

Haptic Relations with Built Environments in the Writings of Rebecca

West, 1909-1941

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Abstract

This thesis examines representations of haptic relations with built environments in the writings of Rebecca West from 1909-1941. I explore the ways that depictions of this aspect of bodily engagement with the world significantly enables and shapes her public voice, with which she thinks through the situation of the modern subject. My project demonstrates that West's portrayal of haptic experiences frame her approach to a range of modernist concerns and highlights the contexts which inform this. My first chapter examines how her depictions of painful experiences in the prison cell and reservoir critique representations of transformative suffering in suffragette fiction and modernist magazines. The second chapter considers how representations of tactile practice are used to subvert principles of aesthetic practice defined by Henry James' 'house of fiction' and theories of the 'house beautiful'. My third chapter explores how portrayals of 'global touch' in private and public structures frame West's attempt to express a sensitive female awareness of patriarchal and celebrity culture. The fourth chapter traces how renderings of aesthetic empathy in the built environments of Paris and London shape her theory about the socially orienting and disorienting power of art. My fifth chapter maps how depictions of reach-touch in religious architecture elaborate West's interest in ritual actions that transcend the influence of religious doctrine on subjectivity. I approach each of my chosen texts using a range of phenomenological theorists, supported by engagements with West's journalism, archival materials and the work of other modernists. Each chapter uses an analysis of the haptic to situate West's writings in relation to scholarship which addresses modernism's relationship with violence, bodily confrontations with technology, sensuous geographies, empathy, aesthetic experience and religion. The project provides an extensive reading of haptic relations with built environments in West's writings and asserts that this provides a richer understanding of her representation of modern subjectivity.

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Abbreviations

- TS* *The Sentinel: An Incomplete Early Novel by Rebecca West*, ed. by Kathryn Laing (Oxford: Legenda, 2002).
- IM* ‘Indissoluble Matrimony’, in *The Young Rebecca: Writings of Rebecca West, 1911-1917*, ed. by Jane Marcus (London: Virago Press Limited, 1983).
- HJ* *Henry James* (London: Nisbet and Company, 1916).
- RS* *The Return of the Soldier*, ed. by Bernard Schweizer and Charles Thorne (Ontario: Broadview, 2010).
- TJ* *The Judge* (London: Virago Press Limited, 1980).
- S* *Sunflower* (London: Virago Press Limited, 1986).
- SN* ‘The Strange Necessity’, in *The Strange Necessity: Essays and Reviews* (London: Virago Press Limited, 1987).
- HH* *Harriet Hume: A London Fantasy* (London: Virago Press Limited, 1980).
- LG* *A Letter to a Grandfather* (London: Hogarth Press, 1933).
- BLGF* *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon: A Journey Through Yugoslavia* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books Limited, 1993).

Introduction

Dipping his head he would glance sideways at the old oak panelling; and nearer things he fingered as though sight were not intimate enough a contact, his hands caressed the arm of his chair, because he remembered the black gleam of it, stole out and touched the recollected saltcellar. (*RS 67*)

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the term ‘haptic’ as denoting something ‘of the nature of, involving, or relating to the sense of touch, the perception of position or motion (proprioception)’, and as ‘having a greater dependence on sensations of touch and kinaesthetic experiences than on sight, esp. as a means of psychological orientation’.¹ Chris Baldry, the shell-shocked army officer who is sent home from the Western Front suffering from amnesia in Rebecca West’s *The Return of the Soldier* (1918), displays this dependence through ‘the nearer things he fingered as though sight were not intimate enough a contact’ in his home at Baldry Court (*RS 67*). Furthermore, Chris’ haptic relations with the furniture of the house function as ‘a means of psychological orientation’.² His ‘hands caressed the arm of his chair, because he remembered the black gleam of it’ (*RS 67*). Though not cited as an important factor in the *OED* definition of the haptic, in West’s novel it is the built environment of Baldry Court which is vital in drawing out the soldier’s reliance upon his sense of touch.

Chris’ predominantly tactile relations with the furniture of his home in West’s 1918 novel reflects the fundamental shift that the First World War initiated in human sensory interactions with the built environment. Santanu Das explores the ways in which soldiers’ perceptions were conditioned by the battlefields of the Western Front in *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature* (2005). Das argues that ‘the visual

¹ ‘Haptic’, *Oxford English Dictionary Online* <<http://www.oed.com>> [accessed 01 November 2016].

² *Ibid.*

topography of the everyday world [...] was replaced by the haptic geography of the trenches and mud was a prime agent in this change'.³ As a result of this sensory shift, 'the geography of fear is thus registered and represented through a haptic mode of perception: the threat of enclosure and exposure alike produces a sense of space that is felt as volume surrounding the body rather than as surface or distance to be covered'.⁴ In one sense, then, we might read Chris' compulsive need to 'finger[...]', 'caress[...]' and 'touch[...]' the furniture of Baldry Court as in part a continuation of the haptic sensibility which he has developed and honed during his time spent in the trenches of Northern France (*RS 67*).

Though it is possible that Chris' dependence on his tactile sense has its origins in the sensory conditions shaped by the trenches, it cannot be said that his tactile engagements with Baldry Court register or represent a 'geography of fear'.⁵ By touching the arm of his chair 'because he remembered the black gleam of it', Chris' sense of touch partly marks Baldry Court out as a geography of memory (*RS 67*). Whilst Chris suffers from amnesia and recognises only the sections and objects in the house that were present fifteen years before his memory loss, his cousin Jenny Baldry also implies that the sense of touch reinforces his inhabitation of a world that is now lost: 'he would glance sideways at the old oak panelling' (*RS 67*). More subtly, Chris' tactile appreciations of Baldry Court also parallel his aesthetic and emotional preference for the beauty of his former lover, Margaret, over his current wife Kitty. Jenny's remark that Chris fingers objects in Baldry Court 'as though sight were not intimate enough a contact' flags up his indifference to his wife's attempt to attract her husband's eye to her visual charms with necklaces he had bought for her:

³ Santanu Das, *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 23.

⁴ Das, p. 76.

⁵ *Ibid.*

He answered kindly. "I am glad I did that. You look very beautiful in them". But as he spoke his gaze shifted to the shadows in the corners of the room. He was thinking of another woman, of another beauty. (*RS 67*)

In contrast, what Jenny notices about his relationship with Margaret, the other beauty of whom Chris is thinking, is the extent to which it is governed by an appreciation of beauty which appeals to the touch rather than the eye. She observes: 'I covered my eyes and said aloud, "In a minute he will see her face, her hands". But although it was a long time before I looked again they were still clinging breast to breast. It was as though her embrace fed him, he looked so strong as he broke away' (*RS 92*). In this context, Chris' relationship with the built environment shows the aesthetic preferences which have a profound impact on his attempts to forge and sustain human relationships.

That Chris' appreciation of tactile beauty also stems back to his sensory conditioning in the geography of the trenches is possible, but this was certainly the case for one of the most important modernist theorists of touch. In the 1924 version of his manifesto on 'Tactilism', F.T. Marinetti cites the geography of the trenches as the inspiration behind his new system of tactile aesthetic appreciation:

One night during the winter of 1917 I was crawling on hands and knees down to my pallet in the darkness of an artillery battery's dugout. Hard as I tried not to, I keep hitting bayonets, mess tins, and the heads of sleeping soldiers. I lay down, but didn't sleep, obsessed with the tactile sensations I'd felt and classified. For the first time that night I thought of a tactile art.⁶

With the ideas outlined in 'Tactilism', Marinetti hopes to 'contribute indirectly toward the perfection of spiritual communication between human beings, through the epidermis'.⁷ Suggesting that 'it was as though her embrace fed him' (*RS 92*), Jenny's

⁶ F.T. Marinetti, 'Tactilism', in Mary Ann Caws, *Manifesto: A Century of Isms* (Omaha: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), pp. 197-200 (p. 197).

⁷ Marinetti, p. 199.

description of Chris and Margaret's relationship seems to demonstrate Marinetti's model of 'the perfection of spiritual communication between human beings'.⁸

In his theorisation of 'Skinscapes: Embodiment, Culture and Environment' (2005), David Howes notes that 'it is commonly assumed that we are best served by our tactile environment when we scarcely notice its presence':

Our time is largely spent indoors, where architecture and design collude to provide an environment as devoid as possible of tactile stimulation. In the modern university or office building floors and walls are flat and smooth, corridors are clear, the air is still, the temperature is neutral, and elevators carry one effortlessly from one level to another.⁹

In this thesis, I intend to argue that the opposite is the case in West's representations of haptic relations with built environments. Her writings emphasise a heightened sensibility to the tactile environment that not only provide a means through which to explore the importance of the haptic to the experience of modernity, but also to register some of the aesthetic, historical and cultural factors which informed this.

I. Key Contexts

In the influential hierarchy of the senses created by Aristotle in *De Anima* (c. 350 BC), sight is positioned as the superior sense and touch designated as the lowest sense. Nevertheless, he regarded the tactile sense as the basis of all the other senses: 'without the sense of touch none of the other senses is present'.¹⁰ Picking up on Aristotle's identification of touch as a base sense, the eighteenth-century philosopher George Berkeley posited that the tactile sense is foundational to our perception of

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ David Howes, 'Skinscapes: Embodiment, Culture and Environment', in *The Book of Touch*, ed. by Constance Classen (Oxford: Berg, 2005), pp. 27-39 (p. 29).

¹⁰ Aristotle, *De Anima (On the Soul)*, trans. by Hugh Lawson-Tancred (London: Penguin Books Limited, 1986), p. 163.

spatial distance. In *An Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision* (1732), Berkeley claimed that:

whoever will look narrowly into his own Thoughts, and examine what he means by saying, he sees this or that thing at a Distance, will agree with me, that what he sees only suggests to his Understanding, that after having passed a certain Distance, to be measured by the Motion of his Body, which is perceivable by Touch, he shall come to perceive such and such tangible Ideas which have been usually connected with such and such visible Ideas.¹¹

In this thesis, I will consider some of the ways in which West's work is shaped by late-nineteenth and early twentieth century political upheavals, social shifts and aesthetic developments that placed a renewed emphasis on the importance of the haptic sense as a basis for human engagement with built space. It will be useful here to outline some of the key contexts which prompted West to lend significance to the tactile reception of architecture in her quest to elaborate the political, social, aesthetic and spiritual situation of her characters.

