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# The Entanglement of Thing and Subject in Virginia Woolf's "Street Haunting: A London Adventure"

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Virginia Woolf's essay "Street Haunting: A London Adventure" highlights the complex relationships between things and the subject. On the individual's level, indoor things construct and limit the subject's identity, while outdoor things allow fluid identities; these things reveal Woolf's dual identity as both a rebel against and a ruler of the hierarchical system. On the intersubjective level, subjects are linked through common aesthetic experience mediated by things, which enjoys a high degree of arbitrariness. With the help of things, subjects form an "imagined community". Concerning the relationship between things and the mind, things also endow order in the fragmented reality, yet in this sense they are abstract, metaphysical and universal rather than specific in Virginia Woolf's thoughts. They are the withdrawn things expressed by sensual qualities. These sensual aspects, however, are tools to reveal the essence and meaning of life, secondary to the mind.

*Keywords:* thing, subject, identity, community, mind

## Introduction

In his article "The Secret Life of Things" Bill Brown put forward that Virginia Woolf's essay "Solid Objects" presented "a noninstrumental passion for things" (Brown, 1999, p. 17). The protagonist is avid for anything "so long it [is] an object of some kind, more or less round" (Brown, 1999, p. 4). He calls it an end to his life as a politician, devoting only to the search of forsaken objects. The story, together with some other modernist novels, demonstrates "a continuum of modernist attention to materials" (Brown, 1999, p. 7). They shed an anti-anthropocentric light to emancipate objects from the domination of human subjects.

Things in Woolf's works are put into a foregrounding position. Apart from "Solid Objects" whose title already involves a rich implication, there is still "The Mark on the Wall" and *To the Lighthouse*, wherein the mark and lighthouse serve as the narrative threads; there is also "Moments of Being", which ends in the retrieval of the lost pin. Not to mention "Street Haunting: A London Adventure", as the whole process of street haunting is under the pretext of buying a lead pencil. What are, then, the roles of things in Woolf's writings? In *Between the Acts* Mrs. Swithin claims "We live in things" (Woolf, 1998, p. 64); then when Woolf commented in "Modern Fiction", that "life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end" (Woolf, 1984, p. 150), what is the relationship between things and the subject? Saving the attention to focus on "Street Haunting: A London Adventure" to have an examination of the above issues.

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In its sharp contrast with Woolf's representative works, this essay has been much less explored. It's related to Benjamin's flaneur and studied from the perspective of space. Those comments offer a bird's eye's view top down in their effort to grasp the gist, with a neglection of analysis bottom up. Yet "thing" in the essay enjoys multilayer significances, requiring a much more detailed examination. This paper explores the roles of things played on various levels from individual to society. It will then dig out the interaction between things and the mind, so as to figure out their relationships in Woolf's system of thought and to get a glimpse about her literary criticism. These tacit "things" are actually imbedded with expressive social and historical implications.

## Thing of the Identity: From the Interior to Exterior Space

Dailey and Tomedi commented that Woolf "was a Londoner through and through", and that her characters are "full of London" (2005, p. 122). In "Street Haunting", by means of the protagonist's constant movement between the interior and the exterior scenes, Woolf caught the soul of the city of an age. It was demonstrated through "things" indoors and outdoors.

The recurrence and careful depiction of things make them outstanding elements. Inside the house, that bowl on the mantlepiece, the coffee cups, the iron tables, and the brown stamp bear more implications than solely useful objects. According to Heidegger and Bill Brown, a thing differs from an object when it's attached encoded values and judgements beyond the common use. As the narrator steps out to the streets, she leaves the familiar things behind, encountering "shock experiences". The interior epitomizes order and hierarchy imposed on her subject, while the exterior the breaking of habitual hierarchy and the fluidity of identity, wherein it's the particularity of disparate things that make so. These things are what Tang Weisheng called "thing[s] as signs", a kind of cultural signs revealing the social and cultural significances (Tang, 2023, p. 16). He puts forward three basic ways of western scholars to study things as signs: that on the basis of Marxist commodity theory, of Baudrillard's theory of consumerism, and of a broader material culture criticism (Tang, 2023, p. 18). The term "material culture", in Ian Woodward's eyes, "emphasizes how apparently inanimate things within the environment act on people, and are acted upon by people, for the purposes of carrying out social functions, regulating social relations and giving symbolic meaning to human activity" (Woodward, 2007, p. 3). It is how things function on the subject's identity.

