing avoids any uniformity but insists on being experimental through its intricate and diverse techniques (Marsh 1998, 1, 2). When Scalapino was asked if she considered herself to be a part of the language writers group in her interview with Anne Brewster, she replied that although she found similarities between the writings of those writers and hers and although she had contact to some of them, she was not “considered to be in that original group” by the “originators given that name” (Brewster 2004, n. pag.):

For one thing, there's the question of the use of the title “language writers”, the distinction between people who were originators given that name—the term “language writers” arising of course from the name of *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* Magazine—and the younger and large number of writers now called by that name. Though of the same approximate age and knowing them (liking them), I wasn't considered to be in that original group. I thought I was doing work that was germane to theirs and theirs was germane to mine. It was and is important to me. There were other poets who were doing

work of an “experimental” nature who weren't in that particular social group. (Brewster 2004, n. pag.)

Indeed, characterizing Leslie Scalapino only as a language poet would be a reductive approach because her focus on action and revealing the action itself makes her poetics much richer and deeper than this and any other limited term. As Elisabeth Frost remarks in “American Poets since World War II.; Leslie Scalapino,” despite some similarities to language poets, such as Rae Armantrout, Steve Benson, Alan Bernheimer, Charles Bernstein, Carla Harryman, Lyn Hejinian, Tom Mandel, Ted Pearson, Bob Perelman, Kit Robinson, Ron Silliman and Barrett Watten, Scalapino's writing is not typical of any particular literary movement. She follows her own line of thinking which was influenced by different poetic sources, including “her early immersion in Asian culture and philosophy” such as Hindu Vedas and Dōgen (Frost 1998, 319). As well as the impacts of Asian culture and philosophy, her poetry can be seen in the tradition of Edward Thomas and Emily Dickinson.

Scalapino’s poetry is pioneering in abstract syntax and semantic. She employs very short sentences, irregular and erratic phrases, unusual images, repetitions and negations often accompanied by dashes. She manipulates words and turns them into a transparent artifice (Bedient 2000, 170-196). Besides, in her writing, all times occur simultaneously. With these characteristics, in Scalapino's writing everything exists without excluding each other, creating, as she mentions in her interview with Brewster (2004), a sort of *flat surface*. Through this notion of *flat surface*, she tries to generate a *roll paper* effect. The notion of *roll paper* excludes boundaries and hierarchical order. This provides one/her with the ability to play with one’s/her writing and to make any changes, including alterations in the notion of human relations. Scalapino also remarks that she merges the “strange and conventional” in her writing intentionally on this *flat surface* at a moderate level so that the distinctions can become more subtle and the reader’s subtle responses can be triggered:

That particular piece is both “strange” and a convention. The reader is given a

reassurance that it's ordinary, but precisely the fact that it is only slightly strange makes it a ground on which distinctions can be more subtle. It's not based on shock, it's based on a more medium range where various subtle responses on the part of the reader can be brought into play. I'm not using extreme surface, but making a flat surface again. It's almost like roll paper in a funny sort of way. That actually can have a big effect—because you have flattened the surface out in terms of what you can do—on the possibilities of changing someone's conception of relations between people. (Brewster 2004, n. pag.)

In the same interview, Scalapino explains that the two major concerns of hers are “this moment in time” and “continuous engagement” with whatever she is doing. She says that focusing on the moment and concentrating intensively prevent one from not only “any propaganda that’s coming from the outside,” but can also lead to “enjoyment of being alive in that moment” (Brewster 2004, n. pag.). These two make one realize that one is “varied” and “multiple”:

I'm interested in being in this moment in time and engaging something continually, whether one is reading, thinking, perceiving. You're here in this location, and the specificity of the action in which you were engaged is an act of not having any propaganda that's coming from the outside. And it is also simply the act of enjoyment of being alive in that moment. I want to make a writing in which one, in the reading process, is in a free action, and aware of oneself as being a varied, multiple being. (Brewster n. pag.)

Scalapino’s writing is rhetorically and contextually distinct. Nothing is wasted, but everything “coils up into the spring-like keenness of the writing” (Marsh 1998, 3). Her poetics attempts to make the reader realize that there is no text which stands for *reality*, but each text introduces its own terms of *reality*. Scalapino's poetics:

Den[ies] the distance between the text and its referents, making the text its own action. Scalapino's writing inverts the insight that social constructions are always necessarily mediated through language [...], suggesting instead these vehicles of meditation are themselves the central constituents of experience--hence the text becomes the act. Scalapino asks that the reader acknowledge that the text doesn't simply represent reality for us (albeit in an ideologically governed way) but produces a reality on its own terms. (Marsh 1998, 3)

As one of the most innovative writers, Scalapino wrote works which persistently challenge the boundaries of literature’s various forms including poetry, prose, plays and articles over a period of thirty-four years. Her works embody ideas about writing and invention in form

and content by demonstrating how these inventions are possible. As stated in “American Poets,” Scalapino's works “challenge the reader to reconceive literary form and its relation to both personal experience and cultural politics. [...] and initiates instead an innovative poetics of meticulous [scrutiny]” (Frost 1998, 319). In her interview with Edward Foster in 1994, Scalapino notes that she tries to employ the writing to examine the mind “in the process of whatever it's creating” (Foster 1994, 115). In the same interview, she says that she grew up with the Chinese, Japanese and Korean students of her father, who was a professor specialized in Asian politics, and was influenced by them and Zen thought, according to which the outside world is just a reflection of the mind (Foster 1994, 118). She appropriated this approach and employed it as the basis of her search for a new poetics. As stated in *Objects in the Terrifying Tense/Longing from Taking Place*:

In Zen practice ‘appearances’ which *are* the world are the same as mind. The mind is freed from itself and those appearances by delusion itself. (Scalapino, 1993, 9, emphasis in original)

Scalapino's poetics is radical and heroic because it is indispensably contradictory to the Western dualistic approach which is based on the division of world and mind. In this context, she makes a significant contribution to philosophy, theology and psychology. She scrutinizes conventional notions of epistemology and ontology. Through her works, she shows how to re-think epistemological and ontological issues.

In her writing, Scalapino employs certain terms that I would call ‘leitmotifs,’ not only because they appear repetitively, but also because her works create a feeling as if one is being exposed to a complicated, but great symphony composed by an extraordinarily talented and demanding composer. What leads me to think in this way is both Scalapino's mode of thinking and use of language, both of which are incredibly fine. The very abstract and subtle quality of her works are like the essence of music. Thus, it seemed reasonable to me to develop the Scalapino chapter of this dissertation through and around these leitmotifs, namely “continuous present,” “serialthinking/writing,” “travelling” and “phenomena.” These terms are always

related to the notions that she deals with such as occurrences/ events, experience, perception, mind, memory, authority, hierarchy, writing, serial thinking, reality and self. I will begin by discussing the “continuous present” as one of the leitmotifs.

### 1.1 The Notion of Time in Scalapino's Works: The Continuous Present

One key to understanding Scalapino's view is in her approach to time, which focuses on the present as its focus of thought and meditation. Scalapino shows that the present is infinite and she reveals how the distinct partition of time is arbitrary. In *New Time* (1999), which is an intensive meditation on time and in relation with it on conventional notions of epistemology and ontology, Scalapino remarks that:

the pressure is violent cumulation of series, in earlier youth (*now*,  
which isn't it) – isn't it, is caused by it(?) (series)

at that present

rain: falling in sheets at the time. sitting floating (not in it) (fictive there while  
occurring) [sic]. (3, emphasis in original)

Here the story of earlier youth is related to the present; the past is in the present and the present is in the past. The divisions of time are melted into each other. In the piece below, it is evident and confirmed that time is “constructed” as a “social unit”:

there's no time to oneself is the dawn occurring – its rim

it has no rim

pressure so that the mind comes in to the social unit

it isn't done by people, there's no time to oneself (it's done by  
people only) – the night, the dawn, there  
the constructed unit being no time to oneself – standing being  
completely alone  
(‘standing,’ as ‘walking’). (17)

In “Pattern-And The ‘Simulacral’,” one of the articles in her book *How Phenomena Appear to Unfold* (1990), Scalapino deals with how things are seen in and defined by a certain time era, and, simultaneously, how that way of seeing things defines and configures that



particular time. She shows that there is a special relationship between time and seeing. In this context, she particularly focuses on the importance of the moment because it is always unique for not having been constructed before. In this view, time is conceived of as a flow of moments and each moment offers a new beginning. This makes the flow of moments the flow of new beginnings; beginning again and again. In this notion of time, nothing is the same as anything else. Every moment enables one to see events, objects, and cultural abstractions in a different way, continually changing the existing composition. In order to make her approach to time more explicit, in her article “Pattern-And the ‘Simulacral’,” which takes place in *How Phenomena Appear to Unfold*, Scalapino refers to Gertrude Stein’s conception of “continuous present,” which Stein first mentioned in her lecture “Composition as Explanation,” which was then published as an article under the same title (1962). In accordance with Stein’s definition, Scalapino considers time as “continuous present” which is composed of continual recurring and beginning. She quotes Stein’s words in her article “Pattern-And the ‘Simulacral’”:

The composition is the thing seen by every one living in the living they are doing, they are the composing of composition that at the time they are living is the composition of the time in which they are living. It is that that makes living a thing they are doing. Nothing else is different, of that almost any one can be certain. The time when and the time of and the time in that composition is the natural phenomena of that composition. [sic] (qtd in *How Phenomena Appear to Unfold* 27)

Scalapino concludes that one should consistently be in the state of “*being always (at) now*” (*How Phenomena Appear to Unfold* 27, emphasis in original) by questioning, conceiving and comprehending what is happening at that very moment. This means that although the composition of any existing culture or convention is a complex compound and has transformative powers to create stereotyped individuals, in her terms “simulacra,” one does not have to become what the culture or convention dictates. One has the opportunity and independence to introduce one’s own new idea/suggestion through “*being always (at) now*.” Yet, she agrees that this is a hard task to manage and might cause a state of “turmoil” because in the case of “*being always (at) now*,” time should be visualized as something stable, but at the same time moving (*How Phenomena Appear to Unfold* 27, emphasis in original). Once this

difficult task is achieved, the energetic effort toward change through that instant of time and movement brings about qualitative transformations (Scalapino 1990, 27). In other words, an infinite series of successive moments is the domain of change.

Scalapino regards the process of writing as an explicit experience of displaying the transformation through the infinite series of successive moments. Although the conventional texts provide an imposed reality which forms the readers' thoughts as "simulacra" and converts them into replicas, they cannot impede the formation of new words, fantasies and sounds (Scalapino 1990, 30). The potential for change is without limit; hence, it is possible that any individual, any occurrence in nature, any social behavior, or any event is going through change in every moment: "The same scene will not be repeated" (Scalapino 1990, 31). By focusing on the present, Scalapino's works dismantles the conventional texts in which the narrator and the other identities are seen only in terms of location and periods of time (Foster 1994, 116).

In *Zither & Autobiography* (2003), Scalapino asserts that when time is the present, no other time is needed because the present never dies (102). The present requires the destruction of not only the division in time, but also of what has been constructed inside of oneself by the established canon, which makes one an active self who lives life through discrete locations and moments (Scalapino 2003, 86). The active self has a life span "between two" - death and rebirth - , which Scalapino calls being at "bardo." As an example for this, in *How Phenomena Appear to Unfold*, she points to the *Odyssey*, in which while Odysseus is going from Troy to Ithaka, he keeps getting detained in all locations along the way. Odysseus, as a self, is narrated through the bardo realms, as he is always "inhabiting a set which is the (poem's) present" (Scalapino 1990, 61). This makes Odysseus an active self in the sense that he moves forward through detached locations and moments:

A piece of landscape brought to the shore of today, 'detaches itself so so completely from everything, that it floats uncertain in my thought like a flowering Delos, without my being able to say from what country, from what time—perhaps, very simply, from what dream—it comes.'  
(Scalapino 1990, 61)

As mentioned in “Neither In Nor Out: The Poetry of Leslie Scalapino,” Scalapino’s works are “time-specific” and they are examples of a writing mode adjusted to the present, setting up its own version of reality which embraces multiple voices and perspectives and crafts a multi-layered composition (Campbell 1995, 53-60). Similar to Campbell, Frost notes that “Scalapino’s form articulates the present moment from a variety of perspectives” (Frost 1998, 322).

## 1.2 The Continuous Present, Serial Thinking/Writing and Change

One of the most important notions that characterizes Scalapino’s poetics is “serial writing” that she states in *Zither & Autobiography* (Scalapino 2003, 41). It is a technique in which the individual words are added to each other so that the components retain not only their single meaning but also acquire additional meanings. This creates a text which is in a serial form and always in the present because the components of the series exist simultaneously and independently.<sup>3</sup> In this technique, “nothing recurs or is in/crosses the same place itself – yet is going on” since it is based on the present time, creating an alternative mode of perception and reflection. Hence, not only intellectuals and artists, but anyone who applies this technique can see the whole current world changing in every instant (Scalapino 2003, 41-45). In her interview with Katherine Lederer for *Publishers Weekly*, Scalapino remarks that:

The Serial Principle, as writing, implies elements, “staring up continually [...] throughout the work; none recur, summarize, or form a whole. This is similar to travelling without returning to any place, no signs or maps. Each element has equal weight throughout, and isn’t dependent on perspective. Writing serially really would be to be continually free of accumulated associations—which may or may not be impossible.” (Lederer 72)

As in her other works, in *New Time* (1999), Scalapino applies her “serial writing”

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<sup>3</sup> “To add single words to ‘each other’ so that the components retain their single meaning but, ‘by addition only’ have at once an additional meaning. i.e. the text isn’t/(can’t be ) real-time. One’s relation to “early” and one’s relation to “walking” are retained (only as motion) – but only as ‘him’ in space-him existing” (*Zither & Autobiography* 45).

technique and she mentions certain notions repeatedly, but always in a different context. Some of these notions are, in the order they appear in the text: “inside and outside” (7,8,11,41,59,65), “society, social order, authority, social being, social power, convention” (8,9,11,14,27,38,39,46,80,84,86), “the notion of time; the present and the past” (3,9,25,61,87,88,92,93,94), “peace and war” (4,19,26,52,66,68), “writing” (12,50,52,61), “history”(12,52,80), “real(ity)” (48,56,57), “mind” (17,18,39,60,63,64), “distraction and violence” (28,39,58,66,68,76,) and “travelling and walking”(65,80,92). Through this technique, for instance, Scalapino shows how the notion of “war and peace” sounds different to the ones who fight the war and to the ones the war is fought on. She also shows the difficulties that the sufferers, the targeted people, had to deal with, pointing to the unfairness of the war which is caused by the ones who hold the power in their hands. Besides, she shows how the ones who fight the war, “military boys,” are turned into “cattle”:

peace has been cumulative there, in the cubicles in light, outside  
of which is the river through the meadows.

they're clear. (haven't been in war for some time.) [sic] (4)

.....

their existence. ones by being in existence (first).

a pair on the corpse (later).

in spring.  
war heavily weighs on society [sic] (19)

.....

their [the soldiers] going into the houses killing  
is the fact —  
the fact is delicate — in existence even (26)

.....

— military boys —

wearing 'training' spurs of bottle caps — gas stations, differentiated —  
cattle being

whose flesh is dead — before they are — as flying in there at

evening as one (66) (Scalapino 1999)

As it is seen in the montage quotations above, Scalapino puts forward that applying the technique of serial writing enables one to see each and every occurrence in its singularity, but, at the same time, as a part of another occurrence as they are attached to each other. Thus, each segment transmits their specific meaning, and has an additional meaning simultaneously. In this fashion of thinking and writing, the fixed notions can be replaced with flexible ones. One of the outcomes of serial thinking and writing is serial composition. *The Tango* (2001), for instance, is one of Scalapino's works that displays her method of “serial composition” (Tan 2008, 203). It rejects linearity and sequence. The story line or plot is avoided in favor of contingency of associations, occurring in the continuous present (Tan 2008, 202). Through serial thinking/writing and serial composition, Scalapino illustrates how knowledge can be produced and obtained in a different way than what is conventional. Since serial composition has segments which are both separate and linked at the same time, this composition requires and develops a certain mental process and mind-set based on negation. The serial process of negations and contradictions open up the field of inquiry. In this respect, the mind builds upon itself so that, “Every element undergoes a gradual but ceaseless qualification” (Conte 1991, 278). In *The Public World*, Scalapino explains more about serial writing, saying that it:

is not planned or composed, which is ordered in advance. The components /individual poems of the 'series' [...] are delineation of that mind space of that particular poem as it occurs [...] rather than a hierarchical imposition on that mind space substituting social convention as the point of view. (Scalapino 1999, 48, 49)

In her interview with Frost, which Frost mentions in her article “American Poets,” Scalapino explains that she cannot stand closure in poems. She has no fixed forms in her writing, but she prefers separate units of texts which are not constrained by beginning, middle and end. She prefers repetitive variations. Her writing exhibits “minute acts of observation: small blocks of text [...] [which unfold] intricate permutations that continually defy distinctions between external and internal” (Frost 1998, 319).

In *The Public World* (1999), Scalapino notes that serial thinking/writing negates the

social construction which is based on the notion of “higher authority” (48) and the “Puritan ethos” (48). According to her, the Puritan tradition creates a dual consciousness and presupposes a society in which life is obliterated. Obliterated life leads to obliterated reality. In this society self becomes a “confessional self” (48). All these notions generate an illusionary world and a certain mind-set which is haunted by illusions. She suggests that through the method of serial thinking and exercising a critical approach, it might be possible to create a change; serial thinking means watching and reflecting upon the motions and the formation of the mind at that moment, which prevents one from developing a static ethos and personality. That is, whenever one sees an occurrence from a different and a new perspective, one has a chance to change one’s mind: “A new world is only a new mind” (44-50).

### 1.3 Scalapino's Notion of Reality: Scalapino's Notion of Epistemology

The image of something real is contemplated as seeing which does not exist there. Subject it to seeing which may not ever be its occurrence. Then the image that's real exists solely.

An event subject to seeing not to its occurrence there.  
One's seeing it is its sole occurrence. (*Front Matter, Dead Souls* 49)

Scalapino's approach to reality rejects the conventional perception of fixed and so-called objective reality. In *Zither & Autobiography* (2003), she remarks that there is “no inherent reality really” as conventional approach suggests, but there are only infinitesimal motions in the present which provide ceaseless opportunities for getting “re-trained continually” (48). This in turn necessitates that one disengages oneself from “formations, all, interior and cultural” at every possible moment through “redoing” (48), which brings about boundless openness and change. For her, one of the instruments for “undo[ing] one's formations” is writing:

the sense that I have is as if one does see all the time the *way* reality occurs — as having no inherent reality *really* – it's just motions – and that one is being re-trained as language continually, to think as a description of something. So, a task of writing of my period was (is) to undo one's formations, all interior and cultural, at every instant.  
(Scalapino 2003, 48, emphasis in original)

In Scalapino's notion of reality, one is supposed to be a "seeing being." As mentioned in *Zither & Autobiography*, a "seeing being" is one who disassembles oneself from a "fixed relation to events," so from fixed perception because this fixation is the basis of a constructed mind and intellect, creating a "constructed now" (Scalapino 2003, 48, 49). In her article "Silence and Sound/Text," she states that her article *As: All Occurrences in Structure, Unseen – (Deer Night)*, which takes place in *The Public World / Syntactically Impermanence* (1999), which is a commentary on Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and *King Lear* and a total rewriting of those plays "without using the plots, characters or language of Shakespeare," is about "the perspective that is rearrangement by itself (being perspective)" (Scalapino 1999, 31). That is, one perceives something and then one perceives and scrutinizes what one has already perceived. In this respect, one perceives one's perception and rearranges it. This process ties the perceiver to the present:

It is perspective that is rearrangement by itself (being perspective). Analysis takes 'the perceiver' into the most disturbing thing about the present (to paraphrase Stein)—as does being without analysis, being too close.

It's rearrangement of one's thought, by demonstrating its rearrangement. All the (parts and the entirety) of *The Public World Syntactically Impermanence* constitute at once "critical analysis" and 'practice of demonstration of no-procedure.'  
(Scalapino 1999, 31)

In *Zither & Autobiography* Scalapino puts forward that a "seeing being" should cut the fixed relationship between the event and oneself, which liberates one from delusion and from being a replica:

The individual to undercut [...] itself a conception, conception of their self so continually as to dismember their fixed relation to events, even while in the present of those events. Memory itself being only a construction (of itself), of the present also. [...] I was trying to 'punch out' of occurrence real-time events at all [...] the intention is to transform one's illusion of entity by being illusion. [...] A memory is an implant, like the memories placed mechanically in the Replicants [...] it is all that one has.  
(Scalapino 2003, 17-20)

Cutting the fixed relationship between the event and oneself enables one to see the occurrences that seem not to be happening because they are avoided by convention. They are constantly

hidden or denied by the very people who are the cause and the performers of these occurrences. She explains this situation with an analogy of “the black butterfly flying in the blue can't be seen in the blue” in *The Front Matter, Dead Souls* (Scalapino 1996, 3). Being able to *see* these invisible events necessitates freeing oneself from conventional images and the ability to *relate* events (to other events), which enables one to perceive them in their diversity. In *The Front Matter*, which takes up an epistemological stance, Scalapino states that:

Invisible, not that they're not real, actions occur so that one's seeing has to change to be realistic.

These actions are constantly denied by those in them, though sometimes they are not denied and are corroborated exactly.

So that seeing on the rim one could be free one feels but must see actions on the rim with or as where we live. One links them diverging because that is how we see it.

[...]

The deaths of infants of a hundred and seventy thousand maybe in the aftermath of the war are not shown

[...]

The images do not reflect back. They are only themselves, which is not in relation to existence.

Yet that is existence everywhere. This is to isolate the shape or empty interior of some events real in time so their 'arbitrary' location to each other emerges to, whatever they are. (Scalapino 1996, 45, 46)

By pointing to invisible actions and events, as Frost comments, Scalapino calls historical events into question by “dislocate[ing] perspective [of readers] and reorients [them] toward a potent internal reality.” In this way, Scalapino clearly discloses the vacuousness of the conventional view of history and reality (Frost 1998, 327).

The distance between the event and oneself also enables one to connect pieces, that is single events, together and to see the picture as a whole, that is what is really happening: “One links them [actions/events] diverging because that is how to see it” (*The Front Matter* 45). In the introduction of *The Front Matter* (1996), she remarks that she wrote the book as “a serial novel” in the form of “a political cartoon” in terms of its language and the images she used (1).



She says that she employed “vivid” and “extreme” images and language to reveal concealed reality. She also notes that she wrote the book “*to write the modern world, which requires re-writing it*” (1, emphasis in original):

*A serial novel for publication in a newspaper. Its paragraph length chapters can also be published singly on billboards or outdoors as murals. Parts of it were submitted to various newspapers during the election campaign.*<sup>4</sup>  
(Scalapino 1996, 1, emphasis in original)

Some of these events that Scalapino refers to in *The Front Matter* are the First Gulf War, the AIDS epidemic, the trial of Rodney King, the confirmation of Justice Clarence Thomas and the 1992 presidential campaign. Through these events, as Frost comments, Scalapino reflects on:

a culture of violent confrontation, corrupt policing, drug trafficking and narcissistic self-absorption [...] [and] she expands upon her opposition to predatory mass media, which package information for a passive audience of consumers. (Frost 1998, 326)

As in her other works, in *The Front Matter*, Scalapino rejects the division between external and internal. She also rejects the division between the conceptual and the fictional. She connects and interrelates them through the act of writing. Her “compositional practice [...] turns inward and outward at once” (Frost 1998, 327). In this context, Scalapino disrupts and shows the deficiency of conventional perspective based on separation of external and internal. Instead, she attempts to regenerate an alternative perspective based on the interconnectedness of external and internal. Through the interconnectedness of external and internal, she suggests a different reality.

Scalapino’s approach to reality resonates with Zen Buddhism and the philosophy of quantum physics, both of which question and reject conventional notions of arbitrary divisions and any fixation. In the interview with Foster, Scalapino explicates how she was influenced by Buddhism and how she “pursued it simply reading whatever came to hand” after she was given a book on Buddhism by her father (Foster 1994, 118, 119). Her works vibrate with the ancient philosophers Madhyamika and Nāgārjuna<sup>5</sup> in terms of her perception of time, reality and the

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<sup>4</sup> American elections at the beginning of the 1992.

<sup>5</sup> “Nagarjuna, (flourished 2nd century CE), Indian Buddhist philosopher who articulated the doctrine of emptiness

self. According to that approach, any conventional notion of reality is suspect and objectivity is value-free because all phenomena are empty of substance or essence and because they all exist through an interrelated web of circumstances. Thus, there is no phenomenon that holds its meaning or existence in itself. As it was stated in *The Emptiness of Emptiness: An Introduction to Early Indian Mahayana* (1989), “All things are necessarily conditioned and quite empty of independent existence” (Huntington 1989, 109). Since everything exists interrelatedly, there is no inherent and independent reality of its own. This approach frees reality from a “soteriologic” or “essentialist” approach. Reality does not belong to any particular epistemology and ontology, but it appears “in a form of life expressing a certain attitude toward the context of relations, [through] the whole everyday experience” (Huntington 1989, 109).

In her article “The Recovery of the Public World” which takes place in *The Public World / Syntactically Impermanence* (1999), Scalapino refers to the book *Nāgārjuna's Seventy Stanzas* (1987) and ratifies Nāgārjuna's ideas, saying that a phenomenon does not have an intrinsic existence since a phenomenon cannot exist independently, but only interrelatedly. A phenomenon does not exist inherently because it is not based on “a single moment of mind, nor successive moments of mind” because the moment and the mind do not exist inherently: “In other words, the apprehension or the 'moment' of mind appears to be the phenomenon itself, which the mind itself is seeing. Neither exists inherently” (Scalapino 1999, 53). Since a phenomenon and an event “spring from other contingencies,” they do not have individual existence. In this context, they are not and cannot stand as representations of reality and objectivity and should not be perceived as such. This, for Scalapino, “deconstructs” the approach to reality which is based on “observing phenomena” and conventional notions of reality. She considers observing phenomena to be a totally subjective process (Scalapino 1999, 54, 55). In this regard, her approach resonates the philosophy of Quantum physics.

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(shunyata) and is traditionally regarded as the founder of the Madhyamika (“Middle Way”) school, an important tradition of Mahayana Buddhist philosophy” (*Encyclopedia Britannica Online*). Encyclopedia Britannica, 1999.Web.8.2.2016.

As stated in the introduction chapter of this thesis, the philosophy of quantum physics calls into question the notions of the given conventions, and dismantles any deterministic approach and suggests uncertainty principle as an interpretation of reality. In *Atomic Physics and Human Knowledge* (1958), Bohr remarks that laboratory experiences revealed that the observers doing the same experiment perceived differently and received different results due to the temporality and the space the experiment based on and the knowledge of the observer. Bohr argues that it is not possible to make a sharp distinction between subject and object. However, we can give an account of observation. By doing so, it is possible to give unambiguous description within a particular plane of meaning. This is what he calls objectivity. For a full description, all possible other observations on all possible other planes of meaning are necessary. This requires considering the role of subjectivity in the interpretation of reality.

The recognition of the extent to which the physical experience depends on the standpoint of the observer proved most fertile in tracing fundamental laws valid for the observers. [...] The fact that in atomic physics, where we are concerned with regularities of unsurpassed exactness, objective description can be achieved only by including in the account of the phenomena explicit reference to the experimental conditions, emphasizes in a novel manner the inseparability of knowledge and our possibility of inquiry. (Bohr 1958, 10, 12)

In terms of expression of reality, Bohr notes that science overlaps with art, especially poetry, because they both have characteristics of vagueness and boldness. Both science and art are based on a common “human means of expression” (Bohr 1958, 14). As it is mentioned in *Niels Bohr And Contemporary Philosophy* (1994), Bohr explained the uncertainty principle in 1913 (xvi). To Bohr’s principle of uncertainty, the observed values are dependent on the whole experimental context and the atomic systems. Akin to Bohr’s description, from Scalapino’s point of view, reality can be best described as probabilistic and relative because there are no specific elements or dimensions prior to others; everything is just beside everything else. In *Zither & Autobiography*, she indicates that the “real” which is outside of the present is always “unknown and infinite” (Scalapino 2003, 41). I will discuss the impact of the philosophy of quantum physics on Scalapino's philosophy in detail in the “*Way*” chapter.

In Scalapino's works, reality asserted by the convention loses its basis because her works develop along a single, continuous line, but simultaneously withdraw from linear chronology, and deconstruct the mechanism of temporal construction. Perception functions to transform the mind in a way that it leads the self to reconstruct itself and reality. Some of the means of the transformation of the mind is seeing, experiencing, reading and writing. Scalapino considers the attentive mind as center of the perceivable world and of the system of explanation. Therefore, her writings are performance based, and she expects her readers to be interactive (Nash 1995, 90). She constantly tries to show that the world is constructed by us. Instead of adopting artificial images of alienated conventional notions of reality, she takes on the notion of reality which is based on the present moments that provide unlimited probabilities.

#### **1.4 Reality in Relation to Authority and Hierarchy: "Travelling"**

Various experiences of her childhood and later in her adulthood led Scalapino to develop an attitude which was totally against authority. When she was attending university, she encountered such extreme social and literary conventions that she built up a strong stance against both of them. In the interview with Foster, she mentions just how conventional and authoritarian this academic environment was by giving an example how one of the professors insulted them:

[He] baited the women continually [...] screaming at us that women were not creative, could not be scholars, that they had inferior minds to men [which] was totally mixed in my mind with the sense of the war, and the tremendous contradictions of the kind of conventions we were asked to live in and my complete unwillingness or inability to do this. (Foster 1994, 32-41)

Similar to the notion of "present continuous," Scalapino's concept of "travelling" makes it possible to challenge fixed traditional notions such as "occurrence," "experience," "memory," "mind" and particularly "authority and hierarchy." In *Zither & Autobiography*, she explains that she considers the notion of "travelling" to be "motions": "My sense of 'travelling' is only motions — in a real infinite space and time" (12). That is, she advocates being physically

and mentally active and being in continuous change. Except for “motions,” the notion of travelling heightens the notions of “impermanent perspective,” “infinity,” and “deconstruction.” “Traveling” through the moment frees the mind from being static and makes it dynamic. It enables one to be open to other ways of living, thinking and understanding. In *The Front Matter*, she remarks that the notion of “traveling” finds its roots in “a sense of self” which is not conventional (2). The concept of “travelling,” as stated in *The Literary Encyclopedia*, leads to an ontological freedom to think beyond frozen paradigms and cultural formations if one is willing to take such risks (Hinton 2002, n.pag.).

During her Asian travels with her family, her readings on Zen Buddhism taught Scalapino at the age of fourteen that there is no such an authority that one should obey as the convention dictates. This realization, which she explicates in *Zither & Autobiography* (2003), made her conclude that once there is no authority, then the disconnected moments or the present should be taken into consideration:

There is no authority anywhere or in one.  
I freaked out and beginning then [at fourteen] sought (later in writing) the  
'anarchist moment'— the moment that would be only disjunction itself.  
(Scalapino 2003, 2)

Based on the revelation that the indicator is the moment which erases authority at all times, she also realized that there is “no authority to dissolve the events,” that authority is an intellectual activity, but nothing else (Scalapino 2003, 67, 68) and that there are “no rules which govern at all” (Scalapino 2003, 26). These realizations lead her to unchain and destroy a very significant aspect of the conventional linear concept of time, which starts with the act of creation by God that represents the ultimate authority, and finishes with the belief that there will be an end. She sees that the sources of this approach are arbitrary and they are the means of power. In this regard, one should be aware of them and seek a way to get rid of them in order not to be ruled by authority:

Mocking as such – being at present. And as being at present has no  
authority.

The overweening sack mocking, which is authority itself, and in having one's sandbags dragged.

The experience of being mocked from in reality and their being in that. as if it were significant that one were mocked, that is anyone having to explode, detonate, power – because that is oneself – real authority outside, of others (Scalapino 2003, 61)

.....

no authority in one *is* ignorance – and being only in the most fragile place

edge has

sail

one's interior fighting – is conventionality – as reasserting separation of one and dawn – in people's oppression

dawn is. – not now -. Yet torture of one's inner fighting to realign – outside

seeking outside – customs – as the means to *not* realign one.  
(Scalapino 2003, 62, emphasis in original)

The early sense of freedom and being exposed to so many various types of people from different cultures allowed Scalapino to develop a mind-set in which conventional notions lost their sense (Scalapino 2003, 76, 77). When she and her family returned to Berkeley, U.S.A. and she went back to the school system in Berkeley, she felt under “torturous oppression” (Scalapino 2003, 1, 2). She suffered at school due to the way how the teachers and school masters, who represented authority, treated African-American students of her age group who attended her school. She witnessed that the teachers and school masters discriminated and insulted African-American students in all senses: “Humiliating children regarding their race until they stamped and / screamed” (Scalapino 2003, 77). She found that the attitude of the teachers and school masters was openly inappropriate and unjust. She also witnessed the racial discrimination and unjustness of authority outside the school, in social environment (Frost 1998, 119). Observing all these, Scalapino decided that there was no authority to respect and to rely on:

Didn't think that people would be as they really indicated they were

not basing it on the child – and the child perceiving what occurs is  
not based on authority – despairing as it is not capable

– as freedom in rickshaws  
early freedom

ocean ball – in future span sky [is in]-too at all one's-  
Two-starting out rickshaws – no supervision then in the  
city

early freedom – leading to blossomed spring  
separation – as one- leading to bud

– as no authority existing at all is only – so it's not itself even –  
children in school racially – too there- early freedom  
nothing is based  
on anything

One exists now on only past (present) as 'nothing' (as that being in  
fact, events – since placing the past at present *is* dissolved)

Humiliating children regarding their race until they stamped and  
screamed.

then they did also, the adults got out of the way. the realignment by  
present-adult didn't work. we're not. Past.

to change. the past. 'at' present. *no need*.

(Scalapino 2003, 76-77, emphasis in original)

## 1.5 Reality in Relation to Experience and Events/Occurrences

From Scalapino's point of view, considering experience, akin to reality, to be an "exact occurrence" is also discursive and redundant since there are only motions in infinite space and time. In order not to be haunted by fixed notions of experience, as is partially mentioned above, she suggests that one should split oneself continuously from fixed actions in occurrences, from occurrences themselves and from the mind's actions. She claims that this creates disconnected moments, or a "separate present." Dwelling in the "separate present" enables one to be "continuous[ly] travelling," that is, one can act independently of fixed events and a fixed mind-set (Scalapino 2003, 12).

Since occurrences are momentary, every occurrence brings about new experiences. Experience cannot be fixed or cannot be generalized. While explaining her notion of experience in *The Public World* (1999), Scalapino refers to Giorgio Agamben's work, *Infancy & History* (1993), in which Agamben points out that the conventional approach "expropriate[s]"

experience and depreciates the genuine experience:

Agamben's notion of experience having been "expropriated," the individual supposedly no longer being able 'to have' experience ('they' say)—as one being separated from one's action and perception of it, or by their saying that this is so? (Scalapino 1999, 13)

Scalapino's notion of experience advocates Agamben's and remarks that the lack of genuine experience creates a world of replica/reproduction. In order to avoid the world of replica or reproduction, she proposes that one should dynamically defy the temptation to redo the stereotyped fashions of the conventional canon:

Activity is the only community. The conservative gesture, always a constant (any ordering, institutional and societal) is to view both activity and time *per se* as a condition of tradition. As such, both time and activity are a "lost mass" at any time. "For just as modern man has been deprived of his biography, his experience has likewise been expropriated." (Scalapino 1999, emphasis in original)

In order to explicate her approach to experience clearer, except for Agamben, Scalapino refers to Walter Benjamin's opinion on the same issue. In "Essay on the Comic Book," which is one of her essays in *The Return of Painting, The Pearl, and Orion: A trilogy* (1997), she mentions Walter Benjamin's article "On Some Motifs in Charles Baudelaire," published in *Illuminations* (1969), and points to Benjamin's notion of "the emancipation of experience" (Scalapino 1997, 154). She uses Benjamin's article to show how humanity is deprived of genuine experience, arguing that the "highly organized civilization" is based on "consumer[s] [...] / [who are] not [really] using the[ir] minds" (Scalapino 1997, 151). Scalapino asserts that the highly organized civilization is based on consumption. It somehow empties the minds of people and turns them into mere consumers. In this context, "experience" is considered just "a matter of tradition" which can be seen "in collective existence as well as private life" (Scalapino 1997, 155). According to convention, experience is a notion which is produced and reproduced socially and individually again and again. She relates this kind of experience to "[s]erial as the assembly line" (Scalapino 1997, 155). As a remedy, she suggests "emancipat[ion] from



[conventional notions of] experience” (Scalapino 1997, 155). That is, she offers to stay away from “the experience of the dictates” (Scalapino 1997, 155).

Similarly, in his article “On Some Motifs in Charles Baudelaire,” Benjamin argues that urban existence, such as overpopulated streets and new technologies as well cultural innovations such as mass media, advertisements and the film industry have created a hostile environment for experience. He claims that this environment precludes one/the individual from true experience (Benjamin 1969, 162). Benjamin's notion of “emancipation from experience” means “emptying of mind” from conventional thought processes and modes of perception (Lagapa 2006, 51). In this respect, Benjamin's and Scalapino's approaches to experience echo each other and both of them advocate authentic experience. In her search for genuine experience outside of conventional thought processes and modes of perception, Scalapino employs Benjamin's term of emancipation and amalgamates it with her notion of the comic book. In “Essay on the Comic Book,” she writes:

To be emancipated from experiences, in the comic book— to be it as such.  
to have no other self  
than in the comic book

and so for one not to be in rapport with it – or with experience – as being  
Baudelaire's discovery.  
being outside of the experiences of the civilization – that can be by these  
not having order. (Scalapino 1997, 155)

Scalapino relates the notion of experience to the notion of comic book regarding their characteristics. As she explains in *How Phenomena Appear to Unfold* (1990), in comic books there are the comic strips and frames which are “continuous [and] multiple” and include “future and past dimensions” simultaneously (Scalapino 1990, 23). Each frame keeps the reader in the present moment. Similar to the comic book, experience should be continuous and multiple and present-oriented, consisting of future and past dimensions simultaneously:

What is in the frame is occurring—but what's going on (which is  
‘free’) is ahead of, being pushed by, the writing.  
[...]

There are similar possibilities in using the form of plays composed of  
poems. These are ‘experience’[...] it takes place exactly in and as the moment. (Scalapino

1990, 23)

Later in the same book, she continues to discuss her approach to experience and the notion of comic books in “Essay on the Comic Book.” She asserts that the state of mind which is constructed by conventional cultural and social systems and media leads one to have “disjointed experiences.” For the sake of genuine experience she recommends to “relinquish and renounce ideas” enforced by media on purpose (Lagapa 2006, 53). She explains her idea in that matter in *The Return of Painting, The Pearl, and Orion: A trilogy* (1997):

The newspapers have created the impression of disjointed experiences.

[...]

anyway, we're not in these experiences  
is the impression created by the newspapers which  
do not allow us to make connections

[...]

Though popularly we're supposed to be in them – this is a deprivation created by the newspapers themselves. (Scalapino 1997, 158)

In *The Front Matter, Dead Souls* (1996), she shows that the news are made and conveyed by the anchormen/women who are part of the power system and they just reflect the images wanted and imposed by the powers. She calls them “hyenas.” Scalapino notes that the First Gulf war was for big American corporations such as Exxon, Bechtel and other American industries, some of which have their own media branches which voice their owners' policies:

The hyenas swarming for scraps are seen on the news,  
they're the anchormen.

The images do not reflect back. They are only themselves, which is not in relation to existence.

Yet that is existence everywhere. This is to isolate the shape or empty interior of some events real in time so their 'arbitrary' location to each other emerges to, [sic] whatever they are.

This is a serial written to be chapters printed in installments in the newspaper, like Dickens' novels. The reader of the newspaper sees in current time. An arbitrary present time image exists in time here. Mimicking here in writing isn't representation. (Scalapino 1996, 46)

Thus, the news which “hyenas” release has no relation to what is really happening. The images they use show that their approach is to focus on “empty[ing] [the] interior” of real events. She

remarks that the image of *happenings* is not the *happenings* that exist there. The image and the real occurrences have nothing to do with each other. Yet, imposed by the media in this way, images replace the real. In this regard, she makes the point that people analyze or make judgments about occurrences that they cannot really see, which causes experience and reality to disappear forever. Therefore, it is vital that the media, the viewers and the writers should be responsible for the unrepresented and invisible occurrences:

Analyzing the occurrence that can't be seen it splinters in experience infinitely. It recedes continually, causing infinite pain. *It isn't even there. People are responsible for the invisible occurrences. That's exciting.* (Scalapino 1996, 52, emphasis in original)

Scalapino also asserts that most of the newspapers represent conventional notions and through this point of view they tell us about occurrences that we do not take part in: “we're not in” (Scalapino 1996, 50). What we are given is only the impressions that these newspapers implement. This cuts our connection with genuine experience. Since these newspapers misinform us by not telling what is really happening in the scene, Scalapino finds them as dictating and brutal in their attempt of so called informing us. She writes in *The Front Matter, Dead Souls* (1996):

Newspaper writing has a subject.  
It straddles its subject always. It writes on it, in space, it's  
been eliminated. (50)

By emphasizing the confusing and misleading aspects of conventional newspapers, she comments that these newspapers not only detach people from any authentic experience, but they also indoctrinate peoples' minds and lead them to develop prejudices. Similar to Scalapino's proclamation of the damaging and prejudicial impacts of newspapers, Benjamin makes the same point, namely the restraining effect of conventional newspapers, in his essay in Charles Baudelaire, saying:

Newspapers [...] isolate what happens from the realm in which it could affect the experience of the reader.” (Benjamin 1969, 158)

Scalapino's and Benjamin's similar approaches to conventional newspapers “lament the

stultifying and isolating effects of newspapers” and they consider that conventional newspapers encourage “a sense of disorientation and mindlessness” (Lagapa 2006, 52, 53).

In order to save genuine experience and to access what is really happening, Scalapino suggests her notion of the comic book as an alternative to the conventional newspapers/media because in comic book, time conjugates forward and backward including volatile gaps or blank spaces. In this way, it destroys the linear, teleological notion of time as well as way of thinking and offers readers genuine experience. Similar to the comic book, Scalapino creates these volatile gaps or blank spaces through her disjunctive writing. By employing the notion of the comic book in her works as it seen in *The Return of Painting, The Pearl, and Orion: A trilogy* (1997), she attempts to negate the orderly experience and information enforced by conventional media. Akin to the comic book with its seeming disorderliness, Scalapino's writing provides readers with an authentic experience of occurrences and makes them realize that “reality as disorderly” (Scalapino 1997, 156). In *How Phenomena Appear to Unfold* (1990), Scalapino notes that:

The 'media-speak' is regarded as objectively apparent. Not knowing what we are, we analyze what is 'voicing' us. [...] Experience is only the information. There is no 'inner' self or individual, yet the information (the news) is fiction.