During the early years of the twentieth century, the militant campaign for women's suffrage pursued by the Women's Social and Political Union resulted in the imprisonment of over one thousand suffragettes.¹² Many of those incarcerated published accounts of their time in prison, which give prominence to the brutal experience of force-feeding at the hands of the prison authorities. According to Jason Haslam in his contribution to *Captivating Subjects: Writing Confinement, Citizenship, and Nationhood in the Nineteenth Century* (2005), 'the goals of the suffragette prison narrative [...] mimic those of the [suffragette] movement: to replace enforced silence

¹¹ George Berkeley, *An Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision* (Dublin: printed by Aaron Rhames, for Jeremy Pepyat, Bookseller in *Skinner-Row*, 1709), p. 50 <<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/ecco/>> [accessed 19 July 2017].

¹² See Jean H. Baker, *Votes For Women: The Struggle for Suffrage Revisited* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 146.

with active voices, and oppression with agency'.¹³ However, less remarked upon is the fact that many of these narratives also brought into sharp relief how the tactile conditions of the prison cell shape (and threaten to undermine) the political agency of the suffragette. As the suffragette activist Lady Constance Lytton notes in *Prisons and Prisoners: Some Personal Experiences* (1914): 'For several days I did not wear my cap and apron in my cell, but did not in other ways continue my protest against the clothes. The cold seemed to me intense, and I wore the skirt of my dress fastened round my neck for warmth'.¹⁴ In *The Sentinel* (1909-11), an unfinished novel which contains many detailed descriptions of the suffragette prison experience, West is sensitive to the ways in which the cell's bodily conditions shape the pursuit of feminist activism. This will be discussed further in Chapter One.

As Chris Baldry's peculiarly tactile interactions with the interior of Baldry Court in *The Return of the Soldier* indicate, the built environments which emerged following the outbreak of the First World War are also crucial to West's fascination with the tactile. In the early months of 1916, she published a series entitled 'Hands That War' in the *Daily Chronicle*, which documents the working conditions of female munitions workers in factories throughout the United Kingdom. Angela Woollacott argues in her study *On Her Their Lives Depend: Munitions Workers in the Great War* (1994) that 'the woman munitions worker became a powerful symbol of modernity. She challenged the gender order through her patriotic skilled work and control of machinery'.¹⁵ Notable in West's journalism is her sense that the shift in female social roles heralded by the entry of women into the munitions factories was simultaneously accompanied by a

¹³ Jason Haslam, 'Being Jane Warton: Lady Constance Lytton and the Disruption of Privilege', in *Captivating Subjects: Writing Confinement, Citizenship, and Nationhood in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Jason Haslam and Julia M. Wright (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), pp. 25-56 (p. 28).

¹⁴ Lady Constance Lytton, *Prisons and Prisoners: Some Personal Experiences* (New York: George H. Doran and Company, 1914), p. 263 <<https://archive.org/>> [accessed 19 July 2017].

¹⁵ Angela Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend: Munitions Workers in the Great War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p. 3.

heightened and volatile tactile relationship with the industrial space. She recounts in 'Hands That War: The Night Shift' (1916) that:

The grey dust that lay on the bench ignites for quite frivolous reasons; the windows of these rooms are hooded with wire netting, because one day a similar shop in Scotland went up in flames the moment after a robin flew in and pecked at the dust. It stands to reason that, although the women in these works are guarded by every possible device, even in some processes shutting a door between themselves and their machine while it is at work, this stuff, which is more savage than any animal, breaks out.¹⁶

As the narrator of *The Return of the Soldier* is careful to note, the women of the seemingly detached and benign country house at Baldry Court display an equally attuned sense of the significance and potential impact of their tactile engagement with the built environment. Chris' cousin Jenny delights in the fact that: 'I could send my mind creeping from room to room like a purring cat, rubbing itself against all the brittle beautiful things that we had either recovered from antiquity or dug from the obscure pits of modern craftsmanship' (RS 49). Meanwhile, his childhood sweetheart Margaret 'enjoyed the feeling of the thick carpet underfoot' (RS 105). The relationship between touch in West's wartime journalism, criticism and fiction will be examined in Chapter Two.

Whereas the haptic turn in West's writings partly emerges in response to the bodily contexts of contemporary political movements and historical events, it is also based upon an investment in nineteenth and early twentieth-century aesthetic theories. Indeed, the definition of the term 'haptic' was itself shaped by the Viennese art historian Alois Riegl in his influential work *Late Roman Art Industry* (1901). According to Margaret Iverson in *Alois Riegl: Art History and Theory* (1993), Riegl claims that

¹⁶ Rebecca West, 'Hands That War: The Night Shift', in *The Young Rebecca: Writings of Rebecca West, 1911-1917*, ed. by Jane Marcus (London: Virago Press, Limited, 1983), pp. 387-390 (p. 389).

ancient Egyptian art (such as bas-relief) primarily stimulates a tactile form of looking in its maintenance of ‘as far as possible the appearance of a unified, isolated object adhering to a plane. He calls this the ‘tactile’ or ‘haptic’ plane, or in terms of how it is perceived, a near view of objects’.¹⁷ In contrast, ‘the three-dimensional and self-contained objects’ of late Roman art exist in a relationship to the ‘plane [which] is no longer tactile because it contains interruptions achieved through deep shadows; it is, on the contrary, optical-colored [sic], whereby the objects appear to us from a distant view and in which they also blur into their environment’.¹⁸ Fiona Candlin argues in *Art, Museums and Touch* (2010) that this interpretation of historical ‘development is also equated to the acquisition of full subjectivity, for Riegl posits that the Egyptians had a confused sense of external objects and, by implication, they also had a confused sense of themselves as separate subjects’.¹⁹ Candlin adds that ‘whilst touch and tactile looking supposedly shored up their sense of individuated materiality and aimed at objective understanding, it also meant that they could only have a proximate, successive, subjective experience of things’.²⁰ Suffering from a correspondingly ‘confused sense of external objects’, the amnesiac, Chris Baldry, depends on haptic perceptions of Baldry Court which also aim to shore up a ‘sense of individuated materiality’ that conforms to the world that his memory still contains.²¹

Whereas Riegl’s work illustrates the importance that haptic responses to architectural space have in thinking about antique art, this thesis contends that West’s writings specifically engage with late nineteenth and early twentieth-century theories of aesthetic empathy that emphasise the haptic basis of every response to art. Coined by Robert Vischer in his 1873 doctoral thesis ‘On the Optical Sense of Form: A Contribution to Aesthetics’, the term *Einfühlung* (literally “feeling-into”) describes how

¹⁷ Margaret Iverson, *Alois Riegl: Art History and Theory* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1993), p. 78.

¹⁸ Iverson, p. 79.

¹⁹ Fiona Candlin, *Art, Museums and Touch* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), p. 12.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

the human body ‘unconsciously projects its own bodily form – and with this also the soul – into the form of the object’.²² The term would later be translated as ‘empathy’ by the English psychologist E.B. Titchener.²³ Vischer provides proof of this bodily projection into the form of the object by pointing to our perception of architecture:

The content of a work of art is simply the artist. The genius is the soul of his object, everywhere. Even the conditions and forms of architecture do not deny this, although their practical and geometric purposes seem to be justified by reason alone. They seize our feeling of space [*Raumgefühl*], and they touch us like a festive expansion, like a consolidation, a raising or an increase of our own individual being. Thus architecture seems to me the best proof that the whole world of phenomena, that everything can be felt as projection of the human self.²⁴

Though he does not – unlike Riegl – explicitly use the term haptic, Vischer’s claim that architectural forms ‘seize our feeling of space’ and ‘touch us like a festive expansion’ implies that our empathic response to architectural forms is intimately bound up with our tactile perceptions.²⁵ Following Vischer’s theory of empathy, the writings of later aesthetic theorists much more explicitly point to its basis in the haptic sense modality.

Though we cannot be sure that West was familiar with the empathy theory of Vischer, we do know that she was familiar with a figure that later developed it: Theodor Lipps. In a previously unnoticed ‘Explanation’ that West included at the beginning of the first edition of *The Strange Necessity: Essays and Reviews* (1928), she notes that:

²² Robert Vischer, ‘On the Optical Sense of Form: A Contribution to Aesthetics’, in *Empathy, Form and Space: Problems in German Aesthetics, 1873-1893*, trans. by Harry Francis Mallgrave and Eleftherios Ikonomou (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994), pp. 89-123 (p. 92).

²³ See E.B. Titchener, *Lectures on the Experimental Psychology of the Thought-Processes* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1909), p. 21 <<https://archive.org/>> [accessed 19 July 2017].

²⁴ Robert Vischer, ‘*Der ästhetische Akt und die reine Form*’ (1874), quoted in Rainer Schützeichel, ‘Architecture as Bodily and Spatial Art: The Idea of *Einfühlung* in Early Theoretical Contributions by Heinrich Wölfflin and August Schmarsow’, *Architectural Theory Review*, 18.3 (2014), 293-309 (p. 297) <<http://www.tandfonline.com/>> [accessed 19 July 2017].

²⁵ Ibid.

