

Virginia Woolf described the shape of books as analogous to the ‘formed and controlled’ structures of buildings, but her writing also reveals another architecture that is momentary and precarious.

# Cathedrals on the light of a butterfly’s wing: the momentary architecture of Virginia Woolf

Andrew Carr

*The thirty-two chapters of a novel – if we consider how to read a novel first – are an attempt to make something as formed and controlled as a building.*  
Virginia Woolf, ‘How Should One Read a Book?’<sup>1</sup>

Given as a paper, read at a school in the autumn of 1925, Virginia Woolf’s ‘How Should One Read a Book?’ makes a direct connection between the structure, or shape, of a literary work and architecture. Similar architectural imagery permeates much of her work, often associating it with clarity, completeness, control, and stability. Woolf goes on to describe how the shape of a book emerges from its parts:

*And the book as a whole is different from the book received currently in separate phrases. Details now fit themselves into their places. We see the shape from start to finish; it is a barn, a pigsty, or a cathedral. Now then we can compare book with book as we compare building with building.<sup>2</sup>*

Her paper evolved into an essay of the same title, which further developed her concern for shape, structure, and a spatial sensibility as she surveys the inhabitants of a house by ‘looking in at the open window’, exploring a range of different rooms.<sup>3</sup> Woolf’s writing itself echoes such preoccupations. The titles of many works, such as *A Room of One’s Own*, *Jacob’s Room*, and *A Mark on the Wall*, assign significance to rooms and walls. These and other architectural elements – such as windows, doors, thresholds, and even the marks made on them – assume an important presence within each work.

These observations on titles and architectural elements are not new and have been made by others among the many strands of the vast scholarship on Woolf: the places where Woolf lived, or the spaces evoked by her writing, have prompted strands of critical commentary on social issues, biography, gender, sexuality, domesticity, and independence.<sup>4</sup> More abstractly, Woolf’s handling of time and space have been used to situate or compare her against other philosophical traditions, thinkers, writers, and artists.<sup>5</sup> This study attempts to understand Woolf’s writing in its own right, albeit from an architectural standpoint. I will draw upon and

extend another strand of enquiry concerned with the formal literary devices used by Woolf and her analogy with related architectural structures. In so doing the study straddles related directions of research and investigation addressing: the presence of architecture in literature, such as David Spurr’s *Architecture and Modern Literature*, the use of literary analysis to inform architectural thinking, like Jennifer Bloomer’s study of James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*, and the relationship between critical practices of writing and architecture explored by figures such as Jane Rendell and Hélène Frichot.<sup>6</sup>

The ‘formed and controlled’ structures of Woolf’s books will be explored principally through her 1927 novel *To the Lighthouse*, which she was writing around the same time as her essay on ‘How Should One Read a Book?’ and for which she drew an architectural plan of its tripartite structure. While Woolf repeatedly uses imagery that juxtaposes transitory life with fixed buildings her writing also suggests another more complex, fleeting architecture. This is revealed through an examination of the temporal structures of her novels and the momentary architecture that forms around its inhabitants. The decay and renewal of the house in the middle section of *To the Lighthouse* extends this further, revealing a precariousness that undermines the qualities of control, constancy, and permanence she had assumed for a building and, by analogy, her ‘formed and controlled’ structures. Architecture, instead, becomes momentary and precarious. A collage of architectural short stories, glimpses, and fragments then explores an architectural temporality informed by a reversal of Woolf’s analogy – ‘to make something as formed and controlled as a book’.

The study has developed from a close reading of *To the Lighthouse*, alongside Woolf’s wider body of work and the relevant scholarship that has gathered around it. A parallel, intertwined drawn analysis had been undertaken that maps the temporal structures of her novels and particular incidents from *To the Lighthouse*. The trajectories of narrative, character, and time implied by Woolf’s words have been mapped onto an underlying graphical

<sup>1</sup> Diagram of *To the Lighthouse* based on the frequency of occurrence in the text of key characters and objects. These are mapped by the pages on which they occur (left) and the various sections and double-time schemes that structure the novel. Many characters are just as present in the text after they have died, such as Mrs Ramsay, who remains in the thoughts of Lily Briscoe. Several physical objects recur throughout the text, establishing a rhythm that punctuates inner discourse and connecting thoughts between characters. In the last section, the easel and rowing boat bracket the thoughts going to-and-fro between Lily and those venturing across to the lighthouse.

structure derived from the page order of each book. Condensed into a single diagram, a whole book can be seen at once – revealing its structures, rhythms, and relationships – and allowing comparisons to be made with other books. This process is developed more fully for *To the Lighthouse* to map the frequency with which particular objects and characters appear, as words, on each page. The resultant forms of mapping and notation become both a means of describing each novel and interpreting several architectural examples. Extending the approach to closer examine a particular passage within *To the Lighthouse* a three-dimensional drawing projection is adopted and again spaces and objects are located according to the measure of the pages on which they appear. The resultant suite of drawings adopts several approaches to representation as they transpose between text, line, and architecture. Pictograms provide a two-dimensional, statistical method of mapping frequency of occurrence, while the systems of notation that have been deployed and evolved resonate with the architectural diagrams developed by Bernard Tschumi to explore event and action.<sup>7</sup> The three-dimensional studies recall the drawings of James Stirling describing his *promenade architecturale* of selective architectural elements along a route.<sup>8</sup> A related process of recreating the spaces within a literary work has been undertaken by Freddie Phillipson who has attempted to draw parts of Dublin as they appear in James Joyce's *Ulysses*, based on historical records.<sup>9</sup> Though not appearing in *To the Lighthouse*, through drawing I have reconstructed several places inhabited by Woolf relevant to the study, including: Tavistock Square at the time Woolf lived there (using historical maps), her home on the Square (based on bomb damage photographs and survey information from similar building stock nearby) and Talland House (based on old maps, photographs, and survey information of the current building). Collectively, this has informed a critical, temporal, and architectural reading of her work.

### Architectural analogy

While it is difficult to think of a novel where buildings, spaces, and places are not present, or perhaps even take on a greater significance, Woolf invokes them to explain her creative processes and the 'shape' of literary work. This shape structures the life that unfolds between the pages, where further architectural elements, such as thresholds, windows, and rooms, might also assume a particular presence. Woolf describes how a novel: [...]*is a structure leaving a shape on the mind's eye, built now in squares, now pagoda shaped, now throwing out wings and arcades, now solidly compact and domed like the Cathedral of Saint Sofia at Constantinople.*<sup>10</sup>

Having compared the structure of a novel to types of buildings and urban spaces in *A Room of One's Own* she describes how 'a book is not made from sentences laid end to end, but of sentences built, if an image helps, into arcades or domes.'<sup>11</sup> Typically these 'sentences built' form a structure

that is conceived as a stable, physical background that contrasts with the fleeting life which it contains. Architecture is associated with solidity and permanence, creating an inhabitable spatial structure within which life takes place.

These analogies could be dismissed as purely illustrative, as a means to help Woolf explain herself and her work to others, or the working of writers, literature, and novels more generally, 'if', as she notes, 'an image helps'. However, the frequency with which architectural imagery appears in her work and the dexterous handling of perspective and point of view within her novels suggest an active, immersive spatial imagination. The architecture that is depicted is typically not just one of form and shape, but is occupied and explored, space-to-space, appearing and dissolving from moment to moment.

Within the accumulated scholarship on Woolf two key references are directly relevant to this study. The first is C. Ruth Miller's 1988 study *Virginia Woolf, The Frames of Art and Life*, which examines 'rooms', 'thresholds', 'mirrors', and 'windows' as 'frames' constructed and used by Woolf alongside a comparison of framing in painting and literature. Observing how Woolf considered how her predecessors 'built' the novel on the 'wrong plan' Miller describes how Woolf thought that 'the room will hold it together.'<sup>12</sup> She gives examples of rooms as refuges, prisons, or as representations of autonomy and of the mind, eventually suggesting that 'The rooms in her writings are often monuments to the past, while their transitory inhabitants reflect the present moment.'<sup>13</sup> Thresholds are richly considered, both spatially and temporally. Death is noted as a final threshold. It looms within Woolf's work, which can have an open endedness that denies the closure of narrative and interpretation.<sup>14</sup> Mirrors appear as critical witnesses to the transitory life within rooms, while windows combine the characteristics of rooms, thresholds, and mirrors at different times through reflection and prospect. Miller refers to the writings of art critic Roger Fry, drawing parallels between visual representation and the written representation of 'real life'. Woolf knew Fry well, writing a biography on him in 1940 and she was well acquainted with the work of contemporary painters, like her sister Vanessa Bell. Miller suggests the writer, like the painter, composes within a frame:

*Virginia Woolf was particularly attracted to rooms, windows, thresholds and mirrors because they retain the advantages of the frame of a painting without its limitations. They create boundaries, but theirs are the boundaries of life rather than art. They are capable of conferring order and creating significant relationships, but they are not able to impose their own designs. Life is neither restricted nor distorted, but is free to come and go, within the boundaries they provide.*<sup>15</sup>

The second significant point of reference is Ann Henley's PhD study *The Whole Building of a Book: architectural analogy in Virginia Woolf's essays and novels* that was completed in 1990, two years after Miller's book was published.<sup>16</sup> This thorough study discusses the development of Woolf's work, novel by novel,

noting how, from *Jacob's Room* onwards, 'expressive architectural spaces' would be used to illuminate human character. While noting that 'Woolf has no systematic theory of novel-writing' as such, Henley describes the 'equivalence' given to architectural structures and details compared to the part-whole relations of literature in an immersive sense:

*Writing is an architectural process by which a novelist creates a structure in which life can live; reading is a process of experiencing that distinct life, just as we learn to know one another, by visiting the space it inhabits.*<sup>17</sup>

Henley argues that architectural spaces allowed Woolf 'a method of concretising mind or consciousness while noting the interplay of inner consciousness and outer cultural and social forces', her criticism being directed in different cultural and sociological ways in each novel. This dialogue is developed in Henley's analysis of Woolf's works. She notes how in *Jacob's Room* architectural analogy is used in three ways: Formally, by creating a room or space for each chapter. Each of these spaces then becomes a representation of Jacob's consciousness, often having a linked, external space placing it in a wider context. Finally, the past is brought into the present by using architecture to materialise and memorialise the past. Woolf's work is placed in a broader context of 'spatial form criticism' and 'literary architecture', referring to the influence of Walter Pater, a nineteenth-century art critic who, too, relied heavily on architectural analogies to describe literary structures.<sup>18</sup> Beguilingly, Henley notes that Woolf saw architecture as 'of inexhaustible fascination' and considered writing a book on the subject with architect George L. Kennedy, with whom the Woolfs discussed extending Monk's House.<sup>19</sup>

While both these studies are insightful, Henley tends to lean more on analogy than architecture. Miller, though addressing architectural elements in more detail, tends to reinforce a dualism between buildings as empty frames and the life that fills them, rather than emphasising – as I will – the architecture of Woolf's writing itself and her handling of time, space, and structure. Both Henley and Miller rely on a relatively narrow, static understanding of architecture. More exploratory, fluid views have been set out by others, where spaces and objects dissolve among characters and consciousness.<sup>20</sup> While these examples are all helpful, I hope to show that Woolf's relationship with architecture would seem to be less reductive and more complex, partial, and not necessarily consistent.

Woolf's writings construct multiple approaches to architecture. There is architecture understood in Miller's terms as a stable controlled form, a static background shaped according to type and use. Architecture is also understood as an immersive experience of spatial wholes, such as domes or arcades. The 'shape' of Woolf's books is often temporal, implying, by analogy, a similar temporal structure for architecture. Spatial and

temporal terms often seem interchangeable too. A selective momentary architecture is often present that forms, dissolves, and shifts, punctuating and informing the narrative. All of these constructions are present in *To the Lighthouse*, where Woolf devotes the central section of the book to the abandonment, decay, and renewal of a house. As the house decays the strong and stable presence Woolf had assumed for a building, and by analogy the shape of her own literary structures, becomes precarious.