The actual media is completely artificial. We are not it. Yet we are trained to regard it as the manifestation of the polis. (93)

Scalapino regards her book *The Return of Painting, The Pearl, and Orion: A Trilogy* to be a good example which illustrates her notion of “The Comic Book” because it is dominated by visual images and there is not a “narrative focal point,” but the events are narrated through “tenuous glimpses” and “descriptive fragments” (Hinton 2010, 223, 224). She portrays the objects, people and activities which fail “to fulfill symbolic narrative completion” (Hinton 2010, 223, 224). The book is made up of “marginal spaces and graphic lines” which are divided into “frames,” which Scalapino calls “landscapes [by defining them] as compressed time as

motion”<sup>6</sup>:

Separated by marginal spaces and graphic lines, these fragments are divided into porous frames, organizing what Scalapino has called ‘landscripts.’ Defined as ‘compressed time as motion’, the ‘landscripts’ do not represent any portrait of a narrativized past; they are not the nostalgic archives of a speaker. Rather ‘landscripts’ eerily, provocatively, are ‘episodes’ of the perceiving act through writing. ‘Landscripts’ define the writing as material visible space. Each one opens onto the next incompletely, like the experience of glimpsing, then focusing upon more closely, paintings on a wall. (Hinton 2010, 224)

*A Trilogy* breaks the conventional notion of reality and creates a new form of reality based on a new understanding of experience. “Landscripts” function like drawings in a comic-book which create an image of frames in sequence which “are perceived at irregular or odd-angle views” (Scalapino 1997, 247). Similar to the drawings in frames which leads the eyes to move forward and backward due to their setting on the front and the page across, landscripts “move from one stage or artificial drama of people set in a room to” another image, crating simultaneity (Scalapino 1997, 248). Thus, through reading *A Trilogy* what we perceive is “a ‘neutral’ vision of reality, but as if we are experiencing a work of theater” (Scalapino 1997, 224-248). Hinton indicates that:

Scalapino shows that 'the world' is better viewed through a language *about* vision than through a spectator's lens. Writing *as* reality demonstrates that the only visual 'real' any spectator 'sees' is textual. (Hinton 2010, 224, emphasis in original)

In the interview with Anne Brewster, Scalapino mentions that she was impressed by Walter Benjamin's essay “The Storyteller” because, contrary to the private isolated reading, during the process of storytelling, people participate in the event by just sitting and listening, but not interfering. This, for Scalapino, makes the storytelling event both a public and a private experience. That is, while one is sitting among a group of people, and the story is told a group of people, it addresses to each single listener as well, making the experience private. Influenced

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<sup>6</sup> “Scalapino makes this comment in unpublished personal correspondence addressed to me, dated 8May 2002, on p.8. This correspondence was a response to a keynote lecture I had given earlier that spring on *The Return of Painting* and The Huston River School at Barnard College's conference, 'The Poetry of Plays'. In the correspondence, Scalapino describes a phrase in *The Return of Painting* as a 'plate' or 'landscript'. I extend her use of that term here.” (Hinton, 250)

by “The Storyteller,” Scalapino wanted to create the same effect in her work *The Return of Painting, The Pearl, and Orion: A trilogy*, though which she requires the reader to be conscious that her/his experience of reading is between her/him and the book so it is an “isolated” and a private act, but at the same time reading means “social exchange” because it provokes sharing:

I've always been intrigued by Walter Benjamin's essay “The Storyteller”, in which he talks about the communal setting of having something spoken as a communal action. During the tale or the epic that's told from memory, people participate by sitting listening to it as a public group, as opposed to the isolation and privacy of reading the novel which developed later. So partly what I wanted to do in *The Return of Painting, The Pearl and Orion* was to write a takeoff of the novel in which you are keenly aware that the experience of reading is between you and the book, that you are isolated, you're in a private act with only the reader in the room. This is the same kind of thing that Benjamin was describing, but I wanted to mix these kinds of experiences into an active reading which is a social exchange also, something which evokes participation while filtering it through the private action of isolation, so that you're actually contemplating being isolated, and being public at the same time, in the process of reading. (Brewster 2004, n.pag.)

In her article “Murasaki Duncan” published in *How Phenomena Appear to Unfold* (1990), Scalapino again relates her notion of experience to Walter Benjamin's notion which he explains in his essay “The Storyteller” (Benjamin 1969). In his article, Benjamin argues that the art of storytelling which provides the audience with authentic experience that is has lost its value with introduction of mass media controlled by powerholders.

Walter Benjamin, in his essay “The Storyteller,” describes the art of storytelling as active in that the mode of Homer or other storytellers is to transmit experience, which by being free of explanation in the form of psychological or other connection, enables the listener to integrate this as his own experience. According to Benjamin, the art of the storyteller has declined, a process beginning with World War I with the advent of modern war, tyranny of the state, and economic contingencies which have devalued experience. (Scalapino 1990, 91)

Later in the same article, Scalapino relates the storyteller to a poet, pointing out that they are both in the present time: “The poet is in the present time in each immediate event of the poem” (Scalapino 1990, 93). Then, she relates Benjamin's approach to Murasaki's<sup>7</sup> fiction, *The Tale of*

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<sup>7</sup> “Murasaki Shikibu.” (born c. 978, Kyōto, Japan—died c. 1014, Kyōto), court lady who was the author of the *Genji monogatari* (The Tale of Genji), generally considered the greatest work of Japanese Literature and thought to be the world's oldest full novel. The author's real name is unknown; it is conjectured that she acquired the sobriquet of Murasaki from the name of the heroine of her novel, and the name Shikibu reflects her father's position at the Bureau of Rites. She was born into a lesser branch of the noble and highly influential Fujiwara family and was well educated, having learned Chinese (generally the exclusive sphere of males). She married a much older distant cousin, Fujiwara Nobutaka, and bore him a daughter, but after two years of marriage he died. Some critics believe

*Genji*, which contains over a thousand short poems about the Heian period in Japan. The Heian period is the last division of classical of Japanese history, which is the period between 794 and 1185. It was named for the location of the imperial capital Heian-kyō, which is Kyōto today. It was a period when culture of the court aristocracy flourished, which actively engaged in the pursuit of aesthetics refinement, bringing about new developments in art and literature. Lady Murasaki Shikibus's 11th-century novel, *The Tale of Genji* is a record of life among the nobility and is considered one of the great works of world literature (*Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*).

In *The Tale of Genji*, Murasaki introduces events which are “void” and reveal themselves without any interpretation (Scalapino 1990, 94). This is similar to Benjamin's concept of a “communally shared story (i.e. told) which becomes actively integrated as the experience of listeners” (Scalapino 1990, 94). As Scalapino notes, this notion of experience is “not the process of explanation – of being explained – information, is not ideology” (Scalapino 1990, 94). Murasaki's work has existed mainly as an oral literature and social event, it was considered to be in the present. It was composed of:

Repetition of the same emotive words whose range of meaning is multiple, resulted in a floating, diffuse structure in which neither the speakers nor those performing an action are specifically differentiated. There is not the isolated individual. The women remained behind curtains or scenes, travelled in closed carriages; they passed poems under the screens which were set up in public gatherings. Everyone communicated by poems [...] *The Tale of Genji* was read to the court, including the emperor. It was written over a period of twenty years. So it existed primarily as spoken, as a social occurrence. It would have been regarded as totally in present time. Being that life (of the court). It views passion and the beauty of the world and as such reflects [...] time and reality as empty or Void. (Scalapino 1990, 90)

In “The Storyteller,” Benjamin explains that the target of storytelling is not to communicate the pure essence of the thing, like information or a report does. Instead, the pure

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that she wrote the entire *Tale of Genji* between 1001 (the year her husband died) and 1005, the year in which she was summoned to serve at court (for reasons unknown). It is more likely that the composition of her extremely long and complex novel extended over a much greater period; her new position within what was then a leading literary centre likely enabled her to produce a story that was not finished until about 1010. In any case this work is the main source of knowledge about her life. It possesses considerable interest for the delightful glimpses it affords of life at the court of the empress Jōtō mon'in, whom Murasaki Shikibu served (*Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*). Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1999. Web. 18.1. 2016.

essence of the thing becomes insight, a part of the life of the storyteller who simply conveys it to others as his/her own experience (Benjamin 1969, 91). Benjamin likens the stories of the storyteller to Herodotus' stories which have no explanation so they are very neutral. For Benjamin, the more neutral the process is, that is, free from psychological analysis, the greater effect the story creates in the memory of the listener because there is nothing more effective than a story which is free from psychological analysis. Benjamin describes stories as "seeds of grain" that have preserved their "germinative power" until today. They can still produce amazement and contemplation in the listener who is in the company of the storyteller who lets the listener adopt the story as his/her own experience. This adopting process takes place in the depth of the mind, so it necessitates "a state of relaxation." Benjamin remarks that if sleep is the apex of "physical relaxation," boredom is the apex of "mental relaxation." He considers boredom to be "the dream bird that hatches the egg of experience" (Benjamin 1969, 91).

Benjamin also notes that the first real storyteller was a teller of fairy tales, which are tales of the earliest agreements that mankind made in order to clear away "the nightmare" that was placed upon them by myth. The fairy tale has a liberating magic because it points to the "complicity" of nature with a liberated man (Benjamin 1969, 102). Similar to what Benjamin states in "The Story Teller," Paul Valery stated that:

Artistic observation can attain an almost mystical depth. The objects on which it falls lose their names. Light and shade form very particular systems, present very individual questions which depend upon no knowledge and derived from no practice, but get their existence and value exclusively from a certain accord of the soul, the eye, and the hand of someone who was born to perceive them and evoke them in her/his inner self. (qtd. in *Illuminations* 107, 108)

From this point of view, Benjamin remarks that one can wonder:

whether the relationship of the storyteller to his material, human life, is not in itself a craftsman's relationship, whether it is not [the storyteller's] very task to fashion the raw material of experience, his own and that of others, in a solid, useful, and unique way. [...] Seen in this way, a storyteller functions like a teacher and a sage. [...] The storyteller is the figure in which the righteous man encounters himself. (Benjamin 1969, 108, 109)

Benjamin concludes that with the First World War, during which the sovereign power was held by the state and there was economic uncertainty, pure experience lost its original value.



Experience is replaced by information spread through the media which report second-hand “about” experience. This second-hand experience has become more valued than experience itself and genuine experience lost its value. Since genuine experience has lost its value, so has the ability of exchanging experiences (Benjamin 1969, 90, 91, 84, 87):

No event any longer comes to us without already being shot through with explanation. In other words, by now almost nothing that happens benefits storytelling; almost everything benefits information. Actually, it is half the art of storytelling to keep a story free from explanation as one reproduces it. Leskov is a master at this (compare pieces like “The Deception” and “The White Eagle”). The most extraordinary things, marvelous things, are related with the greatest accuracy, but the psychological connection of the events is not forced on the reader. It is left up to him to interpret things the way he understands them, and thus the narrative achieves an amplitude that information lacks. (Benjamin 1969, 89)

Both Scalapino and Benjamin point out that the information which is spread by conventional media holds an authority, and authority holds and controls information through which societies are constructed today. For Scalapino, when information becomes the experience, experience becomes fiction. The art forms of storytelling and poetry attempt to disclose that forged social construction of experience by relinquishing the clichés, but validating the uniqueness of any and every entity and its specific relation to every unique moment. Both Scalapino and Benjamin emphasize that a story is special in that because it is not for “consuming” like short-lived information is. A story is more powerful than the information because it remains in the minds for a long time after it is told. They also remark that there is a difference between the storyteller and the historians of today. The difference is that storytellers are “secularized,” whereas the historians, as Benjamin states, are the descendants of the chroniclers of the Middle Ages. And their works are based on “a divine plan of salvation”- an enigmatic issue which does not have anything to do “with an accurate concentration on definite events” in the sense of the present, but which has to do “with the way [events] are embedded in the great inscrutable course of the world” (Benjamin 1969, 96).

Similar to Benjamin’s concept of experience, Scalapino’s concept and definition of experience is not the process of explanation of explained information, or tradition. For her, the

interpretation and reception of experience is related to a contemplative and reflective state of mind both in the writer and in the reader, similar to the states of storyteller and listener. In her article “Experience/'On' Sight” in *The Public World / Syntactically Impermanence* (1999), she explains experience to be “scrutiny” and “travel” in the sense of “dislocation of one's perception” to the point that one becomes perspectiveless (Scalapino 1999, 42). In spite of the fact that the perspectivelessness or emptying oneself from constructed perspective might sound confusing, even impossible, reaching the point of it is a must to abandon any experience which is dictated by the convention in favor of an authentic experience which provides one with the only valid comprehension. As stated many times in her works, Scalapino regards genuine experience to be a prerequisite to access a genuine reality.

### **1.6 The Notion of Reality in Relation to Experience, Culture and Language**

Reality or cultures are not being subject to ‘halcyon’ /‘normal.’ Apprehension as comprehension isn’t there then, because it’s generalized. (*The Public World* 43)

“Silence and Sound/Text” from her work *As: All Occurrences in Structure, Unseen – (Deer Night)*, which was written during and after the return from her traveling to many places in Bhutan and Thailand, is about how conceptualization and experience that one has had in one’s own culture can be seen as an *illusion* through the eyes of a different culture. In order to illustrate this, she uses her own case as an example. As she mentions in *Zither & Autobiography*, she grew up relatively free from customs of a specific culture because of the travels she had with both her family and alone. Not having inbuilt and inherently fixed sets of customs made it possible for her to be able to see the differences and the conflicts between the cultures. As she remarks, this influenced her and led her to “mirror” the conflicts as “interior.” Yet, it was generally hard for her to express this inner conflict in the conventional language, so she dealt with it through staying silent akin to those “who have been silenced—or who are 'not heard' by 'history'” (Scalapino 1999, 29, 30).

In “Silence and Sound/Text,” Scalapino notes that she displays this position of being

silenced in *Deer Night*. *Deer Night* embodies the experience of exclusion in the form of silence, representing people whose expression is not recognized or not accepted as comprehensible discourse: “Silence and sound both are as written text” (Scalapino 1999, 30). One of the characters in this play is a reader who reads the written words silently, sitting isolated, representing silence; at the same time, the play is enacted on another side of the stage to make this silent side exterior (Scalapino 1999, 29-31):

The refusal to be defined, by the action of out-racing ‘one being defined’—and not ‘being’ that action either (of out-racing), though that’s all that occurs—‘to be’ out racing (as a form of silence that ‘isn’t’ ‘inarticulateness’). Writing ‘could be’ leaping outside the ‘round’ of being interiorly/culturally defined (at all) (by oneself or outside)—yet language intrinsically can’t do that? (Scalapino 1999, 32)

In the same article, she indicates that in one's internal speech there is no written or spoken language. She considers silence to be an “empty dimension” outside of language: “People are everywhere but are part of existing calm endless terrain” (Scalapino 1999, 33). In this context, Scalapino's notion of silence sounds similar to Foucault’s *Experimentum Lingua*. As it is mentioned in Agamben’s book *Infancy & History / Essays on The Deconstruction of Experience* (1993), Foucault considers this realm to be a vacant realm, where there is no language, and to be the source of thoughts and creativity. Foucault's *experimentum lingua*:

is to venture into a perfectly empty dimension [...] in which one can encounter only the pure exteriority of language that 'étalement du langage dans son être brut' of which Foucault speaks in one of his most philosophically dense writings. Every thinker has probably had to undertake this experience at least once; it is possible that we call thought is purely and simply this *experimentum*. (Agamben 1993, 6, emphasis in original)

From Scalapino’s point of view, silence also creates a matrix in which one’s attention becomes an activity. She asserts that language is not always enough to explicate what is seen or what is really happening. Generally what is seen and what is explained are totally different because expression is the seeing of the viewer:

People’s language can’t imitate what is seen/what they’re seeing.  
There is no language (as if ‘at all’ or that interprets people ‘there’) view-  
ing—or what is seen.  
So there is a total separation between anything seen and expression.  
The viewer’s activity of seeing is ‘expression.’  
There is a total separation between expression as ‘seen’ or ‘seeing’—

and the cuts, silent and contentless, without sight/site, yet requiring attentiveness.

There not being either sound or sight in the breaks/cuts, the activity of one's attention, in relation to the *film*, is a terrain.

People seen being destitute, the limp of the person lying on the bench, is not 'expression.'

Really, seeing can't 'imitate' action. Or 'imitate' blackness terrain.

One's internal speaking there is not existing. Always sound/noise, by necessity, 'here' there is no language existing at all, either written or spoken. People are everywhere but are part of the existing calm endless terrain. (Scalapino 1999, 33, emphasis in original)

## 1.7 Reality, Cause and Effect Relation and History

In her essay "Note on My Writing," Scalapino explains that her book *How Phenomena Appear to Unfold* (1990) "punches a hole in [conventional] reality" in order "to void" conventional historical events "actively" (21). In this book she tries to develop an understanding of what an event is and she concludes that there cannot be an objective commentary on events because commentary is usually subjective. She indicates that an event exists only through the activity, not by itself (Scalapino 1990, 21). In her article "The Cannon" from *The Public World / Syntactically Impermanence* (1999), she notes that there is no "cause and effect" relationship between the events and they cannot be "hierarchically ordered" because the present negates any fixation:

There is no cause and effect—the moment of occurrence doesn't exist either—in that the present moment is disjunction *per se* only [sic] (Nāgārjunian logic, which is early Zen, rendering modern physics?). All times (past, present and future) are occurring at the same time separately *as that* disjunctive space or moment (rendition of Dōgen's and Einstein's sense of being as time). So occurrence is not hierarchically ordered. (Scalapino 1999, 23, emphasis in original)

In *The Public World*, she states that the notion of "Cause and effect is 'our' conventional conception of thought, and is our *process* of thought" (38, emphasis in original). She also emphasizes that there is no cause and effect relationship between past and present because "all times occur at the same time" and the present is determiner (Scalapino 1999, 3). According to this approach, an event is not a solid and isolated entity, and it is not limited to a certain period of time. Thus, an event and its commentary are relative. She also notes that the commentaries

about an event are the products of thoughts. The basis of thought is changeable and all that is known about an event is known in the present. This approach inevitably calls conventional history into question and negates it as a byproduct of conventional notions of time and reality (Scalapino 1999, 39, 19, 20).

In “The Cannon,” Scalapino associates the “current [conventional] history” to obscurantism because the characteristic of conservative thought is to iterate itself for its own sake (Scalapino 1999, 19, 20). Indeed, it is merely a “description of an overview” (Scalapino 1999, 21). Scalapino's notion of history calls the current conventional notion of history into question because it includes an interplay among moments remote in time and dictates the associations implied by them. This causes a potentially infinite network which recreates the past again and again (Martin 2003, n. pag.). In order to scrutinize and disclose what is not covered by conventional history, Scalapino suggests poetry:

*now poetry is society's secret interior — thought's demonstration is scrutiny  
(there is no 'history,' because that is merely a description of an overview) — in that  
polemics-based writing merely imposes point of view and suppresses demonstration.  
(Scalapino 1999, 20, 21, emphasis in original)*

Besides poetry, to deal with conventional history, she proposes employing “the camera lens of writing” (Scalapino 1990). In this type of writing the occurrence and the perception of it are separate. There is a split between the event and the recording of that event. This enables one to have interior and exterior perception at the same time in order to be able to intuit and comprehend what is happening. In this way, the writer can make visible what is concealed. Disjoining oneself from implanted, conventional thoughts or the way of thinking necessitates total attention which can only imitate itself in the act of (the camera lens of) writing (Scalapino 1990, 22). As she recurrently remarks, writing should be an inspection of conventional notions of thought patterns, writing itself, history, and reality (Scalapino 1996, 45). She keeps suggesting scrutinizing the conventional notion of image and image-making process. For this, she employs fictional images to be true to the essence of her view according to which fiction is a means of expressing reality. For instance, in *The Front Matter, Dead Souls*, she fictionalizes

situations to show the real reason for America's invasion and destruction of Iraq and the real function of news media. Scalapino finds fictionalizing especially significant because nothing is omitted in fictionalizing and it not only examines events, but it also “examines itself.” For her, except for fictionalizing, no other thing examines itself. Fictionalizing also includes “thinking,” reflecting, contemplating, “scrutinizing” and “conceptualizing.” Thus, it is the best means to reveal and to express reality excluded by conventional approach (Scalapino 1996, 50).

To conclude this section very briefly, Scalapino asserts that there is neither “authority,” nor “objectivity” which can dictate “reality” and “history.” She states that it is the “multiple perspective” that “allows reality to leak from many holes all around” because spatially “infinity is all around one [and it] creates a perspective that is socially democratic, individual (in the sense of specific) and limitless” (Scalapino 1990, 106, 112, 119).

## 1.8 Phenomena<sup>8</sup>

Interpreting phenomena is deciphering one’s view. (*How Phenomena Appear to Unfold* 22, 23)

Scalapino explains her approach to phenomena in her article “How Phenomena Appear to Unfold,” which appears in the book with the same title. She remarks that her main focus is on unfolding phenomena rather than describing them and the unfolding of phenomena is based on the viewer's “physical” and “mental location” (Scalapino 1990, 105). For unfolding the phenomena, Scalapino’s key term is “seeing”; that is, how one sees or perceives spatially. She considers “seeing” to be the key issue because one arranges reality accordingly. As stated by Scalapino, there is an undeniable link between one's “seeing” and one's sense of reality because one both “creates or seems to create events, or appears to be created by them” through one's

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<sup>8</sup> I consider phenomena as the term is defined in *Encyclopedia Britannica*: “what is immediately apprehended by the senses before any judgment is made”; “an appearance; anything visible; whatever, in matter or spirit, is apparent to, or is apprehended by, observation” (*Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*). Encyclopaedia Britannica Online, 1999. Web. 18.1.2016.

“seeing”/perception (Scalapino 1990, 103). How one sees spatially within a written work is also very important because “seeing spatially within a *written* work is actively ordering reality [and/or] investigating reality” (Scalapino 1990, 105, emphasis in original). Scalapino is obviously aware that there are many specific ways of “seeing” things in relation to specific time frames, different spatiality and sources. As she explains in the same article, “seeing” involves both an inner, the “person”, and an outer, the “surroundings,” requiring the combination of them:

How things appear may be seen from the person actually, that is, ‘realistically’ being inside locations commenting on the surroundings; or, thoughts or fantasies may occur springing up that will be realms or scenes taking place in themselves; or, ostensibly ‘realistic’ events may be supposedly (possibly ‘actually’) seen by the reader or speaker but seen to be ‘outside’ and really therefore called up thus seemingly created. (Scalapino 1990, 105)

In this respect, she regards a phenomenology which to be “both inner-and-outer-directed.” Scalapino's focus is on the engagement of inner and outer in the actual moment. By doing so, she displays “how perception always also includes apperception-awareness of process of perceiving” (Simpson 2000, 124, 125). As an example, Simpson points to the woman in Scalapino's work *Considering how exaggerated music is* (1982) who sees both the man seeing her and herself as he sees her. The woman and the man who make gestures are both subject and the object in this encounter:

“But once”, she said, “the man whom I was with and I, out on a walk together, out distanced the one who followed me by circling the block (in order to see him from behind). We saw him, unaware of us staring at him, simply raise his hands (up to his chest) and, at the spot (I thought, if I were I) where my breast would be, cup the air with his hands. Just seeing him”, the woman confessed, “moving his hands so slowly, up and down, the way woman's breast will move as he walks (as if she were loping in slow motion), made me imagine, suddenly, that I was seeing myself for the last time”. [*sic*] (Scalapino 1982, 8)

In terms of the engagement of inner and outer, Scalapino's approach adjusts to Gertrude Stein's view according to which what one eventually finds outside is actually what one has inside. Everything is inside; or, outside and inside are the same. In “How Phenomena Appear to Unfold,” Scalapino refers to Gertrude Stein's point of view, quoting Stein's words from

Stein's essay "Narration" (1962):

If you exist any day you are not the same as any other day no nor any minutes of the day because you have inside you being existing. Anybody who is existing and anybody really anybody is existing anybody is that.

But anything happening well the inside and the outside are not the inside and the outside inside.

Let me do that again. The inside and the outside, the outside which is outside and the inside which is inside are not when they are inside, and outside are not inside in short they are not existing, that is inside, and when the outside is entirely outside that is it is not all inside then it is not at all inside and so it is not existing. Do you not see what a newspaper is and perhaps history. (qtd. in *How Phenomena Appear to Unfold* 106)

With regard to the notions of perception and the adjustedness of inside and outside, as Frost points out in her article "Signifyin(g) on Stein," Stein was one of the pioneers who explored experientially and being self-conscious about consciousness. That is, Stein emphasized that we should think about how we perceive (Frost 1995, 2). In terms of the relation of the inside and the outside, akin to Stein's approach, Scalapino suggests being self-conscious about consciousness. I will discuss Scalapino's approach to inner and outer in detail in the chapter on *Way*.

## 1.9 Mind as a Phenomenon

Mind is one of the major notions associated with phenomena in Scalapino's works. As stated in *Zither & Autobiography* (2003), the main concept of her poem *New Time* is that the mind is infinite as the present time is. Scalapino considers both the present and the mind as being in the same line of infinity, at every instant (Scalapino 2003, 49). She also considers the mind to be an independent phenomenon because the mind is rooted in the nature of mind. At an early age she realized that the mind is an independent phenomenon and it can even protect one tenderly from oneself. In order to exemplify this, she narrates an anecdote from her early teenage years. When she was fourteen, recognizing that there is no authority and discovering that there are only the disjointed moments seemed so impossible to her that she had repeated ferocious experiences which extremely annoyed her. She finally had a dream in which "a huge



dog” was continuously trying to kill her. When she woke up, she understood that the image of the dog was created by her mind and, indeed, it was she herself that was going after herself. Her mind was taking care of herself through the image of the dog, telling her to quit ferocious experiences. This dream and the resulting awareness made her realize astoundedly that the mind is an independent phenomenon (Scalapino 2003, 14). That is, it is independent from consciousness and has somehow a kind of autonomy.

Scalapino also considers the mind to be in continuous movement. It “sails” through the present, providing one with the opportunity to explore the capacity of one’s mind and see things differently. For her, this is possible if and when one separates oneself from the social formations and cultures which is constructed as “one’s early interior” (Scalapino 2003, 53). She asserts that this is achievable through an investigating mind:

as *being* the ‘outside’ culture in conflict, and being at the same time separate from its social formation, are an investigation of the action of one’s ‘mind’ which itself is apprehension only as that phenomena (action of seeing) there.

sail

only. (*Zither & Autobiography* 53, emphasis in original)

The present-mindedness enables one to stay outside or reject conventions, social formations and cultural conflicts. If one can see life as momentary occurrences, one’s perspective and the perception of life changes. She suggests that once one can become present-minded, the rest is just life itself: “Being in life” (Scalapino 2003, 52):

The intention of the shape as thought created is to change perspective (as being itself a thought), occurring as the specific ground (that shape)

spring is in

some – a – life – in  
present. (*Zither & Autobiography* 52)

Scalapino postulates that different minds see things differently. In *Deer Night*, she illustrates Western and Eastern conceptions of mind. As she puts it, her aim is to challenge one’s own culture from the inside: “Seeing inside arose from effort” (Scalapino 1999, 133). The work

was sparked by events which took place in 1996, when Scalapino was in Bhutan. There she observed a group of Western people sticking their cameras into the faces of members of a group of monks who had entered into a dance by bowing to pray. Despite police asking the Western group to desist, they kept mocking the monks who were performing the Bardo dance. In this event, Scalapino experienced the disrespectfulness of a group of Western people who seemingly felt themselves superior to the monks and devalued what they did. Through their attitude, the western group displayed a separation between themselves and the dancing monks. The message they gave was that a different way of existence outside of their way is not valid (Scalapino 1999, 34, 35).

She experienced the same spatial configuration when she returned to the USA. This time, it was a social event in which people were displaying the split between intellect and emotion, validating only the intellect and making existence impossible outside of this split. She realized that the attitude in the second example would have meant the repetition and reproduction of the same configuration of the same mind-set of creating and “colonizing the weak” by not allowing them to be “their self” (Scalapino 1999, 36). Scalapino rejects this frame by claiming that what is inside is what is made to appear outside.

### **1.10 Mind and Exterior Phenomena**

In *Zither & Autobiography*, Scalapino explains that although the mind and exterior world are seemingly perceived as different and separate, in her view they coexist. For instance, *The Tango* deals with very different conceptual phenomena like roses, language-subjectivity, childhood memories, reflections on violence, poverty, imperialism and war. The text is juxtaposed with a series of photographs taken by Scalapino. The photographs are of monks debating and meditating at the Sera Monastery outside Lhasa in Tibet. They are photographed while standing, sitting or kneeling in small groups, looking at each other and holding strings of

beads. Together with the photos, the book provides the reader with multiple perspectives of outside phenomena in conjunction with the mind. The debate of the work is the author's comparison of her mind phenomena to exterior phenomena, both of which are lying alongside each other (Scalapino 2003, 43).

In *The Tango* (2001), she also shows the coexistence of finite and infinite. The long lines in the text end up dropping off at the edges of the margins because the photos diminish the horizontal space, which would be available for writing. Yet, the lines come to an end at the margins only to continue on the next line, as frequently as their length requires. This structural principal of the text, as Frost comments, creates infinity in the form of lines, but, at the same time, emphasizes the arbitrariness of each line (Frost 1996, 22). The text also exhibits what is happening and what is socially seen are in most cases different. With regard to giving "meaning" to "the events" or "what is occurring," Scalapino considers conventional conservative social approach to be failing. She explains her idea about it with the metaphor of "black water": "is black water 'social' *only*? — in that, if the 'meaning' of the event is given." She uses the metaphor of "pink rose" for "what is occurring." Akin to the images created by a "pink rose" and "black water" what is really happening and what is socially/conventionally comprehend and explained are generally completely different:

Is black water 'social' *only*? — in that, if the 'meaning'  
of the event is given (or placement as *what's occurring* —  
even that frames occurrence)

there is no 'social' *there*  
it's *only* social — same with black water — place black  
water to be social — yet it *is*

pink rose — completely unrelated — pink sun rose or  
set? in fact. (Scalapino 2001, n. pag., emphasis in original)

In *The Tango*, she also refers to the Tango. Tango as a dance is a combination of continuous momentary and spontaneous movements of two people in the present, accompanied by music. Dancing tango is possible through the harmony which emerges from the interior and exterior.

Here, the interior stands for one partner and the exterior for the other partner. Also, the minds can be considered to be interior and the bodies to be exterior. While dancing, the mind of each dancer is in his/her mind and body (interior), but simultaneously aware of the other's mind and body (exterior). After a while, two bodies, minds, energies mingle with each other and flow with the rhythm of music. In this sense, tango represents the coexistence of interior and exterior in the present. This notion of coexistence is exactly the same for the mind phenomena and outside phenomena; they exist alongside while holding their individual qualities. Like in the tango, but in a larger scale, the mind phenomena and outside phenomena coexist, which is a never ending process: it is "relentless." Just like the couple, the mind phenomena and outside phenomena embrace each other or they are interwoven: "entwining goes and goes [...] itself — resuming." Mind phenomena and outside phenomena compose a helical/spiral:

(Astor Piazzola's tangos: the tango is relentless. The embrace — a couple? — entwining goes and goes. It skips, jumps ahead of a horizon — itself — resuming. The tango is a hopscotch 'ahead' of them, a couple, it's for convenience of maneuver, it's for intense love.) (Scalapino 2001, n. pag.)

Scalapino's notion of mind as a phenomenon is "sentient," dynamic, interactive and in a state of flux. For her, the issue is "to understand how the mind knows itself and the world around it" (Nash 1995, 90).

### **1.11 Perception as a Phenomenon**

In Scalapino's view, the notion of perception is a phenomenon since perception is rooted in the nature of perception itself. There are either multiple perceptions, or there is no perception at all. In other words, as stated in *The Front Matter, Dead Souls* (1996), one has to be a "nomad" continually in one's mind and should be able to see things from different spatialities because being a "nomad" in mind changes the way of seeing. She asserts that there are only action and "contentless" perceptions (Scalapino 1996, 91, 69, 70, 72, 73). Activity is the reality and

qualitatively different from the content itself (Scalapino 1996, 6, 11, 86). Scalapino explains activity to be in the present with an alert mind:

This is evolution which changes seeing.  
so there is no other time (than action) or apprehension  
there.  
We can't pay attention to anything slow increasingly.  
Measure isn't even time but contentless apprehension.  
Therefore the seeing of anything now has to be faster than  
prior sights, to increase action in order for it to be seen, to enter  
the attention, at all.  
We learn and then use up the 'sight' cognitively, or use  
up the content, and thus quicken the apprehension.

.....  
Motion is a thing in itself; it is a reality  
qualitatively different than 'what it connects'  
motion is apprehension, of its emptiness  
aware of this emptiness  
having no entity which apprehends  
One could slow this so as  
to see apprehension

scenes that have only that

scenes have entity for they  
are volition. (Scalapino 1996, 86, 87)

In the late nineteen eighties, Scalapino started to develop a special notion of perspective which is modeled in the form of the comic book. As is mentioned in the section "Reality in Relation to Experience, Events/Occurrences," in accordance with this model, each "action" is presented from a particular viewpoint and a particular moment. Through modeling the notion of the comic book, she shows how "to evoke the extremes of perception" (Nash 1995, 95). With this notion of perspective, as she explains in the interview with Frost, she aims to disrupt the conventional conceptualizations/perceptions and tries to reach "a neutral tone" in perception. The neutral tone in perception creates transformation in the mind (Frost 1996, 8). Her notion of perception, similar to the comic book, shows two opposite things at the same time. That is, it shows the faulty of conventional notions of perception, reality and the concealed reality. In other words, while Scalapino's poetics is radically criticizing conventional concepts, it simultaneously suggests hope for the better. She often "testifies to impoverished faculties [of] [conventional] perception, yet [...] [also attests] an unexpected statement of hopefulness"

(Lagapa 2006, 48).

Another aspect of her notion of perception is negation. Through negation, she shows how perception is manipulated and reality is concealed. In *Orion* (1997) she shows how the perception of a group of homeless people is manipulated by a domineering person who harasses them for provoking the patrons of a grocery store. Through negation (saying “they see that [manipulation]” and then immediately negating it, saying, “or don't”), Scalapino emphasizes that the homeless people who are involved in the event are not “seeing” their manipulation (which is the concealed reality). What they see is what is imposed on them. This makes their “seeing [...] on the retina.” With her focus on the act of “seeing,” Scalapino shows that many people are unable or deprived from perceiving social manipulation due to their culturally constructed perception. She considers “seeing” to be free from modification, dictation and manipulation. She ends the poem with an optimistic view saying, “we are open”:

Some homeless people are by the Safeway. where [sic] they congregate.  
[...] The instigating bully has a way of flattering them—  
[...]

they see that

or don't – and it isn't there. They're not interpreting it that way.

Then seeing it on the retina is reading memory only.

They say – who really are all right (if that is) – that to approach anyone or  
the stream in that manner makes no sense. not that sense is there. it isn't. and  
we are open.[sic] (Scalapino 1997, 208)

In “The Recovery of the Public World,” Scalapino shows the power of negation in order to deconstruct the culturally or socially constructed perception and to develop insight against it. She also suggests disrupting subjectivity, through which observation is deconstructed as well because subjectivity has no basis: “The deconstruction of our view of [cultural or social] reality is oneself in one time not maintaining *either* one's own subjective view *or* the social or phenomenological interpretation of occurrences. Nor is this 'not holding a view'” (Scalapino 1999, 54, emphasis in original). This dismantles the conventional notions of perception and the observer. Instead, Scalapino recommends a notion of perception which considers “inside and

outside” to be coexisting and relative: “one has a perspective of place that is both ‘spatially’ ‘interior’ and ‘outside’- as relativity” (Scalapino 1999, 54, 55). In other words, the perception is continually “only that and also *not* that” (Scalapino 1999, 57, emphasis in original). In this context, Scalapino's notion of perception is based on skeptical and serial thinking which intends to transform dualistic conventional conceptions into new notions.

### **1.12 The Notion of Self: Scalapino's Ontology**

One *must* not be ‘one,’ change throughout. (*Zither & Autobiography* 41, emphasis in original).

Scalapino's notion of ontology, similar to her notion of epistemology, relies on the notion of non-dualistic thinking and negation. She considers existence to be transitory. Impermanence is the key to her ontology as it is to her epistemology. Her approach makes her ontology dynamic and empowers a vision of self that is neither inherent nor culturally structured, but it is prone to continuous change. Scalapino regards the notions of conventional time and reality function to be a barrier in front of accessing an authentic self since they generate a replica or an “implant” or “illusionary” self and prevent one from developing a genuine self. She considers a replica self to be “torment” (Scalapino 2003, 13, 80).

In order to develop and keep a genuine self, she suggests dwelling in the present: “One’s-as-present is different” (Scalapino 2003, 89). Her notion of self undoes the ancient Greek notion of self, in which “one does not exist if one is not ‘social’” (Scalapino 2003, 36). In *The Public World / Syntactically Impermanence* (1999), she remarks that convention considers the self as if the self were the “cause” of events or of cognition. Being critical to this approach, she asserts that the conventional self is not only “inaccurate” because the events and the nature of events and their relation to each other is relative, but also a “mistake” because self becomes self only through genuine experience. She emphasizes that there is not an inherent experience and reality, thus, there is no “inherent self”:

Distinction as ‘doctrine’ and ‘experience’ is the conventional social separation here; that is, it is the way our experience is culturally described. The other side of this coin (the camp of “emotion”) bolsters the same view of reality but with an opposing allegiance: that is, the ‘opposite’ view (opposite from: ideology as basis) is that emotion/narrative/experience are aspects of “self” that, being viewed ‘inherently,’ appear not to be the same as (appear not to have any relation to) outside events. The personal, the confessional, is an “expression” of an inherent self as if that self were the *cause* (of events, of cognition), thus (in my view [...]) mistaking the nature of self in reality.

Yet either casual agent (self-scrutinizing ‘conceptualization’ or ‘concept of personal self’) are inaccurate as revelation of events—events’ natures and relation to each other. [...] They are aspects of hierarchical categorization that merely duplicate that categorization. (Scalapino 1999, 17, 18, emphasis in original)

Her notion of self attempts to free itself from conventional processes of gaining and learning perception. It can see by its own eyes, which are “floating in its horizon rim” (Scalapino 1996, 12). She tries to replace the conventional conservative self with an egoless self. In *Front Matter, New Time and Way*, she suggests a “self-reflexive” self, in which “One is one's own creator, one's own terrain, [and] even one's own subject” (Bedient 2000, 14).

With respect to her notion of self, Scalapino has sympathy with the down and out, with exploited foreign labor and even with criminals. Some of her subject matters are homeless people, young runaways, the impoverished and the voiceless. All those people are excluded by the convention. Scalapino considers herself to be one of them due to her experiences as a child, teenager and later as a woman. She did not feel being a part of the society and the culture she lived in because she felt that “she was alone, unsupported, ridiculed by others and invalidated by the social realm” (Bedient 2000,14). In these years, Scalapino finds herself alienated and isolated. She remarks that she has nothing in common with the society and conventional notions of reality and self. With Hinton’s term, she “a-positionalizes” herself. That is, she keeps staying out of any social discernment and representation (Hinton 1999, 133).

In Scalapino’s view, the school and social systems force one to be molded into an ego-oriented self whose worth is generally measured through material wealth and social status. This realization makes her critical of the school's pedagogical practice that transforms the youth into the way the convention expects. In her works, she also repeatedly mentions how some people



are alienated and subjugated by the conventional social system, creating marginalized people, the homeless and the bums. In opposition to the approach of society, which looks down on these people, she finds their lives stimulating. She also respects as well as acknowledges the anonymity of their lives. Her works allow the voice of people who are socially marginalized to be heard. She explicates her idea in *The Public World / Syntactically Impermanence* :

My focus is on non-hierarchical structure in writing. For example, the implications of time as activity—the future being in the past and present, these times separate and going on simultaneously, equally active [...] [this] suggest[s] a non-hierarchical structure in which all times exist at once. And occur as activity without excluding each other. This is unrelated to social power (it can possibly transcend it) but is related to social intelligibility at some time. Social marginality is a state not producing necessarily, but related to, thought/form of discovery. (Scalapino 1999, 3)

She constantly describes and reassesses the estranged and discriminated position of the female notion within the social and political sphere. She points out that women, akin to the down-and-out, are situated more or less in the same category and looked down on as well by the school and social systems. They are considered to be passive and can be manipulated by others. She shows how society makes women ineffective and mute. In *Front Matters, Dead Souls*, she describes women who are:

persecuted, obscurely orbiting sumo wrestlers or threatened by skinheads or drug dealers, bossed, stumbling on corpses, compliant while nameless men put their “member” or waterlily bud into them, they take part in an obsessive fantasy in which women are emotionally indestructible, if neither “understood” nor loved. They survive by not feeling anything. Their “spatial relation” to what is around them is masquerade. Really, they are perfectly opaque. (Bedient 2000, 14, 15)

In order to wipe out the ego-oriented conventional notion of self, another remedy that Scalapino suggests is to have a contemplative mind which she associates with the notion of “calmness.” Through the state of calmness or contemplative mind, one can reach a “calm self.” As she explains in *Orion*, she creates the sense of calmness in her works through negations, gaps, blank spaces and serial form of writing (157). Her notion of self attempts to be “empty” oneself from conventional notions. She explains the notion of “empty self” through her notion of comic book, saying that the “comic book is the self” (*The Return of Painting* 64). As Lagapa comments:

With its framing properties and artificial, boxlike construction, the comic book functions equally to delimit space and represent a circumscribed, if not outright negated, existence: “So that repression would not be a way of giving depth.” The negative space of comic book in Scalapino's hands thus becomes an important way of negating subjectivity, for she recurrently [emphasizes] the self is empty. (Lagapa 2006, 44,45)

Scalapino incessantly emphasizes the nullity of identity: “There is no entity but there is action” (Scalapino 1996, 11). In order to show the nullity of identity, one of the methods she employs is not giving much background information about the characters she depicts in her writings. The background information is generally neutral and flat. In the passage in *The Return of Painting*, which is about an old wealthy woman who had an accident, Scalapino does not mention anything emotional and avoids giving any detail about the woman and the accident. The only information given about the old woman is that she was not “wealthy from birth” (12). After this information, Scalapino remarks that neither poverty nor wealth is determinative for one's so called identity (12). She clears the notion of identity, saying: “but not identity”:

The somewhat older woman who lived through having slid or floated out of the car and lying in the rain. Her fingernails from the moment presumably of the accident lose their moon lines registering the shock to her light body which turns later. She had not been wealthy from birth having the opposite of that circumstance – and not identifying with it as identity. [...] - but not identity. (Scalapino 1997, 12)

As is mentioned in this chapter before, she also erases the narrator and any subjectivity, including her subjectivity, by suggesting “undercutting the observer.” In this context, the position of the narrator in her works is indeterminate which makes the voice of the writer as the experience of the reader (Watten 1992, 51). Scalapino's notion of self is constantly changing. In the first part of *Objects in the Terrifying Tense / Longing from Taking Place* (1993), entitled “An H.D. Book,” she notes that one should not stay in a small, static, limited orbit, but move forward. She asserts that one can be reborn with a new moment which offers a new lease on life because “one finite moment [...] undercuts and renders illusory structure and [is] the basis of [...] existence.” The self is valid only as “serial” because it is “multiple” (Scalapino 1993, 6).

In *The Front Matter*, she portrays different selves metaphorically. The selves range from stereotypical ones to surreal images such as sumo wrestlers, hyenas and infants. They represent a culture of violence, corrupt policy and drug trafficking. The sumo wrestlers stand for the soldiers and function to “entertain” the public with their power show. Scalapino describes them as the ones who are devoid of inner voice. Hyenas represent power, authority and hierarchy and they function as the representatives of them to be the members of mass media. And the infants who are born into the culture, in which they are made blind, are forced to become the victims of drug trafficking as either drug addicts drug dealers or both. If this is not an option, then they die due to starving or bombing:

A hyena drifts by in front of the sun, in a business suit.  
The blind moving their limbs are in the purple night as  
it dilates.

So there's not a difference between the ad and the time  
that's been eliminated.

It becomes immense and the blind people are washing  
in it.

There can't be speaking in it. The hyena in the business  
suit passing in front of the sun isn't seen by them [the blind people]. (Scalapino 1996, 4)

.....

The children sipping gasoline, come up sniffing, are  
coerced to work for the drug dealers. In the interior everyone  
is coerced to work for them.

This is the main business in our country, really every-  
where which is structured on it, the new world. (Scalapino 1996, 12)

.....

A hundred and seventy thousand infants maybe died  
there from starving or disease after the bombings. (Scalapino 1996, 20)

In the same book, Scalapino portrays selves from the modern world. She remarks that the people who lead and/or work for mass media are like predators who turn the audience into prey by making them passive consumers. She also mentions that there are “patricians” who “treat foreign workers like slaves” (20). The patricians create pacified public selves: “Being public isn't action” (42). She describes them as ones with “empty retinas,” that is, they are unable to see what is really happening both in their own country and in foreign countries. For her, public self means who:

The empty retinas of the crowd in the dusk are on burning lily fields. They reflect the fields. The retinas are burning themselves are the lily field which reflect the crowd standing. They're trafficking in a stream. Their backs are to one another. Manipulated is solely public itself. (Scalapino 1996, 37)

In her article “The Cannon,” Scalapino discusses the notion of “otherness.” She considers it to be imposed socially and culturally through language. Socially the “other” refers to any minority group, lower class and lower sex, and the ones who are excluded, outraged and pushed outside the rims of society for any reason. Scalapino asserts that the ones who are made “other” are not allowed their voice to be heard; the normative language makes it impossible:

In academic terminology, for example, there is now a category spoken of as “other” the assumption being that *we* are not that and therefore this area cannot be rendered, or even broached except from a distance. As if ‘we’ are of the world that articulates. The implication even is that if one is “other” —while a recipient of sympathy and elucidation, or lip-service—one being outside (as minorities, or lower class, at any rate ex-perientially) has no repute or credibility, cannot speak. The assumption is that language be polemical or discursive exposition as it/one has no (or exposes there being no) intrinsic relation to the subject “other.” (Scalapino 1999, 17)

In this respect, Scalapino's approach is reminiscent of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's argument about the “subaltern” who are excluded by the society and made speechless. In her article “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” Spivak remarks that:

An understanding of contemporary relations of power [...] requires an examination of the intersection of theory of representation [...] [which] points, on the one hand, to the domain of ideology, meaning, and subjectivity, and, on the other hand, to the domain of politics, the state, and law” (Spivak 1988, 271).