Certain persons concerned with the preparation of my manuscript have accused me of using in “empathy” a word that is absent from most dictionaries. I imagine, however, that it is familiar to most people, as a term to express our power of entering into the experience of objects outside ourselves, through its presence in the pages of Lipps (as *Einfühlung*).²⁶

In *Raumästhetik* [*Spatial Aesthetics*] (1897), the most likely source of the pages to which West refers, Lipps also emphasises the haptic basis of our aesthetic appreciation of the built environment:

The powerful contraction and self-raising of the Doric column that I perceive gives me pleasure, just as the powerful contraction and self-raising of my own body that I remember, or as the powerful contraction and self-raising of someone else that I perceive, give me pleasure.²⁷

In the essay ‘The Strange Necessity’, Lipps’ ideas can be seen behind West’s explanation of the enjoyment she gained from noticing that the stance of a sixteen-year-old girl ‘was very like the line of the cantilevers which supported the Forth Bridge [...] behind her’ (*SN* 123). She notes: ‘That matter in such different forms as this soft, rosy girl, and the vast and harsh assemblage of metals were adopting the same method of resisting strain caused me pleasure’ (*SN* 123). West’s interest in haptic relations with buildings is in part prompted by her recognition of their importance to contemporary built environments such as the trench and the munitions factory hut. By appropriating Lipps’ empathy theory in ‘The Strange Necessity’, her interest in this form of response to the buildings is also clearly influenced by late nineteenth-century aesthetic theories

²⁶ Rebecca West, ‘Explanation’, in *The Strange Necessity: Essays and Reviews* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1928), p. 7.

²⁷ Theodor Lipps, ‘*Raumästhetik*’, quoted in Rainer Schützeichel, ‘Architecture as Bodily and Spatial Art: The Idea of *Einfühlung* in Early Theoretical Contributions by Heinrich Wölfflin and August Schmarsow’, *Architectural Theory Review*, 18.3 (2014), 293-309 (p. 298) <<http://www.tandfonline.com/>> [accessed 19 July 2017].

which sought to re-establish the importance of sensations other than sight in our response to aesthetic forms.

In addition to Lipps, West was also familiar with theorists who used German empathy theory to argue for the physical, evolutionary and humanist value of art and aesthetic perception. In West's 'Explanation', she cites 'Vernon Lee' as an important influence on her understanding of empathy, a concept which forms an integral part of the aesthetic theory she outlines in the essay.²⁸ Here, she is most likely referring to Lee's 1897 essay 'Beauty and Ugliness', co-authored with Clementina Anstruther-Thomson, which aims to provide for 'the phenomena of aesthetics an explanation different from that furnished by recent mental science, but an explanation more really consonant with the psychological thought of our day'.²⁹ Heavily influenced by Lipps' *Spatial Aesthetics*, Lee and Anstruther-Thomson suggest that a vital 'part of the perception of Form' is our 'altered breathing, senses of tension, and altered balance'.³⁰ Applied specifically to the architectural form of the Gothic arch, Lee and Anstruther-Thomson conclude that 'a slightly uneven-sided arch, like those of good Gothic work, affects us as extremely interesting, for we see the two sides of the arch actively pressing against each other, and this at once calls up in us active sensations of equilibrium'.³¹ In *The Deepest Sense: A Cultural History of Touch* (2012), Constance Classen notes that 'nineteenth-century evolutionary theory would declare that attending to sights over tactile or olfactory sensations was a defining trait of the human species, which at some point in its long transition from animality had learned to take its hands and nose away from the ground and stand up and look around'.³² Contrasting this, as Susan Lanzoni notes in 'Practicing Psychology in the Art Gallery: Vernon Lee's Aesthetics of

²⁸ West, 'Explanation', p. 7.

²⁹ Vernon Lee and Clementina Anstruther-Thomson, 'Beauty and Ugliness', *Contemporary Review*, 72 (October, 1897), 544-569 (p. 544) <<http://www.proquest.com/>> [accessed 19 July 2017].

³⁰ Lee and Anstruther-Thomson, p. 550.

³¹ Lee and Anstruther-Thomson, p. 567.

³² Constance Classen, *The Deepest Sense: A Cultural History of Touch* (Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 2012), p. 182.

Empathy' (2009), Lee and Anstruther-Thomson argue that the haptic perceptions of the built environment provide important proof that aesthetic experience formed a part of our evolutionary development:

For Lee, aesthetic experience was necessary for well-being: It heightened one's vitality on a physiological level and was an evolutionary achievement. This heightened vitality was not just of the body, but also reached the levels of mind and spirit. As Lee put it, "We do not merely breathe better and digest better, though that is no small gain, but we seem to understand better". It was the natural aesthetic sensitivity of the body and mind that made the appreciation of the beautiful possible.³³

In 'The Strange Necessity', West instead refers to her tactile experiences of Paris as evidence for beauty 'which gives a sense of reassurance, of exultant confidence in the universe, which no personal experience can give' (SN 50). She claims: 'I know, for I felt it there, on the Rue de Rivoli' (SN 50). The influence of Lee and Anstruther-Thomson's empathy theory on West's writings will be considered in Chapter Four and Five.

II. The Critical Gap

This is the first study to explore the importance of haptic relations with built environments in West's writing. West scholars have repeatedly highlighted that her characters' responses to buildings elaborate the author's aesthetic and critical agenda. In 'Under West(ern) Eyes: Rebecca West Reads Joyce' (2002), Francesca Frigerio argues that 'The Strange Necessity' 'makes use of [...] the cathedral of Notre-Dame to deconstruct Leopold Bloom's masculinity' in order to enhance 'the possibility of placing the aloof male artist in a wider intellectual environment in which women played

³³ Susan Lanzoni, 'Practicing Psychology in the Art Gallery: Vernon Lee's Aesthetics of Empathy', *Journal of the History of Behavioural Sciences*, 45.4 (Fall, 2009), 330-354 (p. 336) <<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/>> [accessed 19 July 2017].

a major role'.³⁴ Margaret D. Stetz, in 'Rebecca West, Aestheticism and the Legacy of Oscar Wilde' (2006), has interpreted *The Return of the Soldier* as 'a meditation on the Wildean ideal of the House Beautiful' which is 'also an excoriation of that ideal'.³⁵ Debra Rae Cohen's chapter on 'Sheepish Modernism: Rebecca West, the Adam Brothers, and the Taxonomies of Criticism' (2006) posits that in *Harriet Hume: A London Fantasy* (1929) 'Arnold's Adam Brothers-designed house serves as a kind of proof text whose "readings" by Arnold and Harriet function as opposing theories of tradition, creativity and canonization'.³⁶ In each of these analyses, the readings and responses of characters to the built environment is understood as a predominantly visual or auditory activity. Frigerio's initial point about West's response to Notre-Dame quickly gives way to her argument that 'the possibility of creating links among the literary, visual, and auditory impulses leads [her] to the formulation of an organicist aesthetics based on the alliance between art and nature and among the different fields of art: literature, painting, music are alike tools for "examining the same sets of questions about reality, although they make use of different forms and media"'.³⁷ Stetz argues that in *The Return of the Soldier* 'the texture, the rhythms, the auditory charm, and the visual effects of the prose style depend upon the narrator's detailed and appreciative descriptions of aesthetic objects, as well as of aestheticized moments – moments taken out of the flow of time, framed, idealized, and savoured'.³⁸ Cohen argues that Harriet appreciates the 'organic eclecticism' of Adam Brothers architecture, which 'stimulat[e] the imagination by the use of incomplete views'.³⁹ As insightful as this scholarship is, a purely ocular or audio-centric understanding of West's engagement with architecture

³⁴ Francesca Frigerio, 'Under West(ern) Eyes: Rebecca West Reads Joyce', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 26.1 (Fall, 2002), 66-72 (p. 67) <muse.jhu.edu> [accessed 19 July 2017].

³⁵ Margaret D. Stetz, 'Rebecca West, Aestheticism, and the Legacy of Oscar Wilde', in *Rebecca West Today: Contemporary Critical Approaches*, ed. by Bernard Schweizer (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2006), pp. 157-169 (pp. 160-161).

³⁶ Debra Rae Cohen, 'Sheepish Modernism: Rebecca West, the Adam Brothers, and the Taxonomies of Criticism', in *Rebecca West Today*, ed. by Schweizer, pp. 143-156 (p. 145).

³⁷ Frigerio, pp. 69-70.

³⁸ Stetz, p. 161.

³⁹ Cohen, p. 147.

misses the meaningful ways this is determined by her haptic understanding of space. In this thesis, I argue that West's representations of tactile engagements with buildings offer a fuller understanding of her critical and aesthetic project.

My thesis also offers the first in-depth study of tactile interactions with architecture in the work of a modernist writer. In the introduction to her seminal work *The Senses of Modernism: Technology, Perception, and Aesthetics* (1997), Sara Danius states that she is 'primarily concerned with sight and hearing' in high modernist works by Marcel Proust, Thomas Mann and James Joyce.⁴⁰ The central claim of Danius' study is that 'high-modernist aesthetics is inseparable from a historically specific crisis of the senses, a sensory crisis sparked by, among other things, late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century technological innovations, particularly technologies of perception'.⁴¹ Danius challenges the idea that the modernists maintained a distinction between the fields of technology and aesthetics, positing that 'the emergence of modernist aesthetics signifies the increasing internalization of technological matrices of perception'.⁴² This thesis explores how West representations of the haptic sense reveals a modernist aesthetic which is equally immersed in modernity's architectural matrices of perception.⁴³ Danius argues that:

The ways in which the tasks of the eye and ear are orchestrated in Mann, Proust, and Joyce imply that modernism is coextensive with a shift from idealist theories of aesthetic gratification to essentially materialist ones. That is to say, modernism is an index of a general gravitation toward a conception of aesthetic

⁴⁰ Sara Danius, *The Senses of Modernism: Technology, Perception and Aesthetics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), p. 20.

⁴¹ Danius, p. 3.

⁴² Danius, p. 2.

⁴³ Ibid.

experience based in a notion of the immanence of the body, a body inhabited by temporality and therefore also finite.⁴⁴

As my brief discussion of thinking about empathy began to illustrate above, the ‘shift from idealist theories of aesthetic gratification to essentially materialist ones’ can also be linked to an increasing awareness about the role played by the haptic sense modality in appreciations of art.⁴⁵

More recently, Abbie Garrington’s *Haptic Modernism: Touch and the Tactile in Modernist Writing* (2013) has convincingly established the numerous ways in which modernist writing is fascinated with the tactile sense. Indeed, the starting point of this project came from Garrington’s consideration of West’s ‘fascination with the many meanings of hands, manicured or otherwise’ in *The Return of the Soldier*, her posthumously published novel *Sunflower* (1925-27) and *Harriet Hume*.⁴⁶ Garrington highlights clear evidence that the modernists were interested in the tactile appropriation of architectural space. In her discussion of the ‘Lestrygonians’ episode of Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922), for example, she reminds us of the incident in which Leopold Bloom watches ‘the blind stripling [who] tapped the curbstone and went on his way, drawing his cane back, feeling again. [...] Queer idea of Dublin he must have tapping his way round by the stones’.⁴⁷ However, Garrington’s extensive discussion of ‘spiritual and healing touch, mediumship, anointing, scarification, sexual touch, the “keeping in touch” of epistolary practice, labouring hands, craft and the hand, the hands of the blind, braille, the experience of mechanised transport, the touching or licking eye of the sculpture viewer or cinema spectator’ leave her little room to address haptic interactions

⁴⁴ Danius, p. 194.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Abbie Garrington, *Haptic Modernism: Touch and the Tactile in Modernist Writing* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), p. 14.