### The shape of a book: *To the Lighthouse*

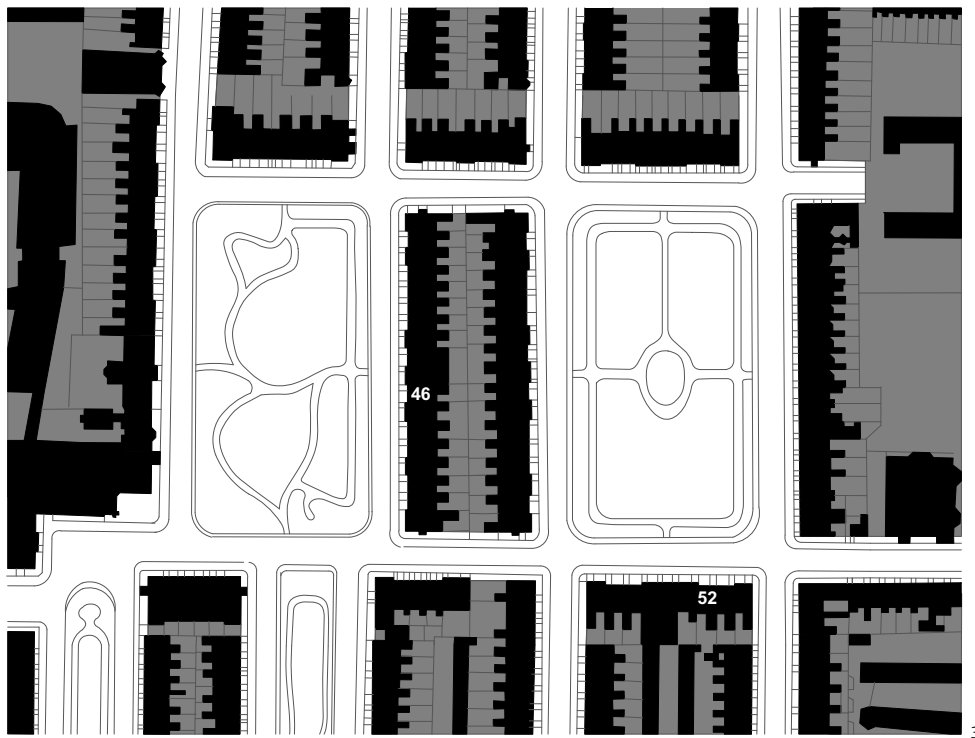
While Woolf was preparing her talk on 'How Should One Read a Book?', she was developing her novel *To the Lighthouse*, notes for the former appearing in the margins of the manuscript for the novel that was published in 1927.<sup>21</sup> The novel is organised into three parts: 'The Window' describes part of one day of a family holiday gathered in and around a rented coastal house and culminates in a meal where all of the characters gather around a table for dinner, hosted by the Ramsays. In the short central section, 'Time Passes', everyone disperses leaving the house unoccupied, untended, and decaying. Through the next decade several characters die and eventually the house is reopened, cleaned, and brought back into use before a more limited number of visitors return. 'The Lighthouse' – the final part of the novel – alternates between two activities linked to the first part: the thoughts of Lily Briscoe as she completes a painting abandoned ten years ago and a belated trip in a rowing boat to a nearby lighthouse, hoped for by James Ramsay as a child in the first part of the book but denied by his father due to the weather.

In Diagram [1] I map the novel based on the frequency of occurrence in the text of key characters and objects against the pages on which they are present, literary structures, double-time schemes, and temporal references. Many characters are present in the text even after they have died, such as Mrs Ramsay who remains in the thoughts of Lily Briscoe in the final section. Several physical objects and places recur throughout the text, establishing a rhythm that punctuates inner discourse.

During the early stages of writing Woolf drew a diagram in one of her notebooks to describe the structure of the novel [2], which includes a written description of it as 'two blocks joined by a corridor'.<sup>22</sup> The 'blocks' are drawn as roughly square

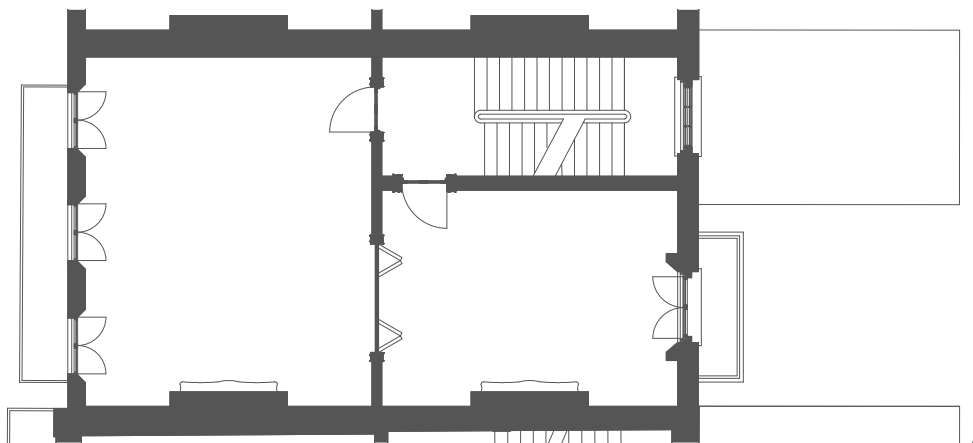


<sup>22</sup> Woolf's sketch of the structure of *To the Lighthouse* adapted from her notebooks.



3 Figure-ground plan of Tavistock Square (right) and Gordon Square (left) based on the 1916 Ordnance Survey Plan. Woolf was resident at 52 Tavistock Square at the time of writing *To the Lighthouse*. She lived at 46 Gordon Square from 1904–07.

4 The first floor plan of 52 Tavistock Square comprises two interconnected rooms 'joined' by the landing and stair. The building was destroyed in 1940, months before Woolf took her own life. The plan has been reconstructed from historic maps, surveys of other buildings around the square, and archival photos.



and presumably correspond to the 'Window' and 'Lighthouse' sections of the novel with the central 'Time passes' section considered a 'corridor' and drawn as a thinner rectangle connecting to the square blocks. The term 'corridor' suggests a place of movement and circulation, a space that connects the rooms of a building, arguably a servant space to the principal served spaces. Woolf does not, however, refer to the first and last parts as rooms, but as 'blocks', avoiding a direct spatial association. However, in making a drawing the blocks assume a spatial presence, one that differs from the narrower space of the connecting corridor.

Woolf claimed retrospectively to have conceived *To the Lighthouse* 'in about an hour' while walking around Tavistock Square, leading several commentators to make connections between the square and Woolf's drawing.<sup>23</sup> If the comparison is extended to also include Gordon

Square the resultant urban figure echoes the *parti* of her diagram. Understood this way the solid boundaries of building façades and urban grain frame the square and host its fleeting life of people, movement, and activity [3]. This reading is echoed too in her essay 'Street Haunting: A London Adventure' as Woolf roams the city describing its 'tides' of life before returning to the comfort and security of her doorstep, having retrieved a 'lead pencil' from her wanderings.<sup>24</sup> Woolf also uses the term 'block' in this context. A diary entry describes 'seeing life, as I walk about the streets, an immense opaque block of material to be conveyed by me into its equivalent of language.'<sup>25</sup>

The spatial *parti* resonates too with the interior structures of Woolf's residence at the time, 52 Tavistock Square, and her earlier home at 46 Gordon Square. Here the principal floors comprise two interconnected rooms, which would host the



5 Analytical view of Talland House showing the pairs of bay windows, balconies, and principal rooms facing the sea. The upper left room was the nursery and upper right the parents' bedroom. The lower ground floor shows the drawing room and dining room on the left and right, respectively. The drawing, based on various sources, speculatively reconstructs the house at the time of Woolf's childhood.

events and daily life of its inhabitants, 'joined' by the landing and stair that connects them to the rest of the house [4].<sup>26</sup> A related *parti* is also present in the paired balconies, bays and principal rooms of Talland House in St Ives, Cornwall, which is a key biographical source for the novel. The villa, with its views across to Godrevy Lighthouse, was the family residence each summer for three to four months throughout Woolf's childhood, organising her year into two 'blocks' of London and St Ives, connected by a day-long train journey arriving in each destination at night. An early cherished memory describes Woolf seeing her mother, entwined within passion flowers, on her bedroom balcony from the nursery balcony.<sup>27</sup> These architectural elements become frames for child and parent, and for viewing one from the other – a generational contrast which reflects the 'Victorian' and 'Edwardian' blocks of *To the Lighthouse* that correspond with two shorter periods of narrative time and the middle 'corridor' to a longer period of ten years [5].

Just as many of the titles of Woolf's works relate to spaces and rooms, many also describe times and temporal phenomena: *Monday or Tuesday*, *The Hours* (which eventually became *Mrs Dalloway*), *Night and Day*, *The Moment*, *The Years*, *Between the Acts*, and *The Waves*. Just as spaces and rooms preoccupied Woolf, so did time. While all written narrative is inherently temporal, since the act of reading creates an immanent directionality, Woolf pushed beyond the 'appalling narrative business of the realist: getting on from lunch to dinner'<sup>28</sup> to explore more complex temporal structures and conditions.