Woolf's domestic interior is a very traditional one. At the beginning of the essay, the narrator shows how things indoors "perpetually express the oddity of our own temperaments and enforce the memories of our own experience" (Woolf, 2017, p. 7). It is more of a Victorian home than a modern one that members of the Bloomsbury group would prefer to visualize. The work of Bloomsbury on the Omega workshop after World War I imaged new forms of home, which was in pair with their aspirations for an unconventional life; "[L]ightness, airiness, and continuity of inner and outer space" (Brown, 2008, p. 95), as shown in Le Corbusier's writings. Yet in a typical Victorian home, "the traces of its inhabitants are molded into the interior" (ibid., p. 95). Family serves as a center of emotional power to counter the emerging and dehumanized Industrialization, "the source of refuge… strength and renewal" (ibid., p. 95). Behind interior things there always exist special memories of personal experiences and disposition of the subject, as the coffee cups and iron table would reveal the secrets of the soul of a "melancholy Englishman" (Woolf, 2017, p. 8). Entering a new room is akin to an adventure, "for the lives and characters of its owners have distilled their atmosphere into it" (Woolf, 2017, p. 18). This atmosphere

could be embodied only through specific things. Those indoor things provide the subject with a sense of familiarity and certainty, while the subject is defined and limited by intimate things.

Come with the interior things are hierarchical orders and a settled identity of the subject. Terry Eagleton pointed out that Woolf lived in such an age "when it was too late for Victorian paternalism and still somewhat early for socialist democracy" (2005, p. 309). There is ambiguity in Woolf's works as both a rebel and a ruler. While she denounced patriarchy and was hailed as "the founding mother of the contemporary debate" (Selden, 2005, p. 118) in Mary Eagleton's phrase with *A Room of One's Own*, she was an admirer of John Ruskin, who in 1865 made his didactic essay "Of Queen's Garden" published. The essay embodied Ruskin's conservatism on women's issues as it claimed that women are of paramount suitability to the private space. While Woolf spoke highly of women's autonomy, she admitted that "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction" (Woolf, 1935, p. 6), and her wealth was not independent of her affluent family background. There she presented a complicated view towards hierarchy.

As mentioned before, the interior house in "Street Haunting" is a Victorian one, wherein things impose hierarchical order. "Circumstances compel unity; for convenience' sake a man must be a whole" (Woolf, 2017, p. 14). Things inside the house also reflect the role of women as the "angel in the house" and help to strengthen the patriarchal hierarchy. They tell women's inferiority. As the flaneuse walks into a stationer's shop, she finds the old man shouting out roughly to his wife when he couldn't find the pencil, "as if his wife had hidden them" (Woolf, 2017, p. 18). It is when the woman finds the pencil that the man realizes her indispensability—"How then could he do without her? Was she not indispensable to him?" (Woolf, 2017, p. 18) The quarrel is over, and the woman "would get out her sewing; he would read his newspaper" (Woolf, 2017, p. 19). "Sewing" is the thing highly feminine, contrasting sharply with newspaper reading. Women and sewing make up recurring images in Western literature from Homer's *Odyssey* to Dickens' *David Copperfield*. It is said from the Middle Ages there were schools kept particularly for women, where sewing was taught to cultivate women's temperament. This time-consuming activity could waste women's energy in case of interfering in male affairs, confining them in the house to be angels. The old woman is sheerly an image of a Victorian angel in the house. Representatives can also be found in *To the Lighthouse* and *Mrs. Dalloway*. Woolf attached importance to angles in the house. Those women, including Mrs. Ramsay who has Woolf's mother as the prototype, maintain a sense of communiality. It's the angel that contributes to "the stability of Victorian domesticity" (Brown, 2008, p. 107), without whom "the community nearly dissolves" (ibid., p. 108)—as Mrs. Ramsay died in "Time Passes", the house quickly decayed.