⁴⁷ James Joyce, *Ulysses: The 1922 Text* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 173.

with buildings.⁴⁸ My approach to West in part aims to more firmly establish the significance of this aspect of spatial experience in modernist writing.

This thesis also develops on recent scholarly work which stresses that '[modern] literature's encounter with the built environment is essential to its definition of what is sometimes called modernity'.⁴⁹ In the introduction to *Architecture and Modern Literature* (2012), David Spurr argues that the attempt to understand literary depictions of modern subjectivity necessitates an appreciation of:

the bodily relations to architectural space that are particularly important to modern literature – in the taut nerves of Baudelaire's *flâneur*, in Whitman's doors unscrewn from their jambs, in Pater's palpable excitement in the Cathedral of Amiens, in the "dark freshness" of Proust's narrator's room at Combray [...], in the "mouldy air" of a ruined medieval abbey visited in Joyce's Dublin.⁵⁰

My discussion of West proceeds from Spurr's emphasis on bodily relations with architectural space. Spurr posits that the notion of dwelling foregrounded by modernist literature's figuration of architectural experience is one in which 'the inner space of the subject turns out to be a constituent part of the symbolic universe to which the subject is just that – subject and not sovereign'.⁵¹ Despite this emphasis on a lost sovereignty of the subject, Spurr is careful to note that 'the point is not merely to expose the modern subject as a mere automaton jostled this way and that by forces beyond the subject's control, [...] rather it is ultimately to come to terms with this condition, to work through it toward a more authentic relation to existence'.⁵² My argument that West's representations of tactile relations with architecture figures the embeddedness of the

⁴⁸ Garrington, p. 50.

⁴⁹ David Spurr, *Architecture and Modern Literature* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2012), p. ix.

⁵⁰ Spurr, p. 37.

⁵¹ Spurr, p. 60

⁵² Ibid.

subject in the conditions of modernity, whilst also being central to the subject's attempt to situate themselves in relation to them, advances from the modernist architectural notion of dwelling identified by Spurr.

Walter Benjamin, in 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1936), invites an argument about the particular significance of haptic relations to architectural space in modernist literature's concern with the situation of the modern subject. Overturning Riegl's association of the haptic with Egyptian bas-relief, Benjamin argues that this sense determines architectural engagements in his own period: 'Buildings are appropriated in a twofold manner: by use and by perception – or rather, by touch and sight'.⁵³ In support of his claim that 'Architecture has always represented the prototype of a work of art the reception of which is consummated by a collectivity in a state of distraction', Benjamin claims that 'tactile appropriation is accomplished not so much by attention as by habit':

As regards architecture, habit determines to a large extent even optical reception. The latter, too, occurs much less through rapt attention than by noticing the object in incidental fashion. This mode of appropriation, developed with reference to architecture, in certain circumstances acquires canonical value. For the tasks which face the human apparatus of perception at the turning points of history cannot be solved by optical means, that is, by contemplation, alone. They are mastered gradually by habit, under the guidance of tactile appropriation.⁵⁴

In 'Ballard and Ballardur: Reading the Intertextual and the Architectural in *Concrete Island*' (2016), Richard Brown proposes that 'in [the] precise Benjaminian sense the architectural may serve as a term for the way in which the modern subject habituates itself to the built environment of modernity in a state of distraction and habit and also

⁵³ Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in *Illuminations*, trans. by Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 2011), pp. 211-244 (p. 233).

⁵⁴ Ibid.

uses senses other than the visual (notably the tactile) to orient itself'.⁵⁵ In the chapters below, I argue that West follows Benjamin by stressing the crucial role played by the tactile reception of architecture in determining her characters' conscious attempts to orient themselves in relation to both the built environment of modernity and some of its most prominent political, social, aesthetic and spiritual contexts.

III. Methodological Approaches

Following Garrington, I will be using the term "haptic" in this thesis as 'an umbrella term denoting one or more of the following experiences: touch (the active or passive experience of the human skin, subcutaneous flesh, viscera and related nerve-endings); kinaesthesia (the body's sense of its own movement); proprioception (the body's sense of its orientation in space); and the vestibular sense (that of balance, reliant on the inner ear)'.⁵⁶ Though this term implies a usefully broad notion of touch which extends beyond the hand and includes the body's muscles and nerves, it also risks conveying an imprecise picture of tactility in West's work. This section outlines some of the approaches and theorists I will be using to develop a more precise understanding of the tactile in her writings. The Construction Industry Council argue that 'the built environment encompasses all forms of building (housing, industrial, commercial, hospitals, schools, etc., and civil engineering infrastructure, both above and below ground and includes the managed landscapes between and around buildings'.⁵⁷ My understanding of the term "built environment" is equally broad, referring to buildings, architectural structures and natural features (such as landscape architecture) constructed or arranged by human beings.

⁵⁵ Richard Brown, 'Ballard and Ballardur: Reading the Intertextual and the Architectural in *Concrete Island*', *Literary Geographies*, 2.1 (2016), 65-78 (p. 75).

<<http://www.literarygeographies.net/index.php/LitGeogs>> [accessed 19 July 2017].

⁵⁶ Garrington, p. 16.

⁵⁷ 'APPG For Excellence in the Built Environment', <<http://cic.org.uk/services/all-party-parliamentary-group.php>> [accessed 6 June 2017].

West's emphasis on the ways in which her characters' tactile experiences of architecture shape their orientation within a variety of contexts invites a phenomenological reading of her work. Foundational to this approach are the theories of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who identifies the body as the primary site of knowing and being-in-the-world. In *The Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), Merleau-Ponty famously challenges the ontological distinction between mind and body which had been a central tenet of the Western philosophical tradition at least as far back as the Cartesian principle of *cogito*. Whereas Decartes had located the basis of human subjectivity in the immaterial mind, Merleau-Ponty instead argues that 'I am conscious of the world through the medium of my body'.⁵⁸ Crucial to the argument of this thesis is Merleau-Ponty's claim that this consciousness of the world through the medium of the body is made possible by the haptic basis of our situation in built space. He argues: 'My flat is, for me, not a set of closely associated images. It remains a familiar domain round about me only as long as I still have "in my hands" or "in my legs" the main distances and directions involved, and as long as from my body intentional threads run out towards it'.⁵⁹ The use of such examples also forms a part of Merleau-Ponty's attempt to theorise the "body schema". In 'The Body in Husserl and Merleau-Ponty' (1999), Taylor Carman explains that for Merleau-Ponty the body schema is the pre-conscious 'crux or reference point that establishes a stable perceptual background against which I perceive and respond to changes and movements in my environment which is fundamentally constituted through the body's situation in space'.⁶⁰ Merleau-Ponty posits that the body's spatiality 'is not, like that of external objects, or like that of "spatial sensations",

⁵⁸ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Colin Smith (London: Taylor and Francis e-Library, 2005), pp. 94-95.

⁵⁹ Merleau-Ponty, p. 150.

⁶⁰ Taylor Carman, 'The Body in Husserl and Merleau-Ponty', *Philosophical Topics*, 27.2 (Fall, 1999), 205-226 (p. 220) <http://www.complextrauma.uk/uploads/2/3/9/4/23949705/carman_body.pdf> [accessed 19 July 2017].

a *spatiality of position*, but a *spatiality of situation*'.⁶¹ To illustrate this, he again refers to an example of his haptic engagement with the built environment:

If I stand in front of my desk and lean on it with both hands, only my hands are stressed and the whole of my body trails behind them like the trail of a comet. It is not that I am unaware of the whereabouts of my shoulder or back but these are simply swallowed up in the position of my hands, and my whole posture can be read so to speak in the pressure they exert on the table.⁶²

With his emphasis on the necessarily embodied relationship with space, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological approach provides one useful frame through which to consider the ways in which haptic interactions with architecture configure subjectivity in West's writings.

More recently, Merleau-Ponty's theories have been mobilised in service of phenomenological approaches that interpret architecture as a kind of interface through which individuals locate themselves in history and culture. In *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses* (1996), Juhani Pallasmaa argues that 'the task of architecture is "to make visible how the world touches us", as Merleau-Ponty said of the paintings of Cezanne'.⁶³ Pallasmaa opens his study with the claim that a fuller understanding of the built environment and its role in mediating our relationship with the world has been hindered by 'the prevailing architecture of the eye'.⁶⁴ In order to tackle this, he calls for an effort to 're-sensualise architecture through a strengthened sense of materiality and hapticity, texture and weight, density of space and materialised light'.⁶⁵ Notable in Pallasmaa's text is his suggestion that architecture which emphasises hapticity make it a frame through which we can orient, establish and outline our

⁶¹ Merleau-Ponty, pp. 114-115. Emphasis in original.

⁶² Merleau-Ponty, p. 115.

⁶³ Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses* (Chichester: John Wiley and Sons Limited, 2005), p. 46.

⁶⁴ Pallasmaa, p. 70.