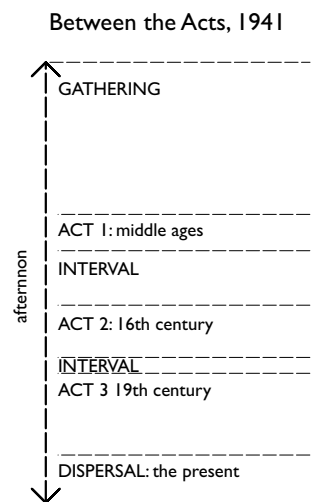
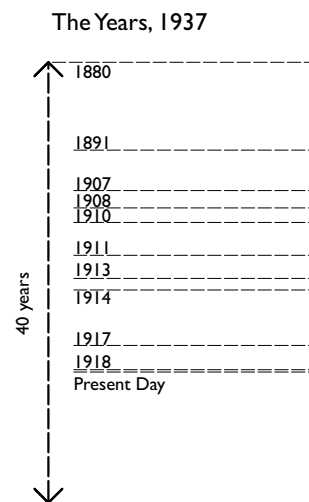
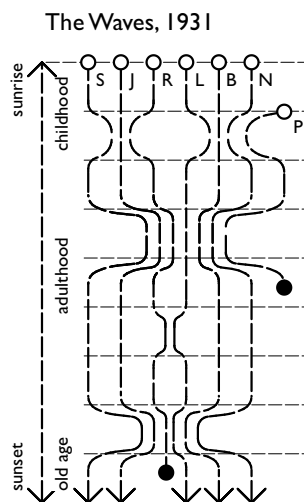
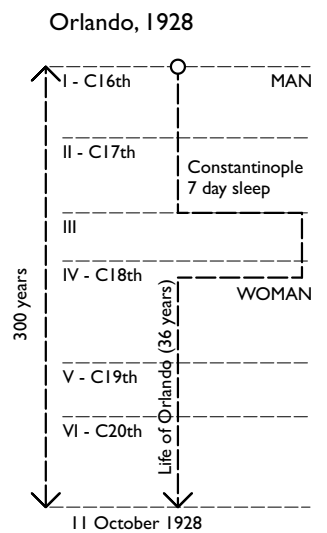
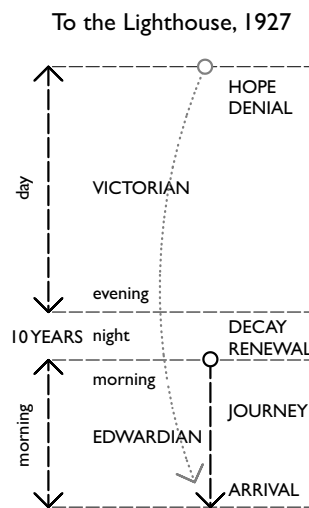
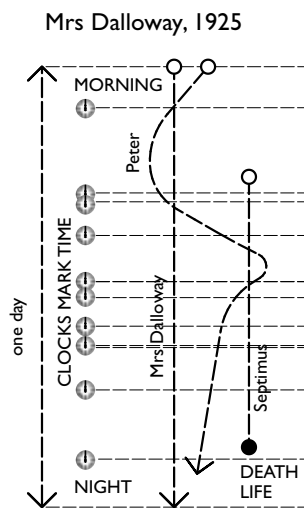
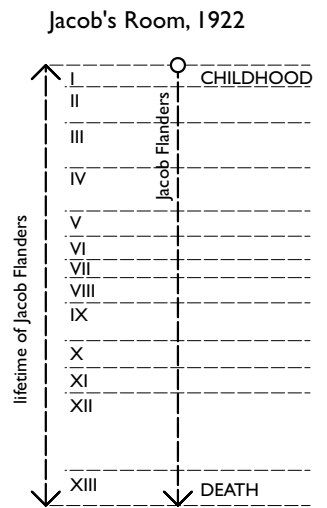
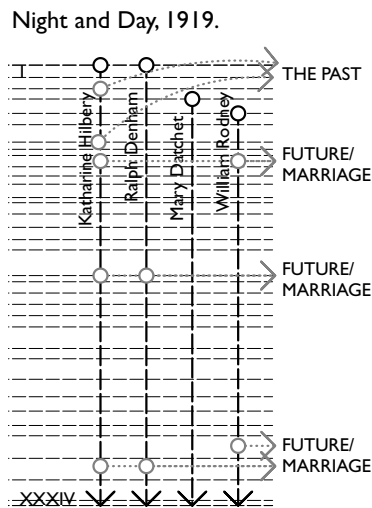
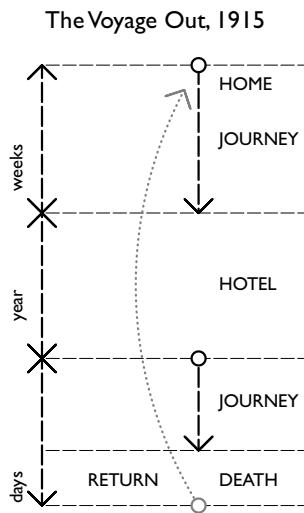
### Temporal structure

Woolf experimented with a range of temporal structures as her work developed. I have summarised these in a series of diagrams, which allow a graphical comparison between each novel [6]. Often Woolf's structures are based upon a simple, discrete overarching timescale, such as a

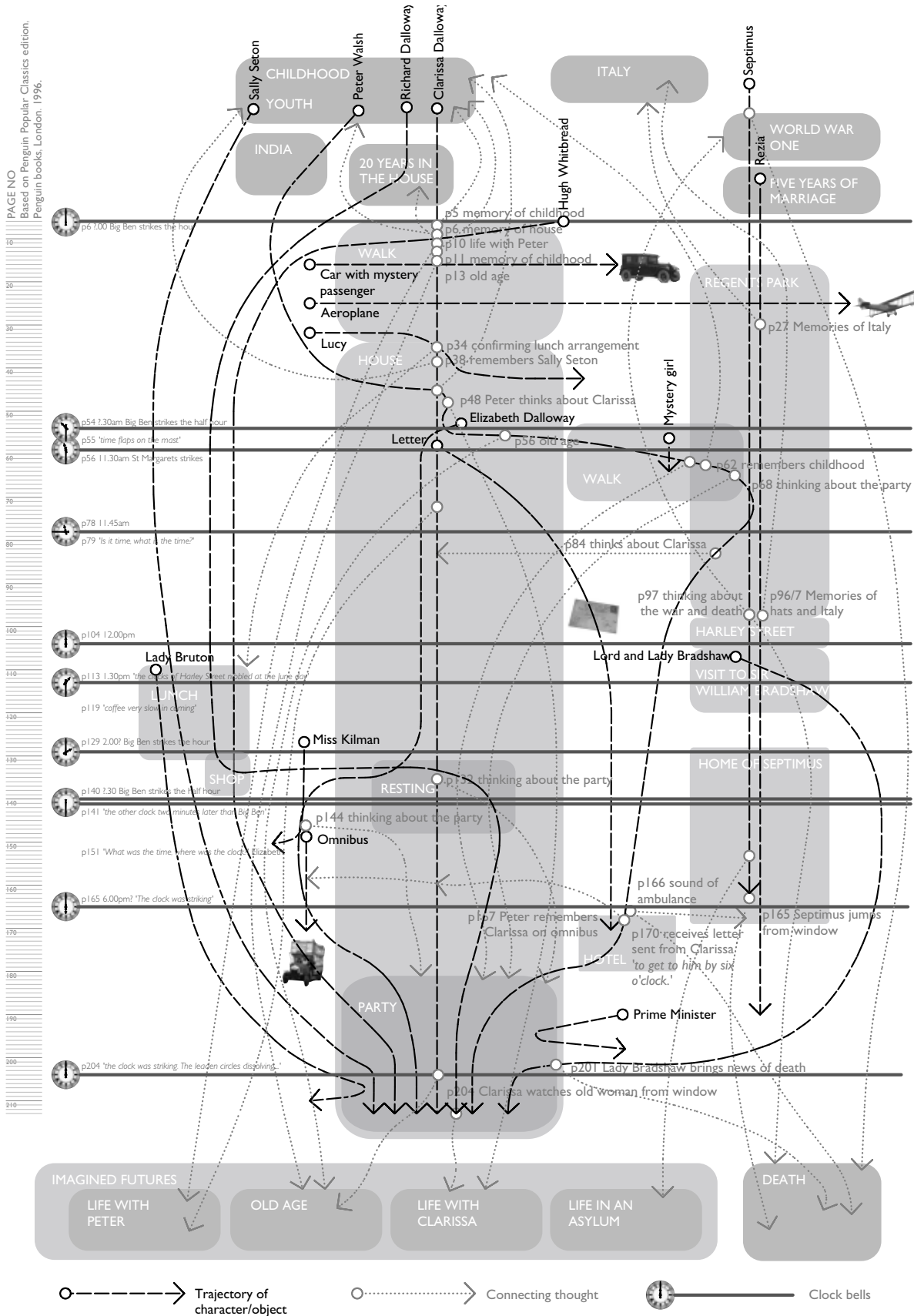
day in *Mrs Dalloway*, the lifetime of Jacob Flanders in *Jacob's Room*, or forty years in *The Years*. This overall timescale is then handled in various ways, often pulling between memories and potential futures. More commonly multiple timescales are nested within a single work as double times: *Orlando* conflates a 36-year lifetime with a 300-year period of historical time. *The Waves* holds the passage of a solar day, from sunrise to sunset, together with lives lived from childhood through to old age. In *Between the Acts* a play performed over an afternoon colludes with the historical time of the play itself, from the Middle Ages to the present.

*Mrs Dalloway* is organised in a single day in June running from morning through to evening. Into this basic structure the trajectories of various characters and objects is described as they move and dwell in a range of spaces within London [7]. Different characters meet and part as narrative strains intertwine and evolve, recollect the past and speculate on potential futures. Past and future interweave and thicken a drifting present punctuated by the measured time of the clock as bells ring across the city. Woolf makes active use of contrasting temporal structures to organise her work and the inhabitation of her fictional world.

This contrast is echoed in the scholarship on Woolf, which frequently distinguishes between two types of time: external events or rhythms, such as the chimes of the clock in *Mrs Dalloway*, are juxtaposed with an inner temporal landscape of thought, feeling, and memory, rendered by Woolf using 'free indirect discourse', often referred to as 'stream of consciousness' or 'interior monologue'. John Graham contrasts the handling of 'linear time' and 'mind time'.<sup>29</sup> Paul Ricoeur observes a dialogue between 'monumental time' and 'mortal time', drawing out parallels and contrasts between life and death, linear time, clock time, structure, and freedom.<sup>30</sup> Potentially, in experiential architectural terms, Erich Auerbach shows how 'inner time' is bracketed with 'exterior time'.<sup>31</sup> Small, incidental



6 Diagrams summarising the temporal structures of the novels of Virginia Woolf. Each is ordered according to the relative number of pages given to each section. Temporal and literary structures are noted together with the trajectories of key characters or events.



7 *A Day in June*, based on *Mrs Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf (originally entitled *The Hours*). This maps the trajectories of each character and

several objects, according to the page numbers in the book. These gather into both physical spaces and temporal events, overlaid with

the interconnecting connections between the inner worlds of each character and the punctuation of chiming clock bells.



moments, such as moving across a room, knitting a stocking or cutting pictures from a magazine form physical notches for interior monologues that wander from viewpoint to viewpoint, recalling past events and projecting imaginary futures, from multiple perspectives. Each excursion occupies a disproportionate duration compared to the external time frame that holds it. When discussing *Mrs Dalloway*, Woolf described this technique as allowing her to ‘dig out beautiful caves behind my characters’, assigning spatial properties to the inner life of the inhabitants.<sup>32</sup>

In *Jacob's Room*, the life of Jacob is glimpsed through discrete, discontinuous chapters written from different viewpoints at different stages of his life [8]. The reader builds up a gradual – though never complete – picture of Jacob from a range of perspectives. Woolf described the structure of the book as follows:

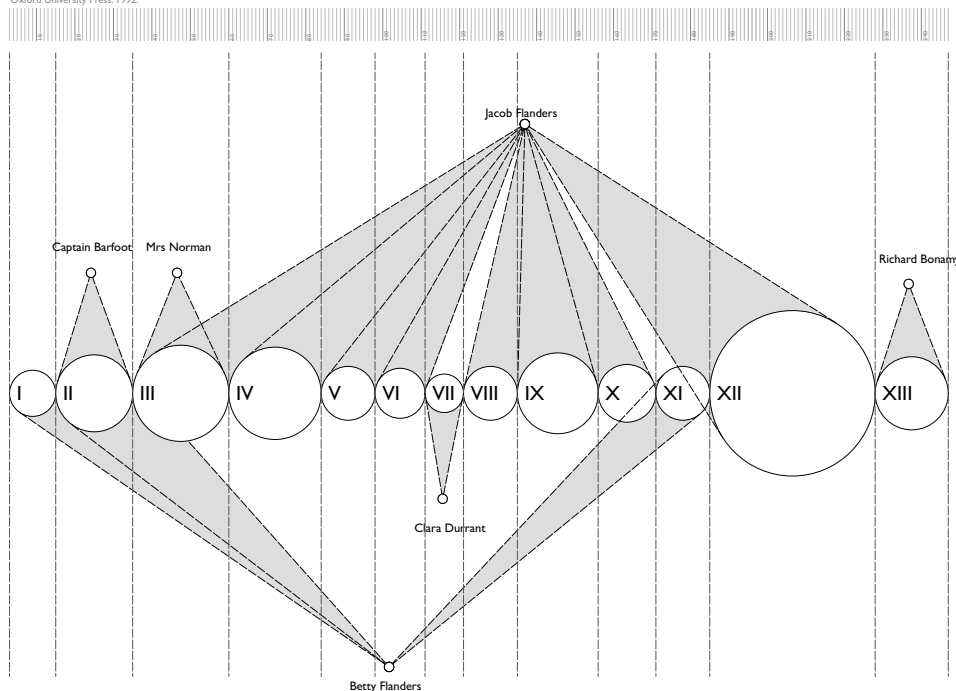
*I figure that the approach will be entirely different this time: no scaffolding; scarcely a brick to be seen; all crepuscular, but the heart, the passion, humour, everything as bright as fire in the mist.*<sup>33</sup>