If things indoors stand for the stability of the subject's identity and hierarchy, outdoor things mark the fluidity of identity, the subversion of order and irrationality. When the door shuts up behind the narrator, all the familiar and definite things "vanish[es]" (Woolf, 2017, p. 8). As people go out of the door, coming to the streets, all that works is an "enormous eye" (ibid., p. 8). There is a comparison between the eye and the brain. The eye is by no means "a seeker after buried treasure" (ibid., p. 8), and "rests only on beauty" (ibid., p. 9). The brain "sleeps perhaps as it looks" (ibid., p. 8). Rationality, as represented by the brain, is dangerous—"We are in danger of digging deeper than the eye approves" (ibid., p. 9). The narrator pleads to "be content still with surfaces only" (ibid., p. 9). To be content with surfaces is to be satisfied with what irrationality would bring us to see. Outdoor, the subject's identity remains no longer determined by things, but interacts with them. With irrationality represented by the eye, the subject's identity stays no longer unchanged.

Outside the door, the Woolfian eye is a Romantic one. When the narrator comes to Oxford Street, "the eye is sportive and generous; it creates; it adorns; it enhances" (Woolf, 2017, p. 12). It is through the creation of the eye that the subject imagines her identity. The narrator would "choose those pearls" (Woolf, 2017, p.13) in the antique jewelers, and imagine how "life would be changed" "if we put them on". The time would be "two and three in the morning" (ibid., p. 13) and she turns into someone who steps on the balcony beside Mayfair. Around her there is the aged Prime Minister. Such a description is highly Romantic, with the mind as a "radiant projector" and as the ability of imagination is praised. From Woolf's diaries and essays, one can prove her knowledge of Romantic poets. In *Common Reader* she mentioned several times the name of Coleridge, Wordsworth and Dorothy; and essay "Poetry, Fiction and the Future" saw her comments on Byron's *Don Juan*. For Romanticism the "poetry is not in the object itself,' but 'in the state of mind'" (Abrams, 1958, p. 24). This kind of imagination of identity, nevertheless, could not be triggered without things. It is the conspiration between things and the subject that the fluidity of identity is made possible.

## Thing of the Society: The Common Aesthetic Experience and an Imagined Community

If things indoors define the subject's identity and things outdoors help the subject to imagine his identities, exposing Woolf as both a rebel to and ruler of hierarchy, they also operate on the level of society. Functioning intersubjectively, things cultivate a sense of communality.

Self becomes fluid after the narrator saunters through the exterior space. Whereas the former discussion examines how the outdoor things involve into the subject's imagination of identity shaping, here the focus would be on the intersubjective interaction. Woolf was "a liberal individualist" in Eagleton's words. While modernists got embroiled in the alienation and breakdown of communication between one and the society and went inwardly, Woolf didn't give up the quest for connection between subjects. Her point about subject is never a "deceptively self-sufficient" (Eagleton, 2005, p. 319) one. Rather, subject is "much more fluid, fragile, borderless" (ibid., p. 319). It is not such a subject that sheerly rejects others, that confines itself in the darkness. On the street the subject keeps interacting with other subjects.