As an alternative, Spivak suggests “decentering of the subject” (271). In the same article, Spivak depicts the circumstances which enclose the suicide of a young Bengali woman and cause her to fail in her attempt at self-representation because her attempt in “speaking” outside patriarchal channels is not understood and supported. Spivak relates the situation of young Bengali women to the marginalized people who are “men, women among the illiterate peasantry, the tribals, the lowest strata of the urban subproletariat”, and she asks: “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (Spivak 1988, 283). She also wonders with what voice of consciousness the subaltern can speak in the case they can speak because in many cases their consciousness is

transformed by the social relations and “the social text”(Spivak 1988, 287). That is, the conventional “episteme operates its silent programming function” on them (283).

Later, in the same article, Spivak explains “the *mechanics* of constitution of the Other” to be “diciplinarization and institutionalization” and suggests that these continuing constitution of the “Other” should be questioned (Spivak 1988, 294, 295, emphasis in original). The convention creates a universal narrative in which the subaltern is ignored and considered to be unimportant and turned into the “Other” (298). Spivak claims that “between the patriarch and [convention], subject constitution disappears.” [...] [And] the figure of [subaltern is turned], not into a pristine nothingness, but into [...] silence and nonexistence” (306). She concludes that “the subaltern cannot speak” because they “cannot be heard or read” by the hegemonic patriarchal convention. She adds: “There is no virtue in global laundry lists with [subaltern] as a pious item. Representation has not withered away” (308).

In terms of the notion of self, Scalapino disjoints the link between her poetics and the traditional Western poetic approach. She rejects “the myth, the unconsciousness, archetypes and collective identity” (Nash 1995, 94). In order to save the genuine self, she suggests that one should never remain the same, but should dislocate oneself continually by destroying cultural enforcement (Scalapino 1996, 6). This, as Scalapino puts it in *The Public World*, requires one to separate oneself from the conventional language. By separating oneself from the conventional language, one might realize that one is not only describing an action occurring, but one is also making it. This realization, Scalapino asserts, is one of the markers of the genuine self.

To conclude this chapter, in order to deal with conventional epistemology and ontology, apart from the present oriented notion of time, serial thinking and serial writing, Scalapino employs and suggests art. Her works operate to show that art is representative of sensory perception, cultural narratives and it functions to “negate” and “dissolve” “the rigid barriers of

mind”:

[Scalapino] goes into that nether region where art shows the influence of cultural narratives on the way we explain sensory perceptions. Thus, Scalapino's work[s] [show] how art can attempt to interact with the mind of the reader to set up a negotiation of meaning which involves the dissolving edges of explanation and the seemingly rigid barriers to various aspect of mind. Once dissolved, the mind has a restored capacity to recombine and reconstruct reality so that the reader may see things as they might exist once they're broken free of habits or obligations of “civilized” or “learned” thought. (Nash 1995, 94)

Scalapino's works give the reader a chance to face opposites which persistently focus on the extreme moments, existence and the state of existence, or the boundaries of conventional logic. Through opposites, she also shows the reader how one can alter one's mind in order to attain “self-awareness” and how to avoid fixed mindedness (Nash 1995, 95). Scalapino proposes that art, mainly poetry, is the root of a dynamic mind. Both art and a dynamic mind focus on revealing concealed reality and authentic self.

Leslie Scalapino's poetics is based on transformation. Through her works, she demolishes any fixation and convention in the notions of perception, events, experience, mind, reality and self. Yet, this should not be confused with nihilism. On the contrary to nihilism, Scalapino's notion of negation has a productive and positive role in her writing. It provides and empowers a dynamic mind-set and a multilayered perception to perceive multilayered reality and to create a many-fold and authentic self which is not a representation or reproduction of the convention any more. In this regard, Scalapino's approach obliterates what has been established epistemologically and ontologically by the existing canon. Her works suggest that one should always go beyond the borders and beyond dualistic thinking to experience new. In this context, Scalapino's works open a door to an independent, distinct and unique perspective and multiple voices which reveal a new notion of epistemology and ontology which endorse and celebrate multi-layeredness of life.

## **Chapter Two: WAY**

### **2.1 Way and Impermanency: Phenomena or Events Have No Inherent Existence**

Events are just ephemeral. [...] They are fabricated as such. Just keep going.  
(*The Front Matter, Dead Souls*)

*Way* (1988) is a good example of Scalapino's writing with its artistic quality and experimental characteristics both in terms of syntax and semantics. It is one long poem which is composed of two main sections "Later Floating Series" and "Way." In *Way*, Scalapino raises historical, societal and sexual issues and interrogates the politics of conventional notions of history, social and erotic. As Elisabeth Frost comments in her article "Signifyin(g) on Stein," in *Way* Scalapino elaborates "a more visually-based poetics in which small blocks of text represent moments of perception or feeling" (3). Similar to Scalapino's other works, there is no definite temporal or spatial orientation in *Way*. Things exist and occur in relation to all other things. The boundaries between past, present, and future, public and private, self and other are erased. Throughout the book the images and events appear repeatedly in different contexts. In this way, Scalapino incessantly wipes out the essentializing and categorical way of thinking and the conventional notions of time, reality and self. As an alternative, she suggests notions which are totally oriented toward the present and rely on continuous and endless change in the course of passing time. In this respect, *Way* reflects Scalapino's view according to which nothing is static and permanent, but everything is prone to transformation. As she notes in *Zither & Autobiography*, "The space/time of a poem [*Way*] is its theory of the new" (49).

In *Zither & Autobiography*, Scalapino explains that she wrote *Way* under the influence of Nāgārjuna's philosophy and of the structure of Japanese poetic diaries, specifically of the Heian period (A.D. 794-1185), which is characterized by the modification and naturalization of ideas and institutions that were earlier introduced from China. Due to the influence of Japanese poetic diaries, *Way* is in the form of poem-prose pairs. And influenced by Nāgārjuna, it exhibits

a recursive way of writing and critique of subjectivity. Scalapino remarks that, in *Way*, she wanted to create and vigorously searched for the sense of impermanency “as a gesture in the world outside of oneself” (41).

In *The Public World / Syntactically Impermanence*, she explains that she was influenced by Nāgārjuna’s philosophy because it is based on a logic of phenomenal emptiness and distorts the notion of conventional reality (53). Nāgārjuna’s philosophy is collected in seventy stanzas. In stanza sixty five Nāgārjuna explains that seeing that things have no inherent existence and seeing reality as emptiness do not mean ignoring the reality of things, but it saves one from blindness, bewilderment and callowness. As it is put in *Nāgārjuna’s Seventy Stanzas, A Buddhist Psychology of Emptiness*:

Understanding the non—inherent existence of things  
means seeing reality [i.e., emptiness] which eliminates  
ignorance about the reality of things. This  
brings about the cessation of ignorantly grasping at an apparently true existence.  
(Komito 1987, 74)

For Nāgārjuna, there are internal and external phenomena. He considers consciousness as inner phenomena and the material or object world as external phenomena. He asserts that these phenomenal formations cannot arise independently; instead, they appear interdependently because “There is no consciousness without an object basis consciousness, nor vice versa. Since they both arise in dependence on each other, so neither exists inherently” [sic] (Komito 1987, 74). That is, consciousness is based on the object and the object is based on consciousness in order to exist. This makes phenomena transitory. Yet, phenomena are not “hallucinations without any basis.” The key is to see that phenomena occur interdependently (Komito 1987, 75).

Similar to the notion of Nāgārjuna, Scalapino’s notion of reality is based on the presence of “empty phenomena” and it, reality, is free of conventional linguistic constructions and so from conventional perception and interpretation of objects and events. In *Way*, by rejecting the inherent existence of all conventional and nominal categories which enforce hierarchical order



and fixed and stable affirmations, as is mentioned above, Scalapino emphasizes the impermanent nature of entities. She shows that events find their existence only in relation to other events and in writing. For instance, in “Delay Series,” as she puts it in her article “The Cannon,” the events in segments of the poem, except for a friend “dying from being sick,” were so infinitesimal that they could not be remembered later, but they had their existence through and in relation to other events and writing (*The Public World* 15). In “Delay Series”, she tells the relatively insignificant story of a robbery which takes place in a park in close vicinity conjunction with the event of a friend “dying from being sick” at a young age:

the boy—who'd  
been the mugger—and had run  
off into the park—with the other  
woman's purse at the time—and that  
relation to him

as being the  
senseless point—though without  
knowing the boy—who was the mugger—after  
that—or of course then  
either—but that as not being it

it's irrelevant to  
want to be like him—whether  
it's the mugger—who'd  
then run in  
to the park—though not that aspect of it

a man—occurring now  
dying from being sick—at a young age  
—we're not  
able to do anything—so fear as an irrelevant  
point

the man's death—from  
being sick at a young age—as not a  
senseless point—not to—  
by desire—reach such a thing in  
that way. (103-105)

Yet, by highlighting that the events find their places in writing, Scalapino does not mean that writing is superior, primary to the event or phenomena. Rather, for her, writing and phenomena are mutually dependent. They are in constant dialogue with each other. Thus,

neither can be seen as superior to the other. Her notion of writing is based on stimulating reality as events. This allows the multiple layers of an event to appear without being structured in an arrangement of hierarchy or causality. In this way, she shows the impermanent nature of events. In *Way* Scalapino tells many events/stories as such. For instance, in “walking by; Fragment,” she tells the story of one who becomes blind to reality due to love, remarking how it does not really matter; “so what” compared to the situation of the friends who are going to die at a young age due to AIDS:

blinded  
by love and  
didn't  
see he  
didn't  
have  
compassion  
and so  
what

not being  
due  
him  
or someone  
—or  
to  
anything. (29, 30)

She points out that even worrying about dying friends does not make sense because worrying does not change the situation:

a person  
not  
having to  
worry  
about death at  
their  
age  
had been  
said to me  
at the time

the relation  
of being  
blinded  
by love later

and the  
thought  
of not  
worrying  
about their  
death  
when  
they're young. (31, 32)

In *Way*, Scalapino remarks that there is no precise knowledge and knowledge obtained through the past experience should not be fixed. She suggests that the events should be considered according to the present experience: “as/ nothing / there in / the past” (43). For her, once the events are taken into consideration according to the present experience, the events and experiences are not attached to a construction of temporal order. In this respect, in *Way*, she seeks to render an experience in all its multiplicity. The poem lets the events and experiences appear in their specific existence rather than conjoining with the established structure. For this, the narration is based on the notions of the present and the coexistence of “inner” and “outer.” In “walking by; End Part,” the speaker narrates events through her inner and outer perceptions that appear simultaneously in the present. While she had an “intense feeling of anger” due to “a kick of a man in the crowd” and a sense of being “under an oppression,” a bird “lit/on [her]/briefly.” At first glance, she associates the sort of unpleasant outer event of the “lit” of the bird with her inner unpleasant feelings. However, soon, she realizes that there is nothing bad in the “lit” of the bird, which leads her to neutralize her inner feelings, and she starts feeling good. She sees the world outside as charming and beautiful. And the poem continuously exhibits a sort of “dialog” between “inner” and “outer.” In this regard, Scalapino attempts to show how the inner and outer exist simultaneously:

a man in  
a city—when  
I'd been  
feeling intense anger  
—kicking  
me in a crowd

a bird

lit on  
my head  
when  
I was walking  
and was  
having the same  
thought

myself  
under  
an  
oppression  
and  
the bird  
that—lit on me  
briefly  
seeming  
to have picked up  
on that

whether  
that's  
true and  
my  
to  
detach  
from having  
that  
intense anger

it—the  
bird  
not  
necessarily  
hostile to me  
—however  
it feels  
such  
a thing

or  
why it  
has  
occured  
continually  
which is  
not related  
to  
my thought's  
accuracy

the lovely  
city and  
regard-  
less of  
my  
attitudes  
or myself  
at  
the time  
of  
the episode  
with the bird

there  
as  
no  
reason  
for living  
—regard-  
less of  
the episode  
walking feeling  
intense anger

it  
has  
nothing to  
do  
with itself  
—my  
feeling  
intense anger

the  
lovely  
city—and  
giving  
it—the  
bird—  
that  
may not  
feel it. (33 – 38)

In this poem, Scalapino accentuates that having “inner” and “outer” simultaneously increases awareness and one can realize the relative notion of the entities. Throughout *Way*, the events are narrated through “interior” and “exterior” spatiality in order to render this notion. I will discuss this in detail in the coming passage.

## 2.2 Inside and Outside

There is no exterior. But we make that exterior, we make that distinction all the time, so I'm talking about making the distinction in one's perception or one's apprehension. In the writing, I'm making the distinction—actions out there—and the difference between interior perception and those activities of people or oneself in those activities. As if one were separate from the action that one is in, and as if on either side of that equation there was silence. So where is the perceiving being? 'Being' in the sense of being there at the instant and also the being person. In the book—*The Pearl* — I was trying to develop a way of writing that would simply be actions, movements — literally physical movements, to take event to its smallest motion. (Brewster 2004, n.pag)

*Way* is a poem of motions that are the flow of senses of “interior” and “exterior” at once. Interior, or inside stands for “inner” spatiality and exterior, or outside stands for “outer” spatiality. These spatialities range from individual to individual, from individual to society or culture or state, from societies to societies, from cultures to cultures and from states to states. Scalapino asserts that all “inner” and “outer” spatialities are interrelated and coexist. She remarks that considering “inner” and “outer” spatiality to be separate from each other leads to exclusion, conflicts, wars and violence. In *Way*, she looks through and scrutinizes the “inner” and “outer” through events that occur randomly. This scrutiny creates insight into the inner life of the narrator which is in turn given to the outside through writing. Scalapino narrates the motions and/or events by avoiding any interpretation. She asserts that writing functions “like a sonar scan” (*Zither & Autobiography* 49).

In *Way*, Scalapino shows how the interrelatedness of the inner and outer spatialities has lost its meaning and the notion of “exclusion” has replaced the notion of interrelatedness in the modern world, leading human experience to become impoverished. In terms of the notions of exclusion and impoverishment of human experience, as is mentioned in Scalapino chapter, her approach corresponds to Agamben's. Both Agamben and Scalapino emphasize how exclusion causes excluded beings to come into being, how these excluded beings are made unimportant, and so how they are left to die or be killed. In his book *Homo Sacer* (1998), Agamben calls these beings “homo sacer.” Scalapino's “bums” are analogous to Agamben's notion of the

“homo sacer.” In his book with the same title, Agamben explains “homo sacer” as an excluded being:

The sacred man is the one whom the people have judged on account of a crime. It is not permitted to sacrifice this man, yet who kills him will not be condemned for homicide. [...] This is why it is customary for a bad or impure man to be called sacred. [...] What, then, is the life of *homo sacer*, if it is situated at the intersection of a capacity to be killed and yet not sacrificed. (Agamben 1998, 71, 73, emphasis in origin)

What Agamben means is that sacred life may not be sacrificed; yet, it can be “expendable/dispensable.” Namely, “homo sacer” may be killed without a homicide having taken place. This, as Agamben asserts, clearly means denying the right of “bare life” or of social life. He remarks that the notion of “homo sacer” was first used in Roman law through which “sacredness is tied for the first time to a human life as such” (Agamben 1998, 71). Agamben relates the notion of “homo sacer” to the notion of “sovereign power.” He describes sovereign power with its four components which function in a process on which the sovereign power establishes itself. These components are “exception,” “zone of indistinction,” “exclusion,” and “violence” (63, 64). Agamben indicates that the beginning of the process of establishing power starts with “exception.” Although there is an obvious link between violence and law, the sovereign power exempts sovereign violence from the law, such as the act of killing committed by the (member of) the legal institutions:

The violence exercised in the state of exception clearly neither preserves nor simply posits law, but rather conserves it in suspending it and posits it in excepting itself from it. [...] sovereign power posits law, since it affirms that an otherwise forbidden act is permitted, and that it conserves law, since the content of the new law is only the conservation of the old one. (Agamben 1998, 64)

The exemption of sovereign power itself from law brings about a “zone of indistinction”: “Sovereign violence opens up a zone of indistinction between law and nature, outside and inside, violence and law” (64). In the “zone of indistinction” it is not possible “to distinguish between exception and rule” (65), which maintains a basis for “violence” and “exclusion” which finally creates “homo sacer.” At the final stage, Agamben concludes that there is not a notion of “sacredness” as such:

*Life that cannot be sacrificed and yet may be killed is sacred life. [...] The sacredness of life, which is invoked today as an absolutely fundamental right in opposition to sovereign power, in fact originally expresses precisely both life's subjection to a power over death and life's irreparable exposure in relation of [sic] abandonment. [...] the sovereign is the one with respect whom all men are potentially *homines sacri*, and *homo sacer* is the one with respect to whom all to men act as sovereigns. [...] Life is sacred only so far as it is taken into the sovereign exception, and to have exchanged a juridico-political phenomenon (*homo sacer*'s capacity to be killed but not sacrificed). (Agamben 1998, 82,83-84,85, emphasis in origin)*

Particularly in “walking-by,” “no(h)-setting” and in “bum series,” Scalapino’s analyses and critics correspond to Agamben’s notion of “homo sacer.” Akin to “homo sacer,” the “bums” are simultaneously “there” as “phenomena” living in the street, but they are considered as if they were invisible or “nothing.” Their “fundamental right of life” is captured and violated in the conventional order when it coincides with politics and becomes the matter of state, in other words, sovereign power. For instance, in “no(h)-setting” and in “hooper,” by portraying how the bums and their dead bodies are treated, Scalapino shows that “bums” and the people who are at the edge of the society are considered to be outer/exterior, not valued and consequently excluded by the society and the state. Since they are not perceived “being special” and “socially important,” their dead bodies are thrown into the river like “rubbish,” which makes their “burial”:

not being special—and  
the corpses that are put into the  
river—coming there for burial—though we are not  
in that situation—would be  
in that—floating there—  
of our own culture (120)

.....

so it's—turned out—which may be  
a or—the—bums—the same as—not from  
that existence—unfortunately—as  
they're not socially important—or—are  
ordinary. (142)

In “bum series,” Scalapino relates the death of bums to the “oil rigs” and the “present president.” In this way she demonstrates that the event of dying bums is interrelated to the sphere of economic and political power. She points out that the relation between “the present



president” and the bums, and the bums and social community are “inverse” and exclusive: “when our present / president is in an inverse / relation to them [the bums]—when there’s / a social struggle in their / whole setting, which is / abroad” (55). The president and the society know the story about bums, yet, they consider bums to be an external entity. Bums are not perceived really as belonging to the country; they are “abroad.” The bums are regarded as existing beyond the boundaries that separate them from those who are of worth and deserve the generosity of the state. Although the bums live within the city limits and haunt its streets, the society and the state effectively exclude them from social life. They are left to die in the streets despite the supposed principle of the sacredness of life. Similar to Agemben's approach, according to which there is not a notion of “sacredness” as such, Scalapino points out that the principle of sacredness is an overt lie because the principal sacredness of the bums’ lives does not prevent them from dying. By portraying dying bums on the street as it is, Scalapino explicitly shows a reality that is as it were in plain sight. In this respect, she takes the readers' attention to the veiled reality, responsibilities, the snobbery and ignorance of the community and the state, as well as their blindness and deafness. She shows that the perception of the public and the state is deluded and what they claim as reality is just fake and fabricated as seen in their attitude towards the bums:

of our present  
president—who doesn't  
know of the foreign  
environs—as vacant—and  
to the freighter and  
his and his relation  
[...]  
when the bums are not  
alive—at this time—though  
were here, not abroad—and  
not aware in being so of a  
social struggle (55, 56)

By remarking the relation of bums to the various parts of the community, but particularly to the unrelenting hierarchical mechanisms, Scalapino shows that there is not necessarily a direct correspondence with event, phenomena and reality. This creates a reality which is

deceptive and misleading as can be seen in the case of the bums. Through conventional perception and reality the bums are considered as invisible, hence already as if dead. By showing the bums' situation, Scalapino, “forces us to consider what it means to be human, or, more pointedly relevant to American culture, to “have-nothing”” in the modern world (Frost 1993, 11, 12).

Scalapino analyzes the notion of inside and outside through the notions of private and public as well. In “The floating series,” she alternates the scenes of private and public in order to dismantle the separation of public and private in the way the convention implies. Below while the speaker is talking about an intimate sexual intercourse, she abruptly turns her focus to the “people from the city”:

or her not  
having  
put it in—and  
the man  
coming on her  
gently  
lying on her  
in that  
situation

people having  
been  
there—being  
from  
the city—already  
—and  
others not  
aware of them (70)

Scalapino portrays an intimate sexual intercourse in a way which is radically different from how it is considered conventionally. She eroticizes ordinary objects from daily life such as a “lily pad” and “bud” in order to refer to sexual organs. She uses them recurrently and takes readers' attention, as Frost comments, “to a stylized but explicitly sexual physical experience.” In Scalapino's poetics, the images of a “lily pad” and “bud” stand for both male female sexual organs. “Lily pad” represents both female sexual organ, “flowering,” and phallic stem. Scalapino uses “bud” in order “to refer to the penis and the clitoris and, indeed, at the final stage

to the “sexual exchange itself.” By not defining either party in the intercourse, she “destabilizes masculine and feminine positions.” She undermines the conventional notion and the position of masculinity and femininity, namely heterosexual culture, claiming that the notions of “man” and “woman” are socially created (Frost 1998, 323, 324). In this respect, she reconceptualizes of the notion of gender as a process:

the  
women—not in  
the immediate  
setting  
—putting the  
lily pads or  
bud of it  
in  
themselves

a man entering  
after  
having  
come on her—that  
and  
the memory of putting  
in  
the lily pad or the  
bud of it first,  
made her come

having put  
the  
lily pad in  
herself—  
encouraging the man  
to  
come inside  
her

a man to  
come on the woman  
gently—her  
having  
put the lily pad in  
herself  
with him not  
having entered  
her yet. (65-67)

Scalapino's approach to gender destroys the dominant erotic representations in the

market, in the magazines and in historical romances. In Scalapino's narrative sexual scenes are constantly and distinctly intruded by non-erotic images of the process of sex. Through this quite unusual sequence of narrative, Scalapino erases the conventional and exaggerated presentation of sexual intercourse in order to refuse its traditional "romantic, moralizing, or medical discourses and "returns it to every day" (Marsh 1998, 5). She often describes the sex act in a way that the conventional construction of public and private are not as it seems

The focus of *Way* is on both personal and social critique by means of the other. Scalapino mingles private and public in order to show that "urban anonymity (estrangement) and personal individuality (sexual intimacy) find contingency in a linking vocabulary" (Lauterbach 1996, 150). Scalapino does this by using a "lyric voice" and by:

creating an intricate seamless splicing by which multiple foci are allowed to "float" across the poem's aural and visual textures. [...] The poem is simultaneous announcement of and disintegrations between personal and social. (Lauterbach 1996, 150)

As is mentioned above, in "The floating series" the sexual intercourse and people from the city are presented simultaneously. The erotic is not perceived as private any longer. Personal experience is also related to a larger socio-economic scene, by employing the terms "high rents" (76), "job" (78), "race" (82), "the shops" (94) and "livelihood" (*Way*, 94). She employs the erotic to deal with "cultural visibility and invisibility" (Frost 1998, 324). This time she relates public/social to private, pointing out how some people disregard some other people who are "lower in social / value" even when they are "immobilated" by "the police" "on a field":

told of  
someone being  
lower in social  
value—that  
and in  
a setting which defined  
us all—when  
at that point

their not  
to have  
a child  
—as it happens  
—and the bud of  
the watery lily  
in her—when  
they'd  
been doing it

her having  
had  
the lily  
pad in her still—after  
she'd  
come—and when there  
wasn't  
that from it

the crowd  
returning when  
the man—of their race, though  
in the police—he'd  
left the van  
was immolated by them—on  
a field (80-82)

Scalapino continuous to shift public and private by relating personal erotica to an old  
person dying:

or  
having  
put in the bud of  
it  
and  
the man not  
having  
entered her  
coming first

that in  
the city as in  
the middle—to

someone who's  
death comes from  
age (71)

She examines the seeming opposite notions such as public and private, class and gender and juxtaposes them. She shows apparently how our internality is formed and organized around “the social politics, class and gender,” remarking “the complexity of these categories” (Marsh 1998, 5, 4). Scalapino considers the division between then/now, me/you, public/private, the economic system/individual relations and inside/outside to be the fundamental notions of convention which is based on dualities. She problematizes these divisions and at the final stage she denies them all. She shows how we are prevented from genuine witnessing and experiencing, but we are encouraged to accept dualities. Despite the opposite claims of convention, Scalapino shows the indistinguishability of “inner” and “outer” and the interrelatedness of entities and events.

### **2.3 The Notion of Time in *Way***

As is analyzed in the previous chapter, in order to display what is happening is radically different from what is seen from the perspective that is imposed by a conventionally linear ordering of events which are linked together by causality, Scalapino employs the present-oriented notion of time. As in her other works, in *Way*, events do not occur in chronological order. Since I discussed Scalapino’s approach to time in detail in the previous chapter, I will wrap up this section by giving only one example. Scalapino employs the image of “walking” as a code of mental action which is free from the divisions of linear time. Similar to her image, the first poem of the book is titled “walking by,” in which she refers to a traffic accident on page ten, yet, she introduces the beginning of this accident on page fourteen. Later there is another remark about it on page nineteen. By telling the traffic accident in this way, she breaks the notion of chronological order and relates events and people through a thematic poetic string. In this regard, Scalapino’s poetics leads several narrative levels to appear simultaneously:

We were in the country—hat would be in the present—though there was no one around

coming, having driven up a dirt path by the highway—though able to see it from where we were—still in the car

my having the car loaned to me—the owner had gone away

—and driving in the country, the police stopped me; it was a huge limousine, the sides crushed from being in accidents—their saying to me I might have stolen it. Though they were simply passing the time—and friendly—my saying why would I do that (10)

.....

I was stopped at a stop light, a funeral procession passing uninterrupted though the lights were against them. A man reacting to their not observing the lights began honking

and going out into the intersection, crashed into the limousine which was passing at the moment—all the people in the procession were white-haired—the occupants of that limousine seeming stunned (14)

.....

the man, whom I didn't know—tiring—as being the instance in which such a situation could erupt, (into hitting the car in the funeral procession)

it would be in the present—as having hit one of the limousines—as many people being around (19)

Scalapino's poetics, so *Way*, requires the reader to inhabit themselves continuously in the present time because, from her point of view, it makes relatively easy to shift the focus. In her poetics, the shifts in focus are introduced through different segments such as a whole stanza or a paragraph or a sentence or/and even a phrase. Yet, although each segment stands for a different focus, they flow through a main theme. In the following sequence from the "hooper," the focus in the first stanza is on the woman who is "banging the seat" on a bus. It shifts slightly to the bus driver in the second stanza. Finally, in the third stanza, it shifts sharply to fragility of "being flesh." Through these different focal points, there is a main theme flowing which emphasizes that everything is interrelated. In order to create a shift in focus or perspective, Scalapino also employs repetition. Through the repetition, she offers diverse and multiple

meanings, rendering “how an object or event or experience or thought [can be] seen” differently from conventionally suggested (Simpson 2000, 129). In her poetics, so in *Way*, whenever the perspective shifts, it stimulates and challenges the readers to have “different kinds of experiences” so as to adapt themselves to “‘knowing’ and ‘meaning’” in different senses (Samuels 2001, 186):

the woman who's not arrested—on  
the bus—from banging the seat—any  
change not occurring—and seen as irrelevant  
in relation to her—and just that—  
in the world—

the woman—banging on  
the seat as—not—in—a situation  
manufacturing—continuing—he driver of  
the bus—isn't able to do it that way  
making the others get off

the flesh being  
fragile—my falling down—on some stairs  
to a sidewalk—again—from bad  
heels of shoes—but this time more vilolently—~~than~~ the  
previous episode—in the soft flesh—of my back being  
hurt (137)

Although the speaker in *Way* recalls events and experiences from her past, they are reverberated in the present time. The present time makes these events and experiences present in time and shows how conventional narrative categories work digressively and how they can be continually scrutinized and broken down. By doing so, Scalapino aims to relate everything within a perspective of simultaneity. In this context, writing becomes a happening. In Scalapino's poetics, time is not a field to “move across, but the very structure of life itself” (Simpson 2000, 128). It is always the present.



## 2.4 *Way* and the Philosophy of Quantum Physics

*Way* opens with a passage taken from physicist David Bohm's<sup>9</sup> book *Causality & Change in Modern Physics* (1957). Putting this passage at the beginning, as is mentioned before, Scalapino points out one of the main focuses of *Way*, which is causality and impermanency. In the excerpt from *Causality & Change in Modern Physics*, Bohm asserted that in the light of developments in quantum physics the old Cartesian model of reality, in which there were two interacting kinds of substance, mental and physical, was limited. He emphasizes the ephemeral nature of things caused by the inevitability of change. The passage exhibits how it is not possible to claim that there is something that stays unchanged as itself while time is proceeding. As Bohm puts it, every entity has infinite background and substructure due to "the qualitative infinity of nature," according to which transformation never ends. He also claims that there is an interaction between the existence of every entity and the maintenance of appropriate circumstances (*Way* n. pag.).

Yet, this is not a simple interaction, but a "reciprocal" interaction. When this interaction grows very strong, it leads to a qualitative change. Furthermore, in this process of change there is no limit to the new kinds of things that come into being. That is, there is no limit to the number of kinds of transformations both qualitatively and quantitatively. If all things go through

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<sup>9</sup> David Joseph Bohm (1917–1992) was theoretical physicist who contributed innovative ideas to quantum theory, philosophy of mind, and neuropsychology. He is considered to be one of the most significant theoretical physicists of the 20th century. Bohm developed in detail a mathematical and physical theory of implicate and explicate order to complement it (David Bohm; *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*; Routledge, 1980). Bohmian mechanics, which is also called the de Broglie-Bohm theory, the pilot-wave model, and the causal interpretation of quantum mechanics, is a version of quantum theory discovered by Louis de Broglie in 1927 and rediscovered by David Bohm in 1952. It is the simplest example of what is often called a hidden variables interpretation of quantum mechanics. In Bohmian mechanics a system of particles is described in part by its wave function, evolving, as usual, according to Schrödinger's equation. However, the wave function provides only a partial description of the system. This description is completed by the specification of the actual positions of the particles. The latter evolve according to the "guiding equation," which expresses the velocities of the particles in terms of the wave function. Thus, in Bohmian mechanics the configuration of a system of particles evolves via a deterministic motion choreographed by the wave function. In particular, when a particle is sent into a two-slit apparatus, the slit through which it passes and its location upon arrival on the photographic plate are completely determined by its initial position and wave function. [...] Bohm's main concern was with understanding the nature of reality in general and of consciousness in particular as a coherent whole, which according to Bohm is never static or complete but which is an unending process of movement and unfolding. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy Online*, 2013. Web. 31 Jan. 2016.

qualitative transformations, the process will never end. This means that all things, sooner or later, can become other kinds of things. This signifies that it is impossible to give a complete and eternally applicable definition of any entity. That is, every and any entity can be defined only through an inexhaustible set of qualities. As a result, each entity has a certain degree of relative autonomy and uniqueness as well as singularity. In other words, there is no entity which is identical to another entity although there might be similarities. To conclude, there is nothing that can even remain identical with itself as time passes (*Way* n. Pag.).

Throughout *Way*, Scalapino reflects the same principles asserted by the philosophy of quantum physics. One of the notions that she deals with is the “natural flux” which is, indeed, the main point of the philosophy of quantum physics. She applies the notion of flux by rejecting any notion of fixation. As Frost comments, Scalapino’s rejection includes Lockean notion of stable identity as well. Instead, as the title of the book “*Way*” suggests, she offers a “path, method, or means: each series unfolds, emerging motifs center on the hills of public sphere, a world in which the speaker observes hardship everywhere” (Frost 1998, 323).

Another principle that Scalapino also embodies is “reciprocal interaction.” Based on this principle, she shows that there is not only an interactive relation between the poem and the reader, but that there is also an interactive relation between the entities in the poem. In terms of the poem and the reader relationship, the readers regenerate the narrative through their own remembered narratives. In return, the poem has a potential to change the perception of the readers. For instance, *Way* makes the readers confront the picture of the world as it is (created by the convention), and it shows that everybody including the speaker is the responsible participant of this picture and we should not refuse to confirm our responsibilities. In “bum series,” the speaker cannot remain senseless to the situation of the bums. Similar to the bums, when she feels she is “almost froze[n],” she “realize[s]” that she can “die” like the bums. This makes her be aware that it is “not possible” for her to disregard, “not caring,” the bums and their “situation.” For her, “not caring” does not make sense because she knows that there are

humane links that interrelate her to the bums:

I almost  
froze—and realized I  
could die from it—when the bums  
were in that situation—and then not  
caring, though that's not possible. (60)

*Way* reveals and expands meaning through the plexus of thematical correspondences. This creates an interlaced narration. Throughout *Way*, the layers of events, relations and time overlap and flow together. The “bum series” opens with the scene of seemingly unrelated entities such as the “bums dying on the street,” the “cranes,” “freighters” and the “man in new wave attire.” In this first scene, Scalapino shows that although the people around the scene of dying bums act as if there were no such an event happening on the street and carry on their usual daily business, they are active components. She portrays some of them such as industrial people at the port who continues to work (in order to preserve the stability of the wealth and economic power of the country) and a young “blonde” man who is the latest fashion with his hair style is waiting for a bus at the bus stop. Scalapino narrates them and the events in a way that the reader perceives the events as a series of interrelated phenomena. By employing an interlaced narration, Scalapino destroys the conventional narrative and descriptive hierarchy:

the men—when I'd  
been out in the cold weather—were  
found lying on the street, having  
died—from the weather; though  
usually being there when it's warmer

the men  
on the street who'd  
died—in the weather—who're bums  
observing it, that instance  
of where they are—not my  
seeing that

cranes are on the  
skyline—which are accustomed  
to lift the containers to or from

the freighters—as the new  
wave attire of the man

though not muscular  
but young—with  
the new wave dyed blonde hair—seeming to  
wait at the bus stop, but  
always outside of the hair salon. (51-52)

## 2.5 Revealing Reality/Truth through Opposites

As she puts it in her article “Footnoting,” included in *The Public World / Syntactically Impermanence* (1999) while she is writing, she simulates an interior spatial configuration which holds contradictions simultaneously (Scalapino 1999, 34). Thus, her writing, *Way* too, requires a kind of reading that acknowledges and recognizes the significance of the dialogue created by the dynamic interplay between conceptually opposed terms. In “walking by,” the speaker tries to adapt herself to society, but at the same time she tries to avoid being absorbed by it. In “walking by” the events and experiences are narrated through a school girl, a black fireman, policemen, a waitress, a store detective, a woman shopper, a white haired woman and a couple sleeping in their beds. The narrator of “walking by” is the school girl who tells her experiences of discrimination, exclusion, hierarchy, authority and violence that she witnesses on the way to school, at school and at home.

“Walking by” recalls Scalapino's experiences at school and in society when she returned from Asia. In the first event narrated, the [African American] school boys “hit the side of the bus everyday” in order to protest against the driver of the bus who had hit an [African American] school girl deliberately (5). Later, the narrator herself experiences violence in her own case when she stands up to read in class. Due to her reading, she is denigrated by her teacher and her class-mates who were encouraged by the teacher: “they hissed and threw their books on the floor when I stood up to read” (6)<sup>10</sup>. This experience makes her feel confused, excluded and

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<sup>10</sup> In *Zither&Autobiography*, Scalapino writes that she “went to John Muir elementary school where the teachers

antisocial (7). When she goes back home, weeping, she tells her father what she experienced at school and expresses her desire not to go school. Her father tells her that she has to be at school by shouting at and scolding her, which makes her feel that she is exposed to the violence once more (8). Experiencing these events at an early age increases her awareness of discrimination, hierarchy, authority, exclusion and violence. She develops an attitude that rejects them altogether. In “hooper,” the last poem of *Way*, she writes that “learning,” “accepting” and “seeking” authority is nonsense because it is damaging:

learning—it seems  
silly—to accept the authority  
—or want it—of some situation  
of needed—and sought after  
instruction—as destroying (138)

In “walking by,” Scalapino narrates more events to exhibit how discrimination, hierarchy, authority and violence are overtly and clandestinely destructive and are related to convention. Through witnessing, experiencing, perceiving and rethinking about her country’s culture, with her words, “travelling the labyrinths of [her] country's culture,” she realizes how violence is one of the standards of American culture. She indicates this realization in *Way* and shows how violence leads to violence by creating the feeling of rage which transforms one into a beast. She exemplifies this in the manner of policemen who bully and arrest an African American fireman just because he is walking by a place where there was a riot: “though they found out he was a fireman—the cop saying oh no—putting him into the paddy wagon” (9).

In another case, policemen catch, hit and beat an African American man with a club when he was trying to escape from them by climbing up a flagpole. Due to the attack of the police and his severe pain, the African American man screams poignantly and vomits a foam of blood from his mouth. Everything happens in front of a crowd of people watching the event. They look at the sight extremely calmly and seriously, and they act as if they were deaf to the

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chose favorites and excluded and spoke meanly to, regarded negatively, the children who were not favorites” (21).

screams of the tormented and dying man. Through this event, Scalapino shows not only the mercilessness of the police, but also the lethargy and indifference of the people. She concludes that the roots of these attitudes are in conventional notions which are culturally valued and encouraged:

him screaming that he'd been hit—there was a crowd—people were still de-  
murring from his extreme emotion, seen in their faces

their—my  
who're  
the ideal but  
in  
the past  
as con-  
vention (7)

Later in the same poem, Scalapino indicates that conventional notions such as hierarchy, authority, discrimination and exclusion create the notion of enemy and cause wars:

therefore endangering them—their being republican—it was said of them—  
leading into another war (22).

## 2.6 *Way* and Norms

Like an analogue to the philosophy of quantum physics, in *Way* Scalapino presents entities as indeterminate, limitless and contingent. She depicts events, perception, experience, mind, reality and self in their multiplicity and in a continuously fragmental manner. This makes the poem dynamic. Yet, the poem is so dynamic and multi-fold that the readers might feel like they are holding something that continuously slides out of their hands like soap. Reading the poem requires continuous checking on perception and comprehension. Readers are never allowed to read the poem with a fixed mind-set, but they are forced to aware of the operations of poetic form and language which serve as a critique of conventional poetics and language based on “unadored subjectivity and direct speech, [...] seeking alternative subjectivity” (Yu 2000, 426).

Scalapino attempts to show how meaning is habitually formed and how interpretation

and comprehension are adjusted and imposed conventionally and culturally. From the front cover till the end of the book, she demonstrates how one customarily builds up meaning through the artificial appearance of things. The two photos by Andrew Savulich on the front cover of book exemplify this clearly. In the first photo, a man and a woman are shown embracing each other. It is entitled “Couple Dancing in Bar.” On the other hand, the second photo shows two half-naked men who are also embracing each other, and it is entitled “Men Fighting on Sidewalk.” The photos echo each other and they are notably similar because both show the movement of embracing in the contexts which are socially considered different although they are (in)directly related in regards to violence in fighting, violence in sexuality and homoeroticism in fighting or fight in homoeroticism. The resemblance in the position of the subjects raises the issues of interpretation and meaning. In an interesting way, the two photos show the sameness of the posture of people who are dancing and fighting. Without a subtitle, the viewer would see a love relationship or a fight in both pictures. Yet, with the subtitles the meaning completely changes. The viewers are perforce led to see a love relation in the first picture and a fight in the second. As in these photos and their subtitles illustrate, the whole poem demonstrates how meaning is prone to interpretation and apprehension which are regulated by convention and culture.

## **2.7 Norms and Scalapino’s Syntax**

In its entirety, *Way* shatters norms syntactically. The poem flows through the stanzas which are formed by sentences and five to ten lines. These lines are generally made up of one or two words. Between the words there are dashes which are very similar to Emily Dickinson’s style. The dashes which frequently interrupt the phrases and sentences and lack of punctuation create semantically a non-hierarchized text. The sentences are often bereft of easily understandable context, which makes the poem, similar to Scalapino’s other works, complex, abstruse and elusive, creating incompleteness and fragmentariness, so a disjunctive style. This fragmental

and disjunctive syntax generates a perplexing and puzzle-like edifice. Scalapino's writing "does not reveal itself according to normative values of 'clarity'" because she employs "extensive use of hypotaxis," which means she inserts modifying clauses and phrases into other clauses and sentences (Simpson 2000, xii).

However, at the same time, Scalapino's puzzle-like syntax functions to form multi-fold meaning, enforcing readers to think of all the possible references of the words and phrases she employs. Scalapino's syntax with its interruptions and equivocations leads to "passages towards alternative tracks of thought, smuggling of meaning, so that [...] [it] contradict[s] the monological enunciation" (Cazé 2007, 201). Frost comments in the same direction, saying that Scalapino breaks up syntax into the parts of speech such as suffixes, prefixes and articles in order to draw attention to "the neglected components of signification" (Frost 1998, 323). Another characteristic of Scalapino's syntax is "expanded paragraphs." For instance, as she mentions in her article "Fiction's Present without Basis" (2004), her work *Defoe*, which she wrote during the first Gulf War in nineties, is composed of:

sheet-like paragraphs (or consecutive, non-stop one line phrases) that included everything above and below a conceptual 'text-horizon line' (as text therefore not visible) as if the *actual* sun and moon together on a line at once (as a paragraph). (Scalapino 2004, 42, emphasis in origin)

Except "expanded paragraphs," one of the significant features of Scalapino's syntax is the ambiguous pronouns and references. She often employs the pronouns, the nouns and the un-named places such as "she," "he," "the man," "the woman," "people" and "city" which are not clear in terms of their references. Most of the time, it is hard to know about whom and which place she is talking about. In this way, Scalapino points to the people who invisibly manipulate and control the events and colonize the others behind the scenes and takes the readers' attention onto them. Through the ambiguous pronouns and nouns, she also signals people who are neglected, ignored, underestimated and excluded. Similar to hypotaxis, extensive use of the ambiguous pronouns and nouns create multiple possibilities for meaning and understanding as well. The difficulty is that, as Simpson comments, sometimes any reading



does not make more sense than the other. This leads readers to add one reading to the other. And one meaning top of the other creates the challenge for them (Simpson 2000, 217). In Scalapino's poetics, challenge is obvious, but in this way she opens a gate to a "unique poetic universe." Another reason for the challenge in Scalapino's poetics is due to her attempt to describe life in constant transition through momentary occurrences. This makes her sentences, as Bedient indicates:

more subtle than usual. They act, above all, as spasmodic, syncopation, a medley of telegraphic expressions [...] and contrasting flows, [...] Yet they hold the ear of the mind and, in particular, touch directly on the imagination's curious ability to apprehend, to hear, voice in written language: in this instance a swift, hard voice, at once all business and inventive enough to beat the band. [...] One can come to see that Scalapino's unaccommodating sentences are governed by a different notion of what can be liked. (Bedient 2000, 17, 18)

In the interview with Anne Brewster, Scalapino remarks that the syntax of her poetry includes open sentences and unclear pronouns intentionally because she avoids "interpretation" or "comments," instead, her focus is on the action and "unfolding the action itself; [...] what's being inside an action; where the [mind] is within the frame of an action." In the same interview, she explains what she means through a poem from her book *Green and Black*:

Between them this man's carried sleeping and uncoils in it to  
slash the other man in a silk suit who flies up to them.  
No rain is falling as it flies in here.  
Pouring so they're in falling rain when it comes up flayed. That  
is at the same time.

The flayed man in silk suit is in waves that pour on them, the  
heavy clothes sagging them.  
The blood-red roses thich-petaled rose up fed on the rain. Thick  
stems on poppies with their black seeds waved on it, since the globe is  
round.

