Chapter One

A Time for the Other: Diachronic Interruptions in *The Waves*

Woolf's reconsideration of the issue of time can be seen as a direct response to the modernist primacy of subjective time. For its general turn toward a more inward, subjective view of time, the modernist idea of time becomes joined with a synchronic desire for the immediate, for the present. "The reflection of an experience into another" corresponds with a reflection on the nature of time. Woolf is said to be preoccupied with the "relations between the successive and the continuous" (Stevenson 133), as she suggests in "Modernist Fiction": "Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end" (*Collected Essays,* vol. II, 106). For numerous literary critics, a similar reading that *The Waves* shares with other modernist texts a reflective concern with subjective time places Woolf at the heart of high modernism. To read Woolf for her "new concentration, exclusiveness and intensity" (Stevenson 61), so the argument goes, is to unravel the implication of the past in the present. These readings privilege the primacy of subjective time in the present. In these accounts, *The Waves* stands for Woolf's faith in "the stream-like continuity of time" (Stevenson 132) or in "a consciousness of eternity" (Hussey 128).

This chapter suggests rather that Woolf's conception of time in *The Waves* should be read as *a time for the other*, instead of a temporal closure that sustains the modernist desire for a synchronous present. The investigation is begun, then, with a consideration of how the characters in this novel are exposed to the diachronic interruptions of the Woolfian "moments of being." For Woolf, the diachrony reveals itself across the present to the extent that *now* time is out of joint. Drawing on the work of Levinas, whose references to ethical time are invoked in a constant opening up by the time of the other, this chapter tries to foreground the ethical outlook of the Woolfian moment for its diachronic openness to the other. We will also

find both Levinas and Woolf take time as the crucial link between the self and the other. A Levinasian reading of this text thus aims to invest the moments of interruption with ethical force when the characters are least aware of but most responsive to its otherness. Most specifically in response to the diachronic interruptions, the Woolfian double bind of delay and recommencement of time evinces the Levinasian "veritable time," the juncture between temporal sameness and difference. That is, through the diachronic temporality the characters achieve an ethical relation with the other in the present. Read in light of Levinasian ethics, the Woolfian "moment" of interruption in *The Waves* demands that time should be reoriented by a call for ethical responsibility.

Woolf's Moment of Being

The failure to understand the relevance of time in Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* stems in part from confusion about her use of stream of consciousness and her idea of "moments of being." In comparison with the enormous amount of discussion of stream of consciousness techniques, there has been little systematic exploration of the "moment of being" in Woolf's work. In her unpublished memoir, "A Sketch of the Past" (1940), Woolf distinguishes between "moments of being" and "moments of non-being." A moment of being is, by her determination, a heightened moment of consciousness, a moment when the individual catches a glimpse of one's connection to a larger pattern hidden behind "cottonwool of daily life." The experiences that define "moments of being" occur as one of rapture or ecstasy. Most frequently, as B. C. Freeman indicates, moments of being "name moments that entail negation and self-shattering" (65). One particularly radical element in these moments of extreme violence emerges in a sense of "utter helplessness and paralysis" (Ibid., 65). Woolf's submission during childhood to her brother Thoby's beating forces upon her and us a larger perspective than that typically indicated as "something [which] happened so violently that I

have remembered it all my life" (Ibid.,71):

> The first: I was fighting with Thoby on the lawn. We were pommelling each other with our fists. Just as I raised my fist to hit him, I felt: *why hurt another person?* I dropped my hand instantly, and stood there, *and let him beat me*. I remember the feeling. *It was a feeling of hopeless sadness*. It was *as if I became aware of something terrible*; and of my own powerlessness. I slunk off alone, feeling horribly depressed. (Ibid., 71; emphasis mine)

Woolf's relation to this moment of being is equally tense and revealing. With her expression, "why hurt another person?" Woolf's only defensive gesture in this bully scene is an acknowledgement of her vulnerability. The impossibility of protection against the beating further intimates the advent of "something terrible" in this substantial moment. The revelation of "something terrible" out of nowhere is expanded in the following passage, which also delineates her suspended resistance:

> Again I had that hopeless sadness; that collapse I have described before; as if I were *passive* under some sledge-hammer blow; *exposed to a whole avalanche of meaning* that had heaped itself up and discharged itself upon me, unprotected, with nothing to ward it off…I could not explain it. (78; emphasis mine)

The ineffable cause of the "moment of being" makes her passive exposure to the "sledge-hammer blow" concrete. She cannot account for these interruptive moments, or even bear to think clearly about them. It is so because Woolf is exposed to an outer violence in which meaning unravels and dissipates, in which "it" crosses the time continuum into her own. In this sense, "these exceptional moments" (72) emphasize an irreducible alterity at the heart of time. Immanent to her conception of time is therefore one's exposure to a shattering violence coming from beyond one's limits. Having explored how Woolfian time is intersected with these moments of being, I will suggest that the interruptive moments in *The Waves*

revolve around this sense of inescapable exposure. In this novel, actions of these characters in a linear time logic are undermined because the overarching narrative progression from prior to present to after, from cause to effect, is effectively blocked. Perhaps this is how Woolf's claim that she wrote *The Waves* "to a rhythm, not to a plot" (*Letters*, IV, 204) should be taken as it is. For "the immediacy, the absence of process, of lyric poetry" in this novel, Julia Briggs indicates, "the element of time, which had run so markedly through Woolf's earlier fiction, is here strangely suspended" (77). There is still action, but it is so disjunctive that the reader has to follow blindly as there seems to be little causal sense or meaning to the story. Writing to a rhythm rather than to a plot, Woolf acknowledged that this method was "completely opposed to the tradition of fiction and I am casting about all the time for some rope to throw to the reader" *(Letters*, IV, 204; qtd., in Dick 67). As I am proposing, the interruptive moment proves a helpful rope for refiguring the relation between disjunctive temporalities in *The Waves*, for its sudden revelation creates a time where the different temporalities of the present rebound in the single moment.