There is a tendency that in Woolf's works characters engage in communication through common experience rather than verbal communication alone; and that things act as the object of the common experience. "Language for Woolf is public, whereas experience and sensation are essentially private. (Eagleton, 2005). Connection between subjects can hardly be established mere verbally. Language in the modern sense is always unreliable and elusive, so it does in Woolf's works. "From *The Voyage Out* through *Between the Acts*, Woolf's fiction demonstrates keen awareness of the limits of language as a means of connecting with others" (Greer, 2017, p. 2). Considering *To the Lighthouse*, in which Lily discovers that "Words fluttered sideways…" (Woolf, 1930, p. 274). And *The Waves*, in which the character says "speech is false" (Woolf, 1931, p. 99).

Woolf's portrayal of conversation not just as verbal exchange but as a form of non-verbal, aesthetic engagement transcends traditional dialogic interactions. It's the process of "aesthetic attunement" as Erin Greer put it, which combines disinterested engagement with an imaginative awareness of others, facilitated by art and the aesthetic experience. Things become in one way or another the material of this "aesthetic attunement", a kind of window to be acquaint and seek contact with others and with society. As mentioned before, the time as the narrator comes into the stationery store, she senses the emotional wave of the shopkeepers' quarrelling, "for the

lives and characters of its owners have distilled their atmosphere into" (Woolf, 2017, p. 18) the room. The narrator links with the old couple by surrounding with the same atmosphere and atheistic experience created by things in the room. The case of the stationary store is the same as in *The Waves*, wherein subjects primarily communicate through shared emotional resonances rather than verbal language. The narrator wields her imaginative awareness of others, aesthetically engaged in the common experience that her imagination builds. When she sees at the street corner the "latest wire from Newmarket in the stop press news" read by two men "consulting under the lamp post" (Woolf, 2017, p.16), the narrator begins to wonder what would be thought by these men. With this there forms a connection between the narrator and the men.

These things, then, participates actively in the narrative progress, pushing the plot heading forward. It acts as the "thing as actors" in Professor Tang Weisheng's theory; it is what Ryan called the "strategic function" of things in narrative (Ryan, 2021, pp. 3-46). The nonhuman agency, in Edwin Sayes's words forms with human a whole of actor network according to Latour's Actor-Network-Theory (Latour, 2005, p. 10). Thing analyzed above bears this "thing-power" (Bennett, 2010) that connect people together and influence their thoughts and acts.

In situation like these, the connection of subjects formed in the common aesthetic experience as inspired by certain things is fairly arbitrary. The outdoor environment provides scenes and things that bring together "different characters in this deliberately arbitrary" (Eagleton, 2005, p. 319). In the outside street, "one catches a word in passing and from a chance phrase fabricates a lifetime." The narrator walks among a stream of walkers, indulging herself in numerous "shock experiences" that burst so abruptly and fleets with such transience. Yet they manage to share the "same experiences from quite different perspectives" (Eagleton, 2005, p. 320).

Aside from the arbitrary connection, things also allow characters to link on a deep, communal level, transcending individual differences and creating a shared sense of being. It is characterized by a collective effort to construct a common aesthetic ground—a sensus communis—that is not predetermined by a priori senses or judgments but is instead built through the communal aesthetic efforts. The bookshop provides such an ideal place for fostering a sense of communality. Through books the narrator develops friendships with their writers, even though they never met. Though she claims that "glancing round the bookshop, we make other such sudden capricious friendships with the unknown and the vanished" (Woolf, 2017, p. 15), it's not actually so capricious. Those publication promotes the propagation of the imagined common experience, which is highly ideological, making it typical "thing of signs". Its records have constructed the nationalism of England—that is, Englishness. There is a sense of uneasiness of this nation, as the narrator says "so restless the English are" (Woolf, 2017, p. 15).

Behind these books is an imagined community of deep communal connection. All those novels would make people think of the assertation of Benedict Anderson that the imagined communities of nations were first and foremost imagined through reading. Printing technology makes one of the preconditions to imagine a community. Sense of identity would be set up among those even they never and ever meet. Books about the exploration of deserts and India beautify the colonization of England, and praise the deeds of Queen Victoria. "English…helps to 'promote sympathy and fellow feeling among all classes" (Eagleton, 2008, p. 22). It took the place of religion to act as the social cement "from the Victorian period onwards" (ibid., p. 21). These printed works build the common aesthetic ground for communality.