Yet the thick petals wave off the waving black air. Huge  
blossoms unfold.  
Nothing occurs when one sleeps so one is curious. (71)

Looking at the poem syntactically, some questions appear unanswered. For instance, let us take "between them," here we are not given between whom; "carried sleeping and uncoils in it," but what is "it," "uncoils in" what. Then, at the end of the sentence "the other man in a silk suit who flies up to them" comes into the scene. Scalapino answers these questions, saying that it is

just shifting the actions back and forth and trying to show what's inside an action and the relation between mind and action:

Visually you're seeing the man carried by the Sumo and himself uncoiling in the air before you see the man flying up and slashing them. The syntax of any open sentence is an entire series of movements and actions. The only thing that's given to you is actions. You're not given interpretation or philosophy or editorial comments on this. It's not an allegory. It's only those actions. There's a constant displacement of further actions, so that you can only be in actions. (Brewster n.pag.).

Another aspect of Scalapino's syntax and writing is, as is mentioned before, her constant use of contradictory utterances and negations. That is, she says something and rejects what she says in the next phrase or later. She simultaneously suggests both something "so" and something "not so." Her disjunctive writing also besets with gaps and/or blank spaces. Through these contradictory utterances, gaps and blank spaces, as Lagapa indicates, Scalapino reinforces the thought she is expressing and develops the meaning. She also shows the transience and the non-dualistic characteristic of poetry. For her, the poem is a momentary occurrence and experimental. Similar to the philosophy of Nāgārjuna, Scalapino's contradictory utterances or negations, however irrational they may seem, achieve a level of reasonability. Scalapino engages a poetics which is based on the "principles of emptiness and negation" (Lagapa 2006, 36, 39, 55). Through negations and contradictions or "back and forth motion," Scalapino creates an effect of simultaneity, as well, erasing "a perception of motion based on linear or chronological time" (Hinton, qtd. in Lagapa 39).

*Way* is composed of a reciprocal relation between conceptually opposed terms. These opposing terms mutually inform and endlessly circulate throughout the poem. Scalapino is one of the poets who urges the scope of language in order to create meaning by means of a reciprocal relation between conceptually opposed terms. As noted in the article "Misquotations from Reality," some characteristics of Scalapino's poetics are "juxtaposition and apposition, rapid disjuncture and repetition, rhythmic variation and imagistic collision" (Lauterbach 1996, 150). Nash's view advocates Lauterbach's. Nash comments that Scalapino employs extremely

unrelated pictures in order to describe an action or a self. These extremes functions like “iconography” and “semiotics,” and Scalapino makes use of them in order to empty them of the conventional meanings they hold, but to also point out something else. Through extremes Scalapino calls all consequences built upon conventional notions into question and makes the reader confront the oppositions to generate alternative meanings. She rejects the meanings created based on extrapolation. Instead, she always searches what is beneath the surface (Nash 1995, 96).

As in her other works, *Way* has a serial form which is composed of both a series of verse stanzas placed vertically and in horizontal blocks of prose which make it prose-poetry. Repetition which creates a thematic string is a significant element of serial form. In this context, through *Way* the repeated words and phrases “swell and recede wavelike” and:

In the absence of conventional narrative and representational language, these repetitions also serve to create forward momentum and thus a sense of continuity and movement within the piece. (Simpson 2000, 127, 126)

Some of the repeated words and phrases which appear in *Way* are “social or the social world,” “convention,” “the police or the cops,” “sentiment,” “in the present”, “an individual,” “crowd,” “the sense of being nothing,” “to be able to be free the past from myself,” “cruelty and violence,” “walking (by),” “the birds,” “death and dying,” “(the lovely) city,” “misery,” “custom,” “the jerk as a public figure,” “the relation,” “the bums,” “freighters” and “the new wave (dyed blonde hair) attire of the man.” By means of the reoccurrence of these certain words and phrases through the poem, sometimes with small changes, Scalapino introduces subtle shifts in context which move from one perspective to the next. The repetition and syntactical strategies that Scalapino employs function to reveal and distract hierarchical distinctions of race, class and gender (Simpson 126). As Lagapa persuasively argues:

[by employing] repetitive, ironic, and self-cancelling utterances, Scalapino forges a vigilant self-reflexive poetics, yet this hyperawareness of the methods and process of composition [...] leads toward a critique of traditional notions of authorship and poetic narration [...] in order to challenge conventional Western conceptions of both the process of writing and the nature of being. (Lagapa 2006, 31)

To conclude, at first glance Scalapino's syntax might generate the feeling of walking into a morass or marsh. Yet, at the same time, the difficulty of her syntax creates the sense of respect and fascination with its invitation for taking challenge. Through the challenge or seeming incommunicableness of her poetry so *Way* due to the narrative elements of fragmentation, interruption, dispersal, and juxtaposition, Scalapino creates an alternative voice, which is, as Brian Mchale mentions, "heteroglossic and polyphonic": "Multiple voices and multiple registers [...] In particular, its plurality of voices resists assimilation to the voice of 'author' [...] The author [...] only contributes" as another voice to the polyphony of poem (Mchale 2000, 259). By its proliferation, discontinuous and fragmentary characteristics, *Way* challenges norms in narrative.

## **2.8 *Way* and Scalapino's Notion of Self**

The self in *Way* has "no [conventional] basis." This self pays close attention to ongoing events and values genuine experience. By contrast with the conventional self, Scalapino presents "the processual self" (Cazé 2007, 203). That is, the self is not governed by temporal categories and trajectories. It considers life to be constantly changing through the present time. As a result, it considers reality and itself to be in a process of constant change based on interactive relation between private and public or inside and outside. Scalapino emphasizes that society generally creates tormenting and suffering selves by dividing people into races, sexes and social classes. The division among people reinforces, intensifies and generates an artificial notion of ranking and encourages the notions of superior and inferior. In "walking by" Scalapino tells a story of a young woman who is well-educated, maybe an academic. She works for an elderly wealthy woman who is in her nineties and blind. The young woman reads newspapers and books to this old wealthy woman who is surrounded by maids and doormen. Through this story, Scalapino shows how the young woman is exposed to class division and

how she is treated contemptuously by the public in a subtle way:

in the morning—getting the newspaper in the hotel's lobby for her; it was  
spring weather—they'd comprehend my function without my wearing a uni-  
form, seen in their expressions at the newspaper stand. (21)

Scalapino radically criticizes the public figure which is created by convention. She calls  
it “the jerk”:

the jerk  
as—to—  
a  
public  
figure—  
that  
custom (46)

As alternative, she suggests that one should open oneself up and let oneself fly apart from this  
social construction, asserting that the real-self is free from any social formation. One can even  
free oneself from a friendship which is not working. In “no(h)-setting,” she remarks that being  
betrayed in a friendship has nothing to do with who oneself is:

a person—betraying  
friendship—or they had—say  
if they do—and the relation to  
who oneself is—and the other  
separate—action (120)

In “bum series,” she notes that the relationship of self to self is complicated and that it is  
conditioned by the interpretations of others and one’s interpretation of one’s own identity. In  
the stanza below, she mentions a man who looks like the model of the recent fashion, indeed,  
has another (reality of ) self as being a “freighter”:

the man in the new  
wave attire—as the relation  
of him  
being another person—as  
the freighter and  
his and its relation (57)

The self Scalapino describes in *Way* has neither permanent, inherent and essential qualities, nor  
is independent from other entities. It exists through interrelatedness. It tries to view reality free

from the illusions of a model of straight resemblance. It embodies the unity of opposites and pluralism. Thus, it simultaneously holds inner and outer, public and private, and subject and object in their interrelatedness. It empties the causal link between events.

To conclude this chapter, in her poetics and in *Way*, Scalapino creates “chiaroscuro” effects, suggesting that not everything is in the “day light” and they are not as they are seen or shown (Nash 1995, 94). What Scalapino aims of in *Way* is to create a qualitative change in the mind-set of readers and make them realize the urgency of a new epistemology and ontology. Her creative and analytical writing illustrates that “reality exists only by example, and is therefore contingent on temporal-spatial contexts” (Lauterbach 1996, 156). Art so poetry can become an act of the refusal of conventional and cultural values. Poetry is not only subjective self-expression which is worthwhile to the writer, but it is a process of exploring, deciphering and criticizing the conventional and cultural way of knowing. As in her works, in *Way*, Scalapino illustrates how art could be beyond a replica or representation of what the conventional cultural narrations or chronicles suggest. *Way* stand for to show:

how art can attempt to interact with the mind of the reader to set up a negotiation of meaning which involves the dissolving edges of explanation and the seemingly rigid barriers to various aspects of mind. Once dissolved, the mind has a restored capacity to recombine and reconstitute reality so that the reader may see things as they might exist once they’re broken free of the habits or obligations of “civilized” or “learned” thought (Nash 1995, 94).

Scalapino extends the conventional notion of art and shows that art has no limits. On the contrary, art particularly experimental art opens new ways to follow. Her writing offers additional qualities to the realm of art by continually providing negations and so creating a dynamic conversation between the text and reader. In her works, art functions to search and to dissolve the conventional epistemological and ontological notions and takes one to the outer limits of what is seen. Art is considered to be an activity to stimulate one’s mind in the exploration of a new epistemological and ontological stance.

## Chapter Three: Virginia Woolf and “Life Writing”

### 3.1 Woolf’s Life and “life-writing”

Every secret of a writer’s soul, every experience of [her/his] life, every quality of [her/his] mind is written large in [her/his] works. (*Orlando* 145)

I would like to start this chapter by briefly mentioning Woolf’s life and her “life-writing” because they shed light on Woolf’s aesthetics and philosophy. Woolf was born at 22 Hyde Park Gate at Kensington Gardens on January 25, 1882 as the second daughter of Leslie Stephen and Julia Prinsep Stephen. She was born into the communicative, literate, letter-writing and articulate late nineteenth century world of not rich, but of well-to-do parents with expansive connections. Both of her parents had strong family associations with literature. Woolf was neither sent to school nor did she have any other formal education. She was instead educated mainly by her mother and later by her father through free access to his library. Only at the age of twenty, in 1902, did she go to King’s College Women’s Department to take as many lectures as she could. Indeed, Woolf was almost entirely self-educated. She lived at 22 Hyde Park Gate at Kensington Gardens between the years 1882-1904 (*Moments of Being* 2202, 79). As Hermione Lee comments in her book *Virginia Woolf* (1997), 22 Hyde Park Gate makes the history of Woolf and the Stephen family. In return, Woolf and the Stephen family make the history of 22 Hyde Park Gate (35). It is as if the house and the fabric of the family were woven together. In this house Woolf spent twenty-four years of her life, which created a strong familiarity with it. She remarks this in *Moments of Being*:

I could write the history of every mark and scratch in my room, I wrote later. The walls and rooms had in sober truth been built to our shape. We had permeated the whole vast fabric [...] with our family history. (45)

The life in this house created various contradictory feelings and emotions knotted together in Woolf, which she reflected in her works later. When she looks back upon that house in her adulthood, she finds it “grotesque, comic and tragic” (45):

Here the four of us were born; here my grandmother died; here my mother died; here

my father died; here Stella engaged to Jack Hills and two doors further down the street after three months marriage she died too. [...] It seems to me so crowded with scenes of family life, grotesque, comic and tragic; with the violent emotions of youth, revolt, despair, intoxicating happiness, immense boredom, with parties of the famous and the dull; with rages again, George and Gerald; with love scenes with Jack Hills; with passionate affection for my father alternating with passionate hatred of him, all tingling and vibrating in an atmosphere of youthful bewilderment and curiosity – that I feel suffocated by the recollection. (45)

The Victorian domestic life-style was dominant at home, which required “labour-intensiveness” carried out by the maids (Lee 1997, 40-49). Woolf remarks upon this Victorian life style in *The Years* (1937) through one of their maids, Crosby:

Crosby held open the door of dining room. [...] Knives and forks rayed out round table. The whole room, with its carved chairs, oil paintings, the two daggers on the mantelpiece, and the handsome sideboard – all the solid objects that Crosby dusted and polished every day – looked at its best in the evening. (35-36)

The Stephen family spent their summers from August till October in Talland House in St Ives. Talland House was always a source for one of “the most important memor[ies]” of hers on which “all other memories of her were built” (*Moments of Being* 2002, 78). It is the place in which she experiences the intense moments of sensation and discovers the miraculousness of life with its rhythm and its hidden patterns, which she later describes in her works. Woolf was “six months old when she was taken there.” She spends her thirteen summers in Talland House and suddenly loses everything with the death of her mother, which creates a “drastic break in her life” (Lee 1997, 23). After her mother’s death, they never again visit there, but Woolf keeps the images alive from there and she makes sketches of the life in Talland House, which she uses in her books:

A sailing ship slowly drew past the women’s backs. Two or three figures crossed the terrace hastily in the dusk. The door opened and shut. Nothing settled or stayed unbroken. (*Jacob’s Room* 1992, 47)

In *To The Lighthouse* (1927), she makes symbolic visits to Talland House through Lily Briscoe. Lily, the narrator of the book, returns to the old house ten years after Mrs. Ramsay’s death and tries to recollect the image of her, calling her name: “Mrs. Ramsay! Mrs. Ramsay!” (218).

Woolf’s writing career started when she was nine years old. She and her sister Vanessa,



sometimes together with her brother Thoby prepared a newspaper for their parents called *Hyde Park Gate News*. It was a weekly newspaper with issues from 9 February 1891 until April 1895 (*Moments of Being* 2002, 105). The news was mainly made up of what they saw in Kensington Gardens. The external world was extremely evoking for little Virginia's senses and mind. She had "a curious focus" and "extreme distinctness." During their walks in Kensington Gardens, she could see the "air-balls, blue and purple, and the ribs on the shells." She is also attracted by "vast and empty spaces" (*Moments of Being* 90). She had always stories to tell. Story-telling was one of her major and the most entertaining activities of her childhood between the years 1882 and 1895, in which, as Woolf remarks, her imagination was shaped by:

Many bright colors; many distinct sounds; some human beings, caricatures; comic; several violent moments of being, always including a circle of scene which they cut out: and all surrounded by a vast space – that is a rough visual description of childhood. (*Moments of Being* 2002, 91)

Imagining, thinking and writing about the things surrounding her made Woolf happy. Yet, what made her extremely happy was her mother's appreciation of her writings. When her mother liked something she wrote in *Hyde Park Gate News* and when she "sent a story of [Virginia Woolf] to Madge Symonds<sup>11</sup>," she felt "like being a violin and being played upon" (*Moments of Being* 2002, 105). Through the years of her childhood and later, Woolf knew that she would be a writer, but she had no idea for a long time whether she would really become a (distinguished) writer or not. On 7 July 1907, in her letter to Violet Dickinson, she mentioned her hesitancy: "I shall be miserable, or happy; a wordy sentimental creature or a writer of such English as shall one day burn the pages" (*Woolf* 2 1975: 299). Although then Woolf was not sure, later she becomes "one of the greatest writers of all time":

not only for her novels but for her essays, her social polemics, her memories, her experiments in biography, her glittering and moving diaries, and her many letters. The story of her life is one of determination, hard work, and untiring interest in the world around her. She took nothing for granted [...] She could never bank on her own success because she never did the same thing twice. [...] Reading chronologically through

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<sup>11</sup> Daughter of John Addington Symonds, who was an English poet and critic. Madge Symonds was born 1869 and married to one of Woolf's cousins, William Wyamar Vaughan and when she took Woolf's uncle's surname her name became Madge Vaughan (*Moments of Being* 4 and Lee, *Virginia Woolf* 162, 163).

Woolf's diaries and letters, it is possible to put hind-sight temporarily on hold and appreciate the decisions she made day by day. [...] We can flick ahead and see [...] Woolf's remarkable toughness and tenacity. (Harris 2013, 7, 8)

Woolf's early writing career was interrupted first by her mother Julia Stephen's death in 1895 and later by her step-sister Stella's in 1897. These two unexpected events affected Woolf deeply, and she stopped writing between the years 1895 and 1897. These were also the years when Woolf had the first symptoms of her illness. Unfortunately, due to the death of a family member or a close friend, her illness kept recurring and affecting Woolf's life and her writing career till the end of her life. Generally the former was followed by the latter. When her mother died, Woolf was at the age of thirteen. As she remarks in *Moments of Being* (2002), through her mother's death, she learned one of her most important "life-lessons." For the first time, she realized that her personal experience was different from the public expectation. Despite the conventional "public mourning style," her mother's death created no feeling in her: "I feel nothing whatever" (102). This experience led her to understand that we are somehow forced to behave in the way the public expect us. In the same way, we repeat the words in prayers without really knowing the meanings of them. Woolf thinks that public expectation makes one "hypocritical":

We were made to act parts that we did not feel; to fumble for words that we did not know. It obscured, it dulled. It made one hypocritical and immeshed in the conventions of sorrow. Many foolish and sentimental ideas came into being. [...] There was a conflict between what we ought to be and what we were. (*Moments of Being* 102, 105)

During the years 1897 and 1904, Woolf trains herself in writing and develops her writing style. Meanwhile, she looks for someone who can read what she writes and she connects with Violet Dickinson, who becomes one of the most important people in her later life. In those years Woolf's other important literary companion is her father, Leslie Stephen. Leslie Stephen is one of the first people who realizes Woolf's intellect and believes sincerely that she would become a writer. He remarks his belief in his letter he wrote to Julia Stephen on 29 July 1893: "She takes in a great deal and will ready be an author in time. History will be a good thing for her to take up" (qtd in Lee 1997, 57). Through the years in the absence of her mother and Stella,

Woolf's relationship with her father becomes both "strong and conflicted" and finally turns into a catastrophe. Leslie Stephen's death due to cancer on 22 February 1904 makes Woolf feel relieved. Yet, with the death of Leslie Stephen, everything in the house at 22 Hyde Park Gate collapses (*Moments of Being* 2002, 44-46).

Between 1904 and the beginning of 1907 are the years of Bloomsbury, in which Bloomsbury meetings start and become very active. They meet on Thursdays evenings and talk and discuss everything, particularly, art and politics. Bloomsbury plays an important role in Woolf's life and writing. In a short time, Bloomsbury makes a name and becomes known among intellectuals almost everywhere in the world, ranging from Germany, France, Turkey to Timbuktu. For Woolf, the effect that Bloomsbury creates on the intellectuals all over the world, including on her and on her sister, was astonishing: "how difficult – how impossible. Talk – even talk which had tremendous results upon the lives and characters of the two Miss Stephens" (*Moments of Being* 2002, 48). In her letter to Gwen Raverant on 1 May 1925, she notes that:

If six people, with no special start except what their wits give them, can so dominate, there must be some reason in it. [...] Where they seem to me to triumph is in having worked out a view of life which was not by any means corrupt or sinister or merely intellectual; rather aesthetic and austere indeed; which still holds, and keeps them dining together, after 20 years. (Woolf 3 1994: 181)

The first chapter of Bloomsbury and Woolf's prolific writing period come to an end with the death of Woolf's elderly brother, Thoby, who was one of the active members of Bloomsbury group. Thoby dies at the age of twenty-nine in November 1906, due to typhoid which he was infected with in Greece during their family trip. Shortly after Thoby's death, Vanessa decides to get married to Clive Bell, another active member of Bloomsbury group. Besides Thoby's death, Vanessa's marriage affects the ending of Bloomsbury. However, this end was somehow unavoidable because, as Woolf remarks: "Even if Vanessa had not married, even if Thoby had lived, change was inevitable. We could not have gone on discussing the nature of beauty in the abstract for ever" (*Moments of Being* 2002, 53).

Between 1908 and 1909, Woolf works on her first novel *The Voyage Out* (1915), which

is about a young woman of twenty four whose name is Rachel. Akin to Woolf's other works, *The Voyage Out*, is "self-exposure" and it has "a voice with an extra ordinary sense of intimacy" (Harris 2013, 52). Through Rachel, Woolf displays her life. Similar to Woolf, Rachel relinquishes an old "claustrophobic house" in order to explore some new ways of living. Like Woolf, Rachel comes from the middle-class family, but hates middle-class values and status quo. She would rather inquire life and herself (Harris 2013, 52). In his letter to Woolf on 25 February 1916, Lytton Strachey writes that he "read it [*The Voyage Out*] with breathless pleasure," adding that he does not think he "ever enjoyed the reading of a book so much" (Strachey 2006, 269). He also notes that the book attracted him with its "wit and exquisiteness [...] a wonderful solidity as well!!! Something Tolstoyan." Lytton remarks that "the people were *not* mere satirical silhouettes, but solid, too, with some other sides of them: Shakespeare wouldn't have been ashamed of some of them" (269):

Perhaps the most important part of [the] book – the secular sense of it all -18<sup>th</sup> century in its absence of folly, but with the color and the amusement of modern life as well. Oh, it's very unvictorian! The handling of the details always seemed to me divine. (Strachey 2006, 269, 270)

In the second year of the First World War, she and Leonard start living in Hogart's House<sup>12</sup> in Richmond, a of the suburb of London. As Leonard Woolf remarks in the introductory of *A Writer's Diary & Virginia Woolf* (1954), Woolf starts to write a diary regularly in 1915 and continues till the end of her life in 1941. Although she does not write regularly every day, the diary gives an account of twenty-seven years as a consecutive record of what she does, of the people whom she meets, particularly of what she thinks about people, about herself, about life, and about the books she writes or hopes to write. When she dies, she leaves twenty six volumes of diary behind her (vii). Woolf uses her diaries as a method of practicing the art of writing. Her diaries throw light upon her intentions, objects and methods as a writer. They give an extra-

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<sup>12</sup>"It was a smart Georgian brick house, with rows of sash windows, large, wood-panelled rooms, and, at the back, views across the rooftops to Kew Gardens. The terrain to London was only a short walk away. [There Woolf] rejoiced in the most ordinary aspects of life because she knew what it was like to lose touch with them"(Harris 55).

ordinary psychological picture of artistic production from within. They illustrate the energy, persistence and concentration with which she devoted herself to the art of writing and an undeviating meticulousness with which she wrote and rewrote and rewrote her books (viii, ix). As Professor Bernard Blackstone remarks in his book *Virginia Woolf*, besides her diaries, Woolf's other works display that Woolf "did supremely well what no one else attempted to do" (Blackstone 1952, 36).

Between the years 1917 and 1922, Woolf reads industriously. As she writes in her diary on Wednesday, March 5<sup>th</sup>, 1919, her reading list ranges from Joyce to Hardy:

But oh, dear, what a lot I've got to read! The entire works of Mr. James Joyce, Wyndham Lewis, Ezra Pound, so as to compare them with the entire works of Dickens and Mrs Gaskell; besides that George Eliot; and finally Hardy. And I've done just Aunt Anny,<sup>13</sup> on a really liberal scale. (Woolf 1954, 8)

Despite those difficult years of the First World War and her illness, Woolf writes two books, a lot of essays, letters and diaries. She also writes short stories which open a window in the history of literature. In those years, her contemporaries T.S. Eliot and James Joyce are becoming known. Yet, they do not impress Woolf much. She notes in her diary on August 16, 1922 that she thinks Joyce's *Ulysses* represents "male arrogance" and "aggressive sexuality." She does not find much "rhythm and beauty in Joyce's language":

I have read 200 pages so far—not a third; and have been amused, stimulated, charmed, interested, by the first 2 or 3 chapters—to the end of the cemetery scene; and then puzzled, bored, irritated and disillusioned by a queasy undergraduate scratching his pimples. [...] An illiterate, underbred book it seems to me [...] how egoistic, insistent, raw, striking, and ultimately nauseating. (Woolf 1954, 47)

In those days, one of the writers who influences Woolf deeply is Proust. In her letter to Roger Fry on May 6, 1922, Woolf writes:

But Proust so titillates my own desire for expression that I can hardly set out the sentence. Oh if I could write like that! I cry. And at the moment such is the astonishing vibration and saturation and intensification that he procures [...] Scarcely anyone so stimulates the nerves of language in me. (Woolf 2 1994: 525)

In early 1920s, Woolf works on *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), while she is collecting her essays

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<sup>13</sup> Lady Ritchie, Thackeray's daughter.

in a book which later becomes *The Common Reader* (1925) and preparing it for publication. The essays in *The Common Reader* are about life, history and literature. The style of the book radically challenges the conventional style because Woolf introduces the figures of literature like the characters in her fiction. Woolf starts writing *To the Lighthouse* on August 6, 1925, at Monk's House. She finishes the first draft of it in September, 1926. In *To the Lighthouse*, she depicts the twentieth-century post-war England as an imperialistic country with a class-oriented society, which is preoccupied with political legacies of the First World War through the story of the Victorian Stephen family (Lee 1997, 479-482). In *Moments of Being* (2002), Woolf remarks that *To the Lighthouse* is a kind of psychoanalysis for herself and for her parents. Writing *To the Lighthouse* clears her mind from her mother's and father's memories. She stops "arguing" and getting upset with her father in her mind. By writing the book, she gets rid of the feeling of restless driven deep into her caused by the things she was not able to say her father:

I rubbed out a good deal of the force of my mother's memory by writing about her in *To the Lighthouse*, so I rubbed out much of his [her father's] memory there too. [...] Until I wrote it out, I would find my lips moving; I would be arguing with him; raging against him; saying to myself all that I never said to him. How deep they drove themselves into me, the things it was impossible to say aloud. (Woolf 2002, 116)

Woolf continues her writing career with *A Room of One's Own* (1929). *A Room of One's Own* is followed by *The Waves* (1931) and then comes her next book *The Years* (1937). By the time she writes *The Years*, Woolf is moved by the death of Roger Fry on September 7, 1934. After Lytton Strachey's death on January 21, 1932, with the death of Fry, Woolf thinks that a great deal of Bloomsbury has "gone." In September 1934, she puts a note in her diary about Fry's funeral and about him, remarking how unique was Fry for her:

It is a strong instinct to be with one's friends. I thought of him too, at intervals. Dignified and honest and large - "large sweet soul" - something ripe and musical about him - and then fun and the fact that he had lived with such variety and generosity and curiosity. I thought of this. (Woolf 1954, 224)

With Fry's death, Woolf becomes Bloomsbury's biographer because both Fry's family and Strachey's family ask her to write Roger's and Lynton's biographies, handing her piles of letters and documents. Having lost her friends and being aware of getting old cause her to work more.

While she writes the biographies of her friends, she works on her own books. She finishes the second draft of *The Years* in December 1935 (Harris 2013, 134-135).

During those years, she struggles with the (economic) circumstances and feelings resulting from the Second World War. They are short of money. She considers war to be “a brutal interruption” (Woolf 1954, 263). In *Three Guineas*, she analyzes the reasons and the results of war:

It destroys the fullness of life - any break – like that of house moving – causes me extreme distress; it breaks; it shallows; it turns the depth into hard thin splinters. As I say to L[eonard]: 'What's there real about this? Shall we ever live a real life again?'.  
(*Moments of Being* 2002, 108)

After finishing writing *Three Guineas*, she starts writing *Roger Fry* (1940). While she is writing *Roger Fry*, she starts a new book *Between the Acts* (1941). *Between the Acts* reflects the intensity of life in war times with its unfinished conversations, forgotten lines and scenes which are continually being disturbed and recollected again. It is about a traditional life in a village and, as Harris notes, extraordinarily experimental. It is made up of conversations which the village people have about war and politics. In the center of the story, there is a play which is written and staged by Miss La Trobe. Through the play, Miss La Trobe tries to push “against the conventions,” making a “comic tour through English history” (Harris 2013, 146-157).

When Woolf’s writing process is analyzed, it is seen that her writing practice has several steps: She writes one or more drafts, reviews them and then types out revisions. The number of revisions sometimes reaches seven or eight (Woolf 2002, 163). Regarding her writing technique, she writes by “making scenes” which are inspired by exceptional moments. I will explain her “scene-making” process later in this chapter more in detail in the section “The Present-The Past Relationship and Scene Making.” In her long and diverse writing process, Woolf writes diaries, essays, biographies and fiction. But what she really writes about is life; what Woolf calls “life-writing”:

Her life story enters and shapes her novels (and her essays); she returns again and again to her family, her parents, her sister, the death of her mother, the death of her brother.

[...] she is one of the most self-reflecting, self-absorbed novelists who ever lived. Yet she was one of the most anxious to remove the personality from the fiction. (Lee 1997, 4, 17)

Woolf's works clearly show that through her journey to explore life and *life-writing*, she employs her own life as a laboratory. She explains in *A Room of One's Own* (1992) that one of her major concerns has been how a woman might write her own life story and life when there are so few historical precedents and so little encouragement. She has been preoccupied with this concern throughout all of her writing life. She constantly keeps questioning how a woman's writing of her life and her life would be different from a man's; why there were no female autobiographers like Rousseau; and why women were, on the whole, inhibited and self-censoring. In order to discuss these questions and very crucial issues about gender assiduously in an indirect and suggestive way, she creates an imaginary sister of Shakespeare in *A Room of One's Own* (60-62). After this imaginary story, she concludes that in the sixteenth century any woman who was born with a great gift would certainly have ended up going crazy or shooting herself or would have ended her days in some lonely cottage outside the village, feared and mocked. Later, Woolf links this story to the twentieth century, pointing out that even in the twentieth century a woman was not encouraged to be an artist. Instead, she was:

snubbed, slapped, lectured and exhorted. Her mind was labored and her vitality lowered by the need of opposing this, of disproving that [...by] obscure masculine complex which has had so much influence upon the woman's movement; that deep-seated desire, not so much that *she* shall be inferior as that *he* shall be superior. (*A Room of One's Own*, 1992, 71, emphasis in original)

Having a very patriarchal father and two step brothers, she suffers under their supremacy her whole life and struggles against and surmounts the patriarchal repression. Finally, she explores her voice and develops her own unique writing style and philosophy, which reject and are completely contrary to patriarchal conventional concepts. She openly remarks and shows that she has never fitted into late-Victorian conventional life style and society. She has refused to play the roles which were designed for and expected from her as a woman. She has recognized the social games behind these veiled parties. In her book *Mrs. Dalloway* (2008), she



depicts Clarrisa as a woman who refuses to become a conventional social figure. Instead, as Lee comments, she considers parties, particularly the ones she organizes, as a sort of art (Lee 1997, 54, 55).

Similar to her approach to the Victorian conventional way of life and society, she rejects conventional approaches in writing and develops her liberal and unique fashion of writing. In “Rambling around Evelyn” in *The Common Reader* (1925), she notes that: “instead of conventional way of direct mentioning and talking about the topic”, she prefers to “ramble” around it. Instead of writing about “hard facts,” she writes about her impressions and sensations (78-85). In her essays she employs a style which is based on informal conversations instead of systematic analysis. On October 15, 1930, in her letter to Ethel Smyth, she notes that she is breaking the rules in conventional writing by employing unfinished thoughts, symbols and images which cannot be easily explained, adding that all these make her writing cryptic, unstable and philosophical: “I shall never compass the plain narrative style” (Woolf 4 1978: 214). Woolf’s writing life and her works prove that she is an exceptional writer: “like Shakespeare, [Woolf] is a writer who lends herself to infinitely various [readings and] interpretation” (Lee 1997, 3).

Woolf’s aesthetics is based on the momentary perception of life. In her writing process, she elaborates new sentiments, values, perceptions and notions which are mostly drawn from her own experience. As is commented in *Virginia Woolf, a Critical Reading* (1975):

Everything she wrote [...] are to be found in the very tissue of her mind, which she held to be a function of all the minds with which she had engaged—in books as well as in life. (Fleishman 1975, x)

The voice in her works, as James Naremore suggests, is “the voice of everyone and no one” (qtd in Fleishman 1975, x). Woolf’s propelling power in her writing process is rooted in *freedom* and *boldness*. She writes in her diary on February 7, 1931:

What interests me in the last stage was the freedom & boldness with which my imagination picked up used & tossed aside all the images symbols which I had prepared. I am sure that this is the right way of using them. [sic.] (Woolf 4 1978: 10)

As regard to her themes and how she expresses them, Woolf is quite repetitive. She uses certain images, phrases and words again and again. She employs repetition for different purposes: to mirror the rhythm of life and the mind, to show the flux of life and the interplay of consistency and change in experience, reality and life and to connect the past to the present. Indeed, her way of repetition is distinctive because, through repetition, Woolf also shows that “reality is entirely changeful and free so that there is no real repetition in life, despite appearances” (Fleishman 1975, 227, 222).

Before closing this section, it is fitting to mention briefly Woolf's illness again because, as is seen, it had an influential effect on her life and writing process:

Her illness is attributable to genetic, environmental and biological factors. It was periodical, and recurrent. [...] It affected her body as much as her mind [...] Five times in her life (four of them between the ages of thirteen and thirty-three), she suffered from major onslaughts of the illness and in almost all (possibly all) of these attacks she attempted to kill herself. Woolf often employs the term 'apprehensive' in order to describe her states of mind just before and during the attacks caused by her illness, which started with her mother's death and the subsequent events, and continued throughout her life. Her illness made her feel 'very lonely', 'very useless' and 'very apprehensive'. (Lee 1997, 175)

Woolf's illness makes her life “vulnerable” due to the “recurrent episodes whose symptoms might range from weeks of intense depression to a night's anxiety or a sudden faint.” Besides these, she has a variety of symptoms caused by her illness such as “a headache,” “a back-ache,” “high temperature,” “an attack of influenza,” “exhaustion,” “rapid pulse rate,” “hallucinations,” “some strange, irrational sense of guilt,” “reluctance to eat,” “severe weight loss” and hearing “horrible voices.” During her life twelve doctors consult with her, yet what they prescribe does not change anything until 1930 (Lee 1997, 176-183). On December 18, 1936, in her letter to Violet Dickinson with a title “A State of Mind,” Woolf writes:

Woke up perhaps at 3. Oh its beginning its coming – the horror – physically like a painful wave about the heart – tossing me up. I'm unhappy unhappy! Down – God, I wish I were dead. Pause. But why am I feeling this? ... Wave crashes. I wish I were dead! I've only a few years to live I hope. I cant face this horror any more – (this is the wave spreading out over me). This goes on; several times; with varieties of horror. Then, at the crisis, instead of the pain remaining intense, it becomes rather vague ... At last ... I brace myself ... I become rigid & straight, & sleep again [sic]. (qtd in Lee 1997, 187)

She connects the treatments of people who are mentally suffering with the question of human rights. The methods of those days used by the health system triggered Woolf's resistance to tyranny and conventionality as a female patient. Most of the time she was upset and stressed by her treatment. In 1918, in her letter to V. Dickinson, Woolf notes that:

I have never spent such a wretched 8 months in my life ... I wonder why Savage doesn't see this ... really a doctor is worse than a husband! ... never has time been more miserable ... I don't expect any doctor to listen to reason ... if only that pigheaded man Savage will see this is the sober truth and no excuse! [sic]. (qtd in Lee 1997, 184)

Woolf records her nervous breakdown in *Mrs. Dalloway* (2008) through Septimus and in *The Waves* (1992) through Rhoda. She depicts both of them to be “imprisoned alone inside their violent feelings of horror at the human race and their inability to communicate” (Lee 1997, 194). Despite the fact that Woolf has often been sick, she has never victimized herself. There have been times she was weak in all senses, but she has had exceptional courage, determinism and intellectual power which she has employed as well as she could in order to overcome her illness, to understand herself and her condition. This has made her able to endure the hardship and the great misery of mind and physical pain. She is very well aware of the cost of her illness. In her letter to E.M. Forster on 21 January 1922, she tells him that she lost five years due to her illnesses. Therefore, she suggests that they should not expect anything more than what she can do, and they should take five years off while they are calculating her age:

Writing is still like heaving bricks over a wall; so you must interpret with your usual sympathy. I should like to growl to you about all this damned lying in bed and doing nothing, and getting up and writing half a page and going to bed again. I've wasted 5 whole years (I count) doing it; so you must call me 35 – not 40 – and expect rather less from me. (Woolf 2 1994: 499)

### **3.2 Woolf's Notion of Time: Exceptional Moments; Moments of Being**

If we are not mistaken, it is [possible] to catch and enclose certain moments which break off from the mass, in which without bidding things come together in a combination of inexplicable significance, to assert those thoughts which suddenly, to the thinker at least, are almost menacing with meaning. Such moments of vision are of an unaccountable nature; leave them alone and they persist for years; try to explain them and they disappear; write them down and they die beneath the pen. (“Moment of Vision.” Woolf 2 1987: 250, 251)

Before starting this section, it is necessary to note that among the various readings of

Woolf's works, the reading represented here is anchored in Woolf's notion of time. In this chapter, I will discuss how Woolf perceives time and how this impacts the notions of reality and truth, namely the notions of epistemology. At the bottom of Woolf's philosophy lies her curiosity about life and celebration of it. Woolf celebrates life with both of its substantial<sup>14</sup> and unsubstantial<sup>15</sup> realms and shows how they are interconnected, and how the boundaries in between are permeable through. In the next chapter titled "The Waves," I will scrutinize Woolf's notion of life, of self and how she employs art as a technique to deal with her epistemological and ontological concerns.

Although some critics indicate that Woolf's notion of time recalls Henri Bergson's, I will argue that Woolf's concept of time and space shares a greater similarity with Albert Einstein's theory of relativity and with the philosophy of quantum physics rather than Bergson's notion of time. Being one of the prominent intellectuals of her time, Woolf was certainly exposed to these ideas and the discussions in physics current in that period through her relationships with other intellectuals and the prevalence of scientific discoveries in the popular media. When we have a look at the dates of the significant discoveries in physics, we see that Planck's discovery of the quantum took place in 1900, Bohr's theory of the atom between 1913 and 1925 and the discoveries of Heisenberg as well as Schrödinger as regards wave-particle relationship in 1925-6. As Paul Tolliver Brown points out, in the mid-1920s and 1930s physicists were discussing the atom with regard to wave-particle duality and the characteristics of light and Woolf was aware of these findings in the notions of space-time and the atom discovered in her time (Brown 2009, 39-62).

As is commented in Banfield's article "Time Passes" (2003), due to the variety of factors such as technological changes, scientific advancements, the new circumstances of work and

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<sup>14</sup> "Substantial: material; solid or solidly built; having body, form, or substance." (Oxford English Dictionary)

<sup>15</sup> "Unsubstantial: Lacking material substance; abstract; having no body, form, or substance." (Oxford English Dictionary)

daily life, the perception of time and space in the decades between 1880 and 1918 was reshaped. Growing up in that period and being influenced by G.E. Moore's question of "Is time real?" (qtd in Banfield 2003), Woolf develops a notion of time which is not only critical, but also contrary to the mainstream notion of time. She considers the moment to be a unit of experienced time rooted in the present of the world of existence (Banfield 2003, 471-476). Woolf's notion of time is based on the present and she considers the present to be composed of sequential moments, which are connected through temporal relations, but not events. As she notes in her diary on November 23, 1926, she rejects the conventional notion of time: "Time shall be utterly obliterated; [...] My theory being that the actual event practically does not exist—nor time either" (Woolf 3 1980: 118).

In her essay "The Moment: Summer's Night" published in *Collected Essays by Virginia Woolf*, Volume II, (1966), Woolf remarks that the notion of the present or the moment is different to different people. She conceives the present moment like an impressionist painter and lets the moment reveal itself through close inspection. Similar to a painter who converts vision into design, Woolf transforms her images into words, phrases, sentences and texts through a continuity of moments including almost every single detail. In the passage below, by the depiction of a summer day and night she explains what the present means to her. She shows that the present/the moment has diverse shades. It is woven with both a sense of solidity and a sense of unsolidity. She portrays the sense of solidity provided by the present through the sense of unsolidity. She describes the changes which occur in the perception of the things during the sunset at the end of the day and displays that we get our impressions and know our feelings through the moments which accumulate and comprise our notion of life and truth:

Yet what composed the present moment? If you are young, the future lies upon the present, like a piece of glass, making it tremble and quiver. If you are old, the past lies upon the present, like a thick glass, making it waver, distorting it. All the same, everybody believes that the present is something, seeks out the different elements in this situation in order to compose the truth of it, the whole of it. [...] [The present] is largely composed of visual and of sense impressions. The day was very hot. After heat, the surface of body is opened, as if all the pores were open and everything lay exposed, not sealed and contracted, as in cold weather. The air wafts cold on the shin

under one's clothes. The soles of the feet expand in slippers after walking on hard roads. Then the sense of light sinking back into darkness seems to be gently putting out with a damp sponge the colour in one's own eyes. Then the leaves shiver now and again, as if the ripple of irresistible sensation ran through them, as a horse ripples its skin. But this moment is also composed of a sense that the legs of the chair are sinking through the centre of the earth, passing through the rich garden earth; they sink, weighted down. Then the sky loses its color perceptibly and a star here and there makes a point of light. Then changes, unseen in the day [...] Yes the time has come in all cottages, in all farms, to light the lamps. Thus then the moment is laced about with these weavings to and fro, these inevitable downsinkings, flights, lamp lightings. [...] Here [are] the four heads, eight legs, eight arms, and four separate bodies. [...] sometimes a hand rests on the table; sometimes a leg is thrown over a leg. (Woolf 2 1966, 293-296)

Woolf considers moments to be a boundless resource because they give one the chance to touch the inexplicable depth beneath the surface. In this limitlessness of moments, one can find freedom and peace that create a feeling of delight. At those moments one can liberate oneself from worries, the rush and the disturbances in all the senses. From this feeling rises the celebration of life. Woolf explains her idea in *To the Lighthouse*, through Lily, for whom moments enable the range of limitless experience to be possible:

When life sank down for a moment, the range of experience seemed limitless. And to everybody there was always this sense of unlimited sources. [...] Beneath it is all dark, it is all spreading, it is unfathomably deep; [...] There was freedom, there was peace, there was, most welcome of all, a summoning together, a resting on a platform of stability. [...] one lost the fret, the hurry, the stir; and there rose to her lips always some exclamation of triumph over life when things came together in this peace, this rest, this eternity. (85, 86)

The moment always disturbs the divisions, resists the firmness, the immobility and resistance to change. Despite the practicality of clock time which is used around the whole world and is considered to be definite and ultimate, for Woolf, it only ticks and tacks with its figures, but it does not make much sense. She finds clock time incredibly boring. She relates the figures on the clock to the hot stones in the desert and the black bars of it to the oases. The connotation of the whole image of clock time feels like dying in the desert. She considers linear clock time to be destructive and remarks that when she is involved in the loop of this notion of time, she feels like she is locked up and jailed in it. Therefore, she would like to save herself from it: "I myself am outside the loop" (*The Waves* 11). Instead of clock time, Woolf puts

forward nature's notion of time. She associates the person's existence with fine cords of a plant in "a flower pot" which pervade the whole world and survive in accordance with this notion of time: "My roots are threaded, like fibres in a flower-pot, round and round about the world" (*The Waves* 10).

Woolf regards clock time to be oppressive and tyrannical. In *Orlando* (1928), she relates it to "thunder" and "earthquake" which demolish more than anything else and turn everything into powder (220). Yet, being embraced by the present moment brings complete calmness and alertness. In those moments, one can see:

The separate grains of earth in the flower beds [...] One can also see the elaborateness of the twigs of every tree. Each blade of grass seems distinct and marks of veins and petals. (Woolf 1928, 220, 223)

By focusing on the present and the moment, one can also float with life and feels as if s/he were a part of it. In the first chapter of *The Waves*, she depicts Jinny lying under the "currant bushes" and immerses herself into that moment. This makes her feel that everything is dissolved in everything else. The border between the things vanishes. She feels her body fluxes and become a part of nature:

This is only here; this is only now. Now we lie under the currant bushes and every time the breeze stirs we are mottled all over. My hand is like a snake's skin. My knees are pink floating islands. Your face is like an apple tree netted under. (12)

For Woolf, the moment brings the joy, the beauty and the hidden rhythm of life with itself, leading to reveal themselves in us. In this way, the moment thrives and allows the latent artist, or the poet inside us to flourish. Adjusting to the moment is like hearing the bell ringing for life, stimulating love and the artist inside of us:

In a world which contains the present moment [...] Let it exist, this bank, this beauty [...] There are bells that ring for life. A leaf falls, from joy. Oh, I am in love with life! [...] Now begins to rise in me the familiar rhythm; words that have lain dormant now lift, now toss their crests, and fall and rise, and fall and rise again. I am a poet [...] I see it all. I feel it all. I am inspired. (*The Waves* 52, 53)

Woolf points out that although time makes animals and vegetables blossom and fade with astonishing punctuality, it has no such simple impact on the human mind because there is

an extraordinary “discrepancy between time on the clock and time in mind.” An hour might stretch to fifty or a hundred times its clock length. On the other hand, an hour might lengthen only one second: “his whole past [...] rushed into the falling second, swelled it a dozen times its natural size” (*Orlando* 68). Time can be perceived longer or shorter based on the experience one goes through. There are moments in which time passes like the steps of an elephant that is heavy and slow; yet, at some other moments it goes like a “gnat-winged fly.” One's life is composed of moments which are colossally long and amazingly short like the twinkling of an eye. In this respect, Woolf concludes that the traditional notion of time does not make much sense and there is no real measure for measuring time. There is no time for the ones who have gone through the thousands of pages of literature. They get lost in time, “smoothing and deciphering of those thickly scored parchments [which have been] rolled tight in [their] heart and brain” (*Orlando* 69).