I. A Time for the Other

For both Levinas and Woolf, it is the reflection upon time that makes possible the advent of a thought of alterity. Unlike the Bergsonian time that encircles alterity in consciousness,[2] Levinas opens up my time to the time of the other for absolute discontinuity. The opening up of my time to the other is the fundamental gesture of what he terms as "the deformalization of time" (RB, 208). Reading "the alterity of intersubjectivity" (Cohen 137) into time, Levinas ventures a bold and decisive reappraisal of time and its possibilities. That is, the openness of

[2] More than once Levinas acknowledges the influence of Bergson's thinking of time as duration upon his reflection on "temporal diachrony" (RB, 268). For him, Bergson's work announces a rupture with the objectivity of scientific time. Especially by virtue of the idea of "duration," "the spiritual is no longer reduced to an event of pure 'knowledge' " (Ibid., 201). Yet as Levinas adds, Bergsonian duration still leaves us with the paradox that the "novelty" given in the intuition of duration ends up "an alterity which is no longer other" (Ibid., 269), as soon as the "novelty" finds its recourse in experience within consciousness. It is around the explicitly raised problem of "duration" that the pursuit of "intelligibility through time"(Ibid., 269) is raised.

my time is a function of exposure to the other.[3] Rather than the Bergsonian correlation of the other to my time in consciousness, for Levinas, the other in my time is a disturbance which depends in large measure upon my exposure in time. Insofar as his conception of time is intersubjective, Levinas portrays time in terms of the alterity of the other person. Ethics for him thus hinges upon this alterity of time which enters into the present and breaches temporal continuity. The alterity of time is manifest in the other's approach. It is present in the excess such an approach manifests beyond what we intend as the "here and now". In other words, discontinuity is to be understood as induced by the exposure of my time to the time of the other. As such the whole point of Levinas's argument is, if I understand it correctly, to offer the possibility of an open time for the other. And it is his fundamental position that the discontinuity in my time opens up and conditions the possibility of encountering the other. "The rupture of continuity" becomes the nature of time per se (Cornell, 136).

The Impossible Now

It is this discontinuity in subjective time that disrupts the very idea of a return to the sufficiency of the present, the "now." Levinas's "deformalization" of time, in effect, results from this very fact that the Bergsonian duration cannot account for the interruption of subjective time which the alterity of the other provokes. In stressing the notion of the alterity that interrupts my consciousness of time, Richard Beardsworth interprets the Levinasian time thus: "time is that which exceeds its temporalization: the excess of time" (129). The "time" Beardsworth designates here needs to be further clarified. In its opening to the other, time is otherwise than the present; time is more than the present can retain. This is the reason Levinas proposes to rethink "the way time breaks reality up into past, present, and future"

[3] The subject is exposed both by and in time—exposed, above all, to the time of the other. The implication is ethically enormous insofar as all experiences are ordered by time, and the self and the other are in this sense temporal. To be is to be exposed in time to the other. It is thus an ongoing process disturbing this subject through exposure to another temporality beyond its immediate reflection.

(Cohen 145). To conceive time otherwise than the present, as a result, turns on the necessity to conceive time in "its full dimensionality, in its unity and difference" (Cohen, 145). Interpreted in this way, a time for the other is no longer determined by thinking time on the privileged basis of the full presence of the present. The present, rather, becomes a place of rupture in the duration of consciousness exposed to the alterity of time. It is so because the present, the time of the self, appears in its inability to represent or contain the "temporal breaking point" (OB, 9), namely the moment of interruption, or the alterity of another temporality.[4] A time for the other is therefore what Levinas believes to engender this "excess of time," which punctuates the time of the self from the other and, most specifically, as Cornell indicates, "implies that temporalization is a diachronic force that cannot be suppressed" (136). Inherent in the temporality of the excess of time, the "diachronic force," too, is a Levinasian concern, which allows him to give a temporal extension to his ethics.

II. Diachrony: Loss of Time and Delay in Time

Levinas's "deformalization of time," a temporal orientation to the other, then, prepares the ground for his idea of diachrony, a singular temporality for the other. For him, the "temporal breaking point" (OB, 9) which interrupts the present to be the "excess of time" implies a diachronic temporality. The excess of time is well summed up in Levinas's account: "there must be signalled a lapse of time *that does not return*, a *diachrony* refractory to all synchronization, a transcending diachrony" (OB, 30; emphasis mine). Levinas himself is quite explicit about the importance of "diachronic" temporality in his ethics. As we have seen, he is moving towards a concrete articulation of the "temporal breaking point" which exceeds and breaks up the present. It can therefore only be articulated in terms of "diachrony" and not in those of "all synchronization" into the present. Against the assumptions of full presence

[4] As Cohen makes clear, the terms of "my time" and "the other's time" are expressions of temporality (147).

founded on a time of synchrony, the unrepeatable diachrony is further determined as "the impossibility of the dispersion of time to assemble itself in the present" (OB 138). To be "the lapse of time," the moment of breakup is forever in excess of the present, of synchronization. Without a "return," the moment of breakup must make unintelligible the very moment when the present is actually broken up.

Breaking up linear time symmetry, diachrony is effective to the degree that it introduces discontinuity into the now. More to the point, the diachronic temporality resists any attempt to overcome the discontinuity, such like the means of the present, representation, and synchrony — any attempt to "[gather]…all alterity into presence and the synchrony of representation" (TO, 100). Levinas's statement thus suggests the futility of attempting to recover the diachronic alterity in the "now." Whereas its events occur in different, irreducible and irreversible times, diachrony intervenes the "now" through the moments of dispersion, and rejects a simple linear vector of "gathering" along the axis of the "now." As such the time of diachrony finds its expression through the broken, discontinuous "now." By doing so, Levinas defends the notion of diachrony against the privileging of the present. At its baldest, "diachrony" tends to open up the breakup of reality while establishing a connection with the present without this connection in its "return" to synchronize this breakup into knowledge. The role of diachrony is seen here to be crucial in linking the time of the other and my time for Levinas.