"For an English writer born at the height of the British Empire and dying in its twilight, the story of empire is clearly central" (Friedman, 1998, p. 119). No matter it is *Mrs. Dalloway*, *Orlando*, or *Between the Acts* there are similar depictions of the other. When she created these works, the myth of "the Sun Never Sets" was vanishing in between two world wars. Woolf's avid for exotic space is actually a projection of the cultural anxiety and national identity crisis caused by the decline of the British Empire. Those books, accordingly, help to strengthen the identity Englishness in the community, even if their readers hardly know each other.

Subjects in the essay are by no means isolated, but merging into the ocean of communality, which is so unnamed and imagined. In that process the aesthetic experience or empathy, relying on objective things, counts more than verbal communication. From self to communality, from arbitrariness to certainty, lives are unconsciously intertwined and individuals are woven into an invisible net by things.

## Interaction of the Thing and the Mind

When things shape the identities of the subjects and cultivate the sense of connection intersubjectively, they also entangle with the mind. Some of the things in Woolf's works are relatively autonomous and independent, which not only endow unity and order in form, but help the narrator or the subject to resist nothingness concerning the content.

The plot of "Street Haunting" is extremely simple: the narrator strolls through half of the city under the pretext of purchasing a lead pencil. It is a modern version, a "London adventure" of the quest of finding the Holy Grail, or a contemporary Odyssey, in which the protagonist ploughs the waves but finally gets what she wants and back home. The narrator calls the lead pencil "spoil" (Woolf, 2017, p. 19). At first glance the lead pencil is under the control of the mind, which is nothing other than a passive object waiting for the coming of the subject; scratch under the surface, however, and one will find a much more complex panorama.

The image of the Holy Grail has been experiencing a process of secularization. The Holy Grail in the modern context shakes off its divine implications since the Middle Ages and becomes more personalized. The London adventure is no longer a romance of the Holy Grail, as it's more appropriate to call its narrator a common man rather than a "hero" in Northrop Frye's words. Yet the act of purchasing a lead pencil crossing the city still endows an affinity with the old myth, thus providing a sense of man-made order to readers, just the same as James Joyce did with his *Ulysses*. In "'Ulysses,' Order and Myth", T. S. Eliot wrote "In using the myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity…It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history" (Eliot, 1975, p. 177). The mimesis of myth is a way of giving significance. Professor Gao Fen has explored that the art of Joyce is impersonalized, corresponding to the ideal creation mode put forward by Jung, that authors process primary images from the unconsciousness to keep the aesthetic value of the work (Gao, 2007, pp. 112-115). The impersonality of Joyce's work is realized through its implied mythological structure. In virtue of the mythological framework, the intricate and chaotic activities of the conscious and unconscious are arranged into a unity and whole. (Underlying the lives of Bloom and Stephen is the universal myth of the return of the lost soul.) Similarly, the purchase of the pencil acts as an endeavor to establish a sense of order. In "The Narrow Bridge of Art", Woolf argued that "Tumult is vile; confusion is hateful; everything in a work of art should be mastered and ordered" (Woolf, 1924, p. 228). Starting with the claim "Really I must buy a pencil" (Woolf, 2017,

p. 7) and ending with the attainment of it, the story is thus coherent and cohesive in structure. It goes well with Woolf's viewpoint of *Tristram Shandy*, which shows that "it will be necessary for the writer of this exacting book to bring to bear upon his tumultuous and contradictory emotions the generalizing and simplifying power of a strict and logical imagination" (Woolf, 1924, p. 228). Albeit the mixed-up thread of thoughts, they are linked into a whole by the lead pencil.