The approach does not prize a single, dominant viewpoint but encompasses many, albeit all controlled by Woolf, drifting from moment to moment. A fluid relation is created between both inner and exterior worlds, multiple perspectives and physical notches, intertwining time and space.<sup>34</sup> The literary risk of this approach is that the reader loses all orientation among the flux and flow. Ann Banfield describes how a similar critique was levelled at Impressionism by Roger Fry – as pure sensation that lacks structure and overall design – causing a reaction in the post-impressionists who sought to ground their work in something more solid. She argues that Woolf, who as we have seen knew Fry and painters such as her sister Vanessa

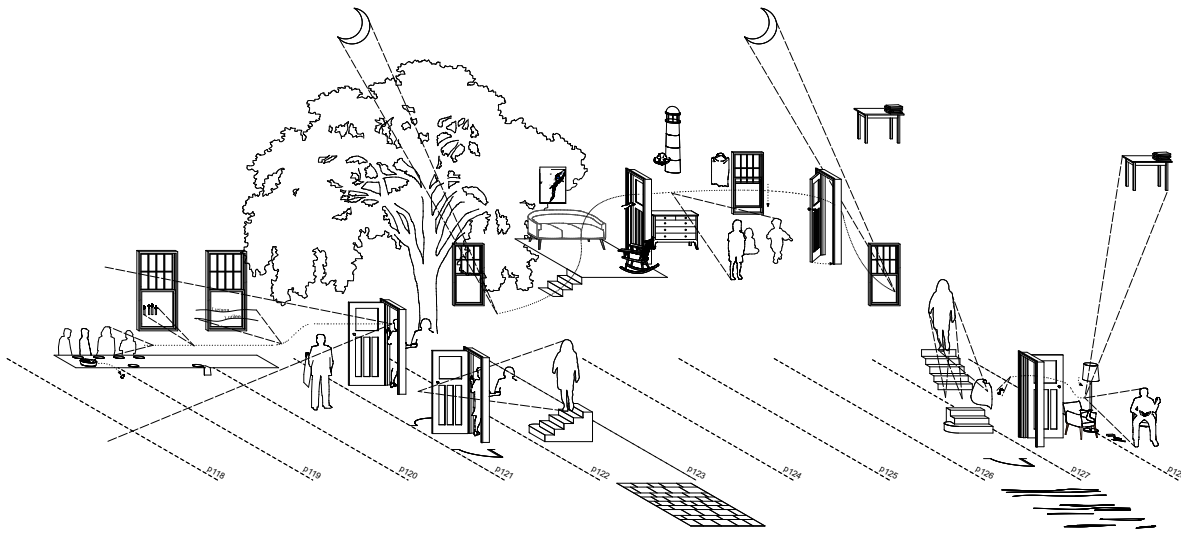
Bell and Duncan Grant well, develops a literary equivalent of an overall design that holds together the individual moments within the text.<sup>35</sup> Banfield goes on to suggest that Woolf's short stories and studies – such as *Kew Gardens* and *A Mark on the Wall* – become preparatory works for later novels, like *To the Lighthouse*, which, in itself, becomes a collage of short stories and fragmentary moments – an ‘incessant shower of innumerable atoms’ which, ‘as they fall [...] shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday.’<sup>36</sup> The novels can then be understood as a series of these partial moments and perspectives, punctuated by Auerbach's exterior brackets, and held within the shape of an overarching temporal structure.

One of the most insistent and noticeable structures used by Woolf is in *To the Lighthouse*, where a simple three-part structure of a day, ten years and another day is overlaid with shifts in tempo and rich temporal relationships. Paul Sheehan helpfully describes the triad as ‘two diurnal time spans separated by a decade long nocturnal time span’, locating each section metaphorically and environmentally, within the solar cycle.<sup>37</sup> ‘The Window’ looks forward to a trip to the lighthouse, but this hoped for future is denied due to poor weather. Though only describing a few hours of a single day this section occupies more than half the novel as, in Auerbach's words, ‘long reveries unfold during brief physical acts’ demanding ‘infinite patience’ in the reader as the light fades to darkness.<sup>38</sup> The second part is an abrupt contrast. Ten years are covered in comparatively few pages and seem like a single night in a Woolfian double-time. The intimacy of wandering through multiple inner landscapes is gone, the death of characters is announced almost incidentally, and the house remains empty. Time

PAGE NO  
Based on Oxford World's Classics edition,  
Oxford University Press, 1992.



8 Diagram of *Jacob's Room* showing how multiple, momentary points of view describe the life of Jacob Flanders. Each chapter is mapped based on the metric of its length in pages and linked back to the narrative point of view in each case, both of which vary from chapter to chapter. Collectively, but not completely, they depict the life of Jacob.



9 Analytical drawing of pages 118–28 of *To the Lighthouse* describing Mrs Ramsay leaving the meal, checking on the children upstairs and retiring to knit and read, with Mr Ramsay based on exterior

'brackets' in the text. Only the characters, physical objects, phenomena, or points of view present in the text are mapped according to the structure of the page number on which they are mentioned.

passes unrelentingly through a period of darkness and decay associated with war and social and generational change before slowing to something more like the first in the third, final part of the novel as the sun rises. Although Mrs Ramsay dies in the central section her presence lingers in the last. Here, the hope of a trip to the lighthouse denied in 'The Window' is fulfilled and past relationships are reconciled. Lily has 'finished' her painting but, as at the beginning of the book, we leave in the midst of action, as the voyagers step out onto the lighthouse, creating an open-endedness and lack of full closure.

### Standing on the moment

Among these rhythms and vectors, at the close of 'The Window', a meal is hosted by Mrs Ramsay. Occupying the central pages of the book this event gathers everyone together in one place, around a table, at one time. Mrs Ramsay remarks that, 'everything depended upon things being served up the precise moment they were ready.'<sup>39</sup> This creates an important, if fleeting, moment of stillness and seems to provide a second fulcrum to the book. This is noticed by Mrs Ramsay:

[...] there is a coherence in things, a stability; something, she meant, is immune from change, and shines out (she glanced at the window with its ripple and reflected lights) in the face of the flowing, the fleeting, the spectral, like a ruby; so that again to-night she had the feeling she had had once to-day already, of peace, of rest. [...] This would remain.<sup>40</sup>

Mrs Ramsay imparts a sense that the meal is a pause, simultaneously drawing our attention to the passage of time and creating a contrast with the upheaval and decade long 'Time Passes' section that looms. Such pauses, which note, or 'pin down'

often otherwise unremarkable moments are typical of Woolf.<sup>41</sup> As she leaves the dining room the pause dissolves:

*With her foot on the threshold she waited a moment longer in a scene which was vanishing even as she looked, and then, as she moved and took Mita's arm and left the room, it changed, it shaped itself differently; it had become, she knew, giving one last look at it over her shoulder, already the past.*<sup>42</sup>

Here the physical threshold of the dining room becomes a temporal threshold, a moment in the present, poised between past and future. It echoes Woolf's tendency to use the temporal and spatial interchangeably: spaces can be associated with particular periods of time, as when 'she was in the centre of that great Cathedral space which was childhood', or exclaims 'But what after all is one night? A short space [...].'<sup>43</sup> The temporal is located physically and immersively as 'The moment I stand on.' or the '[...] little platform of present time on which I stand'.<sup>44</sup> While time continues to take on a tangible, palpable quality when she attempts '[...] to pin down the moment with date and season', or describes how 'I like corners to figures: your Brahms one might stub one's toe against.'<sup>45</sup>

Moments like the threshold recur throughout Woolf's work. Momentary physical presences become points of orientation for wanderings through multiple points of view. For example, as Mrs Ramsay looks over her shoulder to the past the point of view shifts to Lily Briscoe who observes her departure and ascent up the staircase. We then shift back to Mrs Ramsay as she sees the elm tree through the window and opens the door to check on her children before turning down the stairs to look through the window again at the moon. The staircase then frames the view of Mrs Ramsay by Prue, Paul and Minta as she descends to meet them and they go off to the beach. The viewpoint switches back again to Mrs Ramsay as she examines Paul's watch, wraps a shawl around her and leaves the hall to sit by Mr Ramsay [9].

Each moment extends throughout the duration Woolf dwells within one point of view, perhaps being re-examined from another perspective as

Lily describes Mrs Ramsay's departure. Placed end-to-end these moments, like the timed 'rooms' in *Jacob's Room*, suggest a rhythm of places that appear for a time and dissolve, making selective use of the spatial and physical. Bracketing external objects and phenomena orientate and punctate these shifts in viewpoint and inner discourse. The edited excerpt from the novel below omits this discourse to leave only the external:

*Branches of the elm trees [...] windy [...] stars [...] sofa on the landing [...] rocking-chair [...] map of the Hebrides [...] nursery door [...] turned the handle firmly, lest it should squeak [...] room [...] skull [...] chest of drawers [...] lighthouse [...] pulled the window down an inch [...] let the tongue of the door slowly lengthen in the lock [...] bang his books on the floor [...] came downstairs [...] moon [...] staircase window [...] Minta's wrap [...] wash-leather bag [...] gold watch.*<sup>46</sup>

Other, less immediate exterior forms loom within the inner worlds that Woolf visits too: James is preoccupied with the distant lighthouse, the threat of Charles Tansley's books falling on the floor and waking the children preoccupies Mrs Ramsay as she also worries about the repairs to the house.

#### The house was ramshackle after all

Throughout the first part of the book regular references are made to ageing, mortality, and the physical state of the house and its contents. This begins with the chairs, which are 'fearfully shabby'<sup>47</sup> and extends further: 'At a certain moment, she supposed, the house would become so shabby that something must be done', as '[...] things got shabbier and got shabbier summer after summer.'<sup>48</sup> Mrs Ramsay makes repeated references to the costs of repairing the greenhouse roof, which interrupts her thoughts again and again, juxtaposed with her fear of ageing.<sup>49</sup>

We learn that the repairs to the greenhouse are underway, creating a counterpoint image of repair and rebuilding that is echoed in a phone call to London where the caller looks out '[...] to see what progress the workmen were making [...]' on a building site among '[...] the stir of the unfinished walls.'<sup>50</sup> However in the middle section, as the house is left unoccupied, the threat of decay becomes manifest in a '[...] downpouring of immense darkness'<sup>51</sup> as the wind and weather begin to blow through the empty house:

*Only through the rusty hinges and swollen sea-moistened woodwork certain airs, detached from the body of the wind (the house was ramshackle after all) crept around corners and ventured indoors.*<sup>52</sup>

Gradually the abandoned house deteriorates and the deaths of several characters are briefly noted in square brackets, almost as passing asides. Eventually, when the house 'was beyond one person's strength to get it straight', Mrs McNab, Mrs Bast and her son, together with Mrs Beckwith, toil to bring the house back from the brink as '[...] some rusty laborious birth seemed to be taking place.'<sup>53</sup> Thus the physical structure of the house is portrayed as something fragile, unstable, and vulnerable, only sustained through acts of repair

and maintenance. The stability of Woolf's 'formed and controlled' building, and thus her literary shape and structure, is threatened in a struggle between permanence and transience that echoes elsewhere.<sup>54</sup> As the house is reoccupied, in the final section 'The Lighthouse', Lily Briscoe recommences work on the painting she began wresting with ten years previously. In her vision for the painting 'She saw the colour burning on a framework of steel; the light of a butterfly's wing lying upon the arches of a cathedral.'<sup>55</sup> The momentary light on the delicate, fleeting life and movement of a butterfly is contrasted with a rigid underlying steel structure and the slow stone mass of a cathedral.