The concept of diachrony further denies the self the possibility of encountering with the other *at the same time*. Diachrony so conceived resists its own collapse into the economy of the present, be it a recovery of the past or a predictable fulfillment in the future. To quote Levinas: "To let time signify according to its diachrony, disengaged from the simultaneity through which knowledge would grasp it, is to think time under the figure of the ethical" (RB, 118). In this passage he confirms diachrony, or, the radical discontinuity of time, as the basis

for the alterity of the other with the self. Ethics thereby implies a diachronic view of time. At the limit, we would say, for the other to be the other in my time, it must be thought under the figure of diachrony. Precisely, it is in this sense that the alterity of the other is understood as the alterity of time. This is the profound sense in which Levinas seeks to protect the radical difference of the other. As Levinas elaborates, "The relationship with the other is *time*: it is an untotalizable diachrony in which one movement pursues another without ever being able to retrieve it, to catch up with it, or coincide with it" (Kearney 21). As the non-simultaneous temporality of my encounter with the other, diachrony, for Levinas, makes explicit the nature of ethical time. By linking the dimensions of time to the alterity of the other person, the Levinasian time is not only intersubjective, but "[radicalizes] the sense of the other's alterity and thus the sense of time" (Cohen, 140).

Immemorial Past

The "immemorial" past, for Levinas, is the primordial constitution of a diachronic temporality, which is also the precondition of the present. By definition, the immemorial past is "the past that bypasses the present" (OB 11), a time that cannot be reduced to that of consciousness or self-presence. As we know, Levinas's rigorous formulation of diachrony is intended to preclude the possibility of synchronization. The diachrony, in its recurrence, thus requires *a past* that avoids "returning" to the present and cannot be trapped by the present even as it presents itself to us—a past claims in a way that is in principle discontinuous with and irreducible to "all synchronization" of the present. In this sense, the diachronic character of the alterity of time finds its conceptual hinge in the "immemorial" past of the other. To this Levinas adds, whereas my consciousness of time flows from diachrony, a "time that is not my own":

> the lapse of time is also something irrecuperable, refractory to the simultaneity of

> the present, something unrepresentable, immemorial, prehistorical… The immemorial is *not* an effect of a weakness of memory, an incapacity to cross large intervals of time… *It is diachrony that determines the immemorial.* (OB, 38; emphasis mine)

The possibility of this "immemorial" past, however, begins only when diachrony is admitted. In other words, the "immemorial" is inscribed in time inasmuch as diachronic time can never be gathered or synchronized to represent a totality. Given the fact as such, what remains difficult to decide is: what does it mean to take this negative ("not") as true? Levinas is at pains to explain: "The immemorial is *not* an effect of a weakness of memory." This characterization of the immemorial also brings up such questions: how is the "immemorial" possible? how does it come into being?

For Levinas the "immemorial" does not come into being. It now becomes obvious: the rhetorical "not" is indeed a tension toward the privileging of the present. It is because the articulation of the "immemorial" past as such never quite takes place, at least not within the present of a subject who synchronizes the "lapse of time." The past is in this sense immemorial for it is not to be traced back through a linear succession of moments as an "effect"[5] of memory. Hence the immemorial is "not" an effect of a weakness of memory. This tension of the "not" thus mounts to debunk the value of a backward glance from the present to retrieve what has been gone. Moreover, the rigor of this "not" leads us to the "excess of time," what the present cannot "suppress." All the emphasis here is on the effort to demand a shift in the conception of the present. The intervention of the "immemorial," accordingly, contributes indirectly but powerfully to a clear conception of a belated present—a present in its delay in relation to the "immemorial" past.

[5] Despite the interval in time, the cause and effect are for Levinas synchronous. He writes, "[T]hey reestablish a conjuncture, a simultaneity, between the indicating and indicated terms, thus abolishing depth" (EP, 65). As long as the cause and the effect can be identified in parallel, they remain in the world of phenomena.

To the extent that the immemorial past of the other is a time that escapes temporality, for Levinas, this is essentially the manner the other "presents" itself. Despite "large intervals of time," the possibility of the immemorial in diachrony perpetually exposes the subject in time to otherness. The relation to the immemorial, as Levinas sees it, is not the same relation to the other found in "my" relation to the past, whose meaning is to be retrieved retroactively, hence synchronous. Rather, the immemorial opens the past by opening the relation of "my" past to the immemorial past that always already precedes it. As Levinas well sums up, "It is diachrony that determines the immemorial." On the basis of temporal difference and distance, the immemorial past is always inscribed in diachronic time as a perpetual exposure to the other. The immemorial past of the other, accordingly, orients the present of the subject in which the other appears as a "trace."

Trace

Since the other passing by has always retreated into the immemorial past, the non-present, in the form of the "trace," constitutes my temporal rapport with the other. Levinas's term, *trace*, is central to this line of argument. Belonging neither to an immemorial past and inaccessible to any present, the trace is "the presence of that which properly speaking has never been there" (T, 358). The trace is, to quote Levinas, "the modality, the actual 'how' of the ethical code that *disturbs* the established order of being" (BV, 111; emphasis mine). To venture a definition, we would say: the trace disturbs. Its disturbance for the subject is an experience of time as tearing, falling apart or vigilance without rest, "without a punctuality that would let it be designated." While the trace must be thought as one which "withdraws before entering" (Robbins 26), for all its disturbance, the trace[6] structure helps

[6] Thus in order to establish a relation that is not reducible to knowledge, it is necessary to introduce this "disappearance" in our discussion. The intention here is not to lose the possible encounter wholly in a realm outside all experience., in a beyond that cannot be made present. Put otherwise, it is not to let the alterity of the

advance the possibility of a diachronic encounter that can only begin in the wake of the disappearance of the other accordingly. Related only in diachrony, the alterity of the other is introduced into the same through the trace. That is, the trace signifies the inscription of other in the same. Yet there is not much more to be decoded or understood. As Levinas brackets the significance of the trace within the immemorial past, the trace of the other, given Levinasian inflection, is inaccessible to analytic reason. It is not an ordinary sign or image that can be brought under cognitive scheme. The trace, which betokens the time of the other, thus lends a possibility to reveal the effect that "the alterity [of the other] has on the subjectivity of the subject" (Cohen 145). By way of the trace, the passing of the other connects up with my time.[7] The trace, once again, underscores the incommensurable relation between the self and the other with a *temporal* dimension.

Responsibility

In traces speaks the imperative of the exposure of the subject to responsibility. Levinas insists "this obedience prior to all representation, this allegiance before any oath, this responsibility prior to commitment, is precisely the other in the same…the *passing itself* of the infinite" (OB, 150). The full significance of the concept of responsible subjectivity is determined only when they have been brought into relation with time. This passage makes clear Levinas's maneuver of thinking responsibility to the other as a relation to the trace. What Levinas calls the "responsibility," or response-ability, is built on this diachronic structure. The moment of responsibility in its fullest is in the diachronic temporality. For the

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other drop out altogether, but to insist on, as Beardsworth makes clear, "the irreducibility of the other to time"(124).