⁶⁵ Pallasmaa, p. 37.

position in relation to historical shifts and cultural developments.⁶⁶ By appealing to this and senses other than the eye, Pallasmaa posits that ‘architecture enables us to perceive and understand the dialectics of permanence and change, to settle ourselves in the world, and to place ourselves in the continuum of culture and change’.⁶⁷ In all of the writings that I will examine in this thesis, I approach this form of architectural engagement as equally crucial to West’s attempts to think through her characters’ situation within the ‘continuum of culture and change’.⁶⁸

In addition to Merleau-Ponty and Pallasmaa, I draw upon the phenomenological theories of Elaine Scarry’s *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (1985), Pierre Bourdieu’s *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1972), Paul Rodaway’s *Sensuous Geographies: Body, Sense and Place* (1994), Vernon Lee and Clementina Anstruther-Thomson’s ‘Beauty and Ugliness’ and Michel de Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1980). These theorists stake out different intellectual territories: Scarry’s book operates within the field of philosophy and cultural criticism; Rodaway’s volume emphasises the importance of sensory experience to our understanding of human geography; Lee and Anstruther-Thomson’s writings are concerned with developing a theory of psychological aesthetics; Bourdieu and de Certeau’s texts offer theories of practice which both critique and contribute to social science. However, like Pallasmaa, they all adopt an approach to subjectivity which either informs or is indebted to Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of the body. Scarry, Bourdieu, Rodaway, Lee and de Certeau each begin with the notion that human subjectivity is necessarily embodied, and that this especially depends on the body’s mutually affective relationship with space. In *The Body in Pain*, Scarry argues that ‘intense pain [...] destroys a person’s self and world, a destruction experienced spatially as either the contraction of the universe down to the immediate vicinity of the body or as the body swelling to fill the entire

⁶⁶ Merleau-Ponty, p. xvii.

⁶⁷ Pallasmaa, p. 71.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

universe'.⁶⁹ Bruno Frere notes in 'Bourdieu's Sociological Fiction: A Phenomenological Reading of Habitus' (2013) that 'the term "habitus" is a phenomenological concept. Quoting Merleau-Ponty, Bourdieu defines it as "the intrinsic corporality of pre-objective contact between subject and object so as to reproduce the body as a source of practical intentionality"'.⁷⁰ Rodaway defines global touch as 'the presence of the body in a context, a sense of itself within a world – this is related to Merleau-Ponty's concept of the body-subject'.⁷¹ The German concept of *Einfühlung*, which forms a crucial part of Lee and Anstruther-Thomson's theory of aesthetic empathy, was later used by Merleau-Ponty to describe the body-subject. In the working notes for *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968) Merleau-Ponty argues that 'between [the world] and us there is *Einfühlung*', and 'that means that my body is made of the same flesh of the world (it is a perceived), and moreover that this flesh of my body is shared by the world'.⁷² Ian Buchanan, in *Michel de Certeau: Cultural Theorist* (2000), argues that Merleau-Ponty's crucial philosophical move, which de Certeau's theorisation of space implicitly endorses, is to posit the body [...] as the necessary condition of perception'.⁷³

Garrington acknowledges in her introduction to *Haptic Modernism* that every aspect of the haptic sense modality is 'troublesome to define, isolate and understand'.⁷⁴ With this in mind, Scarry's theorisation of pain, Rodaway's concepts of 'global touch' and 'reach-touch', as well as Lee's theories of aesthetic empathy enable me to more clearly define, isolate and theorise West's configuration of touch. Chapter One engages with Scarry's claim that: 'physical pain – unlike any other state of consciousness – has

⁶⁹ Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 35.

⁷⁰ Bruno Frere, 'Bourdieu's Sociological Fiction: A Phenomenological Reading of Habitus', in *The Legacy of Pierre Bourdieu: Critical Essays*, ed. by Simon Susen and Brian S. Turner (London: Anthem Press, 2013), pp. 247-270 (p. 267).

⁷¹ Paul Rodaway, *Sensuous Geographies: Body, Sense and Place* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 49.

⁷² Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), p. 248.

⁷³ Ian Buchanan, *Michel de Certeau: Cultural Theorist* (London: SAGE Publications, 2000), p. 111.

⁷⁴ Garrington, p. 16.

no referential content. It is not *of* or *for* anything'.⁷⁵ Chapter Two interprets representations of tactile practice in *Henry James* (1916) and *The Return of the Soldier* in light of Bourdieu's theory that it is in 'the dialectical relationship between the body and a space' that 'one finds the form par excellence of the structural apprenticeship which leads to the embodying of the structures of the world, that is, the appropriating by the world of a body thus enabled to appropriate the world'.⁷⁶ Chapter Three reads haptic responses to architecture in *The Judge* (1922) and *Sunflower* as examples of 'global touch', which Rodaway defines as 'the presence of the body in a context, a sense of itself within a world, [...] a general feeling of one's body and its intimate environment'.⁷⁷ Chapter Four approaches West's portrayals of empathic participation with architectural forms in 'The Strange Necessity' and *Harriet Hume* alongside Lee and Anstruther-Thomson's theory that aesthetic perception 'implies an active participation of the most important organs of animal life, a constant alteration of vital processes requiring stringent regulation for the benefit of the total organism'.⁷⁸ Chapter Five analyses West's depictions of reach-touch, which Rodaway defines as 'exploring touch which reaches out to, takes hold of or feels the characteristics of objects and their relationship to the environment', in *A Letter to a Grandfather* (1933) and *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon: A Journey Through Yugoslavia* (1941).⁷⁹ I do so in conversation with de Certeau's identification of bodily 'ways of operating' in space that 'manipulate the mechanisms of discipline and conform to them only in order to evade them'.⁸⁰ I will outline how I use these theorists in more detail in the introductions to my chapters.

In *Rebecca West Today: Contemporary Critical Approaches* (2006), Schweizer emphasises the 'merits of deep reading and methodological flexibility' when

⁷⁵ Elaine Scarry, p. 5. Emphasis in original.

⁷⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. by Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 89.

⁷⁷ Rodaway, p. 49.

⁷⁸ Lee and Anstruther-Thomson, 'Beauty and Ugliness', p. 544.

⁷⁹ Rodaway, p. 50.

⁸⁰ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), p. xiv.

approaching West's work.⁸¹ Schweizer suggests that critical engagements which represent West's fiction, journalism and fictional essays as 'a series of airtight compartments' are less fruitful than engagements which read them alongside one another.⁸² To this end, he praises the way in which Carl Rollyson's evaluation of *The Literary Legacy of Rebecca West* (1998) reads West's biography *St. Augustine* (1933) her fictional essay *Letter to a Grandfather*, her novel *The Thinking Reed* (1936), her journalism for the *New York American* and *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* 'all side by side in one multiscopic vision because they were all written in the 1930s'.⁸³ This thesis follows Rollyson's approach by considering West's lesser-known journalism and book essays to be integral to the construction, function and significance of haptic experience in her fiction and non-fiction.

While most of this material has been sourced from online repositories and published collections, I have also made use of forgotten articles and reviews discovered during visits to archival institutions. Three of these articles, which form an important part of my argument in Chapter Two and Three, are reproduced in the Thesis Appendix. In each of my chapters I also use images to elaborate or contextualise my arguments. Most of these illustrate actual buildings that are represented in the texts that I discuss, whilst others are intended to highlight how West's thinking about architecture shapes her work. Many of the architectural images that featured in the first editions of her writings have been omitted from subsequent re-prints. For example, the arch which borders the front cover design of the first edition of *Harriet Hume* (see Fig. 8) and the photographs of buildings included in the early editions of *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* are absent from more recent editions. The illustrations included in this thesis place a

⁸¹ Bernard Schweizer, 'Introduction', in *Rebecca West Today*, ed. by Schweizer, pp. 21-42 (p. 28).

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*

renewed emphasis on the influence that real and imagined built spaces had on West's literary career.

It is appropriate here to qualify my use of the phenomenological approach as inspired by Merleau-Ponty. In *On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy* (2005), Jacques Derrida critiques Merleau-Ponty's work and situates it within a “haptocentric tradition” of philosophical thought'.⁸⁴ Derrida argues that, according to the premises of this tradition, ‘touch is the only sense of *immediate* external perception and thus the one bringing us the greatest certainty, it is the most important or the most serious one [...], although it is the clumsiest [...] among the external senses’.⁸⁵ He further claims that ‘such a hierarchical arrangement is without any doubt part of the great tradition that accords an absolute privilege to touch and does not let itself be encroached upon by the possibility [...] of any vicariousness of the senses’.⁸⁶ Though suggesting that ‘this tradition becomes complicated, with the risk of being interrupted, in Merleau-Ponty’, Derrida claims that he ultimately reinforces its emphasis on tactile presence, immediacy and identification.⁸⁷ It is not my intention in this thesis to argue that West's depictions of touch attempt to accord ‘an absolute privilege to touch’ as a guarantor of certainty and identification.⁸⁸ In fact, I will suggest that tactile experiences also disrupt and problematise characters' sense of orientation in the world in her writings. In doing so, I take her construction of tactility to be closer to the ‘law of touching’ outlined by Jean-Luc Nancy in *Being Singular Plural* (1996): ‘there is proximity, but only to the extent that it emphasizes the distancing it opens up’.⁸⁹ This thesis proposes that West's writings fluctuate between a Merleau-Pontian notion of touch as the sense of

⁸⁴ Jacques Derrida, *On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 41.

⁸⁵ Ibid. Emphasis in original.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural* (California: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 5.

experiential certainty, presence, immediacy or identification and a Nancian notion of touch as a distancing sensory faculty.

Moreover, as numerous West scholars have demonstrated her work does much to promote the visual and auditory senses (see Stetz, Frigerio and Cohen mentioned above). Indeed, many of the depictions of haptic experiences examined in this thesis are prompted by characters' visual perceptions. Derrida also criticises Merleau-Ponty for basing his account of touch too exclusively on 'the exemplarity of the hand and the finger'.⁹⁰ Though in Chapter Two and Five I do focus on explicitly manual interactions with built environments, in Chapters One, Three and Four I also focus on tactile experiences which cannot so easily be located in the hand. Derrida further claims that Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of touch 'runs the risk of reconstituting an intuitionism of immediate access to the other, as originary as my access to my own most properly proper' and 'of *reappropriating* the alterity of the other'.⁹¹ Rather than suggesting that West's configuration of touch foregrounds an intuitionistic subjectivity, I instead suggest that she foregrounds the role of haptic in her characters' attempt to consciously think through and orient themselves in relation to the other.