It is as if places are perpetually being created and dissolved – perhaps as the house decays and is repaired, but also as rooms, thresholds, arrangements of furniture under a window illuminated by a lamp, or as events and occasions – creating an ongoing rhythm of moments and presents, never to be repeated. This is a fleeting architecture that is momentary and precarious, it is fragile and porous; beams from the lighthouse search through windows and breezes blow through rooms. If there is a sense of refuge it is created by people gathering around a table for a meal – a passing social ritual enacted within a room defined by the perforate fabric of a house immersed in weather and time. Occupied seasonally, the house witnesses each generation of visitors. The proximity of the sea, with its rhythms of waves and tides, and the unpredictability of storms form a changing landscape and horizon.

#### The permanence of change

During the development of *To the Lighthouse* notes were made by Woolf, which sketched out something of the overall 'shape' of the novel:

*The seasons  
The skull  
The gradual dissolution of everything  
This is to be contrasted with the permanence of – what?  
Sun, moon & stars.  
Hopeless gulfs of misery.  
Cruelty.  
The War.  
Change. Oblivion. Human vitality. Old Woman  
Cleaning up. The bobbed up, valorous, as a principle of human life projected*<sup>56</sup>

The 'gradual dissolution of everything' is to be contrasted with the 'permanence' of sun, moon and stars, misery, cruelty, war, change, and cleaning up. Natural rhythms, human traits, transience, and a constant effort to maintain and restore are considered as constants. Permanence is paradoxically associated with constant underlying change rather than the unchanging, fixed and solid.<sup>57</sup> This is echoed in the novel too as Lily Briscoe thinks of Mrs Ramsay and toils with the composition of her painting:

*'Life stand still here'; Mrs Ramsay making of the moment something permanent (as in another sphere Lily herself tried to make of the moment something permanent) – this was of the nature of a revelation. In*

*the midst of chaos there was shape; this eternal passing and flowing (she looked at the clouds going and the leaves shaking) was struck into stability. Life stand still here, Mrs Ramsay said.*<sup>58</sup>

Equally paradoxically, this permanence exists within the moment. The eternal is connected with 'passing and flowing'. As Woolf interchanged time and space so too she swapped constancy and change and found constancy in change. It is not the light of a butterfly's wing that rests on the arches of the cathedral but the cathedral that rests on the light of a butterfly's wing. As a writer Woolf is free to work with words, to conjure experiments and provoke insights where such paradoxes can be formed and are allowed to breathe.

### Architecture, as formed and controlled as a book?

Woolf's writings construct multiple, sometimes conflicting, approaches to architecture and temporality, even within a single work like *To the Lighthouse*. Controlled, stable forms contrast with more fragile, decaying, and precarious conditions. The experiences of multiple points of view is bracketed by fleeting external frames that dissolve, punctuate, and inform the narrative. While Woolf saw a book as 'an attempt to make something as formed and controlled as a building', this building has been revealed as something more precarious and uncertain, reversing the analogy. Could then we think of a building as an attempt to make something as formed and controlled as a book like *To the Lighthouse*?

An assembly of architectural short stories follow in which I reflect and ruminate on this possibility – developing further the dialogue between the writing of architecture and building of literature, between architectural possibility and the world-making of words within a book. Woolf, as an author, has complete control over the world she creates and the way it is occupied; an architect does not and must handle authorship in other ways, situating their interventions amid the flux and flow of the world. Organised according to a loose double-time structure, the examples drift from the present to the time of Woolf and from more stable to episodic forms. A library and three homes are described, one only existing in a film. Each analogous glimpse handles architectural authorship and temporality in a different way – gathering Woolfian sketches, as Banfield suggested – as Woolf might use multiple narratives, points of view, and perspectives. They are provisional and partial. The architects referred to are not necessarily aware of Woolf. Nor have they produced their work with her ideas in mind. The work is not being 'written' by Woolf in the sense that Gaston Bachelard makes use of literary places in *The Poetics of Space* when he slowly reads 'several houses and rooms "written" by great writers'.<sup>59</sup> Instead, I read each architectural example through *To the Lighthouse*, contemplating and extending our understanding of the novel's handling of momentary permanence, precariousness, and the relation of flux and life to spatial and temporal structures.

### 1. 'Holding it all together'

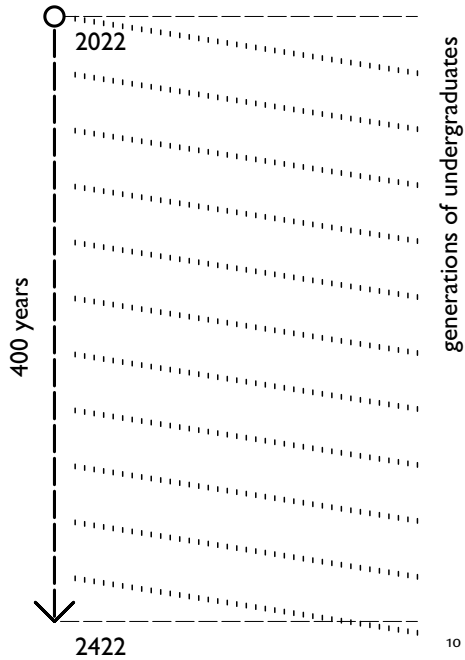
Designed for a lifespan of at least four hundred years from 2022, New College Library at Magdalene College, Cambridge University, by Niall McLaughlin Architects is formed from a lattice of brick columns, organised in squares and laid out on a tartan, Kahnian grid that is spanned by exposed spruce glulam beams. The life of the library inhabits this lattice as generations of readers rise up, through and among the structure to read [10]. The spatial rhythms of the library echo the modular geometry of Centraal Beheer in Apeldoorn, Netherlands, designed by Herman Hertzberger who was awarded the 2012 RIBA Gold Medal for Architecture with a citation written by McLaughlin:

*Structurally, Hertzberger's buildings are characterised by a clear articulation of the supporting lattice. This creates a series of cellular zones within which minor elements – like sills, benches and thresholds – are used to prompt human occupation.*<sup>60</sup>

The term 'lattice' is not from Hertzberger's lexicon but from McLaughlin's and recurs in accounts of his own work. McLaughlin describes his buildings as 'halls', each as an 'open latticework' that 'stands in counterpoint to the continuous cycles of light, season, use and regeneration' enduring the 'endless procession of fugitive elements'.<sup>61</sup> He makes a distinction between the architecture of a static frame, persisting in linear time, and the circular time of light, seasons, and calendars. As 'counterpoint' frames they are hosts rather than active participants, complete in themselves and closely choreographed to an intended use, but silent witnesses.<sup>62</sup>

The citation reads too as a description of the library; 'Minor elements' of oak ledges, desks, bookcases, stairs, and frames modulate the lattice to allow inhabitation, creating a range of different conditions and places where readers can study – sometimes tucked away individually in nooks, gathered in shared relationships or visible and exposed, like the 'pre-Madonna' desk illustrated here [11, 12]. This network of intimately scaled moments situate each reader collectively and individually. More timber elements form a comb that controls views out to the world beyond; deep window reveals and baffles allow light and shadow to play across them but not penetrate too far inside.<sup>63</sup> A balance of calm and animation results, situating the reader within a still frame, both aware and distanced from the turning world beyond, as they enter and return from the worlds of each book. The 'minor elements' become something like Woolf's bracketing objects – prompts for inhabitation that host the momentary within the brick latticework. Hertzberger imagined these elements might alter and adjust over time, held within their 'supporting' background as needs and uses change.<sup>64</sup>

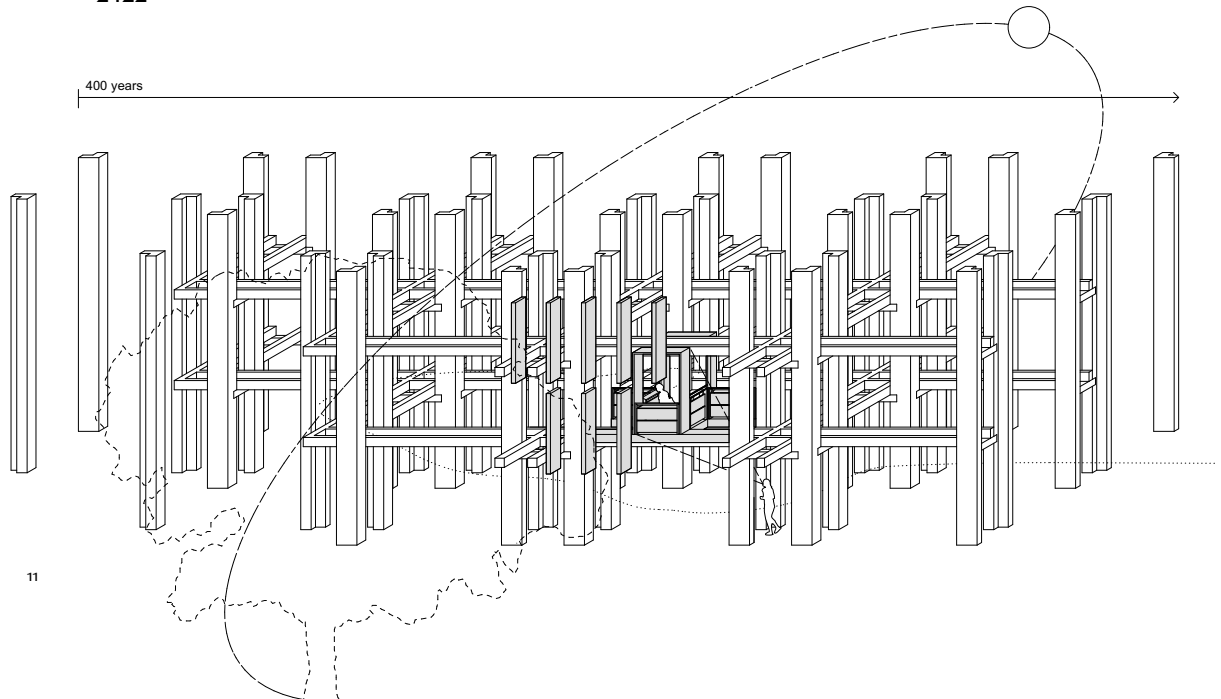
Throughout, the brickwork structure remains indifferent, its projected four-hundred-year lifespan a relentless presence; McLaughlin might refer to this as 'temporal depth'.<sup>65</sup> It gathers the 'block' of life observed by Woolf and, as a fixed spatial score,



10 Diagram projecting the temporal structure of New College Library, Magdalene College, Cambridge designed by Niall McLaughlin Architects.

11 Analytical drawing of New College Library, Cambridge, contrasting the overarching 'lattice' structure with the 'minor elements' that inhabit one bay – in this case the 'pre-Madonna' desk – situating the individual reader.

12 The 'pre-Madonna' desk in the New College Library overlooking a triple height space and looking onto a window to the gardens beyond.



becomes the room that 'will hold it together'. Time is very much present; the enduring brickwork foregrounds the fleeting animation of sun, shadow, and seasonal changes of the surrounding trees alongside the generations of readers who came before and those who will surely come after. A momentary awareness is held within a four-hundred-year frame of reference, implying an unabating temporal inertia, where the unchanging presence of the structure does not pause to adjust

to an individual. The same inertia did not even pause to remark on the death of a key figure such as Mrs Ramsay, which was announced, almost incidentally, between a pair of square brackets – a graphical, spatial mark on the page that sets a space aside from the ongoing flow of words and narrative time. Readers in the library might too be considered as butterflies within the cathedral, but perhaps the 'minor' – bracketing – elements are actually major and the lattice merely a four-hundred-year scaffold.