Woolf also notes that the clock time does not allow one to acknowledge the rhythm of life. Instead of measuring time through the ticks and tacks of a clock, she prefers to perceive it through the movements of thin and thick clouds in the sky, making silhouettes on the grass beneath, and through the sun-dial that registers time never exactly, but cryptically. She proposes that through this perception of time, the rhythm of life can be experienced better:

It can be seen in the light and darkness on the baize apron of a footman, or through the shadow of the starling on the grass. The rhythm of life is also in the hawing of a starling, in the process of the blossoming of the plum and in the humming of a bee. Life is in the cry of birds. Life is in the whirr of the dust-choked gullet of a grasshopper that says 'Life is labour,' which ants and bees consent. However, a moth would whisper into our ears that life is 'Laughter, Laughter.' (*Orlando* 188)

The notion of time which is outside of conventional clock time not only allows one to acknowledge the rhythm of life, but also offers the possibilities for change through every new moment (*Orlando* 189). There is no point in getting stuck to a certain age or conventional notion of time because life ends any notion of time of propagation sooner or later. To some eyes, there might be no change, but, indeed, everything leaves its place to something new. In this regard,



what is remarkable is the change itself which is a consistent process and obviously corresponds with the notion of time. That is, except change, there is nothing permanent and everything subjects to change. Woolf views change as the glory and the triumph of life.

Woolf's notion of time is based particularly on "exceptional moments." In *Moments of Being* (2002), she remarks many times that "exceptional moments" is the key element in her notion of time as well as in her writing and philosophy. She associates exceptional moments with sudden violent shocks which function as a form of "revelation" and claims that it is the revelations that makes one one. In this respect, she calls exceptional moments "moments of being" (Woolf 2002, 83, 84). She believes that the exceptional moments that she has experienced and her shock-receiving capacity made her a writer (Woolf 2002, 85). She calls her method of writing "scene-making," which she employs in her all the writings (Woolf 2002, 145). She considers "scene-making" to be "the insight into exceptional moments," through which one can realize the "hidden pattern" of life which lies "behind the daily routine and dull activities and concealed from ordinary eyes" (Woolf 2002, 85). She calls this hidden pattern "a work of art" which links everybody to everybody else and makes everybody a piece of this "work of art" (Woolf 2002, 85). Exceptional moments make the hidden pattern of life so unveiled and intensified that it stimulates insight and leads to some unexpected changes in perceptions:

I receive these sudden shocks, they are always welcome; after the first surprise, I always feel instantly that they are particularly valuable. [...] I feel that I have had a blow; but it is not, as I thought as a child, simply from an enemy hidden behind the cotton wool of daily life; it is or will be a revelation of some order [...] at any rate it is a constant idea of mine. (Woolf 2002, 85)

Accessing the hidden reality through exceptional moments requires a child's sensitiveness because a child's sight has an extreme distinctness (Woolf 2002, 84). In order to make her point clear, she gives examples from her own childhood. She remembers three important events that she experienced at St. Ives through exceptional moments accompanied by violent shocks, which were followed by definite revelations. She considers them to be very

significant because of the sensations and awareness they created in her mind. The first one occurred when she was fighting with her brother Thoby on the lawn. At one moment she realized that she was not able to hit him because of the sensation she felt: “Why hurt another person?” Then, she dropped her fist and felt “powerlessness” due to not being willing to hurt someone for any reason (Woolf 2002, 84). She had her second experience while she was looking at the flowers in the garden by the front door. It abruptly and plainly occurred to her that the flower itself is not only a part of the earth, but also it is a part of the essence which is not seen. She realized that the earth holds and gives this invisible essence to the flower. She found herself saying: “That is the whole: that a ring enclosed what was the flower” (Woolf 2002, 84). This experience led her to conclude that the whole is composed of what is seen and what is not seen. She had her third experience through her overhearing her parents. They were talking about Mr. Valpy, the cook, who had killed himself. Then she learned that the cook had hanged himself from the beam of the apple tree in the garden. Later, when she was having a walk in the garden and came in front of the same apple tree, her body became paralyzed and she stayed there in a trance of horror of death (Woolf 2002, 84).

Woolf's notion of “exceptional moments” / “moments of being,” which are followed by certain revelation, might recall the notion of “epiphany.” As is remarked in *Dreaming to Some Purpose* (2004), epiphany has normally a religious connotation. Yet, in 1900-31, a group of writers, including Joseph Conrad, James Joyce, Dorothy Richardson and Woolf, secularized the term and started emphasizing the significance of some moments as “the moment of vision” and “the moment of being” in their attempt to understand and explain life and self. In their works, “epiphany” or “the moment of vision” and “the moment of being” require seeing life “as a poet sees it.” That is, “epiphanic” or “momentary” experiences are very personal, and they appear in two ways: The momentary experience happens through memory; that is, reaching a past event from the present and seeing it with a new awareness. Or the momentary experience happens in the way of direct perception of some outer object or event. Through these “moments of being,”

it becomes possible to reveal, understand and explain the event or object better (Wilson 2004, 140). In Woolf's case the former occurs more often than the latter, which I will discuss in details in the coming section.

Woolf's emphasis on the substantial and the unsubstantial realms of reality and the energetic interaction between them have impacts on the traditional definition of epiphany, as well. In her article "The Daily Bread of Experience" (2011), Teresa Prudente claims that it is possible to get a modern redefinition of epiphany from Woolf's works. Through this definition, Woolf displays that there is an active co-operation of materiality (substantiality) and transcendence structures (unsubstantiality). In Woolf's personal experimentations, the epiphanic moments which function as processes take the subject into the revelation of extra-reality. In her article, Prudente quotes from Morris Beja's work *Epiphany in the Modern Novel* (1971) and notes that:

One major concept of such is that epiphany, which indubitably characterizes [...] Woolf writings, and which comes to pertain not only to the thematic but also to the formal levels of [her] experimentations. Beyond the cataloguing of [her] works under the label of the literature from which a modern redefinition of epiphany stems, the issues underlining such a category are to be precisely singled out and disentangled in order to make the dynamics [in Woolf's] works fully emerge [...] The concept of epiphany and its epistemological and aesthetic implications involve a set of fundamental matters that acquire in [Woolf's] [...] manifestations and narrative re-configurations. Materiality and transcendence subject and object, passivity and activity and, finally, art conceived (or not conceived) as a harmonizing process, all congregate into [...] Woolf's treatments of epiphany. [In Woolf's portrayals of epiphany,] the active co-operation in the subject of materiality and transcendence is central, bringing, on the one hand, [her] character[s] [...] [in Woolf's term] to feel 'a level with ordinary experience' [...] and yet at the same time, 'a miracle, [...] an ecstasy.' (quoted in Prudente (2011), 143)

### **3.3 The Present as a Platform to View the Past; The Past is in the Present; Time is Always the Present**

Woolf views the memories of feelings not to be only momentary, but they go thousands of years back and come to the surface through the present under certain circumstances. That is, the present moment is connected to the past through feelings. She notes that feelings such as "ecstasy and rapture" which were felt in the childhood through "the splash of the waves, the beams of light, or the murmur of bees, and the attractive colors of apples and flowers" flow into

the mind momentarily in the present (*Moments of Being* 85). As O'Brien Schaefer comments:

Woolf throws into sharp relief the relationship between emotions which are experienced not temporarily but simultaneously. In personal experience one attains this immediacy as moment or events in the past suddenly spring into life in the presence of new experience. (O'Brien Schaefer 1965, 127)

From Woolf's point of view, time seems to be an immensely long tunnel in which one feels like having been traveling for hundreds of thousands of years. All ages, or centuries are connected through the present moment. That is, the thoughts acquired through the travel in the time tunnel of the mind are put into a form and an order through the present moment. Woolf sees the present as a platform to view the past:

I write the date, because I think that I have discovered a possible form for these notes. That I, to make them include the present – at least enough of the present to serve as platform to stand upon [...] And further, this past is much affected by the present moment. (Woolf 2002, 87)

She exemplifies the past and the present relationship through her visit to St Ives after her mother and father die. Being there at that moment carries her into a certain state of mind, reminding her of some memories. She realizes that what has already been forgotten comes to the surface in the mind through the present moment. This realization makes her conclude that the past is so much in the present that it is like “an avenue lying behind; a long ribbon of scenes and emotions.” The one end of this ribbon is at the very first memories of childhood, and the other end is in the hand of the owner of these memories in the present. Woolf asserts that the “strong emotions” are the bridge between the past and the present and if one can get oneself attached again to one of those strong emotions, one can live one's life “through from the start” (Woolf 2002, 81).

In Woolf's philosophy, it is the moment and the mind that make time time - or, what makes time is the mind by means of the moment. In order to make use of the moment, one should immerse oneself into it and absorb whatever specific sensation and thought it brings with itself, removing anything else. She writes in her diary on 28 November 1928: “What I want now to do is to saturate every atom. I mean to eliminate all waste, deadness, superfluity:

to give the moment whole: whatever it includes” (Woolf 3 1980: 209). Once one completely reaches a state of mind in which one can go back to a certain moment, then, one can reenact the things as if one is reliving them. The reason why Woolf employs the technique of reenacting the things as if one is reliving them in the mind in the present is that it enables one to find out and to encounter the source(s) and reason(s) of intensive feelings and to develop an insight with the equipment provided in the present. Developing an insight through encountering past memories enables one to experience the present and life more peacefully (Woolf 2002, 81).

Woolf uses the metaphor of “river” and “currents” in it in order to explain the relationship between the past and the present. Similar to the way different currents flow together in a river, the present and the past flow together simultaneously and hold each other in themselves. Woolf relates the sliding surface of the river to the present and the depth of it to the past. In *Moments of Being*, she notes that the surface has to be peaceful except for exceptional moments in order to be able to see the depth, that is, the past events in the way they occurred, and the surface where the things are occurring now:

The past comes only when the present runs so smoothly that it is like the sliding surface of the river. [...] In those moments I find one of my greatest satisfactions, not that I am thinking of the past; but that it is then that I am living most fully in the present. [...] Let me then, like a child advancing with the bare feet into a cold river, descend into that stream. (Woolf 2002, 108)

The peaceful present can be obtained through the moments of deep concentration. During these moments, one can contact the depths of the mind which holds many things. She compares this part of mind to a pool or a sea in which everything is reflected. She states in *Orlando* that all our “most violent passions” and “art and religion” have their sources there. She also relates it to “a forest” in which everything becomes slightly everything else and clock time sinks and time is forgotten (Woolf 1928, 224). When the clock time sinks, it is possible to look deeply into the depths of the mind and to travel there. In this way, one might have “virtual” connections with other minds, including the minds of the great artists (Woolf 1928, 226, 227).

The tide of the mind between the present and the past gathers all the times together.

From Woolf's point of view, the most prosperous practitioners of the art of life are the people who perceive "the present [as] neither a violent disruption nor completely forgotten in the past" (Woolf 1928, 211). The past and the present are not so easily separated. The present is required as a base to view the past. Since the past depends on the present to exist, it makes the time always the present or "continuous present." In this respect, Woolf's notion of time recalls Gertrude Stein's concept of "continuous present," which Stein explains in her article "Composition as Explanation" published in *Writings 1903-1932* (1998):

I wrote a negro story called Melanctha. In that there was a constant recurring and beginning there was a marked direction in the direction of being in the present although naturally I had been accustomed to past, present and future, and why, because the composition forming around me was a prolonged present. A composition of prolonged present is a natural composition in the world as it has been thirty years it was more and more prolonged present. I created then a prolonged present naturally. I knew nothing of a continuous present but it came naturally to me to make one, it was simple it was clear to me and nobody knew why it was done like that, I did not myself although naturally to me it was simple. [...] A continuous present is a continuous present. I made almost a thousand pages of a continuous present. Continuous present is one thing and beginning again and again is another thing. (524)

Woolf's notion of time also recalls Walter Benjamin's notion of time. They developed quite similar notions of time independently. Similar to Woolf's acknowledgement of the present as a platform to view the past, in his article, "Mechanical Age of Reproduction" published in *Illuminations* (1969), Walter Benjamin remarks that, "The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and never seen again" (Benjamin 1969, 225). For both Woolf and Benjamin, these vigorous present moments function to develop a counter narration on both the individual and social levels which contradicts the official and conventional narration. In this regard, Woolf's scene-making method maintains an alternative to the conventional notion of narration rejecting chronological order.

In relation to time, another common point in Woolf's and Benjamin's philosophy is their approach to the conventional history. They are critical of official history that has been written from the patriarchal point of view. As Sanja Bahun indicates in her article "The Burden of the Past" (2008), in her attempt to understand time in the relation between the past, the present and

the future, Woolf shows that the customary linearity or homogenous notion of time is a form of hegemony by which humanity unwittingly becomes a tool of power. Being critical of the homogenous notion of time, Woolf is also critical of the notion of conventional history which unfolds progressively in homogenous and empty time. In this sense, her approach overlaps with Walter Benjamin's which he explains in "On the Concept of History" published in *Selected Writings* (1938-40). In this article, Benjamin considers the conventional history to be a process of "unfolding in linear time," emphasizing that it is accompanied by "the violence" (389-400).

In his essay "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (1969), Walter Benjamin replaces the idea of conventional history which is developed along infinite linear time with the image of a "state of history." The key event of this concept is always unfolding and its goal is in the present, but not in the distant future. With this concept of history, instead of the invalidated present of the metaphysical tradition, Benjamin points out a "time of now" (*Jetzt-Zeit*), which is contrary to the empty and quantified instant. He indicates that neither history nor time has a "homogenous structure," creating an image as if past and time were "eternal" and somehow existed independent from the "control of man's power." From Benjamin's point of view, time is composed of moments in the present. The present does not function only as "transition," but also in which time "stands still and has come to a stop." In this way, the present occurs as an opportunity in which one can [re]write history. With this view, Benjamin suggests that there has always been a halting of time and an interruption of chronology (253-257):

History is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogenous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now [*Jetzt-Zeit*] ("On the Concept of History," par. XIV, n.pag.). [...] A [historian] cannot do without the notion of a present which is not a transition, but in which time stands still and has come to a stop. For this notion defines the present in which he himself writing history. Historicism gives the 'eternal' image of the past; [...] [man] remains in control of his powers, man enough to blast open the continuum of history. ("Theses on the Philosophy of History," par. XVI, n.pag.)

Benjamin's view focuses on *now* which leads to a release from the conventional notion of time, in which humanity is in service of continuous linear time and history that is created by the dominant ideology. Benjamin suggests that liberation from the conventional notion of time

and traditional history is possible by using initiative, grasping the favorable opportunity and choosing the freedom that *now* offers. For him, historicism is universal and it comprises a mass of data to “fill homogeneous and empty time.” On the other hand, focusing on *now* negates a homogeneous course of time and history:

A historian who takes this as his point of departure stops telling the sequence of events like the beads of a rosary. Instead, he grasps the constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one. Thus he establishes a conception of the present as the “time of the now.” (“Theses on the Philosophy of History,” par. XVIII, A, n.pag.)

Both Benjamin’s and Woolf’s critical approach to the traditional linear notion of time comes up with two very significant conclusions. The first one has to do with the validity of the past record which Woolf and Benjamin find doubtful because it is written from the standpoint of the victor. The second one, based on the first, is that claims of truth or reality related to that past are “hegemonic practices” (Bahun 2008, 100-105). Hence, according to Woolf and Benjamin, history needs to be rewritten (Hinnov 2011, 214).

For this, Woolf and Benjamin put forward two requirements: Time should be considered to be present-centered and a new vision of past and history should be based on a present-oriented notion of time. Benjamin calls this vision “redemptive optics” which is especially represented by the artists and in their works of art (Hinnov 2011, 214). Similarly, Woolf consistently emphasizes the redemptive role of art and artist in her works. She depicts many of her characters as artists, or as people who have close connections to art. In *The Waves*, Woolf depicts Bernard, Louis and Neville as the ones who reject becoming a part of or the contributing to hegemonic practices, but choose to be creative and lead their life differently than the convention requires:

We are not slaves bound to suffer incessantly unrecorded petty blows on our bent backs. We are not sheep either, following a master. We are creators. We too have made something that will join the innumerable congregations of past time. We too, as we put on our hats and push open the door, stride not into chaos, but into a world that our own force can subjugate and make part of the illumined and everlasting road. (96)



### 3.4 The Present-Past Relationship and Scene-making

Similar to her view on the interrelatedness of the present and past, Woolf does not separate the individual subject of a memoir from the surrounding forces of life. In *Moments of Being*, she describes this situation with the metaphor of “a fish in the stream; deflected; held in a place; but cannot describe the stream” (Woolf 2002, 138). Here the fish stands for an individual subject and the stream for the surrounding forces of life. She finds the relationship between an individual and life dramatic and explains her idea about it in the same book in the passages of “Reminiscences,” “The Memoir Club Contributions” and “Sketch of the Past.” She analyzes how one, particularly a (life-)writer has to deal with such forces. She tries to explore how the subject and the surrounding forces should be described. In doing so, she asks (i.) if the entry point should be primary childhood memories or the history of ancestors; (ii.) if the structure of life should follow a chronological order or the whimsical action of memory; and finally (iii.), how “I” reaches the “I” in the narrative (Woolf 2002, 138). She answers these questions by developing her method of scene-making, which she considers to be the most intense process imaginable. Woolf uses her scene-making technique in order to connect the past to the present, to show that the past is in the present and to have contact with reality.

In order to make the scene-making process clearer, Woolf explains it with a metaphor. She relates the mind to a “sealed vessel.” She notes that at some times regardless of any logical explanation, any intention or any attempt, the sealing matter, that is mind, somehow becomes fissured and “reality” leaks through it, letting her make a scene. The process of scene-making starts with the special moments of sensitivity and responsiveness. In these moments she feels like a leaky container hovering over sensations or a sensitive plate which is exposed to invisible rays. The moments of sensitivity and responsiveness carry her to the depth of the “hidden patterns of life” where she makes contact with reality, and where she marks a point to work on later. Then, the point she has made surfaces in her mind as an “arranged and representative”

scene. Yet, she has no explanation why this certain scene, but not another one, surfaces in her mind and engages it. Therefore, she considers this process of scene-making to be preposterous:

Scene-making is my natural way of marking [and communicating] with the past. A scene always comes to the top; arranged and representative. This confirms me in my instinctive notion – it is irrational; it will not stand argument – that we are sealed vessels afloat upon what it is convenient to call reality; at some moments, without a reason, without an effort, the sealing matter cracks; in floods reality; that is a scene –for they would not survive entire so many ruinous years unless they were made of something permanent; that is a proof of their “reality.” Is this liability of mine to scene receiving the origin of my writing impulse? These are questions about reality, about scenes and their connection with writing to which I have no answer; nor time to put the question carefully. [...] Obviously I have developed the faculty, because in all the writing I have done (novels, criticism, biography) I almost always have to find a scene; either when I am writing about a person, I must find a representative scene in their lives; or when I am writing about a book, I must find the scene in their poems or novels. (Woolf 2002, 145)

Woolf's technique of combining the momentum with the scenes makes the time always the present. In the technique of scene-making, the scenes fluctuate from one to another, creating a wavelike effect. Thus, like the nature of a wave itself, Woolf's works have the quality of fluidity and cyclicity.

Yet, there are moments for Woolf in which it might be hard to communicate with the past, to connect it to the present and to convey the feelings about it. One of the reasons for this is not being able to articulate the ideas and feelings at that certain moment. The other reason is not being eager to communicate with the past. This can be seen, as Lee comments in the introduction of *Moment of Being*, in the passage “Reminiscences” which starts with a statement of not being able to speak: “I can say nothing of that time” (1). And the entire passage is full of negatives and rejections; the children refuse to answer their father's call; their mother Julia never talks about her first love; their father never tells Julia that he loves her; Vanessa acts as if she were dumb in the face of her father's bullying. After her mother and Stella's deaths, death becomes a forbidden topic. A large portion of *Moment of Being* is about hindrance, avoidance and silence. A great deal of Woolf's story is not spoken. She does not speak much about her step sister, Laura, her breakdowns, her brother Adrian, the death of Thoby, her friendship with women, her relationship with Leonard and the beginning of her writing career (Woolf 2002,

xiv).

These moments of speechlessness are the moments of silence. When the thoughts and feelings are unexplicable or when words seem to make no sense to express them, then it is the silence that becomes the means of communication. Woolf considers silence to be the language of the unspeakable, of the inexpressible and of the ones who are suppressed (Woolf 2002, 30). There are cases in which Woolf values silence more than words. She uses nature and especially trees as representative of silence and as the most apparent metaphors for expressing feelings. After Stella's death, Woolf writes:

I remember the shape of a small tree which stood in a little hollow in front of us, and how, as I sat holding Jack's hand, I came to conceive this tree as the symbol of sorrow, for it was silent, enduring and without fruit. (Woolf 2002, 28)

On the other hand, she considers silence to be difficult because it is generally hard to dare to break it unless what is going to be said will be worth doing so (Woolf 2002, 51). In order to let the unspeakable speak, as Lee comments in the introduction of *Moments of Being*, Woolf employs a fragmentary type of writing (Woolf 2002, xiv). This writing style fits her notion of time which values the moment for its inspirational quality.

The moment with its quality of unknowingness is like an accident. That is, one never knows what the moment carries and brings with itself. At the same time, moments possess a lot of potential for numerous occurrences within them. Thus, moments inspire a vision of free life which is "bathed in a personal light" (Woolf 2002, 26). Moments are special because they awaken in us qualities like "beauty, simplicity, eagerness, exquisite liveliness, affection and tenderness" (Woolf 2002, 26). The calmness of a moment is a natural protection to wrap around offended feelings and so to medicate them. There are also moments which trigger "all the scenes of life and tingle and vibrate with emotions" such as "love," "hatred," "curiosity," "bewilderment," "despair," "happiness," "immense boredom," "violent," "grotesque," "comic" and "tragic" (Woolf 2002, 45).

### 3.5 Woolf's Notion of Reality; Woolf's Epistemology

Illusions are shattered by conflict with reality, so no real happiness, no real wit, no real profundity are tolerated where the illusion prevails. (*Orlando* 139)

As Eric Warner mentions in his work *Landmarks of World Literature; Virginia Woolf, The Waves* (1986), the era in which Woolf writes her works is an era of proliferation of bold new energies and of restless experiments, whose characteristics are fragmental, complex and multilayered. Woolf's works reflect these characteristics with an acute awareness and a unique participation. The notions of reality and objectivity have become one of the main issues of particularly the first part of the twentieth century in both the physical and social sciences. As a writer, Woolf is one of the pioneers in the first half of the twentieth century by analyzing the existing conventional concept of reality and suggesting an alternative notion of reality in her works. Her approach to reality and objectivity is stunning and noteworthy when the time period in which she wrote her works is considered. Her works breaks through all traditional restrictions in a distinctive way (Warner 1986, 7). Being one of the pioneers of her age and critical of a descriptive and stable understanding of reality, Woolf also refuses to accept how the notion of reality is expressed. She explains her opinion in her essay "Modern Fiction" published in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf* (Woolf 4: 1994):

Nevertheless, we go on perseveringly, conscientiously, constructing our two and thirty chapters after a design which more and more ceases to resemble the vision our minds. So much of the enormous labour of proving the solidity, the likeness of life, of the story is not merely labour thrown away but labour displaced to the extent of obscuring and blotting out the light of conception. The writer seems constrained, not by his own free will but by some powerful and unscrupulous tyrant who has him in thrall, to provide a plot, to provide comedy, tragedy, love interest, and air of probability embalming the whole so impeccable that if all his figures were to come to life they would find themselves dressed down to the last button of their coats in the fashion of the hour. The tyrant is obeyed; the novel is done to turn. But sometimes, more and more often as time goes by, we suspect a momentary doubt, a spasm of rebellion, as the pages fill themselves in the customary way. Is life like this? Must novel be like this? (160)

As is mentioned in the previous section, Woolf considers reality to be sealed in a hidden pattern which reveals itself through momentary revelations. Through this notion of reality, she

generates a new and unconventional epistemology. In this epistemology there is no place for patriarchal authority. In *The Waves* (1992), she describes the destructive, aggressive behavior of authority and its attempts at expansion, influence, power and violence in any form, but particularly in the form of patriarchal supremacy, which tries to create artificial harmony to maintain its dominance in the name of “civilization”: “the hurrying of many troops of men flocking hither and thither in quest of civilization” (Woolf 1992, 61). Woolf considers school system and religion in her time to be the representatives of patriarchal authority. She finds these institutions artificial because they are based on pretense, deception and insincerity. The methods they employ create a sort of fake reality and identity. For her, they rub out novel reality and identity and make one nobody, or force one to become cruel, indifferent and hostile. In the same book, she depicts all of the characters as ones who are critical of the school system and religion. For Rhoda, for instance, the school resembles a “great company” that swallows her identity, making her “insensitive and unfriendly” (Woolf 1992, 19). Nevil likens the preacher at school to a “brute” who threatens his liberty when he prays. He feels his words are falling on his head like cold “paving-stones” and killing his imagination. For him, the words of authority and those who represent it are corrupted. He would like to scoff at and taunt this religion (Woolf 1992, 20). Bernard thinks that the only thing that the people who represent authority and religion achieve is to make themselves ridiculous (Woolf 1992, 21).

In *To the Lighthouse* (1992), she questions patriarchal authority and its destructiveness through Mr. Ramsay. She depicts him as a man with gestures of “exaltation and sublimity”: “Petty, selfish, vain and egotistical; he is spoilt; he is a tyrant” (Woolf 1992, 35). When he wants his children to do something, he orders them. He “interrupts” and “looks down on” them. He also irritates them through his relationship with women. Woolf shows his attitude towards women through his communication with Mrs. Ramsay. He ignores her and does not take her ideas seriously. Due to these attributes of his, he becomes a nightmare of his children:

He hated him for the exaltation and sublimity of his gestures; for the magnificence of

his head; for his exactingness and egotism (for there he stood, commanding them to attend to him) but most of all he hated the twang and twitter of his father's emotion which, vibrating round them, disturbed the perfect simplicity and good sense of his relations with his mother. By looking fixedly at the page, he hoped to make him move on; by pointing his finger at a word, he hoped to recall his mother's attention, which, he knew angrily, wavered instantly his father stopped. But, no. Nothing would make Mr Ramsay move on. There he stood, demanding sympathy. (Woolf 1992, 51)

In *Orlando* (1928), Woolf criticizes religious system as well, remarking that the whole system is based on interpretation (47): "Nothing, however, can be more arrogant, though nothing is commoner than to assume that of Gods there is only one, and of religious none but the speaker's" (Woolf 1928, 122). She thinks some religious leaders who lead a life of luxury, wealth and adornment in the image of an arrogant God are far from enlightening people. She is convinced that this kind of understanding of life and reality reduce the whole magnificence of the flux of life (Woolf 1928, 122). For her, poetry is superior to religion: "A silly song of Shakespeare's has done more for the poor and the wicked than all the preachers and philanthropists in the world" (Woolf 1928, 123) and "poets and novelists are more likely to be trusted to give the truthful account of life and thoughts" (Woolf 1928, 135).

Woolf's solution to deal with the authority which is imposed by the institutions of patriarchal supremacy is to create a community immune from the chain of command. The method she proposes is to resist and to undo the dictated hierarchy. As a means for this, she suggests employing the transformative power of the present moment and art. She claims that the present moment and art have redemptive value because they provide humanity both with choices through which they can find the instances of agency to understand life better and an alternative way of living. As is commented in "To Give the Moment Whole," Woolf considers art as a means that might lead to humanistic unity. What Woolf seeks is coherence and inter-connectivity. Thus, she counters patriarchal authority, emphasizing the web-like linkage among all of humanity which is possible and available through art (Hinnov 2011, 218). According to Woolf, art is the basis and the stimulus for existence. And the creative mind can make use of art to transform itself for the better by means of fleeting moments. For her, it is art which makes

one recreate oneself continuously. She also views art as a means of communicating with the unsubstantial realm of life and of expressing the fluidity of life (Woolf 2002, 85).

Rejecting patriarchal authority, Woolf places life, along with the present oriented notion of time and art, at the center of her notion of epistemology. As is mentioned before, she views the whole universe and life as “a work of art.” This specific work of art gives its expression through the words and music of special artists like Shakespeare, or Beethoven. Yet, rather than through the artists, it is through *Hamlet* and a Beethoven quartet, in other words, through works of art themselves that reality reveals itself:

*Hamlet* and a Beethoven quartet is the truth about this vast mass that we call the world. But there is no Shakespeare, there is no Beethoven; certainly and emphatically there is no God; we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself. (Woolf 2002, 85)

The device that triggers this “work of art” to unveil itself is the phenomenon of exceptional moments because such moments enable one to recognize and acknowledge the “blueprint,” or the reality which is concealed by “regular, mediocre, everyday activities” (Woolf 2002, 85). In her essay “Reading,” she describes one of those moments in which she is half awake just before dawn. Her mind moves to another stage through this moment which she calls “queer and uneasy,” but “creative.” She feels like her mind is arrested by “fluidity of life” from unsolidity to solidity which seems to be connected “with a rod of light.” Woolf notes that although we have a desire for “shape, clarity and something hard,” at the bottom of our hearts:

We want what is timeless and contemporary. But one might exhaust all images, and run words one's fingers like water and yet not say why it is that such a morning one wakes with the desire for poetry. (Woolf 2002, 152, 153)

Woolf's notion of epistemology is based on the notion of change and she regards change to be “incessant” and it “would never cease” and it is like “a naked sky with fresh stars twinkling in it” (Woolf 1928, 124). She recurrently displays how everything such as values, perspectives, knowledge and life itself are prone to change. She portrays Orlando in such a way that s/he and his/her life become representational processes of change. The pleasure of life is increased and

its experiences are multiplied with change (Woolf 1928, 153):

Then she got into the lift, for the good reason that the door stood open; and was shot smoothly upwards [...] In the eighteenth century we knew how everything was done; but here I rise through the air; I listen to voices in America; I see men flying. (Woolf 1928, 210)

In *Moment of Being*, Woolf describes the process of change in her case and tells how she turned from a naive teenager into a writer through “extraordinary,” “numbing” and “mutilating” experiences. She likens the whole process to the deliverance of a butterfly from a cocoon. She describes her mind-set at teenage time as definitely and extremely “unprotected, unformed, unshielded, apprehensive, receptive, and anticipatory.” She resembles herself as a naive teenager to a moth with its sticky, unsteady legs and antenna, pushing out of the cocoon and sitting trembling next to the broken folder for a moment. While its wings are still wrinkled and eyes are blurred and not able to fly, it tries to fly and turn into a butterfly (Woolf 2002, 130).

The notion of truth and the perception of it are further major epistemological concerns of Woolf. In her article “Craftsmanship” in *Selected Essays* (1992), she notes that truth is multilateral, multifold and diversified. While truth means something to someone, it means completely something else to someone else: “It is because the truth they try to catch is many-sided, and they convey it by being themselves many-sided, flashing this way, then that” (90). Truth is “unintelligible to one generation, plain as a pikestaff to the next” (90). This peculiarity of truth makes it complex (90). In *To the Lighthouse* (1992), Woolf displays her notion of truth through Mr. Ramsay and Mrs. Ramsay. As O'Brien Schaefer remarks, Mr. Ramsay represents “accurate” and “theoretical” knowledge, whereas Mrs. Ramsay represents “vague” and “immediate” knowledge (120, 121). Woolf portrays Mr. Ramsay as a distinguished philosopher who has the nineteenth and early twentieth century perception of deterministic reality which is based on so-called hard-facts. Mr. Ramsay, being a knowledgeable man, believes that whatever he says is true and he is incapable of untruth. He considers that “facts are uncompromising.”



Through Mr. Ramsay, Woolf criticizes the classical approach to reality based on Newtonian absolute, true and mathematical notion of time and space, which does not acknowledge or appreciate the relative nature of the truth. She describes Mr. Ramsay as a man who:

What he said was true. It was always true. He was incapable of untruth; never tampered with a fact; never altered a disagreeable word to suit the pleasure or convenience of any mortal being, least of all of his own children, who, sprung from his loins, should be aware from childhood that life is difficult; [...]; and the passage to that fabled land where our brightest hopes are extinguished, our frail barks founder in darkness [...] one that needs, above all, courage, truth, and the power to endure. (Woolf 1992, 8, 9)

On the other hand, Woolf depicts Mrs. Ramsay as a person who had no chance to go to school and acquired her knowledge through books, observation and genuine experience. She is a person:

[who] knew without having learnt. Her simplicity fathomed what clever people falsified. Her singleness of mind made her drop plumb like a stone, alight exact as a bird, gave her, naturally, this swoop and fall of the spirit upon truth which delighted, eased, sustained — falsely perhaps. (Woolf 1992, 41)

Through Mrs. Ramsay, Woolf displays a perception of reality and truth which is mostly a matter of subjective interpretation. According to this approach, as she puts it in one of her letters from *The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Volume I* (1975), nothing can be said to be simply one thing, due to the complex nature of reality: “You are real to some – I to others. Who’s to decide what reality is?” (402).

Woolf analyzes the concepts of truth and reality through the writings of essayists, journalists, professors, schoolmasters, sociologists, clergymen and novelists. In *A Room of One's Own* (1992), she notes that most of these documents have been dominated by patriarchal ideology, and patriarchy expresses itself through superiority. As a sign of this superiority, she points out the headlines and news in the newspapers which range from “Somebody had made a big score in South Africa” and “Lesser ribbons announced that Sir Austen Chamberlain was at Geneva” to “Mr Justice commented in the Divorce Courts upon the Shamelessness of Women” (42, 43). Woolf claims that: “the most transient visitor to this planet [...] who picked up this paper could not fail to aware, even from this scattered testimony, that England is under the rule

of a patriarchy” (42, 43). In addition, patriarchy introduces truth as something indisputable. Woolf concludes that truth and reality in the hands of and under the control of patriarchy become pseudo real and are not reliable because the written documents in existence do not provide the truth: “I could not grasp the truth [...] It seemed pure waste of time to consult all those gentlemen” (39).

Having realized that truth and reality presented by patriarchy in the form of hard fact are pseudo and undependable, Woolf suggests fiction as a method of telling the truth because, as she puts it in *A Room of One's Own* (1992), the approach to truth in fiction is much more flexible than other forms because fiction is like a spider's web “attached ever so lightly, but still attached to life at all four corners. Often the attachment is scarcely perceptible” (53). Fiction as an imaginative work does not have the strictness of formal documents. Thinking poetically and prosaically provides the assurance that one is keeping in touch with truth (56, 57). For this, one should have the mindset of an artist because the mindset of an artist resists “all impediments.” She believes Shakespeare’s mind was such as this: “must be incandescent [...] without hate, without bitterness, without fear, without protest, without preaching. That was how Shakespeare wrote” (88). In in the same book, Woolf states that these qualities generate an alternative mindset which, like Shakespeare's, creativity streams unhindered and smoothly and truth can be touched:

What was Shakespeare’s state of mind, for instance, when he wrote *Lear* and *Antony and Cleopatra*? [...] what state of mind is most propitious for creative work, because the mind of an artist, in order to achieve the prodigious effort of freeing whole and entire the work that is in him, must be incandescent, like Shakespeare’s mind, I conjectured, looking at the book which lay open at *Antony and Cleopatra*. There must be no obstacle in it, no foreign matter unconsumed [...] Therefore his poetry flows from him free and unimpeded. If ever a human being got his work expressed completely, it was Shakespeare. If ever a mind was incandescent, unimpeded, I thought, turning again to the bookcase, it was Shakespeare’s mind. (Woolf 1992, 66, 73, 74)

Woolf notes that the values of fiction “are to some extent those of real life” (*A Room of One's Own*, 95). In her essay “The Supernatural in Fiction” published in *Granite and Rainbow*

(1958) and originally written for *Time Literary Supplement*, on January 31, 1918, she indicates that “a vast amount of fiction both in prose and verse now assures us that the world to which we shut our eyes is far more friendly and inviting, more beautiful by day and more holy by night, than the world which we persist in thinking the real world” (Woolf 1958, 64). In *Orlando*, she shows how plain real life becomes poetical in fiction: To some eyes, truth is to admit that “the sky is blue” and “the grass is green;” however, to the eye of litterateur, “the sky is like the veils which a thousand Madonnas have let fall from their hair; and the grass fleets and darkens like a flight of girls fleeing the embraces of hairy satyrs from enchanted woods” (Woolf 1928, 70). Woolf notes that it might be hard to say which of these descriptions is more true, but, she prefers the second, saying: “if literature is not the Bride and Bedfellow of Truth, what is she?” (Woolf 1928, 70). She considers fiction to be a means of carrying on a dialogue with herself about the truth (Woolf 1928, 102). What a writer or a poet speaks is truth because truth and reality reveal themselves through the images and the lines of writers and poets:

Now only of the glory of poetry, and the great lines of Marlowe, Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Milton began booming and reverberating [...] the image with its associations gave place to the truth, and revealed itself as nothing more and nothing less than the dome of vast cathedral. (Woolf 1928, 115, 117)

In her another essay “Phases of Fiction” from *Granite and Rainbow* (1858), Woolf discusses “truth-tellers” in two categories; “truth-tellers” as “the perfunctory fact recorders” and “truth-tellers” as writers and poets. The writers and poets provide us with “a world where [...] we get an acute sense of the reality of our physical existence.” The fact-recorders, on the other hand, “walk beside the fact and apes it, like a shadow which is only a little more humped and angular than the object which casts it. [...] [In this sense,] [t]ruth-telling is liable to degenerate into perfunctory fact-recording [...] [it] has nothing of truth in it” (102, 103). In the same essay, she states that the perfunctory fact recording serves in two ways: While it has a “force of obliterating” which “strains our senses and makes us apprehensive,” it awakens “a desire for [...] fine arts and fiction” in which we find a “shelter”:

The lack of metaphor, the plainness of the language, and the fact that we believe most when the truth is most painful to us, it is not strange that we should become aware of another desire welling up spontaneously and making its way into those cracks which the great monuments of the truth-tellers wear upon their solid bases. A desire for distance, for music, for shadow, for space, takes hold of us. The dustman has picked up his broken bottle; he has crossed the road, he begins to lose solidity and detail over there in the evening dusk [...] The novels which make us live imaginatively, with the whole of the body as well as the mind, produce in us the physical sensations of heat, cold, noise, silence, one reason perhaps why we desire change and why our reactions to them vary so much at different times. Only, of course, the change must not be violent. It is rather that we need a new scene; a return to human faces; a sense of walls and towns about us, with their lights and their characters after the silence of the wind-blown heath. After all, [it is] with its coincidences and its convolutions, [...] the prevailing impression [...] of the endless ebb and flow of life. (Woolf 1958, 103, 110-112)

In her essay “The Narrow Bridge of Art” again from *Granite and Rainbow* (1958), Woolf discusses the function of fiction in the form of novels, poetry and prose-poems. She asserts that they express the truth and the real life poetically. The novel gives “the closeness and complexity of life.” It deals with “the most minute fragments of fact and mass them into the most subtle labyrinths, and listen silently at doors behind which only murmur only whisper, is to be heard.” With all its “flexibility” it “record[s] the changes which are typical of the modern mind,” which can be seen, for instance, in the works of Proust and Dostoevsky. Yet, despite great examples of prose, Woolf is skeptical of the *adequateness* of prose: “Can prose say the simple things which are so tremendous? [...] Can it leap at one spring at the heart of its subject as the poet does? I think not.” For her, poetry “express[es] the feelings and the ideas [more]closely and vividly” than prose (Woolf 1958, 17-23).

### 3.6 Woolf's Epistemology and Quantum Physics

It's a hot summer morning. [...] Through the green arches the eye with a curious desire seeks the blue which it knows to be the blue of the sea; and knowing it can somehow set the mind off upon a voyage, can somehow encircle all this substantial earth with the flowing and the unpossessed. (“Reading,” *The Essays of Virginia Woolf* 3 1988:145)

Woolf's approach to space, time, reality and objectivity and her apprehension of “fluid subject-object boundaries” are “reminiscent of assertions made by quantum physicists Bohr and Heisenberg” (Brown 2009, 39). She was familiar with Einstein's ideas through the media,

scientific articles and her relationship with Bertrand Russell. In *A Room of One's Own* (1992), she mentions Einstein's theory of *relativity* without mentioning his name. While she was discussing the situation of women who were deprived of education and any means of power, she imagines what would have happened if women had inherited large amounts of money, saying: "We could have been sitting at our ease tonight and the subject of our talk might have been archaeology, botany, anthropology, physics, the nature of atom, [and] relativity" (Woolf 1992, 27). In *The Waves*, she alludes to Einstein's relativity theory and the new physics. As Holly Henry mentions in her essay "*The Riddle of the Universe*" in *The Waves*:

The monologues are full of waves and loops, literary versions of the new science in her time, as she heard from the radio. [...] Woolf's six [...] characters, personae, frequently refer to the vastness of the universe and the roar of earth whirring [...] Both Bernard and Louis echo several of the persistent themes which emphasized the brevity of human existence in relation to the long cosmological ages. (101)

Woolf's notion of reality, which is based on the notion of the permeable boundaries between subject and object, solid and abstract, or substantial and unsubstantial, coincides with that of the quantum physicists and reflects the subatomic phenomena of quantum physics. She recurrently brings these thematic and philosophical issues to the front in her works. In *To the Lighthouse*, she describes how the perception of world and knowledge is relative and the boundaries between "subject and object" are porous, so is reality. She shows this through a dialogue between Lily who asks Andrew what his father's, Mr. Ramsay's, book is about. Andrew says it is about "subject and object and the nature of reality." Lily replies she had no idea what that meant. Then Andrew says: "Think of the kitchen table then, when you are not there" (33). Through this short dialogue and referring to "the kitchen table," Woolf evokes a philosophical question about our relationship with the external world and presents her scepticism about objective reality, pointing out the existence of the large and massive kitchen table is relative. That is, the existence of kitchen table is not free from the subject who looks at it, which makes its existence relative to the perceiver. What makes a table a table is the combination of object

and the perception of the subject. According to this approach reality is the combination of solid (material) and subtle (perception). As Timothy Mackin comments, Woolf rejects “objective and realist” approaches which consider the world to be existing “in some form outside of our experience.” She also rejects the “idealist” approach according to which “the world is mind-dependent” (112-114). Woolf’s approach to reality is more complicated than those approaches because her notion of reality is neither only substantial nor unsubstantial, but it is composed of both substantial and unsubstantial realms.

In *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf questions so called objective and realist approaches through Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe. Mr. Ramsay represents certainty based on the notion of Newtonian hard facts, which represents unchangeable reality and objectivity. According to this approach, objects exist independently of our perception of them, reality is something external, objective truth is something true for everybody and “facts [are] uncompromising” (8, 9). Mrs. Ramsay, on the other hand, finds Mr. Ramsay’s approach to facts and truth harsh because this approach ignores the thoughts and, particularly, the feelings of others:

To pursue truth with such astonishing lack of consideration for other people’s feelings, to rend the thin veils of civilization so wantonly, so brutally, was to her [Mrs Ramsay] so horrible an outrage of human decency that, without replying, dazed and blinded. (41)

Mrs. Ramsay represents the *obscure* side of reality. For her nothing could be claimed to be exactly *this* or *that*. The nature of things, thus reality, is temporal. Things become something else as soon as we utter them: “Who knows what we are, what we feel? Who knows even at the moment of intimacy. This is knowledge? Aren’t things spoilt then” [sic] (232).

Woolf always tries to understand and to reveal perceptions beyond the hard and dazzling expressions of certainty. In *Three Guinns* (1992), she remarks that the perception of the world, life and reality cannot be so certain when the boundaries between the substantial and the unsubstantial are so unclear. For her, “the power to change and the power to grow” are “preserved by obscurity” and:

if we wish to help the human mind to create, and to prevent it from scoring the same

rut repeatedly, we must do what we can to shroud it in darkness. (Woolf 1992, 322)

Woolf remarks that the voice in her works is evasive and obscure and she does this on purpose because she believes that obscurity allows the mind to dive into itself, uses its source and make its own way freely. Obscurity functions like a shelter that protects one from unwanted eyes, in which nobody can trace the mind. Obscurity also frees one, so one can be truthful and peaceful. An obscure person can sink into a quiet mood and dive into the depths of the mind. Woolf thinks this is the way of great poets: “Shakespeare must have written like that” (Woolf 1928, 72).