[7] Manning, *Interpreting Otherwise Than Heidegger:* "The past of the Other ... cannot be made present, and even has never been present in the time of the subject. Thus, the past of the Other is always past. Since it is always past, even when revealed in the social relation, it is not revealed as a presence, but only as an absence. This is why Levinas says that the immemorial past of the Other shows itself not as a presence, but only as a *trace*, the mark only of its never having been there, and it is this trace that invades the perfect synchrony of the Said and disrupts it" (82).

other who comes from the immemorial past that does not enter into the present, its demand of my responsibility thus derives from "a past that shows itself in the present of obedience without being recalled, without coming from memory" (OB, 13). The idea is that, as Levinas explains, the demand of my responsibility comes through the immemorial other who is already before the beginning of my time, or, beyond my memory. The functioning of trace, once again, underscores the diachronic ethical relationship in time.

Thus, a time for the other that Levinas propounds is grounded in asymmetry, an inequality between the same and the other. The foregoing would suggest that Levinas appeals to responsibility to bring to light the dependence of temporality on alterity. In the asymmetrical relation, as we have seen, the other dominates the same by issuing an immemorial call for responsibility which precedes and constitutes the time of the self. On a thoroughly passive dimension, the present, in its response to the immemorial call, flows from the time of the other in a diachronic relation with a past wholly unrelated to the present moment. In this sense, the asymmetry would be necessary to keep time "open" to the immemorial other in its radical diachrony, to keep time from collapsing back in on itself as a seamless "now." Ultimately for Levinas a time for the other is an asymmetrical dimension that interrupts the synchronous order of the present.

III. Diachronic Interruptions in *The Waves*

We can now turn to what the diachronic view of time means for the engagement between Woolf's moments of being and Levinas's ethics. It is due to Levinas's attention to diachrony that his rethinking of the ethical conjoins Woolf's concern of the moment in *The Waves.* As Levinas suggests, the disjuncture in my time opens itself to the juncture between my time and the time of the other. More precisely in "A Sketch of the Past," Woolf elaborates on the asymmetrical relation revealed in the "moments of being": "many of these exceptional

moments brought with them a peculiar horror and physical collapse; they seemed dominant; myself passive" (72). So in a sense the moment of being not merely interrupts the perceived continuity in time but displays her vulnerability and unprotected exposure to the time of the other. The moment of interruption as such is the moment of "rupture, not unification" (Freeman 68) for which the subject has no immediate and synchronous explanation.

This depiction of the moment of being as one of interruption prepares a ground for my diachronic approach to Woolf's *The Waves.* Tony E. Jackson has fairly directly confronted the issue of alterative temporalities in the present moment: "*The Waves* enacts this temporality by staging overtly what we could call the 'disjunctive immediacy' (Weber, 1991, 11) that is repressed in conventional, linear chronology… this temporality is inscribed within any diachronic narrative" (142). Jackson here pushes the change of modernist conception of time —a change that marks the present as a "disjunctive immediacy" of another temporality. As this another temporality intervenes the present moment, there is a sense of lost time that occurs even while the characters hold to the linear, temporal structure in the novel. McGee's *diachronic*[8] reading is equally illuminating in this regard. His reflection on the import of diachrony finds its expression in the sleeper figure[9] in *The Waves.* McGee evokes this unspecified figure in the backdrop whose primitive existence remains incompatible with the synchronous frame of Jane Marcus's political interpretation, or with the "boundary-line between the text and the context" (638). As "an inscription of undecidability," the presence of the sleeper "exceed[s] the overt message that the monologues of the six characters and the poetic interludes want to convey" (639). McGee, then, goes on to claim that beyond the

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[8] Though the term "diachronic" never quite literally appears in his analysis, McGee's reading is indicative of a larger diachronic framework informing the novel. My usage of the term will be elaborated in the following.

[9] The sleeper appears in Bernard's reflection in *The Waves*: "I can visit the remote verges of the desert lands where the savage sits by the campfire. Day rises; the girl lifts the watery fire-hearted jewels to her brow; the sun levels his beams straight at the sleeping house; the waves deepen their bars; they fling themselves on shore; back blows the spray; sweeping their waters they surround the boat and the sea-holly. The birds sing in chorus; deep tunnels run between the stalks of flowers; the house is whitened; *the sleeper stretches; gradually all is astir.* Light floods the room and drives shadow beyond shadow to where they hang in folds inscrutable. What does the central shadow hold? Something? Nothing? I do not know" (125).

self-conscious subject of modern art lies “another subject or the subject as the Other” (639). The sleeper therefore interrogates the social synchrony of the modernist frame.

McGee’s representation of the Other might, it seems, bear a significant relation to the framing sentence he enlists from Bloch: “authentic reality is also discontinuity” (qtd. in McGee 641). Yet this significant relation to the “discontinuity” among the frames is what his argument promises but does not provide. As he has argued, the presence of the sleeper is the Other to the frames and thus “no longer safely contained by the objective boundaries of the frame” (641). Such a figure is, however, hard to imagine as anything but part of the background, not least because an overriding concern with Woolf’s formal experiment seems to attenuate the reader’s serious engagement either with Bernard as an imperial subject under critique or with the sleeper as a meaningful sign of anything at all outside the text, as Bernard reflecting on the scene seems unconcerned about the sleeper within. In this case, the analysis of textual effects, formal and thematic, or in terms of McGee, “the duality of modernist form as to its effects” (641), actually depends upon the *encounter* between Bernard and the sleeper. We might venture some follow-up questions: what exactly is the nature of this encounter between the text and its context? How is this encounter received, and how transmitted in the synchronous “frames” of representation? As such, this encounter which underwrites McGee’s argument is only made possible through the careful cultivation of *diachronic openness*—to the “Other” as “the unconscious subject,” to the difference between the frame and the main body of the text, and most specifically, to the temporal “discontinuity” that has been compromised by Marcus’s “historical reduction” (632).