In content and theme, thing also imposes order on the fragmenting reality. The little rod would "lay its bar across the velocity and abundance of life" (Woolf, 2017, p. 17). It reminds us of Woolf's criticism of *Robinson Crusoe*, in which "nothing exists except an earthenware pot" (Woolf, 1965, p. 55). It's a world where "[r]eality, fact, substance is going to dominate all that follows" (ibid., p. 54), a world that "[g]od does not exist" (ibid., p. 55). There is nothing but substance. It's a world of pure substances as they were, bearing their autonomy and independence- "everything is seen precisely as it appears to Robinson Crusoe" (Woolf, 1965, p. 56). When Woolf said "Defoe, by reiterating that nothing but a plain earthenware pot stands in the foreground, persuades us to see remote islands and the solitudes of the human soul" (ibid., p. 56), she not only emphasized the foregrounding position of things, but had pondered over the relation between the "earthenware pot" and the mind. Woolfian things, especially the lead pencil here, help to resist the nothingness, vacancy and uneasiness inside the mind. Eagleton concluded "the fragmenting of reality, and the splintering of the human subject, are aspects of the same process" (Eagleton, 2005, p. 315) in Woolf's works. Compared with the insecure life, death seems to be more reassuring and inviting. On the riverbank of the Thames, the narrator sighs that "[h]is is the happiness of death; ours the insecurity of life" (Woolf, 2017, p. 17). In such a society in which "all that is solid melts into air", there is no hope for peace only if she can "take from it the element of uncertainty" (ibid., p. 17). To confront such a capriciousness of reality and uneasiness in the mind, the narrator is in desperate need of the autonomous pencil. That explains why in the following sentences the narrator says at once "[a]s it is, we must turn", and she must "find a shop" which is ready to "sell us a pencil" (Woolf, 2017, p. 18). She would "examine it tenderly" and "touch it with reverence" (ibid., p. 19). Here exposes Woolf's avid for substance—its materials and textures. Heidegger distinguished ready-to-hand (zuhandenheit) from present-at-hand (vorhandenheit) with the image of a broken hammer. The lead pencil is viewed by the narrator in the state of present-at-hand, highlighting its thingness instead of common use—that is, to write something. Much like Defoe's earthenware and Wallace Stevens' jar, they are the only anchor of the world and the mind.

All the discussions above do not bear any hint to mean that Woolf is a realist writer, that she endowed fantasy to things. On the contrary, she frowned upon the Edwardian novelists in both "Mr. Bennett And Mrs. Brown" as well as "Modern Fiction", and labeled them "materialists". They put too much attention to "the trivial and the transitory" (Woolf, 1924, p. 105). The Edwardian "have looked … at factories, at Utopias, even at the decoration and upholstery of the carriage; but never at her, never at life, never at human nature" (Woolf, 1924, p. 106). The disapproval, however, is not at odds with her passion for things. Things here are only tools to reach the meaning of life. For the only thing that counts is life itself—"Life escapes; and perhaps without life nothing else is worth while" (Woolf, 1924, p. 105). And that "'The proper stuff of fiction' does not exist", as any method that "has the merit of bringing us closer to what we were prepared to call life itself" is right (Woolf, 1924, p. 110).

Thing as actors and thing as ontology (the autonomous thing) in Woolf's works as in "Street Haunting: A London Adventure" never indulge in excessive details and facts such as "occupation" "house" and "income" for