In Woolf's epistemology, reality is something abstract which represents itself in all forms of life, such as in dawns or in the sky. Thus, she describes reality as “the essence of life” or “the thing itself” (Woolf 2002, 85). She asserts that one can feel reality, live in it and flow with it. *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves* are two of her books in which she rigorously tries to display what reality is. As is mentioned before, she emphasizes that it is hard to describe reality as something certain, stable and as something that can be clearly known because everything related to it is based on momentary experiences and realization. She calls these moments exceptional moments which lead to a transformation in the mind and in the perception of knowledge and reality. In her attempt to understand what reality is, Woolf not only reads thousands of pages of books and articles, but also uses her own life experiences and experiments. On September 10, 1928, she writes in her diary how she experiences reality:

That is one of the experiences I have had here in some Augusts; and got then to a consciousness of what I call “reality”: a thing I see before me: something abstract; but residing in downs or sky; beside which nothing matters; in which I shall rest and continue to exist. Reality I call it. And I fancy sometimes this is the most necessary thing to me: that which I seek. But who knows— once one takes a pen and writes? How difficult not to go making “reality” this and that, whereas it is one thing. Now perhaps this is my gift: this perhaps is what distinguishes me from other people: I think it may be rare to have so acute a sense of something that – but again who knows? I would like to express it too. (Woolf 1954, 132)

Woolf claims that to make fixed predictions, definitions and the efforts toward compressing reality into fixed frameworks are pointless. For her, speaking about the certainty of knowledge is deceptive: “There is no stability in this world. [...] All is experiment and

adventure. We are for ever mixing ourselves with unknown quantities. What is to come? I know not” (*The Waves* 76). Her notion of reality is *relative* and *uncertain*. She analyzes the notion of *uncertainty* in her essay “The Sun and The Fish” in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf* (1987):

It is an amusing game especially for a dark winter’s morning [...] to see what will happen next. And perhaps nothing happens, and perhaps a great many things happen, but not the things one might expect. [...] For a sight will only survive in the queer pool in which we deposit our memories if it has the good luck to ally itself with some emotion by which it is preserved [...] sights which we travelled and toiled to see, fade and perish and disappear because they failed to find a right mate [...] So, on this dark winter morning, when the real world has faded, let us see what the eye can do for us. (Woolf 4 1987: 519)

From Woolf’s standpoint, nothing lasts as it is, and nothing can be described and defined exactly as only one thing because it becomes different and changes under the many eyes that look at it at the same time and because every eye carries its own contribution to it. This makes things and the knowledge about them relative and erases the notion of *one* reality and objectivity. She makes her point in *The Waves*, through the farewell dinner party given for Percival in which six characters come together. On the surface, there is one dinner party for one reason, but indeed, later we read six different stories told by six different characters. Similar to this, at first glance, there is one “red carnation in the vase” on the party table around which they all sit at. Yet, with simultaneous sights and the different interferences of seven people sitting around the table, it becomes a manifold flower with many leaves in different colors like amber:

We have come together [...] to make one thing, not enduring – for what endures?- but seen by many eyes simultaneously. [...] A single flower [...] a whole flower to which every eye brings its own contribution. (82)

Woolf generally describes the things which “don't quite crystallize, refusing to resolve into any solidly discernible shape” (Harris 2013, 50). The characters and materials she depicts, indeed, her works themselves, reflect this characteristics. *The Voyage Out* (1915) is “obscure, slippery and abstract with its content” (Harris 2013, 52). In *The Voyage Out*, for the first time, Woolf emphasizes that the line between certainty and uncertainty is unclear. In *The Voyage Out*, she depicts Rachel as a critical thinker who is intensely interested in and concerned with what



is not known. Rachel values senses, intuition and silence. She prefers to be inconclusive rather than conclusive. With these qualities, she distinguishes herself from others. Her perception is also different. From her point of view, the boundaries in and between the figures appear indistinct. She sees blocks of matter and people moving across them as “patches of light” (qtd in Harris 2013, 52). In *Night & Day* (1919), through immanent moments, anything substantial such as chairs and tables lose their substantiality and turn into something uncertain or unsubstantial: “He glanced about him with bewilderment at finding himself among her chairs and tables; they were solid, for he grasped the back of the chair in which Katherine had sat; and yet they were unreal” in the absence of her (151).

Later, in her other works, Woolf continues to emphasize the notion of obscurity and the indistinctness of the boundaries in and between the figures while depicting her characters and writing their stories. Similar to the characters in her books *The Voyage Out* and *Night & Day*, in *Jacob's Room* Woolf depicts Jacob as an elusive character as well. He is talked about by other people in the book. The book is made up of fragments of experience (Harris 2013, 78). *Mrs. Dalloway* is more original than *The Voyage Out*, *Night & Day* and *Jacob's Room* in terms of the indistinctness of the boundaries between the figures. Woolf portrays Mrs. Dalloway in a way that everything flows side by side. She narrates the story of Clarissa Dalloway alongside Septimus'. Although they do not know each other, never meet or have any conversation, Woolf links their lives. There is nothing solid that connects them except for an obscure “invisible line” running between them which connects their lives. This link comes to the surface only a little bit through Septimus' death. Clarissa hears about Septimus' death at the middle of a party. She distinctly imagines this young man's death at a silent corner of the house and then turns back to the party. The technique that Woolf applies in *Mrs. Dalloway* makes it authentic because it has not been tried before (Harris 2013, 85-88). In *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf also depicts Lily Brisco as “an obscure figure” by not giving much information about her life and bringing and introducing all the characters together in and through her imagination and mind (Lee 1997,

480).

In Woolf's view, there is a kind of bond between a person and life, which is specific to that person. This bond is mutual and each party tries to get the better of the other. There is a constant conversation between a person and life. Particularly, in peaceful solitary moments lies an intimate communication between the person and life. She also remarks that there are not so many of these moments because the relationship between the person and life is not always peaceful and harmonious. Life can also be dreadful, antagonistic and biting if given a chance.

In *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf exhibits this idea through Mrs. Ramsay:

She took a look at life, for she had a clear sense of it there, something real, something private, which she shared [with nobody]. A sort of transaction went on between them, in which she was on one side, and life was on another, and she was always trying to get the better of it, [...] there were [...] great reconciliation scenes; but for the most part [...] terrible, hostile, and quick to pounce on you. (81, 82)

Although life is hard to deal with and it is not easy to explain, Woolf considers the very fabric of life to be a *miracle* (*Orlando* 207). She also remarks that life is a “miracle” in *To the Lighthouse*: “All was miracle, and leaping from the pinnacle of a tower into the air [...] startling, unexpected, unknown?” (243).

In Woolf's epistemology, the boundaries between subject and subject as well as subject and object are porous. In *To the Lighthouse*, Mrs. Ramsay associates herself with everything solid and abstract. She feels she is connected to everything animate and inanimate. She acquires this feeling of connectedness through silence. Silence binds her to everything else and to others. She feels not only connected to the objects in her environment, but she also feels a strong attachment to people. She has the ability to carry on “silent conversations” with people, by connecting her mind to their minds. In this way, she can access and share their unexpressed thoughts beneath the words:

[Mrs. Ramsay's eyes] were so clear that they seem to go round the table unveiling each of these people, and their thoughts and their feelings, without effort like a light stealing under water so that its ripples and the reeds in it and the minnows balancing themselves, and the sudden silent trout are all lit up hanging, trembling. So she saw them; she heard them; [...] as if what they said was like the movement of trout when, at the same time, one can see the ripple and the gravel, something to the right, something to the left; and

the whole is held together. (144)

Mrs. Ramsay's feelings of tenderness toward inanimate objects, such as the lighthouse and its beam, exhibit her sense of connectedness. She senses that her identity is knit together with the environment. From Mrs. Ramsay's standpoint of connectedness, both she and the beam simultaneously reflect and project each other. This erases the boundary between the subject and the object:

Here rose to her lips always some exclamation of triumph over life when things came together in this peace, this rest, this eternity; and pausing there she looked out to meet that stroke of the Lighthouse, the long steady stroke, the last of the three, which was her stroke, for watching them in this mood always at this hour one could not help attaching oneself to one thing especially of the things one saw; and this thing, the long steady stroke, was her stroke. Often she found herself sitting and looking, sitting and looking, with her work in her hands until she became the thing she looked at—that light, for example [...] She looked up over her knitting and met the third stroke and it seemed to her like her own eyes meeting her own eyes [...] It was odd, she thought, how if one was alone, one leant to inanimate things; trees, streams, flowers; felt they expressed one; felt they became one; felt they knew one, in a sense were one; felt an irrational tenderness thus. (86, 87)

Mrs. Ramsay is quite aware of the fact that her vision of connectedness to the objects around her is considered to be somehow “irrational” because she intuitively knows that the principles of formal reality do not fit with her notion of reality. She also knows that most of the people around her, particularly Mr. Ramsay, would not understand her. Mrs. Ramsay's self-generated sense of connection to the beam of the lighthouse, and in a larger sense, to the world, displays Woolf's conscientious efforts to demonstrate the substantial and unsubstantial nature of life and their interrelatedness.

Woolf's attempt to demonstrate the substantial and unsubstantial nature of life and their interrelatedness, which correlates to the notion of particle-like and wavelike nature of matter, shows an implicit correspondence to the concept in quantum physics according to which all matter displays both particle-like as well as wavelike properties, and a subatomic notion. As Brown indicates, in the early 1900s, through the study of radiative phenomena, physicists revealed that light and matter possess the paradoxical properties of being both particles and

waves:

Coupled with the discovery of the quantum, the particle-like property of energy, is the concurrent, yet paradoxical, wave-like property of all light and matter” which perverted “the notion of location in space (Brown 2009, 50).

Parallel to Brown's remark, Glynn notes that in December 1900, Max Planck discovered quanta-discrete and indivisible packets of energy. Experiments repeatedly confirmed that the quantum, that is, the smallest quantity of radiant energy, was an undeniable component of reality.

Meanwhile, David Bohm and B. J. Huey explained that:

One is led to a new notion of unbroken wholeness which denies the classical idea of analyzability of the world into separate and independently existing parts . . . we have reversed the usual classical notion that independent "elementary parts" of the whole are the fundamental reality and that the various systems are merely the particular contingent forms and arrangements of these parts. Rather we say that the inseparable quantum interconnectedness of the whole universe is the fundamental reality, and that relatively independently behaving parts are merely particular and contingent forms within the whole. (qtd in Glynn, 51)

Woolf claims that this delicate value of life, that is, the interrelatedness substantial and unsubstantial nature of life, is not visible to every eye, but once it becomes discernible, the monotonousness and dimness of life is engulfed. Starting from her early ages, Woolf had been very receptive and responsive to both the qualities and substances of life. *Light* and *waves* are the two terms that Woolf uses the most frequently in her works. Considered the era she lived, in which the focus was mainly on what is concretely seen or on hard facts, Woolf's awareness and conceptualization of light and waves is extraordinary, even revolutionary. She seems to be very aware that light consists of both substantial (particle-like) and unsubstantial (wavelike) qualities. This I will discuss more thoroughly in “The Waves” chapter.

### **3.7 Reality through the Image of “Granite and Rainbow”**

In order to illustrate the interconnectedness of substantial and unsubstantial qualities of life and matter, other significant images that Woolf employs are “granite” and “rainbow.” Granite represents the quality of substantiality, whereas a rainbow represents the quality of unsubstantiality. From Woolf's point of view, life and matter consist of both qualities. In

November of 1927, in her essay “The New Biography” published in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf, Volume IV* (1986), she gives radium as an example to show the union of “granite-like solidity” and “rainbow-like tangibility” (473). She calls this combination “the perpetual marriage of granite and rainbow” (478). Woolf also employs the images of “clay and diamond” to show the unity of substantiality and unsubstantiality:

Nature, who has played so many queer tricks upon us, making us so unequally of clay and diamonds, of rainbow and granite and stuffed them into a case often of the most incongruous [...] has contrived that the whole assortment shall be lightly stitched together by a single thread. (Woolf 1928, 55)

Woolf discusses the issue of the unity of substantiality and unsubstantiality more profoundly in her article “The Sun and the Fish” in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf, Volume IV* (1986) and displays how all the visible substantiality is also very fragile, delicate and flimsy, concluding that the substantial and unsubstantial are coalesced.

At first, so pale and frail and strang the light was sprinkled rainbow-like in a hoop of color, that it seemed as if the earth could never live decked out in such a frail tints. [...] But steadily [...] [t]he world became more and more solid; it became populous; it became a place where an infinite number of farmhouses, of villages, of railway lines have lodgment. (Woolf 4 1986: 522)

Having discovered that the solid and subtle, or the substantial and unsubstantial are fused, that each of them includes the quality of the other and that one can turn into the other, Woolf tries to show that reality is momentarily and multiplicitous similar to the rainbow which is composed of thousands of different raindrops that reflect the various shades of green, blue, red, yellow, orange and purple to the eyes of the many people who are elsewhere. In her essay “The New Biography,” she points out that curiosity is above everything and the way of expressing life and reality is manifold. She questions the issues of truth through the image of granite and rainbow in relation to a biographer. She remarks that for a traditional biographer the truth is “in its hardest [and] most obdurate form” and he has fixed standards and morality. She likens this notion of truth to granite and claims that this kind of truth fails to include fragile issues such as emotions and personal details which represent the singularity of the subject of the biographer.

She suggests that a biographer should not conform to any fixed pattern, or any standard, but s/he can use the means of fiction because “a little fiction mixed with fact” can transmit personality very efficaciously. Woolf considers the combination of truth and fiction to be a kind of must because even if life seems “real to us,” it is “fictitious” (Woolf 4 1986: 473-478). She surmises that coping with reality requires “a queer amalgamation of dream and reality, [...] fact and fiction”:

And here we again approach the difficulty which, [...] the biographer still has to face. Truth of fact and truth of fiction are incompatible; yet he is now more urged to combine them. For it would seem that life which is increasingly real to us is the fictitious life; [...] Each of us is more Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, than he is John Smith, of the Corn Exchange. Thus, the biographer's imagination is always being stimulated to use the novelist's art of arrangement, suggestion, dramatic effect to expound the private life. Yet if he carries the use of fiction too far, so that he disregards the truth, or can only introduce it with incongruity, he loses both worlds; he has neither the freedom of fiction nor the substance of fact. [...] We are in the world of brick and pavement; of birth, marriage and death; of Acts of Parliament; [...] can we name the biographer whose art is subtle and bold enough to present that queer amalgamation of dream and reality. (Woolf 4 1986: 478)

Compiling all that is documented and undocumented, both private and historical about the person whose biography is being written is one of the tasks of a biographer to reveal darkness and mystery about the subject. Without these, a biography is not a biography that tells the truth (Woolf 1928, 47). Woolf criticizes traditional biographers because they separate events from emotions, thoughts and experiences, which are the causes of the events. In this way, she claims, the truth is distorted and their subjects becomes “no better than a corpse” (Woolf 1928, 184-188). In order to exemplify the two different perceptions of truth - as a hard fact and as mixed with fiction - Woolf refers to one of her anecdotes: During one of their regular Sunday walks in nature in St. Ives, what her father sees is just a “natural disposition of ordinary rocks,” but from Woolf's perspective, everything is the subtle beauty of literature. She notes that St. Ives gave her “pure delight.” Before her eyes, every moment unfolded with its “little paths led up to the hill, between the heather and the ling; [...] the blazing yellow gorse with its sweet nutty smell” (Woolf 2002, 138).

In *The Waves*, Woolf introduces her notion of reality and the fragility of the line between

truth and fiction through the stories of six characters. She tries to show that the world seems to be a story book of multiple stories. These stories are not static, they do not endure forever, but their longevity is temporal, even momentary. They are like clouds which move unceasingly. She deduces that if the whole world is like a narrative, then the delicate line between reality and fiction evaporates and reality liquefies in the stories. She explains her idea through Neville:

Bernard says there is always a story. I am a story. Louis is a story. There is the story of the boot-boy, the story of the man with one eye, the story of the woman who sells winkles. Let him burble on with his story while I lie back and regard the stiff-legged figures of the padded batsmen through the trembling grasses. It seems as if the whole world were flowing and curving — on the earth the trees, in the sky the clouds. I look up, through the trees, into the sky. The match seems to be played up there. Faintly among the soft, white clouds [...] The clouds lose tufts of whiteness as the breeze dishevels them. (22)

In terms of truth, Woolf comments that there might always be something that escapes from sight. This makes persisting in precision nonsense: “a precision, an exactitude, that [...] I shall never possess [...] I cannot precisely lay fingers on this fact – it lodges loosely among my thoughts like a button, like a small coin” (*The Waves* 43, 44). She depicts Bernard as someone who is always suspicious, thinking there might always be something else that has escaped from his sight: “Let a man get up and say, 'Behold, this is the truth,' and instantly I perceive a sandy cat filching a piece of fish in the background. Look, you have forgotten the cat, I say” (*The Waves* 124). Woolf asserts that truth is always unstable, fleeting, averted and hidden. She explains her idea about this issue in her essay “How it Strikes Contemporary” in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf, Volume IV* (1986):

Truth, again, to speak in the manner of the myth makers, has always been thus volatile, sometimes coming quietly into the open and suffering herself to be looked at, at others flying averted and obscured. (359)

In this context, Woolf regards words and phrases, indeed, language itself to be the means of forming and expressing truth. Yet, to be able to find the appropriate words and phrases is not an easy task. As is mentioned before, they are like pearls, a treasure concealed in the depth. Woolf often mentions the difficulty of having an idea and finding the right words and phrases to express it in her diaries. In *The Waves*, she explains the formation of expressing truth in the

following steps: First, an image occurs in the mind and creates a thought. She calls this image-thought combination “the fin.” Then, all of a sudden, at one point, “the fin” reveals itself very vividly. She remarks that this step has nothing to do with rationality. And since there is no logic behind it, this formation sounds quite odd as well as obscure. It even seems to her to be a terrifying process. Truth realizes itself as a momentary revelation:

A fin turns. This bare visual impression is unattached to any line of reason, it springs up as one might see the fin of a porpoise on the horizon. Visual impressions often communicate thus briefly statements that we shall in time to come uncover and coax into words. [...] the formation of this new, this unknown, strange, altogether unidentified and terrifying experience—the new drop — which is about to shape itself. (125)

Woolf’s approach to the truth displays parallelism with Walter Benjamin’s pursuit of the truth in several senses. First of all, as is mentioned before, they both consider the truth to be a “revelation” that presents itself momentarily. Secondly, they claim that the truth finds its expression in language. This language is fragmentary, and the fragments are not easily accessible as they are concealed. Woolf calls these concealed fragments “pearls and corals” and Benjamin, as he put it in *Illuminations* (1969), considers them to be “acoustical phenomena.” Just like Woolf, Benjamin also states that “the problem of truth had presented itself to him as a [momentary] revelation which must be heard, that is, which lies in the [...] acoustical sphere” (49). He states that “there is a language of truth, the tensionless and even silent depository of the ultimate secrets which all thought is concerned with (“The Task of Translator”), and this the true language” (50). Both Woolf and Benjamin relate the different parts of language to “pearls and corals at the bottom of the sea,” which are waiting for their divers to be brought up to the surface (49-51). Thirdly, similar to Woolf, Benjamin considers “language as an essentially poetic phenomenon.” Finally, they also emphasize the significance of *thinking poetically*, which is one of the possible and appropriate ways of dealing with truth. “Thinking poetically” is triggered by the present moment through which the artist “fishes out” the thoughts in the form of fragments. As Hannah Arendt mentions in the introduction of *Illuminations*, Benjamin



considers thought fragments to be the essence of poetical thinking and associate them with pearls which have a crystallized form and so immune to decay. Similar to pearls, poetical thinking is immune as well (50, 51):

And this thinking (*thinking poetically*) is fed by the present, works with ‘thought fragments’ it can wrest from the past and gather about itself. Like a pearl diver who descends to the bottom of the sea, not to excavate the bottom and bring it to light but to pry loose the rich and strange, the pearls and the coral in the depths and carry them on the surface, this thinking delves into the depths of the past – but not in order to resuscitate it the way it was and to contribute to the renewal of extinct ages. What guides this thinking is the conviction that although the subject is ruin of the time, the process of decay is at the same time a process of crystallization, that in the depth of the sea, into which sinks and dissolved what once was alive, some things ‘suffer a sea-change’ and survive in new crystallized forms and shapes that remain immune to elements, as though they waited only for the pearl diver who one day will come down to them and bring them up into the world of the living – as thought fragments, as something ‘rich and strange,’ and perhaps even as everlasting *Urphänomene*. So does the poetical thinking. (51, emphasis in original)

Although Woolf points out that, by its nature, the truth presents itself momentarily and it is always unstable, fleeting, averted and hidden, she asserts that the expression of it through language makes it immune to decay as it is seen in the works of great artists such as Shakespeare. At first glance, this might seem conflicting, yet truth embodies these unsubstantial and substantial qualities.

To conclude, as opposed to the conventional patriarchal view of reality which is based on rationalistic hard facts and the separation of substantial and unsubstantial, Woolf considers reality to be fluid and an amalgamation of the substantial and unsubstantial. The conventional patriarchal notion of reality relies on established norms and dictates order with a linear and teleological notion of time. From Woolf’s point of view, this approach diminishes life and leads it to be repetitive and illusory, as she writes in her diary on November 28, 1928: “This appalling narrative business of the realist: getting on from lunch to dinner: it is false, unreal, merely conventional” (Woolf 3 1980: 209). As an alternative to the conventional perspective of realism, she suggests the forms of art such as fiction which enables one to fuse life and reality and to (re)generate indispensable components of being.

Woolf erases the conventional deterministic notion of epistemology with her notion of

reality. As James Hafley comments she “distrusted factual knowledge, and used the facts only as stepping-off places for [different] perception of reality” (Hafley 1954, 99). Woolf criticizes “the Bennet-Galsworthy equation of knowledge and describability,” which she expresses in *Jacob's Room* (O'brien Schaefer 1965, 81). Contrary to Arnold Bennet, John Galsworthy and H.G. Wells' plain notion of reality, or so-called “official reality,” as Roger Poole mentions in “We All Put up with You Virginia,” Woolf values “hundreds of little excessive notations and details” which she “scatters” in her works, allowing reality to appear with its “authenticity,” or as “lived reality.” Lived reality is “unofficial reality” and escapes from many eyes and ears or is avoided (Poole 1991).

Discussions on epistemology have a long philosophical and literary heritage. Thinkers and writers keep analyzing and writing about official or conventional deterministic as well as the alternative notions of reality. Woolf's epistemology is based on “registering sensory experience” which functions as “the first contact between the self and the world” through the present. This provides “knowledge by acquaintance.” That is, the “first-person” and “subjective” experience of “what we see and hear, what we smell and taste, what we think and feel” is obtained. The next step is to describe them in microscopic and atomic details. In this way, Woolf tries to access and express “the likeness of life,” which creates alternative notions of reality (Zhang 2014, 52-58).

Woolf suggests a new notion of epistemology which is based on the notion of reality which is diverse, relative, discontinuous, energetic, subjective, and uncertain. Her epistemology is based on the notion of uncertainty because, as Zhang explains by referring to Bertrand Russell's work *Logic and Knowledge* (1956), “even if both A and B have the same experience of object O, 'neither can experience the other's experiencing'” (53). In this sense, claiming certainty of knowledge makes no sense. Woolf often discusses this notion of unknowability in her works. For her, what we know, we know through our lived experiences which are often opaque to others – even in some cases to ourselves. This is mainly due to language which

sometimes prevents us from expressing life as itself: “nothing could be written in any language known to men” (*To the Lighthouse* 70). Woolf’s specific notion of epistemology suggests that different experiences give rise to different notions of reality, and thus, to different epistemologies.

## Chapter Four: *The Waves*

I begin to see what I had in mind; and want to begin cutting out masses of irrelevance, and clearing, sharpening and making the good phrases shine. One wave after another. (Woolf D3 1980: 303)

### 4.1 What is Life?

Woolf imagines life as “a bowl” and memories as something filling it. In *Moments of Being*, she remarks that memories are the basis for the formation of her perception of life (Woolf 2002, 78-79). Particularly one of early childhood memories from St. Ives has special importance to her because those memories are milestones of her unique life perception. In St. Ives, she realizes for the first time how the outside world creates an impact on her senses. It is also for the first time that she becomes aware that she is fascinated by the sounds of “waves” and the sight of “light.” More importantly, for the first time, maybe not really consciously, she realizes that life is composed of both substantial and unsubstantial realms. Her awareness of life in the early days of her childhood affects her throughout her life, and she devotes herself to understanding and explaining what life might be. In this endeavor of hers, the two major images, waves and light, always accompany her:

It is of lying half asleep, half awake, in my bed in the nursery at St. Ives. It is of hearing the waves breaking, one, two, one, two, and sending a splash of water over the beach; and breaking, one, two, one two, behind a yellow blind. It is of hearing the blind draw its acorn across the floor as the wind blew the blind out. It is of lying and hearing this splash and seeing this light, and feeling, it is almost impossible that I should be here; of the feeling the purest ecstasy I can conceive. (Woolf 2002, 78-79)

Being not satisfied with the conventional static notions of life, Woolf searches for an alternative. *The Waves* written in 1931 is perhaps the most important book of all her books in which she scrutinizes life comprehensively. Yet, she finds writing about it difficult. She explains her idea in her diary on May 11, 1920 which takes place in *A Writer's Diary & Virginia Woolf* (1954), stating that the process of writing about life is like “walking the whole country from one end to the other.” Similar to the process of walking, the process of writing starts with

pleasant feelings and a steadiness. Then, hesitations and fears start crawling into the mind. A struggle starts with how to put into words all those ideas that stir up the mind. She notes that this is a huge challenge, leading to great anxiety, and the writer can even come to a point of quitting writing. The writing process of *The Waves* develops in the way she describes in her diary. Although Woolf declares that *The Waves* is one the “few books” that “interests” her a lot and she enjoyed writing it very much, she has to write the opening sentences of the book at least 18 times:

It is worth mentioning, for future reference, that the creative power which bubbles so pleasantly in beginning a new book quiets down after a time, and one goes on more steadily. Doubts creep in. Then one becomes resigned. Determination not to give in, and the sense of an impending shape keep one at it more than anything. I'm a little anxious. How am I to bring off this conception? Directly one gets to work one is like a person walking, who has seen the country stretching out before. [...] Few books have interested me more to write than *The Waves*. Why even now, at the end, I'm turning up a stone or two: no glibness, no assurance; you see [...] for the 18<sup>th</sup> time, [I] copied out the opening sentences. (Woolf 1954, 26, 165, 172)

*The Waves* is a good example of Woolf's life-writing. In *The Waves*, she draws on experiences with her siblings and her close friends from the Bloomsbury group. She had “deep feelings for the circle of much-loved people in whose company she chose to live” (Harris 2013, 80). As Angela Garnett mentions in the introduction to *The Waves*, it is maybe the most personal of all Virginia Woolf's books. It could even be considered to be a kind of autobiographical account of Woolf's life because it consists of stories from her early childhood, teenage years, adulthood and Bloomsbury years, telling of certain relationships, ideas and experiences. Garnett calls *The Waves* a *roman à clef* in which:

Susan is Vanessa, Percival Thoby and Louis perhaps Leonard Woolf. Neville has on occasion the qualities of Duncan Grant, Vanessa's lover and companion, whereas Jinny is [...] partly Virginia herself, partly her mother Julia Stephen, as well as recalling Kitty Maxse, the prototype of Mrs. Dalloway, a figure for whom Virginia had a lot of sympathy. Rhoda is another side of Virginia, and Bernard has qualities in common with her brother-in-law, Clive Bell. [...] These six characters are chosen for their differences as well as their underlying homogeneity. (Woolf 1992, xii)

With *The Waves*, Woolf attempts to make the reader review her relationship with life and with herself / himself. *The Waves* draws the finest distinctions and tries to depict the

indefinable. Garnett comments that it enables the reader to realize the “subtle rhythms, lyricism” and “subjectivity of life” by means of “extraordinary, vibrating, transparent and searching language of the greatest probity and purity” (Woolf 1992, xi). *The Waves* is made up of soliloquies spoken by six characters: Bernard, Susan, Rhoda, Neville, Jinny and Louis. In addition, Percival, who is never heard speaking in his own voice, is the seventh character. We learn about him in detail as the other six characters repeatedly describe and reflect on him throughout the book. The soliloquies which span the characters' lives are separated by nine brief interludes. Each of them details a coastal scene at varying stages in a day from sunrise to sunset, illustrating and enhancing Woolf's endeavor to explore, understand and elucidate life. As the voices of the six characters alternate, Woolf illuminates the fine and hidden realm of life. She also asserts that one does not have one and only personal life, but “more than one life connected to the others” (Woolf 1992, 188). She explains her idea towards the end of the book, through Bernard's soliloquy:

For this is not one life; nor do I always know if I am man or woman, Bernard or Neville, Louis, Susan, Jinny, or Rhoda – so strange is the contact of with another. (Woolf 1992, 188)

Woolf depicts each character as distinct, yet interconnected with others. From Woolf's point of view, they compose a gestalt. That is, while each individual has his/her somehow independent mind and self-organizing tendencies, they are a part of the whole – “[the] universe” (Woolf 1992, 188). She notes in her diary on March 28, 1930 that although each of the six characters has their own voice, they are facets of selves and minds which illuminate a sense of continuity and constitute pieces of “a mosaic” (Woolf 1954, 156): “They feel that they are bound together by an obscure current passing through them (Harris 2013, 112). Briefly, *The Waves* encompasses the complex concepts of individual self and mind in which multiple selves and minds are woven together, which I will discuss in detail in the section of “Self and Ontology.”

Woolf depicts Bernard as the story-teller, always looking for some elusive and apt phrase; Louis seems to be an outsider who seeks acceptance and success; Neville desires love, seeking out a series of men, each of whom becomes in turn the present object of his transcendent love; Jinny is a socialite, whose world view corresponds to her physical, corporeal beauty; Susan is the one who either loves or hates and prefers to live in the countryside, where she grapples with the thrills and doubts of motherhood; and Rhoda is riddled with self-doubt and anxiety, always rejecting and indicting human compromise, always longing for solitude. Percival, who is partially based on Woolf's brother Toby Stephen, dies midway through the book on an imperialist quest in British-dominated colonial India. In contrast to the other six, he represents a morally flawed hero.

Woolf continually probes the practices of thinking and writing about life, searching for an alternative viable philosophy. She unequivocally espouses a model of a circular, fragmented and intermittent notion of life. In doing so, she also constantly refines her own philosophy. She demands a continual search for deeper understanding of life: "There is always more to be understood" (*The Waves* 134). For her, a continual quest for a deeper understanding requires an insightful and reflective engagement with life, which opens the doors for exploration. In this context, *The Waves* is not only a critical trope, but a distinctive commitment to life, which involves tangible working and reflection on it. In addition, as a novel *The Waves* breaks down the boundaries of conventional notions of a novel because it blurs distinctions between prose and poetry. On November 7, 1928, Woolf writes in her diary that, *The Waves*, or the *Moths* back then, is a "play-poem." In another diary entrance on June 18, 1927, she explains what she means with "the play-poem idea":

Now the *Moths* will I think fill out the skeleton which I dashed in here; the play-poem idea; the idea of some continuous stream, not only human thought, but of the ship, the night etc, all flowing together: intersected [...] That was to be abstract [...] eyeless book: a playpoem. (Woolf 1954, 137, 108)

The present chapter is premised on the interpretation that through the comprehensive

inspection of life *The Waves* is a critical trope on conventional epistemology as well as ontology. In *The Waves*, Woolf's specific target is to display the inadequacy of the existing conventional notions of time, epistemology and ontology – in general, the conventional notion of life. For her, the conventional notion of life relies on normative historiography, progressivism, Enlightenment, the interaction of theory-practice and civilization. Similar to many contemporaneous philosophers of history, like Walter Benjamin, and the Stevens' Cambridge friends, Woolf refuses Hegelian teleological model of life. Her conception of life gives expression to the ending of a “progressive linear sequence, [...] a linear narrative,” which is much in evidence in her thought and writing method of stream of consciousness (Bahun 2008, 103).

In her essay “The Death of the Moth” published in the book with same title (1947), Woolf depicts “the true nature of life as a form of energy which connects everything to everything else through a thread of vital light.” She explains her idea through her close observation of a moth. She considers moths to be “hybrid creatures” because they are “neither gay like butterflies nor somber like their own species.” While watching one of them, she realizes how amazing to observe a moth which “seem[s] to be content with life.” She also realizes how this little creature which looks like a “fibre, very thin but pure” is full of “enourmous [life] energy” and the same energy flows through and “inspires” all the things, including “the rooks, the ploughmen, the horses,” connecting them together (9, 10):

[The moth] was so small, and so simple a form of the energy that was rolling in at the open window and driving its way through so many narrow and intricate corridors in my brain and in those human beings, there was something marvelous as well as pathetic about him. It was as if someone had taken a tiny bead of pure life and decking it as lightly as possible with down and feathers, had set it dancing and zigzagging to show us the true nature of life. (Woolf 1947, 9,10)

Life flows like a river and “Nothing remain[s] stable long” (*Moments of Being* 91). The “immense force of life” changes everything sooner or later. This makes life never static, but momentary, always active, changeable, continuous, mobile and variable. Due to these



characteristics of life, there is a constant movement across the borders of the “moments of being” and of “non-being,” and likewise, between substantial and unsubstantial realms of life as well as human interiority and the outside world. Woolf puts forward that the inner experience and unsubstantial realm of life have more weight and prominence than the outer forces. She notes that the experience of the subject which is brought by the “exceptional moments” and the revelation which follows these moments are central in her notion of life.

By putting the “exceptional moments” at the heart of life, Woolf’s approach to life is intrinsically anti-linear. *The Waves* clearly displays Woolf’s aversion to accepting a teleological understanding of life as is. Rather it celebrates life and reality in their essence which is many-fold. For Woolf, life on the surface (the solid, the substantial) and life in depth (the ethereal, abstract or unsubstantial) have different blueprints, and life is neither only substantial nor unsubstantial, but both. There is a dynamic interaction between the substantial and unsubstantial realms of life.

#### **4.2 Is Life Flux?**

In “Modern Fiction” from *The Essays of Virginia Woolf, Volume IV* (1994), Woolf claims that the nature of life can easily be seen by observing the mind on an ordinary day during which the mind is exposed to innumerable impressions. These impressions can be insignificant and temporary, or can be so extraordinary that they are carved into the brain with the sharpness of steel. They come from all sides of life. The mind somehow screens these impressions and finds some of them significant. In the same essay, she emphasizes that “life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged” (Woolf 4 1994: 160). On the contrary, life has a varying, unknown, unrestricted spirit, which displays aberration and complexity. The only thing for one to do is just to let the mind record the atoms of impressions in the way they fall upon the mind and sketch the pattern however disengaged and incoherent they appear. Woolf remarks that life is fuller and bigger than one tends to think. In addition, searching for a method to examine,

explicate and express it is a futile effort because there is no boundary to the horizon. She concludes that:

Any method is right, every method is right, that expresses what we wish to express if we are writers; that brings us closer to the novelist's intention if we are readers. This method has the merit of bringing us closer to what we were prepared to call life itself than any method with a conventional approach. (Woolf 4 1994: 160-162)

She also remarks that life rejects anything that is forced into it:

Whether we call it life or spirit, truth or reality, this, the essential thing, has moved off, or on, and refuses to be contained any longer in such ill-fitting vestments as [convention] provide[s]. ... Is life like this? (160)

She notes in her diary on Thursday 30, 1926 that she considers life to be the most exceptional and strangest happening, holding the "essence of reality" in it (Woolf 1954, 101).

There are times in which the fluidity of life seems to be interrupted. The death of a close friend and the intensive sorrow caused by it is one of those times. In *The Waves* with the death of Percival, the life of everybody in the book is interrupted in one way or another. In Susan's case, although she has just become a mother and is supposed to be excited and happy, due to her grief caused by Percival's death, she feels lost in the seasons of the year which do not make any sense for her. The immense sorrow brings an unbreakable silence in the house she lives in:

I am no longer January, May or any other season [...] Whether it is summer, whether it is winter, I no longer know by the moor grass, and the heath flower [...] But no sound breaks the silence of our house, where the fields sigh close to the door. (113, 114)

Yet, the force of life returns with its all power sooner or later. Susan does not yield herself to grief. She knows that life comes back with its potential for happiness and resumption of the flow, bringing more of everything:

I am blown like a leaf by the gale; now brushing the wet grass, now whirled up. I am gluttoned natural happiness. (114)

Despite the interruptions, life flows eternally, and in a life span one changes incessantly floating through the stream of it. Woolf shows how life has the potential for the resumption of flow and highlights that attaching oneself to one person and only one certain life pattern is not possible any more. Instead, moving, knowing new people, experiencing life through one's own

eyes and one's own mind and creating one's own style and a multilayered life pattern make life worth living. In the *Waves*, she mentions her opinion through Jinny:

I have lived my life, I must tell you, all these years, and I am now past thirty, perilously, like a mountain goat leaping from crag to crag; I do not settle long anywhere; I do not attach myself to one person in particular. (*The Waves* 115)

While life is eternally in flux, it does not flow in an orderly fashion. Thus, yearning for an extreme precision, orderly progress or an ease in life is a mistake or even a “lie” because there is always something hidden and deeper that the attempt at precision tries to cover. Everything and all events occur simultaneously. Tables are set with snow-white table cloths and the forks, spoons and knives are placed straight next to the plate while thousands of people are killed for some reason at the same time. Such an effort in the direction of precision means diminishing the whole sea into water in a spoon in which nothing can be fished up (*The Waves* 171). There is no single event happening at one time, but many occur simultaneously. Likewise, it is not one thing or an object one sees. It is a shower of many things at the same time. Woolf explains her argument through Bernard, who plunges himself into life by closely looking at a vase with a flower or sky or anything that catches his eyes and he takes them to create his new phrases, which enables him to justify, to realize or to understand something new:

I would say, walking along the Strand, “That’s the phrase I want”, as some beautiful, fabulous phantom bird, fish or cloud with fiery edges swam up to enclose once and for all some notion haunting me, after which on I trotted taking stock with renewed delight of ties and things in shop-windows. (171)

Yet, the flux of life should not be confused with the repetition of the conventional matrix. Although social structures force people to reproduce the conventional matrix, there should be constant renewals in the course of life. It is vital to introduce new conceptions and ideas, rather than echoing the same worn out thoughts and values that are valid only for their ambitious owners and that bring life agony, indifference, depression and hopelessness. Each day is a new beginning through which new forms of life spring such as new policies, new beliefs, new adventures and new forms of art. Even the beauty “must be broken daily to remain beautiful” (115).

Trying to set up a matrix does not make much sense because, similar to a tide, life comes and goes. It clears up what is on the coast and on the sand, making it fresh and anew.

While writing about life, except for the images of river, Woolf frequently employs the images of sea, sailing and diving. Her engagement with the image of water permeates most of her novels, diaries and essays recurrently. Indeed, Woolf places the water-related metaphors in the center of her aesthetics and philosophy. I would argue that this is not coincidental. For her, who is engaged with the notion of life so profoundly, the image of water stands not only for the origin of life, but also for a form of life which is made up of a surface and a depth. The surface of life is composed of substantial, visible and known, whereas the depth is made up of unsubstantial, invisible and unknown. She remarks that the border between these two realms is porous and one encloses the other.

### **4.3 Life and the Images of Swimming and Diving**

Other metaphors that Woolf relates to life are *swimming* and *diving*. There are a lot of examples in her works, as are in *The Waves*, which illustrate that she frequently employs these words in her attempt to scrutinize life. With the image of swimming, she means flowing with life, and with the image of diving she points out contemplating and meditating as a means to understand what life is. Diving to the depths is always related to creativity and it stands for contacting the artist inside of her / his. There is a clear link between water, swimming, diving and her creative power (McNeer 2010, 99). On June 27, 1925 Woolf notes in her diary how she spends a day to contemplate by using the images “the deep water” and “navigating underworld.” (Woolf 3 1980: 33)

Woolf also makes use of the images of the sea, water, the waves, swimming, diving for the unknown, the invisible, the undiscovered, the forgotten and the alternative dimensions of existence. Her reconfiguration of the sea, water and diving engages with complex aesthetic and philosophical questions such as patriarchal order of the logos and integrates the issues of

epistemology and ontology. Another image that Woolf frequently employs is “saturating.” The image of “saturating” targets to inscribe what is left out by traditional fiction and poetry (Muscogiuri 2010, 101-103):

'To saturate' the text means to infuse life into it by re-creating that essential element of [life], for Woolf, is 'the voice of the sea.' Considered as integral to the moment, 'the voice of the sea' is perceived by Woolf as something incompatible with rationalist realism and almost utterly erased by the patriarchal, logocentric order, where it is usually 'obscured and concealed under the other sounds.' This is a 'voice' that relates (to) the most elusive aspects of life and, most crucially, reclaims what is kept out of [the patriarchal] discourse. (Muscogiuri 2010, 103)

In her search for what is beneath the surface of life, other metaphors that Woolf makes use of are *excavating*, *mining* and *drilling*. The image of *mining* stands for something precious which is deposited in the depths. On April 20, 1925, she remarks in her diary that she has to work with her “pickax” and “shovel” very carefully, in order to make use of all the total source (Woolf 3: 12).

To conclude, in Woolf's works the sea, or the voice of the sea initiated in the depths of the sea, has several associations: The sea becomes the substance of life itself; it appears as a source of poetry and existence; and it is the voice of the *other* that is excluded by the patriarchal logocentric order. The voice of the sea signifies both the inner voice and the voices of those innumerable unknown. The sea comes out as exuberant, active life because it moves, whirls and surges. The murmuring of the sea signifies that it may be imagined as the source of an alternative language, a fresh creativity or, more generally, a vital fertility (Muscogiuri 2010, 105).

#### 4.4 The Rhythm of Life

I am conscious of flux, of disorder; [...] Yet I feel, too, the rhythm [...] It is like a waltz tune, eddying in and out, round and round. [...] I watch it expand, contract; and then expand again. (*The Waves* 60)

Woolf asserts that the “flux of life” has its own rhythm and it creates an endless circle.

This flux of life is indeterminate and has a spinal formation. While trying to narrate the rhythm of life, she uses poetic qualities such as musicality and incantatory elements. In this context, bird songs that Woolf depicts in almost every interlude in *The Waves* are noteworthy. She highlights the artistic quality of birds and birdsongs. She shows how they help us observe the rhythm of life and how they artfully mark themselves as an expression of life. She also uses the birdsongs to describe how birds sing their songs as passionately as if they were emitted from the force of life energy, and how they represent creative activity and are an expression of boundlessness. For her, the birdsongs are so beautiful and powerful that they could function as if they were reshaping life and making it finer and finer.

Besides the image of birdsongs, Woolf employs the image of waves in order to lay emphasis on the rhythm of life. On Wednesday, August 20 and later on Tuesday, December 30, 1930, she notes in her diary that she is trying to narrate *The Waves* “in the rhythm of the waves” (Woolf 1954, 159). She starts *The Waves* with a discrete emphasis on the waves that move rhythmically: “The wave paused, and drew out again, sighing like a sleeper whose breath comes and goes unconsciously” (1). The waves have two major qualities: they are inexorable and they move in a rhythm. Woolf seems to employ their inexorableness for the sturdiness of life and their motions for the rhythm of it.

The interludes in *The Waves* function like waves. Similar to the rise of a wave, they give a start to a chapter and they fade away at the end of the chapter. The next chapter starts with a new interlude or a rise carrying that chapter to the next one. This continues till the end of the book. Another aspect of interludes is that they appear repeatedly. They are like a refrain of a song. Akin to the refrain of a song, the interludes function like small chants which “are rhythmic [and] melodious” (Rohman 2010, 15). Like the refrain and the song, there is a dialogue between the interludes and text. This dialogue turns *The Waves* into “a musical symphony, whose theme is introduced in the lyrical interludes” (Henke 2007, 128).