Merleau-Ponty's theories have also come under fire by feminist theorists who accuse him of failing to account for the sexual differences of subjectivity in his phenomenology of the body. In *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (1994), Elizabeth Grosz observes that 'even those feminists strongly influenced by him remain, if not openly critical, then at least suspicious of his avoidance of the question of sexual difference and specificity, wary of his apparent generalizations regarding subjectivity which in fact tend to take men's experiences for human ones'.⁹² In my use of Merleau-Ponty and Merleau-Pontian phenomenological theorists, I attempt to draw out the

⁹⁰ Derrida, p 214.

⁹¹ Derrida, p. 191. Emphasis in original.

⁹² Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 103.

specificity of both male and female subjectivity as it is constructed through West's representations of the haptic. While I will suggest that her depictions of tactile engagements with built space challenge ideas about aesthetic practice and cultural consumption which are shaped by ideologies of sexual difference, I do not claim that West attempts to associate them with an essential "male" or "female" subjectivity.

Derrida's accusation that Merleau-Ponty views the tactile as a sense that provides 'immediate access to the other' may also be levelled at Pallasmaa's theorisation of haptic architecture.⁹³ Pallasmaa posits in 'Hapticity and Time: Notes on a Fragile Architecture' (2000) that whereas the architecture of the eye 'detaches and controls', haptic architecture 'engages and unites': 'Focused vision makes us mere outside observers; peripheral perception transforms retinal images into a spatial and bodily involvement and encourages participation'.⁹⁴ Unlike Pallasmaa's positive theorisation of haptic architecture as promoting a form of bodily involvement which 'engages and unites', I will suggest in this thesis that West often draws attention to haptic architecture's ability to detach, control and overwhelm the subject.⁹⁵ In his published doctoral thesis on 'Touch Machines: An Archaeology of Haptic Interfacing' (2009), David P. Parisi argues that Pallasmaa's book 'deploys the haptic uncritically and ahistorically'.⁹⁶ By establishing the influence of aesthetic theory, journalism and contemporary fiction on West's writing, this project will explore the ways in which a range of historical discourses inform and shape her construction of the haptic. Parisi further notes that Pallasmaa 'mobilize[s] the particular form of touch conjured by the haptic as the basis for a resistive and counterocular politics'⁹⁷, which is:

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Juhani Pallasmaa, 'Hapticity and Time: Notes on Fragile Architecture', *Architectural Review*, 207. 1239 (May, 2000), 78-84 (p. 79) <<https://www.architectural-review.com/>> [accessed 19 July 2017].

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ David P. Parisi, 'Touch Machines: An Archaeology of Haptic Interfacing' (Ann Arbor: ProQuest LLC, 2009), p. 91 <<https://www.scribd.com/>> [accessed 19 July 2017].

⁹⁷ Ibid.

mobilized in service of an anti-modern and anti-ocular argument about aesthetic [sic]. “Our culture aspires to power and domination and this question characterizes Western architecture”; haptic architecture can provide a foil for this logic of domineering and mastering design by nurturing “productive tensions between cultural realism and artistic idealism, determination and discretion, ambition and humility”.⁹⁸

This thesis does not claim that West’s representations of haptic architecture are ‘mobilized in service of an anti-modern and anti-ocular argument about [the] aesthetic’.⁹⁹ Rather than ‘anti-modern’ in nature, I want to suggest that West sees the haptic aspects of architectural engagement as a crucial and defining factor of modern subjectivity.¹⁰⁰

It is also necessary here to acknowledge some of the limitations which have affected both the interpretive approach and the research strategy that I will adopt in this thesis. In the chapters below, my approach to West will mainly revolve around a discussion of one key scene from each of the ten texts I have selected. I do this partly to ensure that I base my arguments on close reading and to allow myself the space to thoroughly discuss the implications of these readings. In addition, my decisions about which textual evidence to analyse have been made with the broader chapter argument in mind. It is my intention that the scenes I discuss in this project will open the way for further exploration of West’s fascination with the haptic. During the data-gathering process of this project, I have drawn upon evidence from West’s manuscript notebooks. Some of this evidence was collected from the Rebecca West Papers during a month-long research trip to Yale University. I have also been able to look at digital images of the manuscript notebook for ‘Indissoluble Matrimony’, which were made available by

⁹⁸ Parisi, p. 93.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Parisi, p. 93.

the McFarlin Library at the University of Tulsa. However, constraints on time and money have meant that I have not managed to look at potentially relevant materials kept at the Lilly Library (Indiana University) and the New York Public Library.

IV. West and Modernism

Following Bonnie Kime Scott's emphasis on West's important position as a key contributor to literary modernism in *Refiguring Modernism* (1996), she has been gradually incorporated back into the canon. Indeed, Lawrence Rainey's introduction to his selection of West's writing in *Modernism: An Anthology* (2005) highlights her contributions to key modernist journals and support for prominent modernist figures. Rainey notes that 'Wyndham Lewis [...] published Rebecca West's first fiction, a short story called "Indissoluble Matrimony", in 1914 in *Blast*' and that 'it was West [...] who got [Ezra] Pound taken on as literary editor at what was then the *New Freewoman* and soon to be rechristened *The Egoist*'.¹⁰¹ In addition to supporting prominent authors, West also had a hand in publicising key modernist aesthetic movements. As Wallace Martin notes in "*The New Age*" *Under Orage* (1967), 'Imagism was introduced to the English audience by Rebecca West'¹⁰² in an article published in the *New Freewoman*.¹⁰³ Notwithstanding this role as a promoter of and contributor to modernism's intersecting network of individuals, journals and movements, West is still predominantly understood as a critic and reviewer of key modernist works and their aesthetic premises. Of the early modernist works, West reviewed Wyndham Lewis' *Tarr* (1918)¹⁰⁴ and D.H. Lawrence's *Women in Love* (1920).¹⁰⁵ She is perhaps best known for her qualified

¹⁰¹ Lawrence Rainey, *Modernism: An Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), p. 693.

¹⁰² Wallace Martin, "*The New Age*" *Under Orage* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1967), p. 179.

¹⁰³ See Rebecca West, 'Imagisme', *New Freewoman*, 15 August 1913, pp. 86-87 <<http://www.modjourn.org/>> [accessed 19 July 2017].

¹⁰⁴ See Rebecca West, 'Tarr', *The Nation* (10 August 1918), pp. 506-508, reprinted in *Agenda* (Wyndham Lewis Special Issue), 7/3-8/1 (Autumn-Winter 1969-1970), pp. 67-69.

¹⁰⁵ See Rebecca West, 'Women in Love', *The New Statesman*, 9 July 1921, pp. 388-390 <<http://www.newstatesman.com/>> [accessed 19 July].

assessment of James Joyce's high modernist work *Ulysses* in 'The Strange Necessity'. In part, this thesis aims to consider how depictions of the haptic further elaborate an understanding of West as an important critic and reviewer of canonical modernism. This thesis reads the portrayal of tactility in her lesser-known modernist writings alongside relevant scenes in the canonical works of D.H. Lawrence, James Joyce, T.S. Eliot and Virginia Woolf.

Though her status as an important critic and reviewer of modernist works is increasingly apparent, the best recent scholarly discussion of her writing explores the ways in which this accompanies West's attempts to outline her own modernist project. One example of this approach can be seen in Laura Heffernan's article 'Reading Modernism's Cultural Field: Rebecca West's *The Strange Necessity* and the Aesthetic "System of Relations"' (2008), which highlights how the essay 'extrapolate[s] West's challenge to [...] [the modernist] ideology of aesthetic formalism' but also how it 'opens up [...] an alternative critical practice that views literary value as formed within a social field of negotiations and competitions for cultural value'.¹⁰⁶ In addition to extending our understanding of the breadth of West's critical responses to modernism, this project also explores some of the ways in which her depictions of the haptic 'opens up' her modernist aesthetic.¹⁰⁷

V. West and Critical Definitions of 'Modernism'

Any attempt to consider how West's depictions of haptic experience allows us to situate her in relation to existing interpretations of modernism comes up against two obstacles. The first of these obstacles is the fact that there is both a plethora of differing

¹⁰⁶ Laura Heffernan, 'Reading Modernism's Cultural Field: Rebecca West's *The Strange Necessity* and the Aesthetic "System of Relations"', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 27.2 (Fall, 2008), 309-325 (p. 310) <<https://muse.jhu.edu/>> [accessed 19 July 2017].

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

definitions of modernism and a related critical acknowledgement that modernism is itself difficult to define. Despite the variety of differing classifications of modernism, they all tend to identify a pronounced attention to the consciousness of the subject as a key feature of modernist literary works. In *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature, 1890-1930* (1976), for example, Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane suggest that ‘the movement towards sophistication and mannerism, towards introversion [...], internal self-scepticism, has often been taken as a common base for a *definition* of modernism’.¹⁰⁸ In *Modernism: A Short Introduction* (2004), David Ayers suggests ‘broad themes about the nature of selfhood and consciousness’ are accompanied by an interest in ‘the autonomy of language, the role of art and of the artist, the nature of the industrial world, and the alienation of gendered existence form a set of concerns which manifest themselves across a range of works and authors’.¹⁰⁹ Ayers’ suggestion that modernist literature’s interest in ‘the nature of selfhood and consciousness’ is accompanied by a range of broader interests makes his definition the most flexible for an exploration of West’s modernism. Though I do not claim that West’s depictions of haptic interactions with architectural space reflect a modernist concern with ‘the autonomy of language’, I do suggest that they address ‘the nature of the industrial world’ (Chapter Two), the ‘alienation of gendered existence’ (Chapter Three), ‘the role of art and of the artist’ (Chapter Four) and ‘the nature of selfhood and consciousness’ (Chapter Five).¹¹⁰

The second obstacle facing any attempt to situate West in relation to modernism is the widespread view that her work exists in a complicated relationship with its typologies. In his introduction to *Rebecca West Today: Contemporary Critical Approaches*, Bernard Schweizer explores some of the ways in which ‘West stands in a

¹⁰⁸ Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, ‘The Name and Nature of Modernism’, in *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature, 1890-1930*, ed. by Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (London: Pelican, 1976), pp. 19-55 (p. 26). Emphasis in original.