their own sake from scratch, which differs them from things in the Edwardian works. They do not mean to implicate specific and trivial description, but always transcend specificity to a sense of universality, as one can see through Robinson Crusoe's pot human souls. They are ultimately impersonal. The lead pencil is not only the property of the narrator, but represents the modern Holy Grail of all modern men. Woolf predicted that prose was the new direction we were going. "It will stand further back from life" (Woolf, 1924, p. 224). It gives the outline instead of detail. The function of the new style is the same as the function of things—"It will resemble poetry in this that it will give not only or mainly people's relations to each other and their activities together, as the novel has hitherto done, but it will give the relation of the mind to general ideas and its soliloquy in solitude" (Woolf, 1924, p. 225). There is a conversion from specific to universal. She wrote things for some more abstract and metaphysical aims, as the insecurity in the modern era and the need to establish order, issues all concern life itself. Autonomous things in her works also enjoy her praise of the Elizabethan drama, in which the settings don't matter. Even though they "laid their scenes in foreign parts" "the country remained English; and the Bohemian prince was the same person as the English noble" (Woolf, 1924, p. 221). It doesn't matter what are the details of those things or what differences are between one thing and another. They share some common significance metaphysically. In this sense, what Eagleton has said is true, that it would be better to call the Edwardian writers "naturalistic" than "materialist".

With the characteristic of the universality of things, they work to reveal the essence of life. In his discussion of speculative realism and especially Object-Oriented Ontology, Graham Harman puts forward the fourfold structure of things, concerning his concept of "quadruple object". Things are divided into two groups: "the real object that withdraws from all experience, and the sensual objects that exists only in experience" (Harman, 2011, p. 49). The Husserlian sensual objects "exist only for another object that encounters them" (Harman, 2011, p. 47), while the Heideggerian real object is "autonomous from whatever encounters it" (Harman, 2011, p. 48). Thus the "real object" here is directly related to life itself. Yet this kind of "Heideggerian real object", liken to Kant's "thing-in-itself", is always "withdrawn" and cannot be sensed directly. It is when the sensual qualities are in need, as "they are the sole way in which the withdrawn tool-beings become present in consciousness" (Harman, 2011, p. 49)—the hammer after all has its own sensual qualities. Then there comes the contradictory between the "real object" and its sensual qualities, which emerges when the hammer is broken. This conflict is the essence of Harman's speculative realism—that he admits the real object, yet it's withdrawn, which can never to be fully grasped, and that there always leaves gaps between the fourfold structures. The truth can only be "allure[d]" (Harman, 2011, p. 104) to with the "allure structure" (Harman, 2012, pp. 183-203) provided by the broken hammer. In other words, the essence of literature and also the core of Harman's ontography is to allure readers to catch a glimpse of the real object through revealing the gap. Therefore, the sensual qualities are still needed, which explains why the narrator would "examine it tenderly" and "touch it with reverence" (Woolf, 2017, p. 19) after getting the pencil. Yet it's just the "way" "in which the withdrawn tool-beings become present in consciousness" (Harman, 2011, p. 50). It is only "surface accessible to thought or action" (Harman, 2011, p. 50).

Consequently, in Woolf's writing, things—here especially the sensual things and the sensual qualities—are secondary to mind, as in her works life consists of "impressions" than realities. "The mind receives a myriad of impressions—trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of Monday or

Tuesday" (Woolf, 1924, p. 106). The sensual qualities of things are the materials of the impressions, and it is impression that makes life. The impressions link together objective things and consciousness. One's world is half created by his mind. "It is as though nothing for Woolf is entirely real unless it has first been filtered through consciousness" (Eagleton, 2005, p. 315). Life is a "luminous halo" (Woolf, 1924, p. 106) semi-transparent. Therefore, while the "real objects" or things is to reveal myths of life itself, the "sensual qualities" provide the possibilities and access for human to reach the ultimate core of life. Woolf's view to things is a very phenomenological one, as how "atoms" drop on the mind is much more important than the "atoms" themselves. It is through phenomenological reduction that things equip the function to show readers what life it is at all.

## Conclusion

In Virginia Woolf's works, especially the essay "Street Haunting: A London Adventure", she demonstrated a passion for things. Things in the essay interact with the subject on the individual level and the intersubjective level. Yet it does not contradict with Woolf's rejection to materialist writers represented by the Edwardian novelists. For Woolf, the only thing that counts is life itself, and therefore things here are only tools to reach the meaning of life.

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