Once again our reference to Woolf’s “moment of being” invests this encounter with a possibility of a diachronic interruption of the frames of representation. In this novel the time of the characters are exposed and made vulnerable to the moments of being, or put otherwise, moments of interruption. Whereas “[the moments of being] seemed dominant; myself

passive," the inability to resist or escape prompts Woolf to unhook time from the venerable distinction between subjective time and objective time. With the burden of this distinction, the Bergsonian duration of consciousness degenerates into operative closure in the present. For Woolf, however, what we call time in its fullest complexity has always slipped between diachrony and synchrony in *The Waves*. This reappraisal of the time of the self raises explicitly the question with which we begin, that of moments of interruption when the immemorial other crosses the present.[10] Textual support is found in the situations where the representation of the other threatens to fall back into the interruptive impact that the characters purport to resist. In these cases, diachrony is a temporality in which consciousness comes too late. Before consciousness enters the scene, the diachronic temporality has already affected the subject as a stoppage or interruption in time.

The Woolfian "moment," the moment of interruption, which makes *The Waves* original and opaque concerning what happens in experience, in effect, fully shares its ethical assumptions with diachrony to envision transformative possibilities for what Levinas calls "veritable time." The ethical can only arise if there is the diachronic relation between my time and the time of the other. The crucial message inherent in the recognition of a diachronic relation is even more explicitly ethical. Woolf always wants to remind us of the Levinasian

[10] Jerry Wasserman in her essay "Mimetic Form in *The Waves*" raises the question about the relationship between synchrony and diachrony as he ponders on the significance of "the moment": "But to what extent is real permanence attainable or desirable in human life, and how can a series of static narrative units render the flow of 'an incessant shower of innumerable atoms?' 'Connection' is attained within the moment, but is not separation also desirable and necessary? And does not the discreteness of the narrative unity as it coalesces around individual consciousness seem to deny the very unity of the moment?" (41). His insightful questions reveal a general pattern in Woolf's conception of time in *The Waves*. In a similar vein, Randall Stevenson suggests that "division and continuity competes" in Woolf's construction of the novel. At this point the reader may have in mind Woolf's question: "Is life very solid or shifting? I am haunted by the two contradictions. This has gone on forever; will last forever; goes down to the bottom of the world—this moment I stand on… Perhaps it may be that though we change…so quick, so quick, yet we are *somehow* successive and continuous we human beings" (*A Writer's Diary*, 140; emphasis mine). With the qualifier "somehow," it seems to me that Woolf ends her inquiry in a note of indeterminacy. In my reading, such an unresolved tension between connection and separation, division and continuity, needs be approached from a Levinasian diachronic perspective. As I will show in the following, the tension is not to be resolved. The tension is instead proven to be inherent in time to the extent that it problematize the divide between connection and separation, division and continuity. In this sense, identifying a diachronic temporality in *The Waves* comes down to finding a crucial juncture of different temporalities that is central to the possibility of our openness to temporal differences.

"disjointed conjunction" (Cohen 147), the diachronic aspect of any claim to temporal closure. The issue is raised as following: how does diachrony unfold in *The Waves,* and how and why the Levinasian ethics can be possible within this structure of time? Put otherwise, how can Woolf write in a manner that preserves the ethics of the encounter as an event, as an immediate occurrence of the thing beyond the powers of representation? How can she write in a way that speaks *to*, instead of about or for, the other, since none of us can escape representational schemes, their betrayal of the other?

In the following I argue that Woolf intends to place "the other" precisely in the diachronic interruption which makes possible the present. A feasible answer thus lies in the exposition of *how* the Woolfian "moment" is not a synchronous representation of the other, but a diachronic moment in which the passing of the other interrupts my time. In inserting the principle of diachrony into the practice of representation, Woolf reveals her commitments to the other in a fidelity to the ethical interruption upon the characters. Through this re-examination of the time of representation, Woolf reaches the limit of our conception of time, to the point at which even the characters get quite lost. The characters' representational grip on the "here and now" loosens even more as their present is interrupted by traces of the other. What this encounter with the other amounts to, whether it is anything that can be made intelligible for the characters who occupy their here and now, is something that needs to be worked out. As I hasten to add here, their thwarted attempts to synchronize the diachronic encounter into the present attest to certain gap in time continuum. This being said, each moment of interruption must be understood as an interruption that crosses my time and blocks the path to re-assertion of the present.

"Too vast an undertaking" (201): Bernard's Impossible Story

For Woolf, something aberrant about the modernist conception of time is found in its

synchronous desire, a desire to concentrate time on the present. This contention for recouping everything in the present is echoed in Bernard's lifelong project of "story." His project ultimately has important implications for the diachrony of time irreducible to representation. In its impulse to verify the present, Bernard's story of temporal "integration" fails to directly address the time of the other as material for his story. Instead, during his search for a "perfect phrase," he is recurrently exposed to "the appalling moment" as the moment of interruption. This interrupted moment thus denies the possibility of any punctual "integration" of the time of the other – the reconstitution of a unitary temporality inclusive of otherness. On this reading, the time of Bernard's story becomes a delay of time. His never-ending story which marks its gradual move to non-closure in the present should, in turn, be understood ethically.

Bernard's narrative project is, in fact, intended to verify the "linked phrases," the rhythm of his living present. His "story" is meant to realize the synchronization of other temporalities in such a way as to purportedly deny the diachronic force of time. To "integrate" (58), a capacity he deems cardinal to a successful writer, Bernard has taken explicit recourse to a temporal integration of these phrases. He says, "I must open the little trap-door and let out these *linked phrases* in which I run together *whatever happens*, so that *instead of incoherence* there is perceived a wandering thread, lightly joining one thing to another" (35; emphasis mine). So "linked phrases," on this line of thinking, establish themselves solidly in Bernard's time. His totalizing aspiration of time finds an appropriate vehicle in "phrases": "If I could measure things with compasses I could, but since my only measure is a phrase, I make phrases" (197).

Bernard thus inadvertently gives the impression of writing off the singular temporalities of "these linked phrases," subsuming them under the rubric of "the *one* story." One may well reflect on the necessity by which Bernard records phrases in "his notebook under A or under B" (50). According to him, "I have filled innumerable notebooks with phrases to be used

when I have found the true story, *the one story* to which all these phrases refer" (133; emphasis mine). The recording is justified in view of a unitary temporality. Intent on spinning "the *one* story" out of the "linked phrases," Bernard shows us how the experience of coherence, instead of "incoherence," is built into the very fiber of our time. At all events the coherence of the story stands for, again in his terms, the "happy concatenation of one event following another in our lives" (166). For this "happy concatenation," Bernard's temporal conversion of "whatever happens" into "the *one* story" becomes the condition of having the time of the self fully present to him.