Woolf also celebrates the rhythm of life through the characters who participate in it. In

the first chapter, she portrays the six characters through their sensitivity to the rhythm of life. Bernard notices how light is constantly “shimmering, changing,” its color in variety and looks like “a gold thread.” He also notices how light is felt “in the beat of the birdsongs” and seen “in the reflection of nature in a small water drop.” He sees light as: “a ring” that “quivers and hangs in a loop” (2). Susan notices “a slab of pale yellow, spreading away until it meets a purple stripe” (2). Rhoda hears birds that sound “cheep, chirp; cheep, chirp; going up and down.” Neville recognizes “a globe, hanging down in a drop against the enormous flanks of some hill.” Jinny resembles something she sees in nature to “a crimson tassel, twisted with gold threads” (2). Finally, Louis imagines the flowers as if they were “fish made of light swimming” in the meadow which to him like “green sea” and “the petals” as if they were “harlequins”:

Flower after flower is specked on the depths of green. [...] Stalks rise from the black hallows beneath. The flowers swim like fish made of light upon dark, green waters. (4)

Woolf also associates the rhythm of life and the rhythm of humanity with the rhythm of the waves: “I sometimes think humanity is a vast wave, undulating” (Woolf 3 1980: 22). The rhythm of life requires attention, response and appreciation. When one notices the pulsation of life, one realizes that everything is flexible, in constant movement and transitory:

I see every blade of grass very clear. But the pulse drums so in my forehead, behind my eyes, that everything dances — the net, the grass; your faces leap like butterflies; the trees seem to jump up and down. There is nothing staid, nothing settled, in this universe. All is rippling, all is dancing; all is quickness and triumph. (Woolf 3 1980: 27, 28)

She writes the eight interludes in italics except for the ninth and the last one which turns out to be Bernard’s soliloquy, through which Woolf emphasizes that the rhythm of life is inside of us: “And in me too the waves rises. It swells; it arches back” (199). In her essay “Street Music” published in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf Volume I*, Woolf regards the importance of the notion of rhythm to be undeniable for different reasons, ranging from “ordering daily life” to creative work like “writing” which she associates with music:

When the sense of rhythm was thoroughly alive in every mind we should [,] if I mistake not, notice a great improvement not only in the ordering of all the affairs of

daily life, but also in the art of writing, which is nearly allied to the art of music.  
(Woolf 1 1986: 30, 31)

Her narrative technique contains a hidden melody through the repeated sounds such as the sounds of waves which “sigh like a sleeper” (*The Waves* 1); the birds which “chirp high up” and sing “their blank melody” (2); “the murmurs of the waves” (8); “the sullen thud of the waves; and the chained beast stamps on the beach. It stamps and stamps” (36); “[London] hums and murmurs” (72); “horns and trumpets, ting out” (91); “the tap dripped one, two, three” and “the waves massed themselves, curved their backs and crashed” (109). As she notes in her diary, on Wednesday, January 7 1931, she perceives *The Waves* to be a “rhapsody”:

I could perhaps do B[ernard]'s soliloquy in such a way as to break up, dig deep, make prose move—yes I swear—as prose has never moved before; from the chuckle, the babble to the rhapsody. (Woolf 1954, 165)

In her PhD thesis “Wave to the Depths” (2006), Killian-O’Callaghan<sup>16</sup> mentions the musical quality of *The Waves*. She describes it as “the verbal inscription of a hidden melody yet with definite tones and distinct harmonic colour.” She comments that Woolf’s rhythm-oriented narrative makes Woolf “a great composer.” According to Killian-O’Callaghan, Woolf’s recurrent use of certain sounds creates a rhythmical form which is both very “fine” and “strong” like a “spider’s” net. Additionally, “the sounds of language” that Woolf employs are “sense-perceptible.” This makes *The Waves* transferrable to other mediums like a piece of music. Killian-O’Callaghan showed this by composing a musical piece under the same title. She finds “*The Waves*’ hidden yet palpably sonorous music is very complete” (151, 152). The rhythm of the language in *The Waves* with its “perpetual rise and falls” symbolizes the rhythm of *being* with its “perpetual” ups and downs:

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<sup>16</sup> Danae Killian-O’Callaghan is an Australian pianist whose performances have found regard internationally for their intense originality and rare communicative power. Her repertoire ranges across the complete solo piano music of the Second Viennese School, major polyphonic works by JS Bach, and a wealth of Australian compositions. [...] She has been the recipient of prestigious awards both for her academic and her musical prowess, including the Australian Alumni [...] Danae Killian-O’Callaghan earned her PhD from the University of Melbourne in 2010. Her thesis on Virginia Woolf’s playpoem *The Waves* as a contemporary imagining of the harmony of the spheres was nominated by the Faculty of the VCA and MCM for the University’s prestigious Chancellor’s Prize. (The University of Melbourne. Web. <http://vca-mcm.unimelb.edu.au/staff/danaekillian-ocallaghan>. March 1 2016)



Like a great composer, Woolf sculpts her form with a virtuoso rhythmic technique that seems to make time move in multiple directions, transcending limited uni-linear conceptions of plottable connections between events. To experience *The Waves* whole in all the intricacy of its form and meaning, the reader must listen for its “rhythmic harmony.” [...] the powerful rhythmic dimension of Woolf’s sound-weaving manifests itself *beneath* the sensory surface of the words, moves in the partial hiddenness that belongs to rhythm’s being-in-becoming, being-in-passing, to its perpetual rise and fall. The sound is borne into appearance on waves of rhythm; [...] The being of rhythm is half-silent, always mysterious, like the virtually silent “said Bernard, ... said Susan, ... said Rhoda,” which can be felt as *The Waves*’ heartbeat, always present, yet always beneath the surface. (Killian-O’Callaghan 2006, 151, emphasis in original)

Parallel to Killian-O’Callaghan’s comment, Woolf perceives life as a symphony which is made up of harmony on the top and disharmony underneath. Akin to her notion of life, she also associates people with the notions of music. She finds it difficult to categorize people because it is not possible to think of them independently or in totality. In this context, she resembles people to musical instruments. Similar to musical instruments in an orchestra which play “a symphony with its concord and its discord,” people have their own tune in life-symphony:

The crystal, the globe of life as one calls it, far from being hard and cold to the touch, has walls of thinnest air. If I press them all will burst. Whatever sentence I extract whole and entire from this cauldron is only a string of six little fish that let themselves be caught while a million others leap and sizzle, making the cauldron bubble like boiling silver, and slip through my fingers. Faces recur, faces and faces — they press their beauty to the walls of my bubble — Neville, Susan, Louis, Jinny, Rhoda and a thousand others. How impossible to order them rightly; to detach one separately, or to give the effect of the whole — again like music. [...] and its tunes on top and its complicated bass beneath, then grew up! Each played his own tune, fiddle, flute, trumpet, drum or whatever the instrument might be. With Neville, “Let’s discuss Hamlet.” With Louis, science. With Jinny, love. (*The waves* 171)

The rhythm of life flows in us and we just move with it “in and out.” Although, for different reasons, this flow is jolted and shaken from time to time, this does not encumber the continuity of the flow that holds humanity to itself. It is not possible to stay out of “its hesitating, its abrupt, its perfectly encircling walls” (*The Waves* 66, 67).

#### **4.5 Substantial and Unsubstantial Realms of Life**

But when we sit together, close, we melt into each other with phrases. We are edged with mist. We make an unsubstantial territory. (*The Waves* 7)

In her attempt to understand life, the other central image that Woolf applies is the image of light because it is special with its both particle and wave qualities. In other words, light holds both substantial and unsubstantial qualities and the dynamic interaction between them. As is mentioned before, for Woolf, life and human beings have the same characteristics. Similar to “ a cloud and the waves,” now we exist then we disappear. To illustrate this, while she is drafting *The Waves*, she writes in her diary on Friday, 4 Jan 1929:

Now is life very solid, or very shifting? I am haunted by the two contradictions. This has gone on for ever; will last for ever; goes down to the bottom of the word—this moment I stand on. Also it is transitory, flying, diaphanous. I shall pass like a cloud on the waves. Perhaps it may be that though we change, one flying after another, so quick, so quick, yet we are somehow successive and continuous we human beings, and show the light through. (Woolf 1954, 141)

*The Waves*, to a great extent, can be considered to be a literary scrutiny during which life is observed and examined as if it were an entity under a microscope. In this examination, Woolf tries to figure out if there is a clear boundary between the substantial and unsubstantial forms of life and realizes that the boundary in between is quite vague. In the interludes, she presents the active communication between the substantial and unsubstantial forms of life. For instance, in the first interlude, first the sea looks like a grey cloth. The waves are not seen clearly. They look like a thin white veil across the sand when they reach the shore. Then, gradually, with the first light of the sun, the dark bar on the horizon becomes clear, turning the color of the sea into green (1, 2). For a moment, everything becomes visible and substantial.

Yet, this does not last for long. The unsubstantiality overrides the substantiality. The image of the green surface of the sea, which glimmers and blazes red and yellow in color, looks like a smoky fire. This becomes fused into one haze, turning the woolen grey sky on top of the green sea into a million atoms of soft blue. The surface of the sea slowly becomes transparent, waving and glittering until the dark stripes are almost wiped out. Then, with a slow movement of the sun, an arch of fire burns on the edge of the horizon and blazes the sea golden. The light strikes upon the trees in the garden, making the leaves transparent one after another, while it makes the walls of the house visible. Substantiality and unsubstantiality are intertwined:

The sun sharpened the walls of the house, and rested like the tip of a fan upon a white blind and made a blue finger-print of shadow under the leaf by the bedroom window. The blind stirred slightly, but all within was dim and unsubstantial. (1, 2)

Another example which demonstrates very artistically the dynamic interaction between substantiality and unsubstantiality can be found in the second interlude. Under the sun, the blue and green waves of the sea sweep the shore and form shallow pools of light here and there. Then, the rocks which look soft and invisible at first become noticeable with the red fissures on them. The spiky shadows on the grass and the dew on the top of the flowers make the garden look like a mosaic of single beams. A simple green spot at the edge of the window turns into emerald. The rims of tables, chairs and white table-clothe become fine gold lines. Everything loses its definite shape and becomes unstructured and unsubstantial. The china bowl flows and a steel knife turns into liquid:

The sun rose higher. Blue waves, green waves swept a quick fan over the beach, circling the spike of sea-holly and leaving shallow pools of light here and there on the sand. A faint black rim was left behind them. The rocks which had been misty and soft hardened and were marked with red clefts. Sharp stripes of shadow lay on the grass, and the dew dancing on the tips of the flowers and leaves made the garden like a mosaic of single sparks not yet formed into one whole. [...] The light touched something green in the window corner and made it a lump of emerald, a cave of pure green like stoneless fruit. It sharpened the edges of chairs and tables and stitched white table-cloths with fine gold wires. [...] Everything became softly amorphous, as if the china of the plate flowed and the steel of the knife were liquid. Meanwhile the concussion of the waves breaking fell with muffled thuds, like logs falling, on the shore. (16)

Akin to the first interlude in which everything appears from nothingness, in the last interlude the sun sets and everything disappears into nothingness again. In this perception, the sky and the sea look identical. Their sighs are the only signs of the waves as they are elongating on the shore. Everything in the garden turns to black and grey. Dark shadows cover everything like a blanket. All the colors in the room disappear. The huge mass of brown cupboards and chairs are liquefied into obscurity; the mirror in the room looks like a pale mouth of a cave. The sense of dimension and space gets lost; the height from floor to ceiling vanishes. The light fades and darkness takes its place. The very exact shape of the brush turns into a puffy and irregular

form. The moving light makes a plummy edge among invisible roads. The darkness takes the light's place, creating waves of darkness in the air. Darkness moves and wraps the houses, hills, streets, trees, and whirlpools around single figures, surrounding them, like the waves of water which wash the side of a sunken ship. Darkness covers everything. The hills lose their solidity. Substantiality turns entirely into unsubstantiality (157, 158).

#### 4.6 Life and Death

Based on the notions of substantiality and unsubstantiality, Woolf states that life and death are not occurrences which are separated from each other, but interconnected. One follows the other along the spinal cord of the present. Death is not capable of rubbing out the miraculousness of life. She first realizes this very soon after she learned about her mother's death. She looks out of the window in her room with the feeling of sadness and finality. Meanwhile, she recognizes that despite the great pain inside of her, she could see the beauty of life: "I saw pigeons floating and settling. [...] It was a beautiful blue spring morning, and very still" (*Moments of Being* 96). Two years later Stella's early death, then Thoby's unexpected death and later her friends' deaths make Woolf profoundly think about the relationship between life and death. She concludes that most of the time the force of life is more powerful than the force of death. After Roger Fry's funeral, she notes in her diary on September 18, 1934:

How we all fought with our brains, loves and so on; and *must* be vanquished. Then the vanquisher, this outer force became so clear; the indifferent, and we so small, fine and delicate. A fear then came to me, of death. Of course I shall lie there too before that gate and slide in; and it frightened me. But why? I mean, I felt the vainness of this perpetual fight, with our brains and loving each other against the other thing; if Roger could die. But then the next day, today, which is Thursday, one week later, the other thing begins to work—the exalted sense of being above time and death which comes from being again in a writing mood. And this is not an illusion, so far as I can tell. Certainly I have a strong sense that Roger would be all on one's side in this excitement, and that whatever the invisible force does, we thus get outside it. (Woolf 1954, 224, 225, emphasis in original)

In Woolf's works there is an "intense love of life" even in the moments of severe hopelessness. At the bottom of her "intense love of life" lies Woolf's present-centered notion of time which lets her celebrate life with its momentary revelations (Beja 1970, 218). Woolf

prefers not to surrender to the force of death, but to fight against it. She finishes her book *Roger Fry* with the words of Spinoza: “A free man thinks of death least of all things; and his wisdom is a meditation not of death but of life” (Woolf 2003, 298). In *Mrs. Dalloway*, she depicts the ongoing tide between the forces of life and death through Clarissa and Septimus. At the end of the book, after Septimus’ death, in the next scene Clarissa returns to the party, through which Woolf inclines that life somehow overcomes death. As she notes in her diary on February 17, 1922, whenever she wants “to write about death,” life conquers it:

I meant to write about death, only life came breaking in as usual. I like, I see, to question people about death. [...] Suppose, I said to myself the other day this pain over my heart suddenly wrung me out like a dish cloth & left me dead?—I was feeling sleepy, indifferent, & calm; & so thought it didn't much matter, except for L[eonard]. Then some bird or light I daresay, or walking wider, set me off wishing to live on my own—wishing chiefly to walk along the river & look at things. (Woolf 2 1978: 167, 168)

Woolf affirms that death functions to create a “synergic” point within people and in their lives because death leads them to deal with their personal conflicts and their conflicts with life in-depth. This is one of the themes that she discusses in *The Waves*, which is marked by the general feeling of doom with the sudden death of Percival, who represents Woolf’s brother, Thoby. Despite the fact that Thoby's death affects Woolf deeply, she “fights” against the grief: “no one knows how I suffer, walking up this street, engaged with my anguish, as I was after Thoby died—alone; fighting something alone [...] I had the devil to fight” (Woolf 1954, 147). Yet, upon Thoby's death, she has to confront life and herself once more. Similar to her struggle with Thoby's death, the death of Percival leads the characters in *The Waves* to struggle with the conflicts with themselves and life, making them more quizzical about life, reality, self and the notion of time. Their pursuit of the meaning of life goes deeper. In this respect, death emerges as a privileged synergic point within them and in their lives.

What leads one to perceive life in a fundamentally different way is the feelings of agony and dignity that death and mourning include. The inescapability of death shows how our knowledge about life and death is limited and how life is harder than we think. As Kelly S.

Walsh comments, mourning becomes the search for a way of existing that is balanced with the loss (Walsh 2009, 9). For instance, due to the agony in her soul caused by Percival's death, at one point, Rhoda wants to “ride rough waters and [to] sink” there, so “no one [could] save [her]” (*The Waves* 105). Yet, in a short time, this feeling leaves in its place a realization that, actually, Percival's death makes her see the horror of life and discloses its disgrace. This makes her realize that Percival's death is a gift and she decides to find the extra-reality that lies underneath the appearance:

Percival by his death, has made me this present, has revealed this terror, has left me to undergo this humiliation. [...] but what is the thing that lies beneath the semblance of the thing? Now that lightning has gashed the tree and the flowering branch has fallen and Percival, by his death, has made me this gift, let me see the thing. (105, 107)

In this regard, life and death are parts of a whole. An invisible thread connects them. In *The Waves*, Woolf exhibits this invisible link through the ghostly connection between Percival and the other six characters (Walsh 2009, 15). Bernard's mourning due to the loss of a close friend makes him realize the (hyper) subtleness of life more. He wonders what form of communication there could be between him and Percival after his death. He somehow senses that Percival “exists somewhere” or “something remains” (*The Waves* 101). It seems to him as if there was a very “fine thread” between him and Percival, connecting them to each other. He knows he will continue feeling Percival in him and that there will always be an inner conversation with Percival (*The Waves* 101). Yet, he also knows that this situation will not last long and there will be new things which will carry him to new happenings; and grief will give its place over to delight. Even the very simple things such as “doves flying up and down” will bring the change. The daily routine will come back again:

I ask, if I shall never see you again and fix my eyes on that solidity, what form will our communication take? [...] You shall remain an arbiter. But how long? Things will become too difficult to explain: there will be new things; already my son. I am now at the zenith of an experience. It will decline. Already I no longer cry with conviction, ‘What luck!’ Exaltation, the flight of doves descending, is over. Chaos, detail return. [...] The sequence returns: one thing leading leads to another –the usual order. (*The Waves* 101, 102)

Understanding life in its entirety requires hard work and one should not allow oneself to be carried on by passivity. On the contrary, one should try to explore life with/in all its forms although the survey and exploration of the unknown seems a mission impossible, and although the desire for exploration is interrupted by some impulsive and unrelated curiosity, or greed. Regarding the territory of exploration the unknown and to understand life, Woolf points out the realm of life which is beyond or underneath what is seen on the appearance or on the surface:

No, but I wish to go under; to visit the profound depths; once in a while to exercise my prerogative not always to act, but to explore; to hear vague, ancestral sounds of boughs creaking, of mammoths; to indulge impossible desires to embrace the whole world with the arms of understanding—impossible to those who act. [...] I am aware of our ephemeral passage. (*The Waves* 73, 74)

Life in its entirety incessantly moves from surface to depth, from simplicity to supremacy, from disparity to unification, from tranquility to activity and from living to dead. At the end of the day, the greatest challenge of life is death. Sometimes life gets stronger and wins and sometimes death diminishes the power of life. Woolf discusses this dialogue or struggle between life and death in her essay “The Death of the Moth” and shows it through a story of a dying moth. The story starts with her observation of a moth which is moving very actively. Yet, all of a sudden, the moth falls down and its legs start agitating. Now, it is dying. Woolf resembles the agitating legs of the moth and its struggle to fighting against an “enemy”:

Stillness and quiet had replaced the previous animation. [...] Yet the power was there all the same, massed outside indifferent, impersonal, not attending to anything in particular. Somehow it was opposed to the little hay-coloured moth. It was useless to try to do anything. One could only watch the extraordinary efforts made by those tiny legs against an oncoming doom, [...]; nothing, I knew, had any chance against death. Nevertheless after a pause of exhaustion the legs fluttered again. It was superb this last protest, and so frantic that he succeeded at last in righting himself. [...] Again, somehow, one saw life, a pure bead. [...] As I looked at the dead moth, this minute wayside triumph of so great a force over so mean an antagonist filled me with wonder. Just as life had been strange a few minutes before, so death was now as strange. The moth having righted himself now lay most decently and uncomplainingly composed. (Woolf 1965, 11, 12)

Despite the sturdiness, stubbornness and invincibility of death, life never yields and continues in new forms. Every day looks like an eternal rebirth. The sun rises, like the rising

waves. Then, it sets and the stars come back, like falling waves. This is the never-ending process. Yet, the tide of life is always accompanied by the force of death. We all come and go between the forces of life and death. Woolf resembles the force of life to and “horse” and notes that everybody has a kind of “rider” of this horse in her/him. This rider drives and then pulls “the horse” back, running towards the greatest “enemy that is death.” Although this enemy is obstinate and undefeatable, it is worth fighting against it on behalf of life:

Another day [...] Another general awakening. The stars draw back and are extinguished...Yes, this is the eternal renewal, the incessant rise and fall and fall and rise again... And in me too the wave rises. It swells; it arches its back. [...]. Death is the enemy. It is death against whom I ride [...] I will fling and unyielding, O Death! The waves broke on the shore. (*The Waves*, 199)

#### **4.7 Woolf's Notion of Self: Woolf's Ontology**

Sunday was memorable to me for another visit to Shelly House—where actually shook hands [...] All expressed great surprise at seeing me, as if I were a strange bird joining a flock of same species. I felt strange enough; but oddly familiar with their ways. (*The Diary of Virginia Woolf* 1 1977: 226)

Having grown up in a house in which the patriarchal society of the Victorian age had full dominance led Woolf to reject the self-hood that is immersed in patriarchal qualities. In this environment, she feels like an outsider, a gypsy or a child who stands at the flap of the tent and sees the circus going on. She realizes that especially girls and women are pushed aside or excluded by this society, whereas boys and men are crowned and raised as the inheritors of the system. She remembers how her brothers learned the rules of this social machine and game so well and played it so diligently just like acrobats jumping through loops. Woolf describes the self that is soaked with patriarchal qualities to be traditional, ordinary, fixed by certain values, theatrical, arrogant, violent, brutal and imperialistic (Woolf 2002, 154, 155). In *The Waves*, she portrays Percival as a man who symbolizes this sort of self and supreme power. He goes to India to solve “the oriental problem” as a supreme imperialist and a colonizer:

He is a hero. [...] By applying the standards of West, by using a violent language



that is natural to him [...] He rides on; the multitude cluster around him as if he were – what indeed he is – a God. (80, 89)

In order not to be haunted by the conventional notion of self, she suggests the present-oriented notion of time which provides one with “flashes of insight,” through which one can transfer oneself from the “forced self” into authentic self which is composed of many selves. Woolf relates this process to the process of a moth's becoming a butterfly by leaving its coating behind:

I am like a worm that has eaten its way through the wood of a very old oak beam. But now I am compact; now I am gathered together this fine morning [...] Now a full-grown man; now upright standing in sun or rain [...] I have fused my many lives into one. (*The Waves* 109, 110)

A “multifold” self provides one with a productive and rich mind which is open to probabilities, conjectures and instant images. The self with this mind knows that fixed knowledge makes no sense since there is no steadiness in the universe and so in the world, but all is tentative and adventure and we are a mixture of indefinite quantities. Everything is just probabilistic and “all is experiment and adventure” (*The Waves* 76). This self is sensitive to knowledge and it is like a bee that collects insubstantial signs of information in the air in order to find its way (*To the Lighthouse* 71, 193). It is interested in the depths of life and what is not seen because the surface of life is affected by interruptions, cacophonies which pierce and nerve sensations. Connecting the depths of life enables one to explore the “vague, ancestral sounds of boughs creaking, of mammoths; to indulge impossible desires to embrace the whole world with the arms of understanding” (*The Waves* 74). Woolf's notion of self is related and connected to everything and everybody. There is no clear boundary between it and anything surrounding it.

As Roxanne Fand comments:

The selves of the fictional characters become shifting centers of interaction with everything from subtle immediate influences to those far out in time and space. The boundaries [...] appear and disappear in negotiated meanings that are both serious and ironically playful, disrupting conventional monologic self-narratives. (Fand 2009, 41)

For instance, Rhoda feels as if she were “like the foam,” or “the moonlight,” or one of the

objects thrown onto the shore by the waves (*The Waves* 85). And Louis imagines himself as a part of nature: “I am green as a yew tree in the shade of the hedge. My hair is made of leaves. I am rooted to the middle of the earth. My body is a stalk” (*The Waves* 5).

*The Waves* is perhaps Woolf's most sustained meditation and scrutiny of the nature of self. The characters in the book start asking who they are at very early ages. They realize that the harsh discipline, order and authority at school and in society try to turn everybody into simple “cadavers” that will take their places in the social game. Contrary to this attempt, they develop present-oriented selves based on a continuous process of reforming the inner and outer world:

I am not one and simple, but complex and many. Bernard, in public, bubbles; in private, is secretive. That is what they do not understand, for they are now undoubtedly discussing me, saying I escape them, am evasive. They do not understand that I have to effect different transitions; have to cover the entrances and exits of several different men who alternately act their parts as Bernard. I am abnormally aware of circumstances. (*The Waves* 48)

The single-self-image that society tries to create leads to a superficial and surface-self. Woolf likens this kind of self to a clown. Yet, she remarks that everybody has both surface-self and true-self and there is a sort of communication between them. She explicates this idea through Bernard:

But *you* understand, *you*, my [true] self, who always comes at a call (that would be a harrowing experience to call and for no one to come; that would make the midnight hollow, and explains the expression of old men in clubs – they have given up calling for a self who does not come), you understand that I am only superficially represented by what I was saying to-night. [...] I sympathise effusively; I also sit, like a toad in a whole, receiving with perfect coldness whatever comes. [...] I n my case something remains floating, unattached [...] I feel that I am that dashing yet reflective man, that bold and deleterious figure. (*The Waves* 49, emphasis in original)

The true-self often emerges when one is contemplating deeply, falls silent and becomes still. With the presence of solitude, the surface-self is replaced with the true-self. Through true-self, one feels in accord with all things and whole. The surface becomes deep and near becomes remote. The mind becomes fluid and flows around all things and covers everything completely:

“While I sat here I have been changing” (*The Waves* 197, 198). Woolf puts forward that there is a continuous transition between the surface-self and true-self. However, this transition is not easy because the true-self is very sensitive to circumstances. Sometimes true-self feels exhausted and cannot be original, imaginative, inventive or innovative any more: “Yet it falls flat. It peters out. I cannot get up steam enough to carry me over the transition” (*The Waves* 50). In regard to the question “who one really is,” the answer is always the “true-self” which has “no age and exhibits itself in the present”:

But now let me ask myself the final question [...] which of these people am I? [...] When I say to myself, ‘Bernard’, who comes? [...] A man of no particular age or calling. Myself, merely. It is he who now takes the poker and rattles the cinders so that they fall in showers through the grate. (*The Waves* 51)

One of the reasons for the transition between surface-self and true-self is the existence of others. The true-self of a person does not generally match with the image of him or her in the mind of others because the image in the mind of others is usually based on the others' assumptions and the expectations. These assumptions and expectations are generally known by the true-self, which leads it to turn itself into a social-self willingly or unwillingly. In the presence of the other(s), the true-self is also affected by the self/selves of the other(s). In this respect, the true-self merges with the other's self. This is a kind of self-contamination and self-deception, but one can always fight against it. Either fighting against self-deception or acting in accordance with it causes true-self to lessen itself, which, Woolf calls as “the real pain”:

Something now leaves me; something goes from me to meet that figure who is coming, and assures me that I know him before I see who it is. How curiously one is changed by the addition, even at a distance, of a friend. How useful an office one's friends perform when they recall us. Yet how painful to be recalled, to be mitigated, to have one's self adulterated, mixed up, become part of another. As he approaches I become not myself but Neville mixed with somebody — with whom? — with Bernard? Yes, it is Bernard, and it is to Bernard that I shall put the question, Who am I? [sic] (*The Waves* 53)

True-self shrinks or escapes in the presence of friends because each time when there is a contact with another, an invisible link occurs, spinning from two parties and elongating its subtle thread. Connecting with someone means undergoing a close examination of curiosity and

trying to act in the direction of the expectancy of the other. In this case, the true-self flees to the scruffy corners and gets itself imprisoned there till the alien presence disappears, though the subtle thread between them still exists for a while:

How strange to feel the line that is spun from us lengthening its fine filament across the misty spaces of the intervening world. He is gone; I stand here, holding his poem. Between us is this line. (*The Waves* 57)

On the other hand, after each encounter, the true-self has a chance to re-establish itself with some new realizations and reflections. Compared to the former effect, this is an enhancing effect:

The mocking, the observant spirits who, even in the crisis and stab of the moment, watched on my behalf now come flocking home again. With their addition, I am Bernard; I am Byron; I am this, that and the other. They darken the air and enrich me, as of old, with their antics, their comments, and cloud the fine simplicity of my moment of emotion. For I am more selves than Neville thinks. We are not simple as our friends would have us to meet their needs [...] I am almost whole now; and see how jubilant I am, bringing into play all that Neville ignores in me. (*The Waves* 57)

Sometimes the company of others is necessary in order to make the self self. After spending some time in solitude, the existence and sight of others are missed. The light coming from their eyes increases self-esteem and one feels valuable and special: “I need eyes on me to draw out these frills and furbelows. [...] I need the illumination of other people’s eyes (*The Waves* 75).

In the moments of solitude or seclusion and in a state of ecstasy, the boundaries are thawed and the senses of immensity lead the body and life to diminish, carrying self into the realm of silence (*To the Lighthouse* 103, 241). At those moments life becomes the most vibrant and one feels in contact with the unsubstantial realm of life. It feels like “taking wings” and “experiencing freedom.”<sup>17</sup> In those moments of seclusion, we “embrace our disparate experiences [and realize that] our 'selves' [are] provisional.” We also meet “the challenge of discovering how shifting” the self between the surface-self and the true-self. Those moments

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<sup>17</sup> “It was all in keeping with this silence, this emptiness, and the unreality of the early morning hour. It was a way things had sometimes, she thought, lingering for a moment and looking at the long glittering windows and the plume of blue smoke: they became illness, before habits had spun themselves across the surface, one felt that same unreality, which was so startling; felt something emerge. Life was most vivid then. One could be at one’s ease.” (*The to Lighthouse* 258, 259)

of seclusion provide one with the recognition that “many domains of consciousness [and so the selves] coexists within us” which are “created when the need arises.” We also realize that the notion of self is always an “unfinished” story. This makes the self a “debatable” and fragmentary self which embodies new understandings as a part of itself (Caramagno 1992, 295).

Although Woolf's notion of self is unfinished, fragmentary and debatable, its purpose is wholeness and unity. Woolf perceives wholeness and unity in terms of the vanquishment of ego. The characters in *The Waves* are depicted as discordant in their personality and in their relationship with each other, but they try to embody wholeness and unity both within themselves individually and among themselves. It is not solipsistic (Poresky 1981, 186-188). At the end of *The Waves*, Bernard's egoistic-self who “banged his spoon on the table, saying, 'I will not consent'” turns into a selfless-self whose “fist did not form.” He considers his previous “indefatigable busyness” to be “a litter.” He realizes that he has “no more appetites to glut, [...] no more sharp teeth and clutching hands or desire to feel the pear and grape.” He becomes “A man without a self [...] without illusion” (*The Waves* 190, 191). From this selfless-self point of view “the world [...] or individual identities, that arch their backs in a surge of power, [...] fall in upon themselves and dissolve”, allowing one to become a part of “awesome vastness” like the image of “broken waves on the shore” at the end of the book (Poresky 1981, 211).

“Selflessness” is one of the significant notions in Woolf's philosophy. She is very critical of egotism and self-centered behavior, including her own, suggesting that egotism should be controlled. One of the means to control it is to question it thoroughly (Lee 1997, 4, 5). Then, one should fight against it because “nothing is so much to be dreaded as egotism. Nothing so cruelly hurts the person himself; nothing so wounds those who are forced into contact with it” (Woolf 2022, 149). Woolf reflects her struggle against the egocentric-self in her works by placing the audience in the central position (Harris 2013, 158). For instance, in *The Waves*, the narrator is elusive. The whole story of the book is woven around the interludes. The language is poetic rather than dictating.

In terms of the relationship between self and life, Woolf explains her opinion in *The Waves* through an analogy of “a bee on the sunflower.” This is a very intimate, close and mutual relationship, but at the same time very delicate. The bee lands on the sunflower and collects the nectar from it. It stands on the flower with its slender, featherlike legs, gets the nectar with its tongue which heaves and holds itself on the flower while beating/shaking its tulle like wings. The existence of the bee on the sunflower is very subtle, not fixed and permanent. The bee stays on the sunflower only till it gets its nectar. While the bee collects nectar from the sunflower, it transfers pollen from other florets to it. Similar to this analogy of the bee and the sunflower, Woolf proposes that one should also have a very fine, subtle and temporary relationship with life:

I do not cling to life. I shall be brushed like a bee from a sunflower. My philosophy, always accumulating, welling up moment by moment, runs like quicksilver a dozen ways at once. (*The Waves* 145)

In this context, Woolf finds it ridiculous to try to form fixed/unchangeable conclusions about life and the self and their relationship with each other. As is mentioned before, in Woolf's notion of self, one can shape one's self. She relates this process to the process of creating a work of art. It is like a novelist who creates a narrative. As is stated in *Monday or Tuesday*, this self is not unitary, constant, integrated, stable and knowable with its all dimensions:

But when the self speaks to the self, who is speaking? The entombed soul, the spirit driven in, in to the central catacomb; the self that took the veil and left the world ... a coward perhaps, yet somehow beautiful, as it flits with its lantern restlessly up and down the dark corridors. (Woolf 1921, 44)

To conclude, Woolf's notion of self is very sensitive and capable of clearing the boundaries between itself and anything else surrounding it, including the difference in genders. Woolf's notion of self is androgynous. By combining the male and the female in one self, but at the same time keeping them apart, Woolf maintains a unique self. The portrait of the self that she draws refuses to obey authority and power which are represented by a hierarchical social system and religion. This self is complex, multilayered, genuine and authentic. It is composed of both a surface-self/selves and a true-self that hides itself in the depth of the surface-self.

Although the presence of other people might disturb this self, sometimes the company of them pleases it. With all these characteristics, the self that Woolf depicts in *The Waves* is profoundly at variance with any ontology which sees the self as static, finite and clock time oriented.

#### 4.8 The Function of Art in Woolf's Philosophy

I should come back, after a year or two, & find that the collection had sorted itself & refined itself & coalesced, as such deposits so mysteriously do, into a mould, transparent enough to reflect the light of our life, & yet steady, tranquil [,] composed with the aloofness of a work of art. (*The Diary of Virginia Woolf* 1977: 226)

Art and artists are the backbone of *The Waves*. She shows that art can save, restore and prevent one from disintegration and enable one to see and to understand more about life. Art also provides one with an opportunity to see one's environment and oneself from both inside and outside. In order to endure the sorrow from any cause, to put up with a prosaic social life and the conventional linear clock notion of time, Woolf advocates that one should let oneself be absorbed by some form of art. On Monday, October 25, 1920, she notes in her diary that she sometimes finds life heart-rending and this sucks her life energy away and makes her feel weak and depressed. And she wonders if she can bear such a life till the end of her life journey. In order to cope with these feelings, she engages herself with a form of art, writing, and gets her energy from it. Writing soothes her, changes her mood and leads her to see that her concerns are not so important. The act of creativity revitalizes her and takes her back to the rhythm of life:

[Life is] like a little strip of pavement over an abyss. I look down; I feel giddy; I wonder how I am ever to walk to end. [...] Here I sit at Richmond, and like a lantern stood in the middle of a field my light goes up in darkness. Melancholy diminishes as I write. [...] I think sometimes, for us in our generation so tragic—no newspaper placard without its shriek of agony from someone. [...] Unhappiness is everywhere; just beyond the door; or stupidity, which is worse. Still I don't pluck the nettle out of me. To write *Jacob's Room* again will revive my fibres, I feel. (Woolf 1954, 1954, 29)

Woolf views art as an inexhaustible source, a diverse range of human activities and,

more importantly, as a vehicle to express and communicate emotions and ideas. She also asserts that art functions as a means for consolation and relief. She writes in her diary on Saturday, July 28, 1934: “Odd how the creative power at once brings the whole universe to order” (Woolf 4 1982: 232). Art operates against and transcends the destructive forces of life, such as death (*Moments of Being* 92). Art provides one with the waves of sensations and through these sensations one has a revelation and relief from pain. She gives evidence for this in her works repeatedly. In *To the Lighthouse*, through Lily's artistic endeavor, Woolf shows that the emptiness caused by the death of Mrs. Ramsay does not remain an open wound when it is reflected through art. The grief is diminished and the mind opens itself to new horizons.

In *The Waves*, after learning of Percival's death, Bernard finds himself stepping into the [National] Art Gallery. There, he thinks that he can recover some mental peace, by allowing himself to be influenced by the artists' minds. He thinks that the best part of being in front of the paintings is that they expand the awareness and the perception of the viewer through the sensations they create in the mind and in the body, which leads one to mitigate one's pain and sorrow. He realizes that art expands and augments his horizon and keeps his mind ceaselessly active and saves him from the boredom of the routine of ordinary life. After spending half an hour in front of the works of art, the deep agony and melancholy that he feels are replaced by feelings which make him strong enough to endure the hardships of life:

Here are pictures [...] Let them lay to rest the incessant activity of the mind's eye [...] so that I may find something unvisual beneath. Mercifully these pictures [...] expand my consciousness [...] I am titillated inordinately by some splendor; the ruffled crimson against the green lining [...] Arrows of sensation strike from my spine, but without order. (*The Waves* 102, 103)

Similar to Bernard, Rhoda seeks a place where she can expose herself to beauty in order to tranquilize the pain caused by Percival's death, and to quiet her mind that is busy with questioning life. She decides to go to an opera. The music and the concept of the opera liberate her from her grief. Her distress dissipates and she is “overflowed” with the feeling of freedom. At the end of the opera, she feels like “a bird” and wants to spend the rest of the afternoon



disregarding any concern:

The sweetness of this content overflowing runs down the walls of my mind, and liberates [...] I will go. I will set aside this afternoon [...] I will fling myself fearlessly into trams, into omnibuses. (*The Waves* 107)

The opera Rhoda watches makes her realize that life moves in a circular mode. Experiencing the spiral formation of life carries one to the furthest corners of it like a river that paces through valleys and hills reaching to the sea whose waves strike “the utmost corners of the earth” (*The Waves* 108).

For Neville, Percival's death is also hard to accept. Thinking that there will be no connection to Percival any more makes him suffer from great agony and bitterness. He regards poetry to be a form of communication with missing ones so with Percival. This thought relieves him: “the poem, I think, is only your [Percival's] voice speaking [...] That is what consoles me for the lack of many things.” Neville considers a library to be a good place for plunging oneself into the books and for paying attention to the opinions of many writers and poets who “whisper their words and phrases into one's ears” (*The Waves* 119). The art of poetry creates mental depth and richness in perception. The meaning of particular poems is so profound that it is like trying to see something in the ocean such as a bunch of seaweed or to experience a sudden squelch of a wave. Poetry requires being patient and continuous attention. It is like listening to the sound of silence or trying to hear the delicate “foot-steps of a spider on a leaf.” Reading poetry means to dive into one's mind deeper and deeper and coming up to surface with “what is fished”:

I go to the bookcase. If I choose, I read half a page of anything. I need not speak. But I listen. I am marvelously on the alert. Certainly, one cannot read this poem without effort [...] Nothing is to be rejected in fear or horror. The poet who has written this page (what I read with people talking) has withdrawn. There are no commas or semi-colons. The lines do not run in convenient lengths. Much is sheer nonsense. One must be sceptical, but throw caution to the winds and when the door opens accept absolutely. Also sometimes weep; also cut away ruthlessly with a slice of the blade soot, bark, hard accretions of all sorts. And so (while they talk) let down one's net deeper and deeper and gently draw in and bring to the surface what he said and she said and make poetry. (*The Waves* 131, 132)

In her essay, “Life and the Novelist,” Woolf scans the relationship between life and art

through a novelist. She states that the relationship between a novelist and life is very intense because the novelist is someone who is wide-open to what life brings, which is covered by different disciplines and exercises. This makes the novelist's task challenging because s/he is exposed to and receives many impressions, which can be likened to water that runs through the gills of a fish in the ocean. Woolf considers a novelist to be a movie watcher who watches the things and people around, contacting life closely. The novelist's exposure of herself/himself to life is a kind of must. In this way, the novelist grasps the richness that life offers. Nevertheless, at certain times, the novelist should retreat from life and remove back solitude in order to process the "treasure" that s/he obtained from life (Woolf 4 1994: 400-405).

During the process of creating a work of art in isolation with concentration, the artist has an opportunity to get rid of clichés and to create something authentic. At these moments of creation, there are illuminations and little daily miracles that strike the mind of an artist unexpectedly. In the midst of chaos some images appear, such as "moving clouds and shaking leaves." Then, the mind comes into work "hurling, like a spring bursts out." At the end of this process, the mind comes up with a revelation such as a spring spraying out (*To the Lighthouse* 214-216). Woolf rejects the explanations about life and the universe which privilege a particular view and give themselves "an air of pure objectivity". Both her diary entries and her works, particularly *The Waves*, reveal Woolf's skepticism.

In 1930s, Sir James Jeans<sup>18</sup> and his book, *The Universe around Us and The Mysterious Universe* (1930) were very popular. He was giving lectures and his talks were broadcasted in BBC. Jeans claimed that "the universe was formed by a creator-mathematician" (*The Mysterious Universe* 176; quoted in Holly Henry, 93-96). Yet, Woolf disagrees with Sir James Jeans' explanation about the universe because from his point of view there is a creator who is

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<sup>18</sup> "Sir James Jeans, in full Sir James Hopwood Jeans was born on Sept. 11, 1877, London and died on Sept. 16, 1946, Dorking, Surrey. He is an physicist and mathematician who was the first to propose that matter is continuously created throughout the universe. He made other innovations in astronomical theory but is perhaps best known as a writer of popular books about astronomy." (Encyclopedia Britannica).

outside time and space and created everything with a mathematical precision. In opposition to the outside mathematician-creator Jeans evokes, Woolf suggests “a decentered aesthetic practice that invariably inserts the artist, writer or scientist within the frame of their own narratives” (Henry 2003, 98). In *The Waves*, she considers “a whole universe” to be “unconfined” (196) and demonstrates an attempt to move away from a structured point of view of the universe. She asserts that material phenomena always exceed or resist any fixation.

Woolf also postulates that different forms of art have different “destinies.” Poets are generally treated like “scapegoats” and “they are chained to the rocks” since they express themselves verbally, whereas painters stay in the realm of “silence and sublimity.” In *The Waves*, Woolf compares the lives of poets with painters' through Bernard while he is sitting in the Italian room in front of a painting of Titian<sup>19</sup> at the National gallery. He thinks that painters' life is relatively easier and less complicated because what they say they say in silence:

I doubt that Titian ever felt this rat gnaw. Painters live lives of methodical absorption, adding stroke to stroke. They are not like poets – scapegoats; they are not chained to the rock. Hence the silence, the sublimity. (103)

In her essay “Dreams and Realities,” Woolf analyzes why poets are treated like “scapegoats” by referring to Walter de la Mare<sup>20</sup>. She views poets to be the pioneers of humanity with their extra-ordinary mind-sets and attitudes towards life, which makes them special. She also considers them to be ones who awaken while the world slumbers and inspire us with a hope of something “that we can neither hear nor see” (Woolf 2 1987: 253). In “The intellectual Imagination,” she asserts that, having both the power of imagination and intellect, they,

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<sup>19</sup> “Tiziano Vecelli or Tiziano Vecellio - c. 1488/1490 – 27 August 1576 - known in English as Titian was an Italian painter, the most important member of the 16th-century Venetian school. He was born in Pieve di Cadore, near Belluno (in Veneto), in the Republic of Venice. During his lifetime he was often called *da Cadore*, taken from the place of his birth. Recognized by his contemporaries as “The Sun Amidst Small Stars”, Titian was one of the most versatile of Italian painters, equally adept with portraits, landscape backgrounds, and mythological and religious subjects. His painting methods, particularly in the application and use of color, would exercise a profound influence not only on painters of the Italian Renaissance, but on future generations of Western art.” (Fossi 1994)

<sup>20</sup> “Walter de la Mare, in full Walter John de la Mare, was born on April 25, 1873, in Charlton, Kent, England and died on June 22, 1956, Twickenham, Middlesex. He is a British poet and novelist with an unusual power to evoke the ghostly, evanescent moments in life. His anthology *Come Hither* (1923) is often held to be one of the best and most original in the language.” Encyclopedia Britannica

particularly the greatest poets, are able to cope with both the substantial and unsubstantial sides of life (Woolf 3 1988: 134).