¹⁰⁹ David Ayers, *Modernism: A Short Introduction* (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), p. x.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

problematic relationship to modernism'.¹¹¹ On the one hand, Schweizer stresses that 'she was not without her proper moorings in the typical modernist repertoire of styles and ideas':

Certainly, West engaged in stylistic experimentation; she wrote fiction that was as internalized and consciousness-driven as anything Woolf and Joyce ever wrote; she incorporated psychoanalytical concepts into her work; she wrote fragmented, interrupted, and perspectival fiction; she penned subversive essays.¹¹²

On the other hand, he discusses the work of critics such as Bonnie Kime Scott, Margaret Stetz, and Lyn Pykett, which has shown that West's work 'transgresses normative typologies associated with gendered models of modernism'.¹¹³ I will argue that her representations of tactile responses to buildings register an equally complex relationship with a range of typologies linked to modernism. Encouragingly for modernist scholars, Schweizer posits that 'if West stands in a problematic relationship to modernism, then we should see this as less of a shortcoming on her part than as an opportunity to develop a more inclusive modernist cultural theory that can accommodate figures like West'.¹¹⁴ Rather than arguing that West's work necessitates a need 'to develop a more inclusive modernist cultural theory that can accommodate' her relationship to it, my approach aims to situate her writings in relation to some of the scholarly re-evaluations of – and debates about – modernism that have emerged out of the expansive impulse of the New Modernist Studies.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ Schweizer, p. 25.

¹¹² Schweizer, p. 24.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Schweizer, p. 25.

¹¹⁵ Schweizer, p. 25.

VI. West and the New Modernist Studies

In recent years, a movement towards the development of a ‘more inclusive modernist cultural theory’ has arguably been at the heart of the New Modernist Studies.¹¹⁶ In their survey of the emergence of ‘The New Modernist Studies’ (2008), Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz highlight the increasing tendency toward temporal, spatial and vertical inclusiveness:

Were one seeking a single word to sum up or transformations in modernist literary scholarship over the past decade or two, one could do worse than light on *expansion*. In its expansive tendency, the field is hardly unique: all period-centered areas of literary scholarship have broadened in scope, and this in what we might think of as temporal, spatial, and vertical directions.¹¹⁷

In *Bad Modernisms* (2006), Mao and Walkowitz posit that, ‘in its definitional aspect, the new modernist studies has extended the designation “modernist” beyond such familiar figures as Eliot, Pound, Joyce, and Woolf [...] and embraced less widely known women writers’ like West.¹¹⁸ Indeed, in ‘The New Modernist Studies’, Mao and Walkowitz note that West’s writings feature in ‘recent studies [which] locate literary modernism in a rhetorical arena transformed by media’s capacity to disseminate words and images in less time, across bigger distances, and to greater numbers of people than ever before’ – such as Patrick Collier’s *Modernism on Fleet Street* (2006).¹¹⁹ My approach continues this embrace of West under the new modernist studies by using an analysis of tactile experience to situate her work in relation to studies which explore modernism’s fascination with violence (Chapter One), aesthetic practice/technology (Chapter Two), sensuous geographies (Chapter Three), empathy/aesthetic experience

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, ‘The New Modernist Studies’, *PMLA*, 123.3 (May, 2008), 737-748 (p. 737). Emphasis in original <<http://www.mlajournals.org/>> [accessed 19 July 2017].

¹¹⁸ Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, ‘Introduction: Modernisms Bad and New’, *Bad Modernisms* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), pp. 1-17 (p. 1).

¹¹⁹ Mao and Walkowitz, ‘The New Modernist Studies’, p. 743.

(Chapter Four), as well as religious/spiritual experience (Chapter Five). In doing so, I will argue that West's writings add to and further complicate our understanding of modernism's approach to these concerns in the ever-expanding debate about what Bradbury and McFarlane term 'The Name and Nature of Modernism'.¹²⁰

VII. Thesis Overview

This thesis focuses on selected published and unpublished modernist writings by West between the years 1909-1941, which roughly comprise the first half of her literary career. In doing so, I broadly follow the chronological parameters of Laura Cowan's recent study *Rebecca West's Subversive Use of Hybrid Genres, 1911-1941* (2015). In her introduction, Cowan notes that 'some critics might call 1911-1941 West's "modernist" period'.¹²¹ Her work published after *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* in 1941 has never been confidently approached as modernist by West scholars. I have, therefore, focused my discussion on ten texts which were written and published before this date. In the five chapters that follow, I have chosen to discuss these ten texts in chronological order. This is a strategic decision, intended to reinforce my claim that representations of tactile relations with built space form an abiding and important part of West's work. Each of my chapters are constructed around a discussion of two key texts which, though discussed separately, form part of a broader chapter argument about a specific aspect of the haptic sense modality.

In Chapter One, I will explore how representations of painful interactions with the built environment in *The Sentinel* and 'Indissoluble Matrimony' elaborate West's approach to violence. Along with her feminist and modernist contemporaries, West's

¹²⁰ Bradbury and McFarlane, p. 19.

¹²¹ Laura Cowan, *Rebecca West's Subversive Use of Hybrid Genres, 1911-1941* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), p. 12.

early fiction explores violent experiences which are attributed with redemptive value. In *The Sentinel*, the imprisoned suffragette Adela Furnival's agonising interaction with her cell registers her battle to reform the structure of the Edwardian State. In 'Indissoluble Matrimony', George Silverton dives into a violent reservoir whirlpool in an attempt to dissolve his marriage. In both works, West's representations of pain are constructed in relation to an established symbolism of violent suffering that was deployed in contemporary suffragette fiction and modernist magazines. Using Elaine Scarry's theories of pain and the torture room, I suggest that *The Sentinel* and 'Indissoluble Matrimony' develop a critical language of pain which challenges the idea put forward by this symbolism that violence is endowed with a politically or artistically redemptive value.

In Chapter Two, I consider how *Henry James* and *The Return of the Soldier* show a transformation (or development) of such tactile experiences into an aesthetic practice. In West's critical biography of James, she uses metaphors of tactile practice to express the writer's approach to the 'house of fiction'. In the novel *The Return of the Soldier*, her depictions of tactile practices within the domestic interior of Baldry Court flag up characters' attempts to maintain the 'house beautiful'. In both texts, the connections that West makes between tactile practice and aesthetic practice draw upon discussions developed in her journalism about the bodily conditions of the First World War. Using Pierre Bourdieu's theory of habitus and bodily hexis, I will suggest that *Henry James* and *The Return of the Soldier* draw attention to the ways in which the bodily practices initiated by the war disrupt existing conceptions of aesthetic practice. This chapter will suggest that West's representations of unsettling relationships between manual and aesthetic activities distinguish her from modernist writers who promote either a harmonious union between – or separation of – touch and modernity's technological conditions following the outbreak of the war.

In Chapter Three, I examine how representations of haptic geographies related to experiences of global touch conceptualise characters' situation within patriarchal society and celebrity culture in *The Judge* and *Sunflower*. In *The Judge*, Ellen Melville's sense of her unequal situation within the patriarchal environment of Yaverland's End is prompted by her tactile response to its massive architectural dimensions. In *Sunflower*, the actress Sybil Fassendyll's bizarre vision of herself as a fleshly ruin handled by tourists highlights her awareness of the desires and compulsions to which she is subjected as an object of public spectacle. West's emphasis on the situational awareness created by experiences of global touch is shaped by her journalistic analysis on the bodily impact of theatrical *mise-en-scène* and technologies of mass spectatorship. In addition, both texts attempt to convey the personal and ethical implications of Ellen's and Sybil's embodied situation by constructing these experiences in relation to eighteenth-century theories of sublime architecture and ruin gazing. Using Paul Rodaway's concept of global touch, I will argue that *The Judge* and *Sunflower* depict characters whose sense of haptic geography is crucial to their awareness of the ideologies and compulsions that shape their imbalanced situation in society. This chapter will argue that *The Judge* and *Sunflower* position West as a modernist writer who shares Woolf's and Joyce's sensitivity to the importance of modernity's haptic geographies for the definition and conceptualisation of modern consciousness.

In Chapter Four, I chart the link that West establishes between aesthetic empathy and her theories about the function of aesthetic experience in 'The Strange Necessity' and *Harriet Hume*. In 'The Strange Necessity', West's descriptions of her empathic participation in the forces of architectural equilibrium at work in Notre-Dame cathedral are intended to validate her ideas about the socially orienting (and disorienting) power of art. This chapter will posit that, in both texts, West bases her portrayals of empathic experience on the responses to architecture theorised in Lee and Anstruther-Thomson's

‘Beauty and Ugliness’. Her emphasis on the empathic basis of aesthetic perception implicitly challenges modernist theories – such as those of I.A. Richards – which promote art that initiates detached responses. In *Harriet Hume*, Arnold Condorex’s empathic participation in the forces and movements suggested by the clear lines of landscape architecture in Hyde Park reinforce his commitment to a socially disorienting model of political conduct. The connections that West establishes between Arnold’s aesthetic perception and his conduct in this scene are intended to dispute Clive Bell’s theory of disinterested aesthetic emotion, as outlined in *Art* (1914).

In Chapter Five, I consider how depictions of reach-touch initiated by sacred architecture frame West’s attempt to negotiate the influence of the Augustinian doctrine of the Atonement on the modern subject in *A Letter to a Grandfather* and *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*. In *A Letter to a Grandfather*, the ruined architecture of a medieval abbey compels C.B.’s consciousness to both imitate and to reach beyond the stretching posture of the suffering Christ on the cross. In part, West’s configuration of reach-touch in this scene elaborates her thesis in *St Augustine* (1933) that the Augustinian complex is ‘the ring-fence in which the modern mind is prisoner’.¹²² Notwithstanding this, her emphasis on the exploratory awareness prompted by the architectural forms of the abbey suggests that this ‘ring-fence’ might be transcended by the aesthetic process which she identifies in modern art.¹²³ In *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, West gives an account of a Muslim pillar ritual involving acts of reach-touch that both re-enact and contradict the Augustinian act of renunciation. Her account of the women’s ritual re-enactment of the renunciation highlights her belief that the field of human conduct has still ‘not got out of the fateful ring-fence of primitive ideas’ (*LG* 36). Nevertheless, West’s argument that the bodily vigour displayed in these acts of reach-touch enhances the women’s individuality reveal her attempt to counter the Augustinian principle of

¹²² Rebecca West, *St. Augustine* (Edinburgh: Peter Davies Limited, 1933), p. 162.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

renunciation with a hedonist philosophy. Using de Certeau's theories about transgressive spatial practices, I will argue that West's depictions of reach-touch elaborate an experiential form of modernist spirituality which she identified as key to the modern subject's (and the modernist writer's) progression beyond pervasive theological epistemologies.