But the temporal interruption of Bernard's "one story" is made evident in his exposure to the time of the other. The difficulty of his project is felt: "There are the things that for ever *interrupt* the process upon which I am eternally engaged of finding some *perfect phrase* that *fits this very moment exactly*" (50; emphasis mine). This passage, then, rightfully points us to a tension that is never completely resolved in Bernard's narrative project. On the one hand, as Bernard looks for some "perfect phrase," the search is part of a wider search for the sense of temporal "integration" of the present, of "fit[ting] this very moment exactly." The impulse to verify the present becomes the condition of his time. As he says elsewhere, "The whole mechanism seemed to expand, to contract, like the mainspring of a clock" (185). In this sense, his narrative project is carried out in order to verify, with linked phrases, the rhythm of his living present.

On the other hand, Bernard's failure to "fit the moment exactly" suggests that the time of his story is a time that always comes too late. He can only fall behind when it is time to grasp something that cannot be grasped. As he sums up, "I, carrying a notebook, making phrases, had recorded mere changes; a shadow, I had been sedulous to take note of shadows" (202). That is, all his insistences to verify the present only turns out to be "shadows" of something, the absence of what has never been present within the time of his story. At this point he

brings us up against the limit of the time of representation, on which his project of story hinges. Yet the recurrent "interruption" of his search for some perfect phrase only prompts, rather than frustrates, the synchronous desire of his story to overcome this delay in time. For the time of the story that comes too late, Neville observes, Bernard will give another story to make it up: "Only Bernard could go with them, but Bernard is too late to go with him. He is always too late… But they would forgive him; for he would tell them a story" (35). Even though the story to be offered is always too late, and even though the phrase does not "[fit] this very moment exactly," the temporal differences is sealed off by the "happy concatenation" of the present.

Neville expresses his unease with this claim, as he defines this interruption of the time of Bernard's story as "the appalling moment." This moment arrives when "Bernard's power fails him and there is no longer any sequence and he sags and twiddles a bit of string and falls silent, gaping as if about to burst into tears" (28). How, then, do we understand this "appalling moment" when time is out of joint and where will Woolf's thinking about the nature of my time emerge through it? To put the effect succinctly: there is a temporal split, or a lapse in time, within the present. The illusion of continuity as "happy concatenation" in time is no longer sustained. It may seem even as if time comes to a standstill and little progress is being made. As Bernard inquires, "what is *this moment of time*, this particular day in which I have found myself caught? Time has whizzed back an inch or two on its reel; our short progress has been cancelled?" (81; emphasis mine).

The Problematic Representation of the "Present"

The significance of Bernard's inquiry is apparent when we consider how the concept of this "appalling moment," or the moment of interruption, shall open up the time of the subject to other temporalities. For Woolf, the question might fairly be re-stated thus: what is, after all,

the meaning of this relation between the subject and the moment of interruption in *The Waves*? In the light of the problematics of time, whenever the characters offer their conceptions of "now," which initiate most monologues in this novel, the representation of the living present falters. The present does not appear exactly continuous or unitary as they take it to be. The description of the living present, rather, signifies the unstable ground of representation. The following passage has a pretty immediate impact on how we think about the validity of "the present" in representation and, above all, its spurious sufficiency:

> Chairs and cupboards loomed behind so that though each was separate they seemed inextricably involved. The looking-glass whitened its pool upon the wall. The real flower on the window-sill was attended by a phantom flower. Yet the phantom was part of the flower, for *when* a bud broke free the paler flower in the glass opened a bud *too*. (54; emphasis mine)

Woolf uncovers in this passage a temporal slippage in that "when a bud broke free the paler flower in the glass opened a bud too." The temporality the bud of "the paler flower in the glass" breaks into is, in effect, a diachrony that breaks into the present of the real flower. Without this moment of diachrony the otherness of the "phantom flower" can only be too easily reduced to the ironies of mimetic reflection. In this sense, the harsh rhetoric of the "Yet the phantom was part of the flower…," is one of representation which seeks to encompass the whole scene. The explanation that ensues, "for *when* a bud broke free the paler flower in the glass opened a bud *too,*" however, interrupts the time of representation as a punctual happening. What then precisely is made present—and passed over in this simultaneous order—in this mirroring scene? Woolf's rendering of a situation of multiple narrative possibilities therefore amounts to starting paths which may involve overlapping, and even different, times. What happens—as the plot thickens—is that the interruptive alterity cannot be maintained within the time of representation. Put otherwise, Woolf's treatment of this

passage shows that a temporal difference is inscribed—a diachrony, as she would say with Levinas. As Woolf endeavors to register the very temporal slippage among refracting moments, the scene is shown to be invariably intersected with other temporalities. There is more than a single time, more than the simultaneous time of representation accordingly.

As Woolf re-creates the subtle play of temporal slippage, the blurring between past and present, reality and representation, what might be the ethical consequences of such a practice? I am suggesting, then, since there is more than a single time, it exceeds the time of representation and foregrounds the haunting of the present by the invisible, or the non-present forces. There is a significant lapse in time here in the way which "*when* a bud broke free the paler flower in the glass opened a bud *too.*" The multiple temporalities of the present moment at once fragment the unity and continuity of time as well as its illusory order of synchrony in human experience. Thus said, any resort to representation always possesses an ambivalent and discontinuous relation to the present. It is in passages like this one that we can read Woolf as showing us in *The Waves*, over and over again, that the recurrent depictions of moments of interruption tell another story.