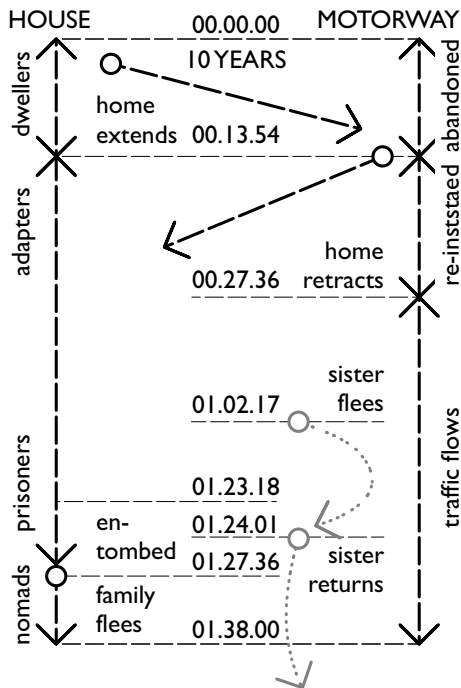
## 2. A precarious present

Woolf was left peering through the gates of Oxbridge colleges during her wanderings in *A Room of One's Own*. Though now she would be able to enter inside and study, the distractions of the world beyond remain veiled by the library. By contrast, the house depicted in Ursula Meier's 2008

film *Home* seems powerless to resist the intrusion of the world as it infiltrates and compromises family life.

Occupying a house built next to an un-commissioned, seemingly abandoned, motorway for many years the tarmac surface of the road has become an extension of the domestic space of the family: Their son rides his bike along its expanse. A paddling pool is placed on the nearside lane, goals and hockey sticks in the middle and a cosy armchair, with a view back to the house, is positioned on the opposite carriageway where the father has a quiet cigarette at night. Though next to a motorway the house is without an access road, cutting it off from the world beyond, which can only be reached by driving across the meadow landscape that extends to the horizon from each window [13, 14].

One day the E57 motorway is brought into use, vehicle barriers are erected, the appropriated domestic space on the tarmac is lost and suddenly family life is cut off and isolated. The noise of traffic invades each window, the motorway must be crossed to put out the bins or get to school. The house remains but life is changed. This change soon becomes unbearable and the family begins to block up windows and line walls to insulate themselves from the traffic. The house becomes a refuge from noise, air pollution, and violating gazes from car windows. Isolated and gradually turning inward, eventually closing up the last remaining door, the house has been



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13 Diagram mapping the temporal structure of Ursula Meier's film *Home*.

14 Still at 0:04:24 from *Home* showing the unused motorway being used as an extension of the family home with paddling pool and armchair.

15 A later still at 01:25:35 from *Home* after motorway has been brought into use. The daughter, who left some time previously, returns to find the family home fortified and turned inward against the noise, air pollution, and views from passing motorists. Unknown to her before she leaves, assuming the house has been abandoned, her family are still inside.



15

transformed into a prison, a family entombed in their own home until they reach a crisis point and break out again to wander in the meadow [15].

Like the penetrating search of the lighthouse beam and the coastal conditions that invaded the Ramsays vacant summerhouse causing it to decay, here changes in the external environment infiltrate Meier's depiction of home and make it uninhabitable, forcing the family to flee. The house remains but its context has changed. The moment of the family home has passed and it has now become an oddity on the side of the motorway.

Their home is not a 'deep defence against the terror of time'; it is something very different to Martin Heidegger's idealised Black Forest farmhouse, lived in by generations, encompassing the seasons, birth and death.<sup>66</sup> The experience of the family resonates with a more unstable, nomadic occupation of spaces untied to a particular place and subject to the instability and precariousness of social and economic winds, whether the fixed term rental agreements of tenants or the ad-hoc assembly of a refugee camp by the displaced. The glimpse Meier offers, filmed in a real building to evoke a fictional French place and narrative, become further dislocated when we understand that it was actually shot in Bulgaria, next to an unfinished motorway where the house was built just for the film.

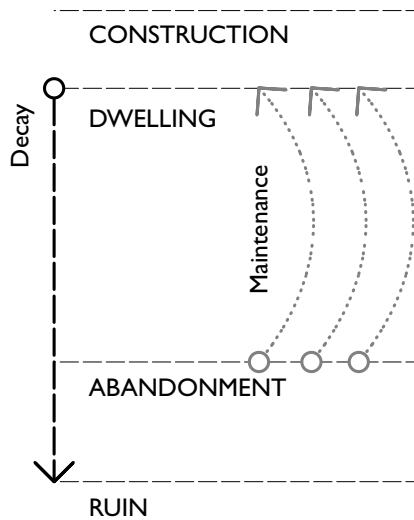
### 3. A momentary permanence

We've seen that Woolf uses clear temporal structures to organise her novels, often based on timeframes with a clear shape: The life of a character from birth to death or the progress of a day from morning to night. The summer residence of the Ramsays in *To the Lighthouse* provides us with an example of a building with a particular temporal character. The seasonal occupation of the house, in the summer holidays, emphasises the fleeting nature of the events taking place within it and the relative slowness of the building as it lies dormant, waiting for the rest of the year. Similar temporal structures are imposed on a related variety of spaces that are occupied at particular times: the summerhouse, winter garden, breakfast room, night club, day room, morning room and so on. As spaces much of their character is defined by the times they are available for use. In each of these examples the existence of the room or space is preceded by an action that brings it into being. This act establishes an underlying temporal structure, which constructs a space in the first instance that will last for a period of time.

16 Diagram projecting the temporal structure of maintenance and decay in the Marshall House, designed by Dow Jones Architects.

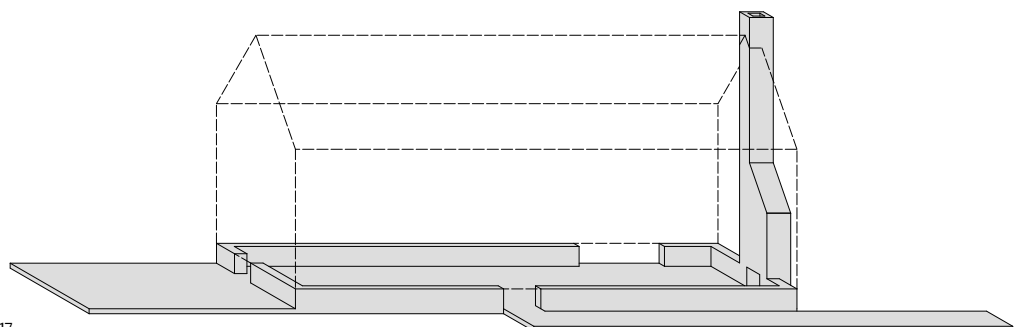
17 A drawing of the Marshall House showing the brick plinth, hearth, and fireplace grounding the more transient timber envelope and stair.

18 A brick hearth on Dungeness beach photographed by Dow Jones Architects that informed the design of the Marshall House.



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When Dow Jones started designing the Marshall House in Suffolk, they imagined it as a future ruin [16]. Biba Dow described how:

*The building we made in Suffolk might easily have been wasted by time and what you would find afterwards was the placing of this ground and the chimney in the corner of the site.*<sup>67</sup>

The house was built in 2001. A brick plinth, hearth and chimney form a base upon which a timber frame, doors, wall, and roof are erected [17]. The inscription of the longer lasting brick plinth into the landscape is conceived as a temporal act that anticipates the loss of more vulnerable, transient timber elements. Dow compares it to an abandoned brick hearth observed in the flat coastal landscape of Dungeness and a line from a Seamus Heaney poem, 'Markings' [18]:

*All these things entered you. As if they were both the door and what came through it. They marked the spot, marked time and held it open.*<sup>68</sup>

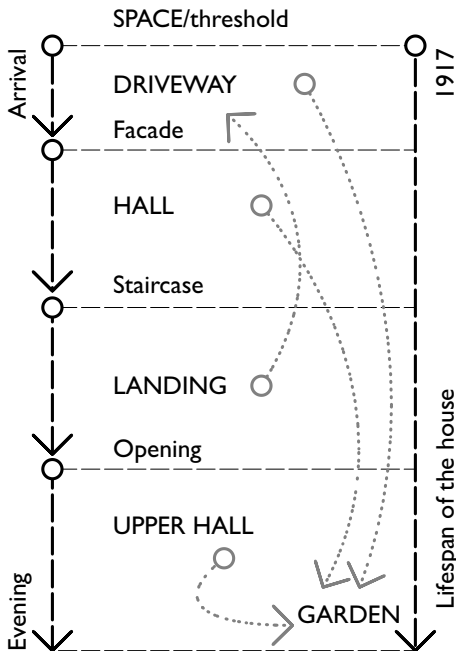
The house is understood as a temporal mark, a Woolfian moment, which will exist for a time and be gone – it begins and ends with a brick plinth and chimney stack. This is less an interest in the ruin and more an awareness that the present is momentary, and architectural marks are finite. The only way to perpetuate this moment is through the continuous labour of maintenance that will hold back entropy and decay. There is a sense that such care is a perpetual task of reconstruction, like the

regular rebuilding of the Ise Shrine in Japan, which allows it to persist. Álvaro Siza has gone as far as claiming, 'Living in a house, in a real house, is a full-time job' due to the unrelenting toil required to keep entropy at bay. He suggests an 'Order of the Guardians of Houses' be given each year to recognise this 'heroism'; an award surely due to Mrs McNab who saved the Ramsay's summer home.<sup>69</sup> The Suffolk house can be understood as having a precarious poise, gathering materials into a shape like a bird might assemble a nest, to serve a present moment, knowing this moment will vanish and the nest fall away.

#### 4. Gathered moments

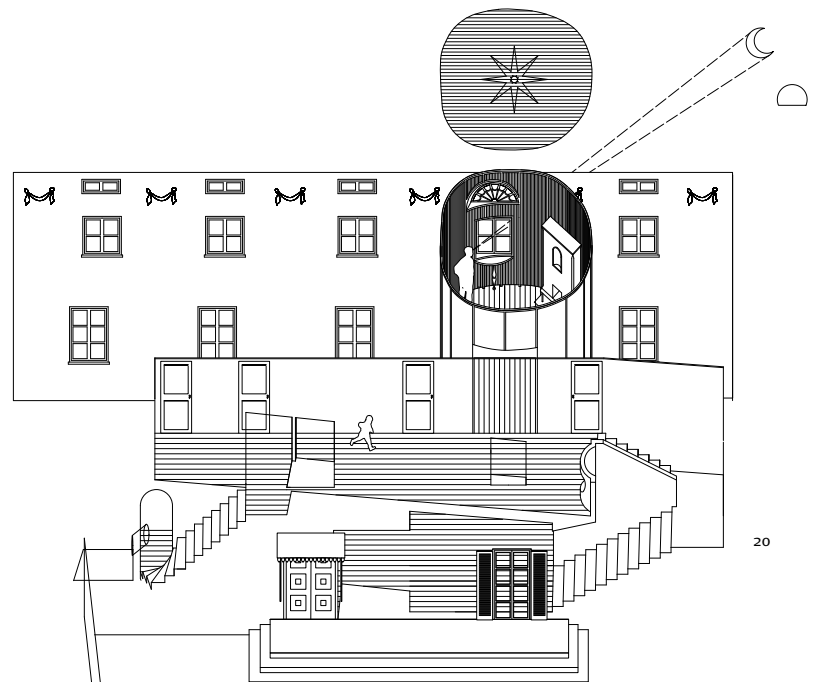
Woolf's use of short stories to form larger works, and her bracketing of inner discourse with physical objects and phenomena, suggest a similar episodic approach to architectural composition.<sup>70</sup> Discrete moments are assembled to form a whole which is often held within an overarching temporal structure. This structure does not determine the identity of each part but gathers each in proximity. The moment might last for the duration that a building stands or could be as fleeting as the place created by a pool of light from a lamp as it is turned on and off.