In “A Letter to a Young Poet” published in *The Death of the Moth And Other Essays* (1965), Woolf analyzes the view which claims that art in general, but particularly poetry, is dead. According to this view, there is no interrelationship between science poetry and “there is no poetry in motor cars and wireless” (188). In her attempt to give an answer to this view, Woolf has a close look at the art of writing through the significant names in English Literature such as “Chaucer, Shakespeare, Dryden, Pope, Tennyson,” connecting them to the contemporary writers and poets. Through this close look, she concludes that a poet is someone who requires respect and s/he should “treat [herself/himself] with respect” because a poet is a person who is “an immensely ancient, complex, and continuous character” (Woolf 1965, 181). Writers and poets are inventors and discoverers and their domain is life itself. Poetry finds its roots in authenticity /genuineness and the poet deals with “reality on one side” and “beauty on the other,” arising imagination and feeding the intellect. A poet is an exceptional and courageous person because s/he dares to describe a world that is extraordinary to common eyes and a self who rejects limitations implemented by the society, but it flows with the swing of life. This is the self “that Wordsworth, Keats, and Shelley have described.” (Woolf 1965, 182-187). Woolf sums up her view addressing to a young poet:

All you need now is to stand at the window and let your rhythmical sense open and shut, open and shut, boldly and freely, until one thing melts in another, until the taxis are dancing with the daffodils, until a whole has been made from all these separate fragments. [...] That perhaps is your task—to find the relation between things that seem incompatible yet have a mysterious affinity, to absorb every experience that comes to your way fearlessly and saturate it completely so that your poem is a whole, [...] to rethink human life into poetry and so give us [...] in a poet's way— this is what we look to you to do now. (Woolf 1965, 188, 189)

In “How it Strikes Contemporary,” continues to discuss what makes art, particularly literature, special is that it helps us to question our existing view and makes us develop insights and enrich our perspectives and enlarge our horizon. It prompts all our senses, leading us to

experience all sorts of different feelings, ranging from exhilaration to the depth of misery. More importantly, it functions to carry us to the present and keeps us there (Woolf 3 1988, 358). In Woolf's view, as she indicates in "The Narrow Bridge of Art," the most artful and unsubstantial aspects of life find their genuine place in literature, particularly in poetry. For the artist's mind everything is in everything else and it wishes to verify everything; thus, it refuses to accept anything simply as it is. This questioning condition of mind brings about refreshment of thoughts and inspiration (Woolf 1958, 16, 17).

An artist's mind is not occupied by only his/her personal life, but by that of every human being. The artist is the one who travels fearlessly through "tortuous subtle labyrinths" of life. Artists embrace a different attitude so that they may once more stand easily and naturally in a position where their powers have full play upon important things. It is when a book strikes us as the result of this attitude rather than its beauty or its brilliancy that we know that it has in it the seeds of an enduring existence ("The Narrow Bridge of Art," 20-23). On September 18, 1927, Woolf writes upon the death of her writer friend Katherine Mansfield in "A Terribly Sensitive Mind." In this essay, she emphasizes how an artist's mind is attentive, tender and how it picks up notes everything and turns it into a form of art – "writing" (Woolf 1958, 73, 74).

While praising art, literature and artist, Woolf is conscious of the challenges and dilemmas of the process of creation. She portrays particularly her main characters as the ones who have an artist's mind and attitude. In *The Waves*, Bernard carries a "pocket-book" in order to make notes for his stories (162). Orlando writes forty-seven plays, histories, romances and poems; some in prose some in verse, some in French, some in Italian (*Orlando* 54). Through Bernard and Orlando, Woolf shows the perplexities of the process of creation. She relates it to "passing through the gates of death and encountering the flames of hell" (*Orlando* 52). She describes literature to be something "wild as the wind, hot as fire, swift as lightning; something errant, incalculable, abrupt, and behold" (*Orlando* 194, 195). On the other hand, she affirms that it is so precious that "all the gold in Peru would not buy the treasure of well-turned line"

(*Orlando* 53). She notes that all sorts of art, literature and manuscripts including Spenser's, Shakespeare's and Milton's enlighten the way of their readers in their attempt to understand and to explain what life is (*Orlando* 197). Woolf relates the relation between art and life to a secret transaction between two voices. It is like an intimate relationship of lovers or like "the old crooning song of the woods" (*Orlando* 225). She concludes that there is a reciprocal interaction between art and life; one is made into the other (*Orlando* 198).

As is mentioned in "Reading," similar to life, art flows through centuries and connects all times and people together. Behind a work of art, such as a book, lies a stream which runs through a vast realm and links everything to everything else, reaching to the most distant skyline. While reading a contemporary writer, one can communicate with "Keats and Pope [...] and then Dryden and Sir Thomas Browne" (Woolf 3 1988, 142). Additionally, art embraces life with all its layers and connects even simple people to art and artist. For instance, "a gardener" who is described as a character in a book takes his place "by the side of the poets" (Woolf 3 1988, 142).

In conclusion, from Woolf's point of view, art is a sphere where the mind exposes itself to life and lets one explore what life and self really are. Art also allows one to flow with the rhythm of life. Art is an act of expressing feelings, thoughts, and observations and it stimulates thoughts, emotions, beliefs, or ideas through the senses. Through art, it is always possible to reach a new understanding because art leads one to transformation. In her works, particularly in *The Waves*, she explicitly illustrates that art functions as a technique that consoles one who suffers from innumerable pestering feelings. I will close this section and this chapter with a remark of Woolf from her essay "Dreams and Realities," in which she considers "the merit of art, particularly poetry" to be above and beyond any appreciation:

The poem ends in silence and hush, but strangely, the sound goes on. The quiet has become full of tremors and vibrations; we are still listening long after the words are done (Woolf 2 1987, 254).

## **Chapter Five: Conclusion**

I have arrived at the end of my discussion. As I mentioned at the beginning of my dissertation, I have tried to show the relation between the notion of time and the epistemological and ontological notions in Virginia Woolf's and Leslie Scalapino's works by asking the following questions: Is there any relationship between the conventional linear notion of time and conventional epistemological and ontological notions? What if time is considered to be *always the present* rather than being linear and chronological? When time is considered to be *always the present*, how does the mind function and how are the notions of perception, experience, truth and truth-claims, reality and self affected? In other words, how are epistemological and ontological notions influenced by the notion of time? Finally, is it possible to avoid replicating and reproducing the patriarchal and conventional epistemological and ontological notions through the present-centered notion of time and, instead of them, is it possible to suggest alternative notions? Through my study, I have come to the conclusion that the notion of time is one of inseparable indicators for examining epistemological and ontological notions. Put another way, epistemological and ontological notions operate in a time-specific framework. That is, the notion of time has a dynamic role to comprehend and create reality, truth and self.

As has been practiced for centuries, patriarchal and conventional epistemology and ontology and the master narratives generating them are based on a linear notion of time. In the linear notion of time, time is divided into past, present and future, suggesting temporal and spatial unity. The notion of temporal and spatial unity brings together epistemological and ontological notions which are based on generalization, a fixed and objective notion of rationality, logic and reality; an impartial, coherent and universally true notion of knowledge, and a unified, coherent and authoritarian notion of self. Due to these characteristics, patriarchal and conventional epistemological and ontological notions remain one of the central obstacles

to the new and change because they automatically exclude them and reproduce themselves. Conventional epistemology is designed to struggle for and hold on to power and its parallel ontology constructs individuals who serve this purpose and position themselves accordingly. Yet, these epistemological and ontological notions are no longer adequate or valid, especially when the present-centered notion of time is taken into consideration because the present-centered time designates continuous change in life and, in contrast to the conventional epistemological and ontological notions, attempts to explore shifts away from patriarchal and conventional paradigms

In this context, it has been rewarding to focus on the works of two innovative and experimental women writers, Virginia Woolf and Leslie Scalapino, who challenge the conventional linear notion of time, emphasizing that there is a connection between the notion of time and epistemological and ontological notions. Both Woolf and Scalapino claim that the notion of time is more complex than a linear notion of time allows. Similarly, being related to the notion of time, the epistemological and ontological notions are also more complex than convention suggests they are. By transforming the notion of time, Woolf and Scalapino suggest an epistemology in which knowledge is partial, uncertain, multiple and can never be neutral or objective, and they suggest an ontology in which self is multifold and remains outside of any hierarchical order. Scalapino's and Woolf's works serve to rescue the hidden or invisible reality and silenced voices from the authoritarian forms of convention.

My thesis is based on the negation of the conventional concept of time and its impacts on epistemological and ontological notions in Scalapino's and Woolf's works. I have devoted two chapters to each writer in order to show various aspects of this issue in their works. To remain true to the scope of this study, in Chapters One and Two, I have looked at Scalapino's works and in Chapters Three and Four, I have examined Woolf's works in order to trace the writers' criticism of the conventional notion of time and patriarchal and conventional epistemology and ontology. In the conclusion chapter, I will focus on the corresponding and



non-corresponding points that the two writers highlighted in this matter. The objective is to show Woolf's and Scalapino's accomplishment in pointing out the necessity to abandon the linear notion of time together with patriarchal and conventional epistemological and ontological notions, also in suggesting new notions that should be embraced in their place. I aim to show that their approaches open new gates to new epistemologies and ontologies.

By focusing on Woolf's and Scalapino's works, I have taken into account almost a century's literary content and criticism and have tried to explore, despite some differences which I will state in couple of paragraphs later, how these two writers and their methods of inquiry intersect and overlap quite closely, both challenging the dominant and hierarchical cultural and social practices of time, of reality and of self. While I was working on syntactically and semantically difficult texts by Woolf and Scalapino, which for many readers could be obscure, I employed "a text-oriented approach," which "privileges the individual voice" and "lets the individual texts breathe" (Hotz-Davies 2001, 25, 26). Indeed, this is what particularly Woolf wished for. She insisted that her works speak for themselves (Harris 2013, 124). Throughout my analysis, I have been fed by the opinions of different critics, philosophers and the scientists. Yet my most valuable resources have been the writers' own works, their literary and poetic theories and views, presented in the form of published interviews, letters, autobiographies, essays, novels and poetry. During my research, I have seen that literature and science are not separate from Woolf's and Scalapino's works. On the contrary, they employed science as vital elements of their works. The writers were both interested in the developments in physics and the ideas presented, particularly the quantum physics.

Their works are evidence that Woolf and Scalapino developed their point of views and the present-centered notion of time not only through their scrutiny of philosophical and scientific texts, but also by focusing on their personal experience, which allowed them to show how new and energetic transformations are possible and how to develop their own voice. This is a voice that refuses and avoids employing patriarchal and conventional rationality, rhetoric

and argumentative strategies. Both Woolf and Scalapino attempt to transform this rationality and rhetoric by means of poetic language, illustrative examples, allegories, fictional images and refutations, accompanied by their passionate sensibility. They aim toward a new kind of writing, seeking entirely new forms of epistemological and ontological thinking. For this, they both consider the present-centered notion of time to be a significant tool.

Although Woolf and Scalapino have many points in common in their notion of time, there are some noncorresponding points in the elements and methodologies they employ. First, I will summarize the corresponding points in their notion of time. As has been mentioned repeatedly in this work, both Woolf and Scalapino put the present in the center of their point of views and writing. They reject any mystical or religious prior foundation as a basis for the notion of time. Instead, their notion of time is comparable with the notion of time discussed by the theory of relativity and the philosophy of quantum physics, which claim that time does not exist in the classical way the convention suggests it does. Both Woolf and Scalapino claim that the past is in the present and the present is in the past, that is, they continually commingle. The present and the past are so interconnected that they cannot be separated or considered independently, making the divisions in time nonsense. They assert that what makes the past past and the future future is the notion of present. This makes time always the present, what Gertrude Stein called the “continuous present.” In Woolf’s and Scalapino’s notion of time, the present is composed of moments and being composed of moments makes the present many presents which are interrelated with each other.

In terms of noncorresponding points, I would like to show them by reiterating my earlier remarks in the “Woolf” chapter. In Woolf’s point of view, life is made up of “extraordinary” and “ordinary” moments. She repeatedly emphasizes the significance of exceptional moments and considers them to be “moments of being.” The rest consists of “the rapid passages of events” and “moments of non-being.” During the moments of non-being, time is felt to be heavy and slow like the steps of an “elephant.” However, during the moments of being, time goes so

fast that one feels like a “gnat-winged fly.” “Exceptional moments” function as moments of revelation because they stimulate insight and carry one to such a level that one can reach new realizations. Momentary revelations function to enable one to realize new aspects of reality, self and, in general, life (Woolf 2002, 82-86).

Woolf argues that the moments accumulate and comprise our notion of life and we get our impressions and know our feelings through moments. She conceives the moment as a unit of experienced time rooted in the present of the world of existence. She perceives the present moment like an impressionist painter and lets the moment reveal itself through close inspection. She considers the present moment to be empty and a potentially boundless source for the inspiration of different visions of life. Her notion of the present is not like the present which is separate and confined in a structure, like a film frame that is obtained through a snapshot because in the present as such one feels only that specific present, but nothing else. For her, this kind of notion of the present deforms the fullness of life. Instead, she prefers the notion of *continuous present* because it provides depth in which all times are mingled and flow simultaneously. She relates the notion of time to the rhythm of life. She asserts that the rhythm of life reveals itself in the present and both life and the present are in flux.

Woolf's notion of present serves as a platform and everything related to the past is affected by the present. The “strong emotions” function as a bridge between the past and the present. She is critical of the conventional notion of time since in this view the past exists separately from the present. What the past consists of is considered to be independent from the present and objective as if it were sealed off from any interpretation or modification. Yet, when the past is looked at from the present, the present provides different perspectives. That is, the continuous communication with the past from the present brings together the urge to alter the perspective imposed by the convention. Woolf argues that the notion of the past and in general the notion of time and what is attributed to them are subjective rather than objective and unilateral (Woolf 2002, 108). In this regard, Woolf's approach to time approximates the notion

of “presentism” which means the past cannot be dealt with and understood properly independently from the present.

On the other hand, in Scalapino's notion of time, moments make the present exceptional. She suggests that each and every moment is unique and it cannot be constructed before. This makes the present to be independent and free from control mechanisms. In this respect, the moment is always a new start. Due to this characteristic of the moment, one should consistently be aware of the moment in terms of what the moment brings. This is conceivable through “being *always* [at] now,” questioning, realizing and trying to understand what is happening at that very moment. From Scalapino’s point of view, “being *always* [at] now” necessitates attention and eradication of what is constructed inside a person by the established canon. The present has no resemblance to the past and it never dies. This makes the present infinite. In her notion of time everything happens right now and at the same time. That is, everything happens at once. Any notion of fixation in time is an absolute illusion. Time is cyclical like the cyclical occurrences in nature. The moment is a vital point and the present and being in the present come before everything else:

One brings ‘events’ ‘shreds’ onto this line so that ‘being in life’ is either past or present or any time [...] Being in present-life occurs early. It occurs ‘before’ anything. There is nothing before it. Present-life ‘now’ is what is ‘early’ – it is in fact utterly free. [...] Present bears no resemblance to the present-past. [...] sensation of happiness then [past] – future – black tulip, / which is breathing – has nothing to do with it being in the future [...] some life – in –present– ‘causes’ – spring? – black tulip, which is / breathing – on one’s one-wheel cycle – in – future-past –the forest / zither. (Scalapino 2003, 52 and 82-83)

Woolf's and Scalapino's multifold present-centered notion of time obliterates general conventional laws because every moment provides one with an opportunity to see things in a continually changing composition. This gives one the opportunity and independence to create and introduce alternative knowledge and states of being, that is, to access a new epistemological and ontological awareness. Both Woolf and Scalapino seek new epistemology and ontology because they are dissatisfied with the patriarchal and conventional paradigm. Woolf's works

emerge from the time period where verbal and textual authority representing patriarchal values and ideology is marked by the Newtonian chronological, linear and fixed notion of time, accompanied by a fixed and hard notion of fact and self. The period is also defined by two World Wars driven by imperialistic deeds and colonialism. The picture of the world created in her time reinforced Woolf's position against patriarchal and conventional notions. However, it also provided her with significant insights into epistemological as well as ontological issues and led her to develop her own concepts.

On the other hand, Scalapino's works emerge from the period which is marked by the cold war, racial discrimination and a new form of imperialism, causing new wars in different parts of the world. Her works also emerge from growing up in different cultures and travelling. As she explains in the interview with Anne Brewster which was conducted after the first Gulf War, her view and writing were influenced by all these. Another important influence in her point of view and writing was “reading, history [particularly] World War II, [and] Japanese literature.” Scalapino notes that she does not believe in “a collective consciousness” or “overriding consciousness” which controls and decides about everything. Instead, she believes in “individual perspectives which creates multiplicity.” For her, writing “as a discovery of time and event” creates “various orifices” for these “particular and individual and impermanent” perspectives:

What influenced me most as a kid growing up was reading, history, say of World War II or the history of the Long March in China. My sense was of events as a sweeping panel. I'm also very much attracted to Japanese literature, such as the *Tale of Genji*; the sense of that work, described visually, comparable to the long, horizontal or vertical scrolls, continuous scenes where episodes are changing by one another. The consciousness that is occurring in my writing is not an overriding consciousness that determines the entire frame, but rather goes throughout and is multiple throughout. (Brewster 2004, n.pag.)

In the same interview, Scalapino mentions that she was deeply troubled by these events and crises. Instead of war, she suggests that human beings should find some other ways to deal with crises, noting that she is trying “to discover in writing some other level of transformation and of change that can be effective.” For this, she takes images of public events and turns them

into “visually distorted or extreme” images as if they were something beyond “a realistic representational description.” By violating genres and forms, Scalapino attempts to find and create a platform through which she endeavors to show “what's going on out there that is different from what we've created before.” That is, she tries to show from a different perspective what life is and was like in the land before and during its invasion. She remarks that both *Defoe* and *The Front Matter, Dead Souls* emerged from her attempt to find and create a platform to show the difference between what was really happening and what we are told about the events during the first Gulf War through the conventional media which represent conventional epistemology and ontology (Brewster 2004, n.pag.).

My study as a whole has also attempted to show how Woolf and Scalapino do not only erase the distinctions in time, but they also blur and erase boundaries in other fields. Both of them combine factual and fictional elements in their writings. They blur the boundaries between fact and fiction. Their works are a *fusion* of facts and fiction. The reason why Woolf and Scalapino employ the fusion of facts and fiction is, as Miriam Wallraven comments, to develop a new narrative strategy and a new discourse as an alternative to the patriarchal and conventional ones:

*A fusion of theoretical discourse and fiction as both a contrast to and as a continuation of combining theory and fiction results in a new style of writing in which existing discourses are often altered almost past recognition, while innovative textual strategies transform style (Woolf's essays) and approaches to language [Scalapino's writing]. (Wallraven 2007, 266, emphasis in original)*

Through the *fusion* of facts and fiction, Woolf and Scalapino question the approach which considers fiction to be illusion and fact to be truth and they show that this approach needs reviewing. The new discourse they generate through the *fusion* enables them to investigate anything considered to be absolute. It also allows them to explore the issues in their multivocality. Through their experimental writing process and combining fact with fiction, Woolf and Scalapino wipe out binary oppositions, demanding and underpinning the assemblage of inner and outer world. They show that they coexist and are interrelated. They both associate

and merge entities which are considered separate in patriarchal and conventional epistemology and ontology. They affiliate inner and outer, private and public and subject and object. In *Three Guinias*, Woolf explicitly notes that “public and private worlds are inseparably connected” (270).

Scalapino also claims that normally there is no distinction between interior and exterior, subject and object and private and public, but we create those distinctions ourselves. She considers the internal world and the external world to be coexisting simultaneously in a continuously interrelated fashion. Their interconnectedness and dependentness on each other makes the boundaries in between arbitrary. In this area, her works cover a wide scale, showing interconnectedness and interdependency among extensively disparate people and things. She simultaneously dissolves social categories and constructions, rejecting the restricted or rigid formation of any one form of separation in them. She continually disrupts time frames, themes and events by intermingling subject and object, exterior and interior and private and public in order to create an unresolved and continuous communication among these opposites:

Therefore my thought, and the events which are outside me—and really are me—and the world, are the same. (Scalapino 1990, 70)

Woolf and Scalapino audaciously question the hierarchical dichotomy and constructed boundaries and emphasize that experience, perception, reality and the notion of self cannot be restricted and dictated. Woolf achieves this through her impressionistic and post-impressionistic approaches, and Scalapino through a “chiaroscuro” effect (Smith 2001, 94). They both claim that not everything is as it is seen or shown, and that there is not a clear boundary between concrete and abstract. In most cases one is in the other. What Woolf aims at in *The Waves* and Scalapino in *Way* is to create a qualitative change in the mind-set of readers and make them realize there is no a real boundary.

Based on their approach to time and the relation between internal-external, inner-outer, subject-object and private-public, Woolf and Scalapino set out to rewrite patriarchal and

conventional history from a different point of view. For them, there is no original past or history. There is no settled history that can claim to represent the past because the past exists through the present. History is not of “Great Men” as patriarchal epistemology claims. The reliability of patriarchal history and historians is compromised including basic and foundational notions of reality and truth. As is mentioned before, in *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf emphasizes the need for a space outside of patriarchy, and in *Three Guineas*, she ridicules and questions the patriarchal notion of fact and truth-claims. In *Three Guineas*, she dismantles patriarchal thinking and master narratives and retells history.

Scalapino explains her opinions about history in *How Phenomena Appear to Unfold*, which, aims “to void” conventional historical events “actively” because there is no history as it is claimed (21). There is no cause and effect relationship between past and present because all times are together. An event is not a solid and isolated entity, and it is not limited to a certain period of time. It cannot be subject to so-called objective commentary. An event and its commentary are relative and all that is known about an event is known in the present. That is, the perception and understanding of a past event taking place in conventional history is disputable and prone to change. In *New Time*, she remarks that the conventional narration of history requires “scrutiny” (12):

The writing is not narrative 'telling' the story or stories of events.

Rather, it is movements, a *movement* that was a 'real' event where all is fictional as phenomena. So history is scrutinized by phenomena, observed as minute, particular —and thus 'fictive' as haphazard moving.

Biography that is not 'completed/whole' 'a life', poems, fictions, not-illustrating, are not an early form, undeveloped narrative, but as mere movements are subject to scrutiny by phenomena, are 'the life's' construction *per se*.

The motions of a small poem, of a sole event, of whatever nature — social repression, yet as movement (as written) — are not events compared to each other or 'event'ually showing a whole construction of themselves (even) — not imposed, but sole movements 'fictive.' (*How Phenomena Appear to Unfold* 12, emphasis in original)

Being against any sort of authority and hierarchy, both Woolf and Scalapino avoid hierarchical writing strategies and linear narratives. They create alternative anti-hierarchical multi-vocal writing strategies in which everything aligns alongside everything else. Adopting



non-hierarchical and non-linear writing strategies, they refuse a central “I.” Instead, they amalgamate and consolidate different voices. Particularly Scalapino's writing strategy coalesces different voices from different social and cultural backgrounds, whereas Woolf's writing tends to draw on different voices from more or less the same intellectual and social background. They consider writing to be a must activity and a tool to keep the mind in the present, to understand life and reveal and contact hidden reality and true-self.

Woolf's fiction avoids discrete categorizations (Caughie 1991, 20). Her works are made up of many concise sections, fragments, each of which describes a single scene, or a slice of life in which Woolf employs a vast series of moments, creating cohesion by moving from one fragment to another. The uniqueness of Woolf's writing relies on her always being extremely sensitive to the clandestine, subtle and fine quality of the moment which, for her, enables one to realize the intrinsic meaning of life and to express it. She calls her writing technique scene-making. The process of scene-making starts with the special moments of sensitivity and responsiveness. The moments of sensitivity and responsiveness carry her to the depth of “the hidden patterns of life,” through which she marks a point to work on later. Then, the point she has made surfaces in her mind as an “arranged and representative” scene (*Moments of Being* 138). Through the scene-making technique, Woolf takes a revolutionary step because, in this way, she dismisses chronological order in narration. In scene-making, the scenes fluctuate from one to another and create a wavelike effect. Like a wave itself, Woolf's works have the quality of fluidity and cyclicity.

Scalapino's writing is rhetorically more difficult, repellent and has a self-enclosed quality due to the verbal opacity caused by her special way of rendering of words. Her writing is innovative at the same time. She considers writing to be a process which is an explicit experience of displaying the transformation of mind through the infinite series of successive moments. She associates her cyclical notion of time with her notion of writing which is based on serial thinking. She reflects her concept of serial thinking through a series of simple

sentences, generating cyclical or serial writing style. In this technique, nothing really repeats itself, but flows because serial thinking is based on a present-centered notion of time. For her, serial thinking means watching and reflecting upon the motions and the formation of the mind at that moment. Serial thinking erases any fixity and creates an alternative mode of perception and reflection. She asserts that anyone who applies this technique can see the whole current world changing in every instant (*How Phenomena Appear to Unfold* 30). Since change is intrinsic to every and any entity, the same schema is not reproduced even in what appears to be repetition: “The same scene will not be repeated” (*How Phenomena Appear to Unfold* 31). On the contrary, the potential for change is limitless, making it possible for any individual, any occurrence in nature, any social behavior, or any event to go through change in every moment.

Another aspect of Scalapino's writing is that, as she explains in *The Return of Painting*, she looks at actions from the “irregular or odd-angle views” which is similar to the comic book: “The following is simply vision” (63). Through the comic book notion, as Hinton remarks, Scalapino shows how we are all spectators and eager to partake in cultural narratives and how these narratives makes us alien to ourselves. She achieves her aim by “compressing time as motion”:

In *The Return of Painting*, each observable moment of 'reality' operates like a linguistically shimmering act. The words are the only 'real' of 'realism'. Just as one reads a comic book, always looking at the shiny pictorial surface but engaged in a forward motion, scanning each line and each page, one can read *The Return of Painting* – not for great pictorial truths but for what Hejinian calls 'astonishment', what Scalapino calls, perhaps 'bliss'. (“The Return of Nostalgia,” 249)

In the interview with Brewster, Scalapino notes that the form of the comic book provides a platform in which hierarchies are reduced. In this context, she finds ancient Persian works and Japanese paintings fascinating because in ancient Persian works, the text is painted into the picture which is called miniatures and in Japanese paintings, the text appears as part of long scrolls. In this way, like in the cartoon, the text becomes a part of what is seen; it is not extricated or separated from it. A comic book is made up of squares and panels which are not hierarchical and are not strictly linear. There are many squares on a page and these squares follow each other, providing

one with an opportunity to see all them at once (Brewster 2004, n.pag.). In *How Phenomena Appear to Unfold*, she notes that her work *The Pearl* “is in the form of a comic book as writing. Each line or paragraph is a frame, so that each action occurs in the moment. [...] It 'functions' as does a comic book – in being read” (22).

It is obvious that both Woolf's, but particularly, Scalapino's writing is challenging. Their language is fragmented. They consider language to be multidimensional and use it both to articulate the dominant patriarchal and conventional ideology and to unravel it. Their language is composed of the elements of paradox, irony, contradiction and ambiguity. They suggest and imply rather than make clearly explicit. They show rather than judge. As a result, connotations play a great part in their writings. These linguistic qualities prevent us from fully comprehending Woolf's, but especially Scalapino's works. Scalapino's language seems to create the most challenging form of writing in the last few decades because:

Scalapino's lexicon, in any case, bars the vocabulary of becoming, a concept in time's chains. [...] Yet the sentences are not just notable for the gnarl of a logic keener and more subtle than usual. [without] a certain rhythmical sense. Haywire sentences, then, totally stripped of melody, as of almost every other charm except (and what major exceptions) metaphor, rhythm, and eccentricity. (Bedient 2000, 17, 18)

Martin Harrison similarly notes that Scalapino's lexicon prevents her works from being fully communicative because it makes the text “unparaphrasable.” Yet, at the same time, the same qualities create “textual autonomy” in which “contradiction and ambiguity” become significant because they prevent the text from “being reduced” to any convention (Harrison 2010, 2). The text communicates much more richly with its subtle qualities provided by paradox, irony, contradictions and ambiguity. One of the best ways of communicating with the text is to keep re-reading it. Even in this way, the challenge in communicating with the text does not resolve itself because the text “speaks to itself - it resonates internally through its contradictions and ambiguities - long before it speaks to us” as it is related to the writer's “notating experience” (Harrison 2010, 2). What the poet/writer manages to do is to shape “shapeless materials [...] into a singular formal (experiential) shape” (Harrison 2010, 2). In this

sense, a fine poem/text is not interested in making propositions or suggesting conclusions (Harrison 2010, 2).

Instead of seeking an exact meaning, as Harrison comments, the reader is better advised to trace “the play of images and ambiguous meaning associated with them” and consider the poem/text to be “interwoven stories and images which each reader” shares and participates (Harrison 2010, 3). Sharing and participating means to engage “with a variety of meanings, associations, and affects,” a process which provides a true relationship between the reader and the poet. However, this imaginative and experimental sharing and participating of the reader is possible only partially because it is generally hard to know what the poem/text says due to its paradoxical, ironical, contradictory and ambiguous character. Harrison concludes that “Even in a poem [or a text] where the unreadability of a dream is a key theme, transparent communication is at the heart of the poetic matter” (Harrison 2010, 3).

Given the explanations above, reading any text such as Woolf's, but particularly Scalapino's, requires a perception which has potentially innumerable angles. This multiplicity in perception liberates both the poem/text from being a fixed object and the reader from being fixed-minded. Multiplicity in the perceiving and reading the poem from many different angles invites the reader to flow with the text and experience a kind of topographical wholeness in which the poem/text is not seen through one or two angles, but many. As Harrison points out, in relation to Scalapino's *New Time*:

For Scalapino, it is as if she is involved in a rapid, fragmentary annotation of that moment in the single level dimension that recorded language permits. In this regard, the writing seems to trace less a pattern of ambiguity than a random pattern of less and more meaning, of less and more intention, of passages brought fully into consciousness and passages left half thought and partly recognized. Again, proximity and scale are important to consider here: the poem reads very intimately, very upfront. In a curious way there is a kind of “ambiguity” in all of this, but it is one to do with the other meanings of ambiguous – the meanings which etymologically connect the word with ambience, with ambit, with going about and round. Semantic equivocation is less important than this sense that we are witnesses to a composition in the process of its performance and, in this regard, are witnessing a thought occurring in a sort of hyper-real time phase. Each verse paragraph seems to offer a fragment or trace of ambience made of samples of perceptions, samples of the scene, samples of the man's thoughts, samples of the poet's: in structuring the beginnings of a complex event, a series of microscopic increments compose the action. (Harrison 2010, 8)

Through their writing strategies and language, Woolf and Scalapino render their own unconventional view of epistemology and ontology. Their work enacts and encourages new experiments. At the bottom of their epistemology and ontology lies a curious mind which questions indefatigably any existing notions. The questioning mode is the key to Woolf's and Scalapino's point of view. They both urge the necessity of perpetually reverberating questions in order to pursue hidden and alternative reality and self. As Aimee Gasston comments, they commit themselves to questioning rather than suggesting a solution: “there must be the question put” (Gasston 2014, 31).

Woolf's epistemology presents a significant critique of both the empirical, objective and realist epistemology and of the idealist epistemology because her epistemology rejects polarization and any kind of binary oppositions that idealist and objective-realist epistemologies claim. According to idealist epistemology, the outside world exists only through our mind, that is, it is mind-based. The objective-realist epistemology proposes that the world stands outside of our experiences and senses. However, Woolf's epistemology suggests the assembly of inside and outside, or subject and object. She also proposes that substantial and unsubstantial, in the sense of lacking material substance and being abstract, realms of life are not separate, but embrace each other. She asserts that the boundaries between them are obscure and permeable. She considers them to be reconcilable rather than to be incompatible.

As analyzed in “Scalapino” chapter in details, Scalapino's point of view is influenced by Madhyamika and Nāgārjuna, according to whom the conventional notion of reality is suspect because all phenomena are empty of substance or essence and because they all exist through an interrelated web of circumstances. There is no phenomenon that holds its meaning or existence in itself. Hence, for them and Scalapino there is no reality, which entails disengaging oneself from all interior, cultural and conventional configurations at every possible moment through “redoing” them. Scalapino's approach to reality reverses the conventional perception of stable

and objective reality, leading to a new notion of reality through which one can develop an alternative mind-set, opening oneself to boundless change (Scalapino 2003, 48, 49).

In Scalapino's view, knowledge exists through a set of relationships between and among entities through language. She attempts to search for different possibilities of reaching and producing knowledge. In her works, as Ann Lauterbach remarks: “reality exists only by example, and is therefore contingent on temporal-spatial contexts” (Lauterbach 1996, 156). She offers and acknowledges different forms of knowledge and fashions of knowing. As Simpson comments, her epistemology offers “free knowing” through “transparent representation of [one's] experience,” which is expressed through various ways of writing, assuming that knowledge is “discursively constructed” and that “there *is* knowledge in poetry” (emphasis in original). In her scrutiny of the relations among knower, knowing and knowledge, Scalapino realizes that “language plays a significant perceptual and conceptual role in the phenomenological situation; language is always representative and constitutive of 'reality'” (Simpson 2000, x-xv).

Similar to Woolf's epistemology, Scalapino's epistemology also is inspired by quantum physics. The evidence is the passage at the beginning *Way* taken from physicist David Bohm's book *Causality & Change in Modern Physics* (1997). Akin to the philosophy of quantum physics, Scalapino's epistemology embodies the notions of impermanency and complementarity. In her epistemology one of the central elements is the notion of flux which is also one of the central points in the philosophy of quantum physics. The notion of flux eradicates any notion of fixedness. Like an analogue to the philosophy of quantum physics, Scalapino *presents* entities as indeterminate, limitless and contingent. She depicts events, perception, experience, mind and reality in their multiplicity and in a continuously fragmented manner. *Her* epistemology wipes out the binary polarity and dualistic thinking which are two major features of conventional epistemology. Instead, similar to the notion of complementarity, she suggests a method of discovering the truth through ideas that are opposed to each other (*The*

*Public World / Syntactically Impermanence* 34).

Scalapino argues that considering experience to be an “exact occurrence” is bewildering since there are only infinite motions in infinite space and time. One should separate oneself continuously from fixed actions. What she suggests is that one should emancipate oneself from experiences in the sense of what the experience dictates because when something is happening, there is always a “disjunct moment outside” (*Zither & Autobiography* 38) with a potential for a new, or genuine experience. For her, genuine experience and *multiple perspective are* significant to be able to access genuine reality.

Woolf's and Scalapino's concepts of epistemology and ontology do not attempt to arrive at a general universal fact, reality or truth, but they suggest multiple notions of fact, reality or truth. Problems of patriarchal and conventional notion of reality, fact, truth and self are not resolved but on the one hand made very clear as problems, as they are developed and controlled by patriarchal mechanisms, and on the other hand shown and emphasized as multifold. Both Woolf and Scalapino reveal patriarchal mechanisms and their view of fact and truth-claim and, at the same time, they dissolve these mechanisms, emphasizing their one-sidedness and restrictions.

Akin to her notion of epistemology, Woolf's notion of ontology is present-centered. The momentary flashes of insight allow one to uncover the characteristics loaded by conventional notions and wrap one like a “thick blanket” (*The Waves* 74). Woolf's notion of self is made up of the flux of permanently changing feelings, thoughts and behavior. The development of self entails a continuous process of overviewing the inner and outer world. The self who is in instant flux is in continuous change. She asserts that the self that society tries to create is superficial. Her notion of self is an “unfinished” story and fragmented. She suggests a kind of *egoless* notion of self which coincides with *the weak* and *the genius* at the same time. Her notion of self continuously seeks ways to liberate itself from conventional values and tries to achieve autonomy within itself and in society.

In Scalapino's concept, self is considered to be a "seeing being" (*Zither & Autobiography* 48, 49). A seeing being is one who disassembles oneself from a "fixed relation to events." Scalapino's ontology empowers a concept of self that is not culturally structured, but it is impermanent. She constantly highlights that there is no "identity" (*The Return of Painting* 12). She considers self to be an "absent marginalia," which erases the notion of identity (*Front Matter, Dead Souls* 3, 11). To show the nullification of identity, one of the methods she employs is to depict the characters in her writing as neutral and flat. As has been analyzed in the "Scalapino" chapter, she also erases the narrators, thus also (her) subjectivity, by suggesting that the subject in the position of observer should be undermined. She remarks that the notion of self is paradoxical because in the final stage it is "illusionary" along with all of our perceptions and sensory faculties (*Objects in the Terrifying Tense/Longing from Taking Place* 8). In her view, self is valid only as "serial" and "multiple" (*The Front Matter* 3).

In order to save the genuine self, Scalapino suggests that one should dislocate oneself continually. That is, one should continually check the cultural and social enforcements (*The Front Matter* 6). This, as she puts it in *The Public World*, requires one to separate oneself from the conventional language. Yet, at the same time one should be "conscious of [this] separation" (12). She asserts that the separation from the conventional language enables one to see events through one's eye. It should not confine itself in a small, static, limited orbit, but move forward and use the opportunity to be reborn with a new moment which offers a new lease on life (*Objects in the Terrifying Tense/Longing from Taking Place* 6). This self refuses to create "other" ("The Cannon," 17, 18). For Scalapino, all these characteristics make the self genuine.

In their works, both Woolf and Scalapino raise the importance of art and artists, particularly poets and poetry. Art, artist and artistic processes and their connection to life are inextricable. They remark that art tries to disclose the fake social construction by not producing clichés, but instead validating the uniqueness of any and every entity and its specific relation to every unique moment. In the interview with Edward Foster, Scalapino states that poets have



something in common:

What [the] poets have in common is a trust in radical form, however achieved, and as a result, their work collectively implies a truly radical politics that does not depend on a transcendent or ulterior authority. The poetry rises from its own necessities and in this way becomes its own “ultimate fact” and so, when it is heard or read, ‘the first of a new series’. (Foster 1994, “Leslie Scalapino,” viii)

They both consider writing to be a work of art about art. They generally combine the elements of writing and other fields of art. Their works have musical qualities with the strong sense of rhythm, pulse, swing and tempo they create. They also develop their works like (portions of) a symphony in terms of the volume and the themes they discuss, which function like the leitmotifs of symphonic work. In addition, especially Woolf's works have the dynamics of a painting. She combines writing and painting by making use of the written words as if she were drawing a picture with a brush in her hand. As Ruth Miller comments, she considers that writing and painting “have much to tell each other” (Miller 1988, 49). In *To the Lighthouse*, she gives colours to words, weaving the writing with painting elements in order to invoke special meanings: “words, like little shaded lights, one red, one blue, one yellow” (Woolf 1992, 119).

Woolf links art to existence and life. For her, life is art itself (*Moments of Being* 85). She explicitly presents this idea in her works, directly infusing art and the artist into the substance of her creation. As Ann Ronchetti comments, Woolf's predominantly autobiographical works serve as her most basic connection between life and art. In *To the Lighthouse*, “the lives, deaths, trials, and tribulations of the Ramsay family are paralleled with Lily Briscoe's endeavors at artistic creation.” While the Ramsays live, Lily paints. The day-to-day life of the Ramsays and their guests are scattered and intertwined with Lily's painting. The two processes, life and artistic creation go together throughout the novel (Ronchetti 2004, 62). An artist and art and life are meshed into each other, implying that life is “like a work of art” (*To the Lighthouse* 161). For Woolf, art, particularly poetry and literature provides a realm for “unhindered” human edifices, offering opportunities and reminding of us our capacity to make different choices in different scopes of life. As Lauterbach remarks, an artist, a poet for instance, is driven by the

likelihood of knowing things in a distinctive and divergent way thus a piece of art or a poem functions as a manifestation of this idea. This transforms artists into an explorers and innovators and makes art a realm of experimentations and innovations. In this context, art is an act of rejecting conventional assumptions of value(s) (Lauterbach 1996, 156, 155).

Similarly, for Scalapino, art, particularly poetry is where conventional and cultural calcifications are invalidated. Through art and poetry, we have an opportunity to see things and ourselves in the temporary present as they are and as we are, situated in juxtaposition. Through her notion of art, she aims to challenge all concepts of tyranny in any form by attempting to liberate the imagination and language from the rigid conventional and cultural frames. To achieve her aim, as Michael Cross remarks in “Leslie Scalapino's *Waking Life*,” she makes both images and language somehow unworkable through complicated and controversial arguments which oscillate between “overamplification and underdetermination”:

As images pass sequentially before the readers’ eyes, one begins habitually to construct a scale or narrative to frame the percussive rupture of this antilandscape. The result is an incredibly intense barrage of detail that begins to visually shape the terrain of this antilandscape as a kind of musical score. As the images pass by, they begin to act more as texture, rhythm, percussive elements, synonymous with trees and rocks and bushes in a visual landscape, and as the eyes pass over the ridge, the reader begins to watch herself reading. (Cross 2014, n.pag.)

Put another way, as Scalapino puts it in *R-hu*, she approximates “disparate images [...] so as to create an antilandscape that no longer ‘refers’ to a recognizable world” (Scalapino 2000, 93). In her view, art enables one to be in the present which provides one with an *awakening* because the present or each moment gives one a chance to free oneself from the continuum of conventional sequences, making authentic experience possible. In this concept, art/poetry is a realm where images neither represent or connect meaning in a chain of causality nor designate a special indication. Yet, as is mentioned in *Zither & Autobiography*, images are temporary, multifold and changeable as the language of poetry testifies:

One is seeing constructing, and seeing ‘not seeing constructing’  
by ‘seeing’ being ‘visual’ which is actually only-language.  
This can only be done as poetic language. (Scalapino 2003, 36)

In *Objects in the Terrifying Tense*, Scalapino states that poetry also provides the dissolution of conventional notions of reality and self as “myth” and suggests that these notions require *undoing* because they are “continual as it is constantly being reestablished. [...] There is no consistency [...] anywhere [...] though it appears to be in 'reality'” (Scalapino 1993, 26). In this respect, Scalapino puts extreme emphasis on the notion of *seeing*, relating it to *awaking* in order to be able to “recognize of the inherent destitution of [reality and] the being” and be able to create new images which deconstruct reality and self as conventional (*Objects in the Terrifying Tense* 8).

In conclusion, Woolf and Scalapino share the same view in terms of the significance of art and artists in dealing with epistemological and ontological questions. Art and artistic creation span Woolf's and Scalapino's existences and works. Through art they detach themselves completely from conventional concepts which only provide a mimetic replica or representation by framing the cultural and conventional value of the signifiers, hence leading to a misrecognition and mistransmission of reality and self. Their works bear the characteristics of demolishing the conventional myth of homogenous time, reality and self. As Rachel Tardiff comments, both Woolf and Scalapino address the inadequacy of a single medium of art by personally creating art that ranges from poetry, essays, criticism, short stories and novels to letters and diaries. Neither of them isolates their talents to a single arena, “implying that singularity in medium present[s] an inadequacy of expressionistic possibility” (Tardiff 2011, n. pag.). Their works also imply that artistic creation should not be a replica or a reproduction or “a preoccupation, a hobby or distraction, but rather, a way of life” (Tardiff 2011, n. pag.). For Woolf and Scalapino, art is not only subjective self-expression, which is worthwhile to the writer, but it is also a process of exploring, deciphering, criticizing and suggesting alternatives to the conventional way of knowing. They consider art to be a sort of *mode of knowing*. They assert that art discloses fake constructions by validating the uniqueness of any and every entity

and their specific relation to each other. In Woolf's and Scalapino's view, art and artist serve as a bridging or consolidating medium, and they open a gate to new epistemologies and ontologies.

This study has aimed to shed some light on conventional notion of time and the relationship between it and epistemological and ontological notions in Virginia Woolf and Leslie Scalapino's works. It concluded that Woolf's and Scalapino's claims, that there is a reciprocal relationship between these notions, that the conventional notion of time is not adequate enough to understand and deal with life which is in a continual process of change, that we need to know more about the relationship between the notion of time and epistemological and ontological notions and that new concepts are needed in order to rupture constant replication and reproduction which leads to misperception of reality and self and violence and wars, are convincing. It is obvious that this subject matter requires more researches and work by more researchers and scholars. I hope that my study will prove to be of value in opening the doors to discussions of similar concerns.

Another intent of this study is to offer a deeper appreciation for Woolf's and Scalapino's works and their views. Considered their extra-ordinary life stories, their arduous and devoted work to develop unique literary styles, both Woolf and Scalapino can be likened to Icarus. Similar to Icarus, who *took a challenge and dared to fly too near the sun* and be innovative for freedom and for anew, Woolf and Scalapino, despite all the hardships they had to deal with, created pioneering works which have become milestones of literary world and inspired change. I hope this thesis will encourage readers to seek out and directly experience the works of Virginia Woolf and Leslie Scalapino.

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## **Chapter two and three: Leslie Scalapino and Way**

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## **Conclusion**

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Erklärung:

Hiermit erkläre ich, dass ich diese Arbeit selbständig und nur mit den angegeben Hilfsmitteln angefertigt habe, und dass alle Stellen, die dem Wortlaut nach anderen Werken entnommen sind, durch die Angabe der Quellen als Entlehnungen kenntlich gemacht worden sind.

Tübingen, March 2016

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