"But if there are no stories…" (189): There Are Always Moments of Interruption

The unalleviated recognition of recurrent interruption holds fast to the possibility of a different conception of time. It is as Bernard encounters the limits to the time of representation that his bitter disillusionment with his "story" begins. If, as he admits, "Some people go to priests; others to poetry…I too seek among phrases and fragments something unbroken" (189), it is also for this reason that his story cannot be achieved, but only betrayed, by the interruption of the other. It is a painful knowledge: "I conceive myself *called upon* to provide, some winter's night, a meaning for all my observations—a line that runs from one to another, a summing up that completes… I need an audience. That is my downfall. That

always ruffles the edge of the final statement and prevents it from forming" (83; emphasis mine). The force of Woolf's thinking about the ethical, as this passage indicates, finds its source in the interruptive moment of the other. The interruption has "called upon" Bernard in the way the other presents itself, the way the sequence of his story is disturbed enormously. That is, the other shows itself within Bernard's time by interrupting it, by "ruffl[ing] the edge of the final statement and prevents it from forming." As the narrative develops, there is "always" a moment of interruption that can be said to be always already operative in his project. Put otherwise, Bernard must presuppose what he will describe to be interrupted. As Bernard remarks, "But if there are no stories, what end can there be, or what beginning? Life is not susceptible perhaps to the treatment we give it when we try to tell it" (189). He ends up discerning the "interruption" or "incoherence" within his activity of constructing himself as a narrative project: "I said life had been imperfect, an unfinished phrase. It had been impossible for me…to keep coherency… It had been too vast an undertaking" (201).

It may be said that Woolf addresses the question of the ethical on the level of this moment of interruption. Always possible and hence a necessary possibility, interruption is structured as a necessary possibility of the ethical encounter. "To enter into a relation with the other," as Derrida observes, "interruption must be possible: the relation [rapport] must a relation of interruption. And interruption here does not interrupt the relation to the other, it opens the relation to the other" (82). In a profound sense, this momentary *rapport* of interruption allows the self to understand belonging together in *time* without some synchronizing efforts. The intertwinement, and yet disjuncture, between my time and the time of the other, once again, persistently exposes the temporal fallacy of representation by showing us the moment of ethical interruption inherent in Bernard's purported enclosure of a story. His narrative project is evidenced as one of impossibility accordingly.

IV. “I pretended that I was not surprised” (145): Iterative Delay and Recommencement as Truth of Time

Rhoda’s experience of interruption further dramatizes this recognition of an ethical juncture between temporal sameness and difference in the present. The truth of time in her case—of iterative delay and recommencement— is presented as a condition of the living present and as an advent of the alterity. It is in this direction that I look for textual evidences of gaps and differences in the time of the self, which refuses representation in *The Waves*. Indeed, Woolf’s writing has familiarized us either with her narrative technique of interruptions of given horizons, or with her concern for the dimension of the present moment. It is important to note again, however, that in *The Waves* the realization of events in the present is all suddenly. The effect is of a series of textual instances whose intelligibility remains unstable with its ambient lines. There seems always the tension between intelligibility and personal expressions of the characters. To unravel this problem of intelligibility requires an effort: to ask the question of time without taking the subject’s expression for granted, starting instead from its interruption in the character’s present as what opens it to the approach of the other.

The Intelligibility of Time

The intelligibility problem is, perhaps, most significant for the purpose of our discussion here, because it most clearly registers a diachronic temporality in *The Waves*. The tension arises because the interruptive moment cannot be understood in terms of the “here and now” of the characters to which they are explicitly committed. This is the real source of the intelligibility problem. For example, Rhoda’s description of her experience is characteristically equivocal: “There is the puddle,” said Rhoda, “*and* I cannot cross it. I hear the rush of the great grindstone within an itch of my head. Its wind roars in my face. All

palpable forms of life have failed me" (113; emphasis mine). Without any foreshadowing, the image of the puddle is deemed abrupt. Even the ensuing descriptions hardly qualify as effective foreshadowing of what was to be or what was going on for Rhoda. A short while after the sudden suspense of the image of the puddle, we read thus: "*Now* the shadow has fallen and the purple light slants downwards. The figure that was robed in beauty is now clothed in ruin" (113; emphasis mine). The reader then gathers that what most obviously balks Rhoda's passage in mind turns out to be the *alterity* of Percival's death. It is the moment of interruption about to be mediated: the cognitive question – what hinders Rhoda's passage of consciousness– is answered: Percival's death.

Simply put, the puddle image is abrupt in the sense that it engenders a delay in Rhoda's present— the cause of the interruptive moment within Rhoda is given only after its effect. Even to Rhoda herself, the impact is one of delay, a delay in realizing what is actually happening. The realization does not come until she names it for the death of Percival. Before that, Woolf leaves the reader no clues, no premonition of what is to come, no emotional reactions that show how to relate to the death of the other at the interruptive moment. Only a puddle that stands in Rhoda's way. It seems that Woolf wants the reader to experience in the way Rhoda does, the way she is extremely taken aback as the news is revealed, for the otherness of the news comes out of nowhere, without any foreshadowing or introduction at all. Traversing the trial of this overwhelming experience, Rhoda is there to *re*-discover her sense of the present, as soon as she recounts the death of Percival. In other words, whereas the movement of temporalization from Rhoda's depiction of the puddle to its blockage delays the answer of what *is* happening, it promises the answer only as a deferral in the "Now": Percival's death.

“This is here and now” (47): Recommencement as the Time of Representation

Concerning Rhoda’s “now” that is forever delayed, representation is created by the very urgency of making present—a “recommencement” of the temporal continuity. Caught in the structural delay, “a representation is a recommencement of the present which in its ‘first time’ is for the second time” (OB 29). Take for example the way Rhoda uses the puddle image as one of the “devices” to bring temporal breakup of reality to representable closure: “With intermittent shock, sudden as the springs of a tiger, life emerges heaving its dark crest from the sea. It is to this we are attached; it is to this we are bound, as bodies to wild horses. *And yet we have invented devices for filling up the crevices and disguising these fissures*…this is *here and now*” (47; emphasis mine). This “crevices” and “fissures,” I think, can best be understood as the intervention of the time of the other in Rhoda’s time, in like manner as the abrupt puddle image is. For Levinas, conversely, the time of representation is nothing less than “the time of simultaneity,” in the sense that “it does not sufficiently account for the breakup of reality” (qtd. in Cohen 147). Bernard is quite right as he remarks on “the breakup of reality”: “It is curious how, *at every crisis*, some phrase which does not fit insists upon *coming to the rescue*—the penalty of living in an old civilization with a notebook” (131; emphasis mine). His remark explains a lot of conflicts about the simultaneity and legitimacy of representation within the “here and now” of the characters. Through representation that “comes to the rescue,” as a result, the present of the characters regain its continuity which would make sense of and assimilate the preceding interruptive moment. The blockage in time is *now* overcome, crevices filled up, and fissures disguised. Hence the illusion of their representation as simultaneous and continuous, as the saying goes: “this is here and now.”