More contemporary with Woolf than the present, the Villa Snellman was built in 1917–18 in Djursholm, Sweden. Designed by Erik Gunnar



19

19 Diagram mapping the temporal structure of one trajectory of episodes, from arrival through to evening prayers in the upper hall, at Villa Snellman, Djursholm, Sweden, designed by Erik Gunnar Asplund.



20

20 Analytical view of Villa Snellman showing how the house is composed of multiple individual, distinct, and often surprising episodes, which are 'held together' by its simple rectangular form.



Asplund, it embodies an episodic approach to composition. The simple two-storey high rectangular volume of the house ‘holds together’ an assemblage of unexpected individual episodes and incidents where one part does not necessarily relate directly to another. The diverse spaces of the house read as a collection of short stories contained in a single volume, much like Woolf’s *Jacob’s Room*, which would be published four years later [19].

A restrained, modest entrance façade conceals a complex, unpredictable interior. The entrance façade is flanked by a lower service wing and includes two doorways joined by a stepped plinth. Moving through a doorway in this façade visitors enter a tapered hallway, surprisingly non-parallel to the façade they have just passed through. Culminating in a staircase with a half landing, which itself tapers in another direction, the space continues upstairs where the varying thickness of the tapered façade wall, created by cupboards and a secondary staircase, can be read in the depth of a landing window. Among a series of closed doors along the landing wall is another opening which leads to another surprise – an ‘upper hall’ formed from a curved space lined with timber. Here, juxtaposed with a stove and awkwardly offset in the facing wall is a window, which when viewed from the garden, does not line up with the other windows as you might expect. Both this window and another half circle one above – the only one in the house – face south-west to receive the sunset and fading light as the family gather for evening prayers [20].<sup>71</sup>

This single trajectory – which will also be punctuated by a coterie of other objects and conditions, like the curved table ledge below the window, the warmth of the stove and comfort of a chair – is limited to one point of view. When other trajectories are considered, and the rest of the household become involved, a string of individual moments and points of view gather and entangle as the family dwell from day to day in the world created by the home. A multiplicity of intertwined narratives is written by each resident author – all bracketed by the episodes of the house. Each of these individual, interior incidents is contained by the modest exterior and rectangular form that hold them together.

## Life and structure

*To the Lighthouse* and ‘How should one read a book?’ mark a particular moment in Woolf’s literary development. Structures created in earlier works, such as *Mrs Dalloway*, *Jacob’s Room*, and a number of short stories, form a productive tension with fluid inner discourse to ‘hold it all together’. Afterwards, Woolf would quickly move onto *Orlando*, a wholly different experiment, prior to embarking on *The Waves*, which pushes this tension between structure and inner discourse to an extreme.

Woolf’s ‘formed and controlled’ building emerges from the study as but one short story, one approach to handling time, life, and structure. Other approaches appear that are fragile and precarious, composed momentarily before falling away, working spatially and temporally in different, sometimes interchangeable ways and combining the loose and experiential with the highly structured. Collectively – as the ongoing, evolving work of a writer – they do not form a single consistent approach but suggest multiple, complex, partial, and interwoven possibilities. The drawings developed in the study help describe and reveal this diverse potential, transposing literary temporal structures into graphical forms, which then become a means to analyse, draw – and potentially compose with – architectural temporalities. Through the descriptions of three buildings and a film I offer glimpses and fragments, short stories which, when gathered together, offer multiple perspectives that collectively, though incompletely, suggest something of the architectural potential evoked by this study of Woolf. Like her prose these glimpses never give the reader everything but have gaps that require work. Gathered at a particular time they would be different if collected again at another. None of the examples fully articulate the architecture suggested by Woolf’s writing, which can perhaps only exist in the form of words. Instead they offer partial glimpses of its presence, framed by multiple perspectives and immersed in natural cycles, its inhabitants transient occupants aware of the passage of time and haunted by mortality. This presence is a sobering yet somehow insightful place to glimpse at a time of ecological breakdown, when the moment we stand on seems precarious, uncertain and fractured. Woolf points us to a poetic, momentary architecture with both spatial and temporal intelligence.

## Notes

1. Virginia Woolf, ‘How Should One Read a Book?’, in Virginia Woolf, *Collected Essays, Volume 2* (London: Hogarth Press, 1966), p. 2.
2. Woolf’s paper was later developed into an essay of the same title, which omits the ‘formed and controlled’ sentence: ‘The different details which have accumulated in reading assemble themselves in their proper places. The book takes on a

- definite shape; it becomes a castle, cowshed, gothic ruin, as the case may be.’ Virginia Woolf, ‘How Should One Read a Book?’, in Virginia Woolf, *Selected Essays*, ed. by David Bradshaw (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 8, 71.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 68.
4. Victoria Rosner compares Woolf’s writing with built work commissioned by Woolf at Monk’s House, her residence in West Sussex. This assumes an

autobiographical quality as Woolf creates new additions and alterations, each being linked to funds received from the publication of literary works: Victoria Rosner, *Machines for Living: Modernism and Domestic Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 225–58. Allan Johnson explores the role of the threshold and negative architectural space to undermine patriarchal mechanisms: Allan Johnson,

- “The Doors Would be Taken Off their Hinges”: Space, Place and Architectural Absence in Virginia Woolf, *English Studies*, 97:4 (2016), 412–19. The notion that a space becomes a mechanism of representation in its own right is developed by others through the buildings represented in Orlando – entangling architecture, gender, sexuality, status, and culture: Kaori Kikuchi, ‘A Conjunction of Architecture and the Writing of Virginia Woolf: Sexuality and Creativity in Orlando’, *Studies in English Literature*, 92 (2015), 77–99; Rebecca Sinclair and Mark Taylor, ‘Vivid Spaces: The Settings of Virginia Woolf and Edith Wharton’, in *Conference Proceedings - Habitus 2000: A Sense of Place*, ed. by J. R. Stephens (Perth, Curtin University (2000), p. 10.
5. Mark Hussey, *The Singing of the Real World, The Philosophy of Virginia Woolf's Fiction* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State Press, 1985); Derek Ryan and Laci Mattison, ‘Introduction: Deleuze, Virginia Woolf and Modernism’, in *Deleuze Studies*, 7:4 (2013), 421–6; Beatrice Monaco, ‘The Spatiotemporality of To the Lighthouse’, in *Machinic Modernism: The Deleuzian Literary Machines of Woolf, Lawrence and Joyce* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 18–53; Michael Levenson, ‘From the Closed Room to an Opening Sky: Vectors of Space in Eliot, Woolf, and Lewis’, *Critical Quarterly*, 49:4 (2007), 2–20. See also a later footnote relating to Bergson with whom Woolf is often associated.
  6. David Spurr, *Architecture and Modern Literature* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2012); see also Jonathan Charley, *The Routledge Companion on Architecture, Literature and The City* (London: Routledge, 2019); Jennifer Bloomer, *Architecture and the Text: The (S)cripts of Joyce and Piranesi* (London: Yale University Press, 1995); Jane Rendell, ‘Architecture-Writing’, in ‘Critical Architecture’, ed. by Jane Rendell, in *The Journal of Architecture*, 10:3 (June 2005), 255–64; *Writing Architectures: Fictio-Critical Approaches*, ed. by H el ene Frichot and Naomi Stead (London: Bloomsbury, 2020).
  7. Bernard Tschumi, *The Manhattan Transcripts* (London: John Wiley & Sons, 1994).
  8. Geoffrey Baker, ‘James Stirling and the Promenade Architecturale’, *Architectural Review*, December (1992), 72. A more recent study includes an epigraph contrasting the approaches of writer, and architect, Thomas Hardy and Woolf before describing the three ‘plots’ of James Stirling as classical, ambiguous, and fragmentary: Lu s Henrique Ribeiro da Silva, ‘The Breakdown of the Promenade Plot and Temporality in James Stirling’s Architecture 1959–1979’ (PhD thesis, ETH Zurich, 2018).
  9. Freddie Phillipson, *The Ulysses Project: Architecture and the City through James Joyce’s Dublin*, Drawing Matter (8 June 2022) <<https://drawingmatter.org/the-ulysses-project-architecture-and-the-city-through-james-joyces-dublin-introduction/>> [accessed 16 February 23]
  10. Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own and Three Guineas* (London: Vintage 2001)
  11. *Ibid.*, pp. 65–6.
  12. C. Ruth Miller, *Virginia Woolf, The Frames of Art and Life* (London: Macmillan Press, 1988), p. 78.
  13. *Ibid.*, p. 86.
  14. This is developed further in: Emily Clark, ‘The Walls are Crumbling Down: Houses and Death Metaphors in Virginia Woolf’s Orlando and To the Lighthouse’, in *Constructing the Literary Self: Race and Gender in Twentieth-Century Literature*, ed. by Patsy J. Daniels (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), pp. 49–64.
  15. Miller, *Virginia Woolf, The Frames of Art and Life*, p. 75.
  16. Ann Henley, ‘“The Whole Building of a Book”: Architectural Analogy in Virginia Woolf’s Essays and Novels’, (PhD thesis, University of Alabama, 1990).
  17. ‘Instinct’ and been corrected to ‘distinct’ in the quotation by the author though it is unclear if this was the intention of Henley. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
  18. *Ibid.*, pp. 6, 7. The literary architecture of Walter Pater is discussed in more depth in Ellen Eve Frank, *Literary Architecture: Essays Toward a Tradition: Walter Pater, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Marcel Proust, Henry James* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1979), pp. 16–51. The influence of Walter Pater on Woolf is examined in Perry Meisel, *The Absent Father: Virginia Woolf and Walter Pater* (New York, NY: Yale University Press, 1980).
  19. *Ibid.*, pp. 14, 15.
  20. See, for instance, Marko Jobst who, in the context of a discussion preoccupied with ‘writing-architecture’ and the ideas of Giles Deleuze, describes a ‘becoming-architecture’ of sensations grounded in objects. Marko Jobst, ‘Writing Sensation: Deleuze, Literature, Architecture and Virginia Woolf’s The Waves’, *The Journal of Architecture*, 21:1 (2016), 55–67.
  21. Hermoine Lee, ‘Introduction’, in Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), p. xi.
  22. Virginia Woolf, ‘Notes for Writing: To the Lighthouse’, in *Woolf Online*, ed. by Pamela L. Caughie, Nick Hayward, Mark Hussey, Peter Shillingsburg, George K. Thiruvathukal, Holograph MS. Berg Collection. New York Public Library <[http://www.woolfonline.com/?node=content/image\\_gallery&project=1&parent=6&taxa=16&content=732](http://www.woolfonline.com/?node=content/image_gallery&project=1&parent=6&taxa=16&content=732)> [accessed 9 December 20]
  23. Virginia Woolf on 14 March 1927 in *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Volume 3, 1925–1930*, ed. by Anne Oliver Bell and Andrew McNeillie (London: Chatto & Windus, 1980), pp. 131, 132; Jane Goldman, ‘To the Lighthouse’s Use of Language and Form’, in *The Cambridge Companion to To the Lighthouse*, ed. by Allison Pease (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 34. Goldman also ruminates on other readings of Woolf’s diagram in her essay.
  24. Virginia Woolf, ‘Street Haunting: A London Adventure’, in *Virginia Woolf, Selected Essays*, pp. 177–87.
  25. Virginia Woolf in *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Volume 1: 1915–1919*, ed. by Anne Olivier Bell (Richmond, VA: Hogarth Press, 1977), p. 214.
  26. The ground and first floors of 52 Tavistock Square were let out to a firm of solicitors with the Woolfs occupying the rest of the house. Hermoine Lee, *Virginia Woolf* (London: Vintage, 1997), p. 473.
  27. Virginia Woolf, ‘A Sketch of the Past’, in *Moments of Being*, ed. by Jeanne Schulkind (London: University of Sussex Press, 1976), p. 81.
  28. Virginia Woolf in *A Writer’s Diary*, ed. by Leonard Woolf (London: The Hogarth Press, 1975), p. 139.
  29. John Graham, ‘Time in the Novels of Virginia Woolf’, in *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 18:2 (1949), 186–201.
  30. Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative, Volume 2* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1985), pp. 101–12.
  31. Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton

- University Press, 1974).
32. Virginia Woolf in *The Question of Things Happening: The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Volume 2: 1912–1922*, ed. by Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann (London: Hogarth Press, 1976), p. 262.
  33. Virginia Woolf, 'Modern Novels', in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf, Volume 3: 1919–24*, ed. by Andrew McNeillie (London: Hogarth Press, 1988), p. 33.
  34. This handling of inner consciousness, memories, and anticipation has led many to link Woolf's work with Henri Bergson and his concept of *durée*, a thickened present irreducibly bound with past and future. Mary Ann Gillies contrasts the Bergsonian *durée* of 'moments of being' with the *l'étendu* of underlying narrative or structure: Mary Ann Gillies, *Henri Bergson and British Modernism* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), pp. 107–31. While Woolf's writing can echo this contrast, the equivalence and interchangeability that she gives to time and space make a direct comparison with a purely Bergsonian strain of thinking problematic. Bergson was careful to consider time on its own terms, rather than through a spatial lens. As noted by others, Woolf could also be linked with other approaches to time: The space-time of Albert Einstein, derived from his *Theories of Relativity* written during Woolf's lifetime, closely bind space and time. Woolf, and the Bloomsbury Group generally, were close to Bertrand Russell, Cambridge and the 'analytical' tradition, which places emphasis on a considered understanding of the relation of past, present, and future compared with before and after. For a helpful discussion of this, see: Ann Banfield, 'Tragic Time: The Problem of the Future in Cambridge Philosophy and To the Lighthouse', *Modernism/modernity*, 7:1 (2000), 43–75; Paul Sheehan, 'Time as a Protagonist in To the Lighthouse', in *The Cambridge Companion to To The Lighthouse*, pp. 48–50. If anything, I would suggest that Woolf's temporality is much more punctuated, discontinuous, and momentary than Bergsonian *durée*, being closer to Gaston Bachelard's critique of the same in: Gaston Bachelard, *The Dialectic of Duration* (Paris: Clinamen Press, 2000). However, rather than attempt to understand Woolf through associating her with the ideas of others it is more productive to describe Woolf's temporality in its own terms, as a writer experimenting with it through her work. As such it may evolve and develop, perhaps contradicting itself and is not necessarily a consistent philosophical treatise, or an illustration of the thought of others.
  35. Ann Banfield, 'Time Passes: Virginia Woolf, Post-Impressionism, and Cambridge Time', *Poetics Today*, 24:3 (autumn 2003), 471, 516.
  36. Virginia Woolf, 'Modern Fiction', in Bradshaw, *Virginia Woolf, Selected Essays*, p. 9.
  37. Sheehan, 'Time as a Protagonist in To the Lighthouse', p. 51.
  38. Michael Levenson, 'Narrative perspective in To the Lighthouse', *The Cambridge Companion to To The Lighthouse*, pp. 19–29.
  39. Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, p. 87.
  40. *Ibid.*, p. 114.
  41. Hermione Lee, *To Pin Down the Moment with Date and Season* (Southport: Virginia Woolf Society of Great Britain, 2014).
  42. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, p. 121.
  43. Virginia Woolf, 'A Sketch of the Past', in *Moments of Being*, ed. by Schulkind, p. 81; Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, p. 139.
  44. Virginia Woolf on 4 January 1929 in *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Volume 3, 1925–1930*, ed. by Bell and McNeillie, p. 218; Woolf, 'A Sketch of the Past', p. 85.
  45. Virginia Woolf, *A Room of Ones Own and Three Guineas* (London: Vintage, 2001), p. 76; Virginia Woolf in *The Sickle Side of the Moon: The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Volume 5: 1932–1935*, ed. by Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann (London: Hogarth Press, 1979), p. 168.
  46. Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, pp. 121–7.
  47. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
  48. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
  49. *Ibid.*, pp. 45, 67, 73, 108.
  50. *Ibid.*, p. 34.
  51. *Ibid.*, p. 137.
  52. *Ibid.*, p. 138.
  53. *Ibid.*, pp. 147, 152.
  54. This echoes in Woolf's working practices too which analogously delete, edit, compose, and re-compose: Stefanie Heine, 'Forces of Unworking in Virginia Woolf's "Time Passes"', *Textual Cultures*, 12:1 (spring 2019), 120–36.
  55. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, p. ix.
  56. An 'Outline' for 'Time Passes' from 'To the Lighthouse: The Original Holograph Draft' quoted in Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, p. 251.
  57. This recurs too when Woolf is writing *The Waves* when she remarks: 'I am haunted by the two contradictions. This has gone on for ever: will last for ever; goes down to the bottom of the world – this moment I stand on. Also it is transitory, flying, diaphanous. I shall pass like a cloud in the waves.' Bell and McNeillie, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Volume 3, 1925–1930*, p. 218. A helpful morphology of Woolf's evolving sense of time is provided in Julia Briggs, *This Moment I Stand On: Woolf and the Spaces in Time* (Southport: The Virginia Woolf Society of Great Britain, 2001).
  58. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, p. 176.
  59. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1994), p. 38. Similarly the glimpses are intended to be analogous with Woolf rather than being more literal interpretations of her work as has been explored by others: Sevinc Kurt, 'Recreating Woolf's Public and Private Spaces in Architectural Design Education', in *Woolf and the City* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), pp. 204–21.
  60. Níall McLaughlin, Royal Gold Medal 2012 Presentation (February 2012) <<https://vimeo.com/37110350>> [accessed 4 November 21] and unpublished script from McLaughlin.
  61. Níall McLaughlin, *Twelve Halls* (London: Níall McLaughlin Architects, 2018), p. 7.
  62. This distinction is echoed by a time-based drawing created by McLaughlin in collaboration with Yeoryia Manolopoulou entitled *Losing Myself*. First exhibited at the Venice Biennale in 2016 an array of projectors create a single large plan of McLaughlin's Alzheimers's Respite Centre in Dublin. The fixed walls and spaces of the floor plan contrast with the wandering lines of filmed hand drawings made by sixteen collaborators in the 'continuous present tense' that describe the inhabitation of the building, bound by the fixed elements, from morning through to evening. This is overlaid with incidental sounds of conversations, music, running water, and footsteps that cease at 6pm when the Angelus bell rings, before rain starts to fall. The period of a day doubles as a year, as the time-based drawing moves

- through the seasons, establishing a triple time scheme of day, year and the sixteen minutes of the projection. McLaughlin acknowledges the influence of James Joyce's *Ulysses* on the time sequence and motifs. Published a few years before *To the Lighthouse* and to which it is often compared, Joyce reluctantly published a table describing the undisclosed underlying structure of *Ulysses* according to hours, scenes, organs, art, colours, symbols, and technics. Níall McLaughlin, *RIBA Charles Jencks Award 2016 Lecture* <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wn4TyJ8coIc>> [accessed 1 April 22].
63. McLaughlin's use of linear elements as combs to mediate between inner and outer worlds is common to many of his projects as discussed in: Andrew Carr, 'Combs, Cages and Thickets: Níall McLaughlin and an architecture of line', *arq*, 24:1 (2020), 18–36.
64. Hertzberger and several of his contemporaries, such as Aldo Rossi, compared this individual articulation within a bigger whole, to the structures of writing, language, and speech. Use and inhabitation, like individual expressive speech, become distinct from the underlying structure of a building understood as an established linguistic system. For Rossi this reinforced a duality between the permanence of the structure of the city and its transient occupation.
65. McLaughlin describes temporal depth as follows: 'If we are able to consider ourselves as having a deeper or longer history, it incentivises us to think beyond the span of our own life as a community, and to make plans for generations who do not yet exist. Therefore, the increasing complexity of human society required individuals to think more about themselves not just as one increment existing in a short period of time, but as part of a longer continuity. That continuity was represented through buildings. And it is that seam of architecture as a representation of what I would call "temporal depth" in other words, the idea that we can understand and see deeper time by visiting buildings and inhabit them and therefore understand ourselves as part of a longer continuity, that seems to me to be central to the task of the architect.' Níall McLaughlin in a transcript of his lecture 'Building Time' given as the 2021 Takshila Lecture on Architecture & Society on 26 January 2021, p. 4.
66. Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* [*Being and Time*] was published in German in 1927, the same year as *To the Lighthouse*. It established his thinking on 'daesin', which was later expanded through his description of the Blackforest Farmhouse in his 1951 lecture 'Building Dwelling Thinking'. The temporality of this house is discussed by Harries in relation to his thinking on building as a 'deep defence against the terror to time' in: Karsten Harries, 'Time, Death and Building', in *Constancy and Change in Architecture*, ed. by Malcolm Quantrill and Bruce Webb (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1991), pp. 23–41. Several comparative studies between Heidegger and Woolf have been made: Heidi Storl, 'Heidegger in Woolf's Clothing', *Philosophy and Literature*, 32:2 (2008), 303–14; and Emma Simone, *Virginia Woolf and Being-in-the-World: A Heideggerian Study* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017).
67. Biba Dow, 'Legacy, New Horizons', in *The Cultural Significance of Architecture: In Memory of Dalibor Vesely Session 3*, The Dalibor Vesely Memorial Conference: Session 3 (1 April 2016) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=efo4zKQAJDs>> [accessed 19 March 2021]
68. 'Markings', from Seamus Heaney, *Seeing Things* (London: Faber and Faber, 1991), quoted by Biba Dow in 'Summer Nights 2009', a lecture at the Architecture Foundation, London <<https://vimeo.com/1866196>> [accessed 19 February 2021]
69. Álvaro Siza, 'Living in a House', in Kenneth Frampton, *Álvaro Siza: Complete Works* (London: Phaidon, 2000), p. 252.
70. Episodic approaches to architectural composition are examined further in: Andrew Carr, 'Episodes and Incidents: From Hotel Palenque to Aalto's Italian Grill', *JoCA, The Journal of Civic Architecture*, 9 (June 2022), 94–107.
71. Peter Blundell Jones notes that the upper hall was used as a sitting room and for evening prayers. Peter Blundell Jones, *Gunnar Asplund* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 2006), p. 50.

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The author declares none.

#### Author's biography

Andrew Carr is an architect, based in London, practising with Brady Mallalieu Architects. Time and temporality are a common thread in his writing, which includes a study of the architectural chronotope, in *arq* 21:2, and *Contrapposto Permanence*, a review of David Leatherbarrow's book *Building Time* in *arq* 25:1.

#### Author's affiliation

Andrew Carr, independent scholar and architect, Brady Mallalieu Architects, United Kingdom.

#### Author's address

Andrew Carr  
[andrew@bradymallalieu.com](mailto:andrew@bradymallalieu.com)