Veritable Time

Upon scrutiny, the puddle image given to the alterity of Percival’s death discloses an

incongruity within the present that can never be smoothed out in Rhoda's resort to representation. She murmurs, "What, then, can I touch? …and so draw myself across the enormous gulf into my body safely?" (113).[11] She remains caught up in a restless state, even after she comes up with this image, after she renders in representation the radical alterity that is not the object of a representable intuition, that cannot be confronted or referentially, literally named. Obviously, Rhoda cannot calm herself back to the seamless present by "drawing [herself] across the enormous gulf" between the moment of interruption and the "here and now." If, as we have seen, Rhoda's chosen image is intended to "disguise the fissures" in her time, her resort at this moment of "crisis," like Bernard's, fails to "fit the moment exactly." In spite of her efforts, Bernard laments, "Nothing that has been said meets our case" (112).

Other than the privileging of the present, it would, then, be more adequate to envision the relation between the present and what is otherwise than the present as a diachrony. Let us again return to Rhoda's case. On the one hand, there is the time of Rhoda's mention of the puddle, which seems to be at a standstill: "and I cannot cross it." On the other, there is the time when Rhoda's consciousness recommences and gives the belated account of Percival's death. As we have seen, in my interpretation, Woolf's illustration does not create a synchronous relation to what is exactly happening *to* Rhoda. Yet the interruptive appeal of the passage only increases, for the time of the other is not stressed but only felt in passing. The advent of the alterity of Percival's death thus breaks up the "here and now," because it is already there before Rhoda brings up the puddle image and disappears after. What is opened up is, then, the concept of an "immemorial" time of the other, I shall hasten to add here, that concerns the self but eludes memory or representation. This is why it is on the basis of the

[11] In her memoir "A Sketch of the Past" Woolf wrote of a similar experience to that of Rhoda: "There was the moment of the puddle in the path; when for no reason I could discover, everything suddenly became unreal; I was suspended; I could not step across the puddle; I tried to touch something…the whole world became unreal" (78).

thinking of another temporality other than my time that the ethical becomes legible in Woolf. Thus said, the present becomes thick, layered not only in its contingency and in its resistance to the impact of the other, but also in its implicit relation to other temporalities, or, to the time of the other.

The implication of Woolf's espousal of diachrony is, as Levinas would have it, the collapse of time as a "here and now," as a punctual production of human consciousness. Time is not to be conceived solely in terms of the present, let alone the simultaneity of representation. As I have suggested, Bernard's recognition of his failure, of "the appalling moment," points to the dimension of the time of the other. Woolf's ethics is therefore to be seen in this re-articulation of time as iterative delay and recommencement. That is, time is delayed when an advent of the alterity suspends the temporal continuity of my present and baffles all representation. Time is also recommencement when my living present must regain its continuity to bear this delay in time. This Woolfian double bind of delay and recommencement, once again, evinces the Levinasian "veritable time," the juncture between temporal sameness and difference. As Richard Cohen concisely sums up the variegated modes of temporalities in time, and the introduction of punctuation into consciousness of time:

> The time of the Other and my time, or the time of mineness, ecstatic temporalities, do not occur at the same time. *Veritable time*, in Levinas's sense, is the effect or event of the *disjointed conjunction* of these two different times: the time of the Other disrupts or interrupts my temporality. It is this upset, this insertion of the Other's time into mine, that establishes the alterity of veritable time, which is neither the Other's time nor mine.
>
> (Cohen, "Introduction," TO 12; emphasis mine)

As Cornell succinctly puts it, "Time recommences precisely because it is discontinuous"

(137). The characters can no longer "pretend that we can make out a plain and logical story, so that when one matter is dispatched—love for instance—we go on, in an orderly manner, to the next" (178). Rather, the belated experience of blockage that the approach of the alterity entails becomes a principle in Rhoda's relation to time. Whenever she tries to describe similar experiences, she runs up against her own temporal limitations: "One moment does not lead to another. The door opens and the tiger leaps…I cannot deal with it as you do—I cannot make one moment merge in the next. To me they are all violent, all separate" (93). Against the grain of the time of the self, as Woolf shows us, there is a time of the other that affects the characters in a way they cannot recoup the alterity in the "here and now." The discontinuity in time, violent and separate, becomes the truth of the present *per se*. This insight is what has come to be known as the Woolfian moment. Its "breakup of reality," or discontinuity, simply does not fit in. The interrupted moment is singular to the extent that Rhoda cannot circumscribe or link each moment to make it up. In this sense, it is even more singular, for the Woolfian moment becomes "the very articulation, the very concreteness of the temporality of a time that signifies through the other (RB, 254). That is, through diachrony time is thought ethically in *The Waves*.

As should be fully apparent by now, I do not think such diachronic interruptions elide the possibility of an ethical relation for its resistance against the principle of intelligibility. Given that for Levinas the "experience" of the other exceeds all my categories and understanding, it seems that one may frown on Woolf's portrait of these interruptions as "unethical" by simply reducing it to an ineffable "experience" of interruptions and stops there. The reading as such leads to an utter disregard for the characters' irreducible exposure to the other. However, Woolf's Levinasian insistence on the consequences of total *delay* as irreducible exposure allows us to attend to the diachronic interruptions differently—not in terms of how these characters languish at the moments, but rather in terms of the condition of

irreducible exposure that is prior to any ethical action: the issue of *a responsible subject* for the other, as I shall hasten to add here. The other, then, must be attended to not in terms of my experience but in terms of my delay in the present as responsibility. As I have argued in this chapter, the figure of diachrony offers us a way to think the delay in the present in relation to the ethical specificity of the time of the other. The next chapter will try to elaborate on how to think my delay in the present to the immemorial other as an asymmetric relation of responsibility. In this sense, the subject that arises in the delay in the present henceforth owes to the immemorial other a primordial debt. “The delay of time,” as Beardsworth argues, “re-marks itself in my unconditioned responsibility to others” (129). The moment of interruption then proves the one in which an absolute exposure of the ethical subject makes response and responsibility possible.