Chapter 1: Pain and the Representation of Violence in *The Sentinel* and ‘Indissoluble Matrimony’

I. Introduction

West began writing *The Sentinel* in 1909 and abandoned it, unfinished, in late 1911.¹ The novel explores the series of violent ordeals suffered by Adela Furnival, a young suffragette and science mistress, at public demonstrations and in prison. Kathryn Laing argues in her introduction to the novel that ‘the rawness of the prose in its description of violence done to women [...] might be seen as one of the aesthetic failings of the novel’ and ‘part of its distinctiveness and newness, its power to shock, surprise and intrigue’.² The short story ‘Indissoluble Matrimony’ was West’s first published piece of fiction and appeared in the opening issue of Wyndham Lewis’ Vorticist magazine *BLAST* on 2 July 1914. The tale traces the turbulent relationship between George Silverton and his mixed-race wife Evadne in the suburban environment of ‘Sumatra Crescent’ (*IM* 275). Critical assessments of ‘Indissoluble Matrimony’ often discuss its relationship to the violence advocated by *BLAST*. Laura A. Winkiel argues in her chapter on ‘Cabaret Modernism: Vorticism and Racial Spectacle’ (2005) that ‘it remains perfectly in line with Lewis’ apocalyptic vision of frontiers interpenetrating and antagonistic, violent duos exchanging blows’.³ This chapter examines how West’s portrayal of tactility in both texts contest suffragette and modernist ideas about violence.

In West’s early fiction, haptic experiences of the built environment emerge out of violent situations. One dramatic passage in *The Sentinel* describes how the young

¹ *The Sentinel* was published posthumously in 2001.

² Kathryn Laing, ‘Introduction’, in *The Sentinel: An Incomplete Early Novel by Rebecca West*, ed. by Kathryn Laing (Oxford: Legenda, 2002), pp. xiii- liii (p. xv).

³ Laura A. Winkiel, ‘Cabaret Modernism: Vorticism and Racial Spectacle’, in *Geomodernisms: Race, Modernism, Modernity*, ed. by Laura Doyle and Laura A. Winkiel (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005), pp. 206-226 (p. 214).

suffragette Adela Furnival endures worsening agonies as she languishes in a prison cell at H.M.P. Holloway. In ‘Indissoluble Matrimony’, George Silverton’s attempt to drown his wife in the local reservoir plunge him painfully against the jagged edges of its walls. These situations illustrate that, in both texts, haptic experiences are most often painful experiences associated with the turbulent political and social context of Britain during the early 1910s.

West’s representations of pain are constructed in relation to contemporary writings that seek to emphasise the politically and artistically redemptive value of violence. The narrator of *The Sentinel* compares Adela’s body in pain with that of Jesus Christ. Here, West draws upon religious imagery often used in the suffragette novel to stress the political agency of the activist’s suffering body. In ‘Indissoluble Matrimony’, she compares George Silverton’s body in pain to a destroyed canvas. West alludes to the link between violence and artistic regeneration made by emerging modernist theories of art in *BLAST* and John Middleton Murry’s magazine *Rhythm*.

I want to argue that, in both texts, West’s depiction of painful interactions with the built environment both present and complicate this emphasis on the redemptive value of violent suffering. I will seek to demonstrate this in dialogue with Elaine Scarry’s theorisation of pain, which she outlines in *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (1985). Scarry claims that ‘physical pain – unlike any other state of consciousness – has no referential content. It is not *of* or *for* anything’.⁴ I intend to demonstrate that West’s critical stance toward redemptive portrayals of violence can be interpreted through this understanding of pain. In particular, the experiences described in *The Sentinel* and ‘Indissoluble Matrimony’ resemble those of the torture room, which Scarry argues is a space that has been ‘literally converted into another

⁴ Scarry, p. 5. Emphasis in original.

weapon, into an agent of pain'⁵: 'The room, both in its structure and its content, is converted into a weapon, deconverted, undone, made to participate in the annihilation of the prisoners, made to demonstrate that everything is a weapon, the objects themselves, and with them the fact of civilization, are annihilated'.⁶ By contributing to 'the annihilation of the prisoners', the torture room enacts what Scarry identifies as the sixth element of pain: the 'obliteration of the contents of consciousness'.⁷ West's depictions of pain in her early fiction also result in an obliteration of cognitive awareness. For Scarry, the torture room entails a 'conversion of absolute pain into the fiction of absolute power' which is by no means redemptive.⁸ In *The Sentinel* and 'Indissoluble Matrimony', West's depictions of obliterating painful relations within the built environment aim to challenge representations of violent experience as politically and artistically redemptive. Scarry argues that:

Torture, which contains specific acts of inflicting pain, is also itself a demonstration and magnification of the felt experience of pain. In the very processes it uses to produce pain within the body of the prisoner, it bestows visibility on the structure and enormity of what is usually private and incommunicable, contained within the boundaries of the sufferer's body.⁹

By 'bestowing visibility' on the 'felt experience of pain' through depictions of violent situations, West signals her opposition to representations of violent suffering in contemporary writing.¹⁰

I intend to situate my reading of West's responses to suffering in *The Sentinel* and 'Indissoluble Matrimony' alongside recent scholarship that focuses on representations of violence in modernism. *The Sentinel* and 'Indissoluble Matrimony'

⁵ Scarry, p. 40.

⁶ Scarry, p. 41.

⁷ Scarry, p. 54.

⁸ Scarry, p. 27.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

have not previously been discussed in the growing number of studies that have assessed modernism's relationship to violence, including William A. Johnsen's *Violence and Modernism: Ibsen, Joyce, and Woolf* (2003), Sarah Cole's *At the Violet Hour: Modernism and Violence in England and Ireland* (2012) and Paul Sheehan's *Modernism and the Aesthetics of Violence* (2013). Sheehan suggests that 'the urge to violate is now regarded as central to [modernism's] aesthetic makeup'.¹¹ Sheehan claims that 'literary modernism [...] confronts violent modernity with its own forms of violation – overturning canons, norms and proprieties, imposing its own axioms and understandings on the dormant present'.¹² I want to make the case that West's early writings deserve critical attention as texts which address some of the assumptions that inform the urge to violate in suffragette and modernist writing.

The contrasting representations of the body in pain featured in West's early writings pivot around two key archetypes of violence that have so far been identified in modernist aesthetics. In her study *At the Violet Hour: Modernism and Violence in England and Ireland*, Cole argues 'that conceptualizing and writing about violence has for the last century been organized around the dichotomous paradigms of "enchanted" and "disenchanted" violence'.¹³ The representations of redemptive suffering that West references in *The Sentinel* and 'Indissoluble Matrimony' take 'an [enchanted] approach to violence that stresses its transformative value'.¹⁴ The notion of enchanted violence that operates in modernism is significantly influenced by Georges Sorel's *Reflections on Violence* (1908). In this text, Sorel argues that 'not only can proletarian violence ensure the future revolution but it also seems the only means by which the European nations,

¹¹ Paul Sheehan, *Modernism and the Aesthetics of Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 2.

¹² Sheehan, p. 11.

¹³ Sarah Cole, *At the Violet Hour: Modernism and Violence in England and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 39.

¹⁴ Ibid.

stupefied by humanitarianism, can recover their former energy'.¹⁵ Dominick LaCapra's analysis of *Reflections on Violence* in *The Modernist Imagination: Intellectual History and Critical Theory* (2009) highlights the text's emphasis on the redemptive value of violence: 'Sorel's apology focuses on violence as a regenerative or redemptive force that will transfigure civilization, mark the return of heroic values, and end the reign of despised bourgeois complacency and instrumental or calculative rationality'.¹⁶ This figuration, in turn, shapes the depiction of violence in modernist texts in a variety of ways. Michael Tratner notes in *Modernism and Mass Politics: Joyce, Woolf, Eliot, Yeats* (1995) that '[W.B.] Yeats developed a Sorelian theory of violence as releasing and at the same time mutating the mass'¹⁷, whilst Sorel's 'claim that violence is essential to liberation, to the release of what is buried in the unconscious, haunts and undermines Joyce's and Woolf's supposedly non-violent works'.¹⁸ This chapter situates West's depictions of pain in her early writings in relation to contemporary Sorelian attempts 'to imbue the violent experience with symbolic and cultural potency' in Lewis' 'Our Wild Body' (1910) and *BLAST* (1914-1915), the first issue of John Middleton Murry's *Rhythm* (1911-1913) and F.T. Marinetti's 'Tactilism'.¹⁹

Contrasted with the Sorelian attitude towards violence that has been discerned in the work of her modernist contemporaries, West's depictions of pain in her early fiction take a disenchanting approach which 'insists on its unredeemability'.²⁰ According to Cole, 'to enchant [...] is to imbue the violent experience with symbolic and cultural potency; to disenchant is to refuse that structure, to insist on the bare, forked existence

¹⁵ Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, ed. by Jeremy Jennings (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 78.

¹⁶ Dominick LaCapra, 'Toward a Critique of Violence', in *The Modernist Imagination: Intellectual History and Critical Theory* (New York: Bergahn Books, 2009), pp. 210-241 (p. 215).

¹⁷ Michael Tratner, *Modernism and Mass Politics: Joyce, Woolf, Eliot, Yeats* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 17.

¹⁸ Tratner, p. 41.

¹⁹ Cole, p. 43.

²⁰ Cole, p. 39.

of the violated being, bereft of symbol, and expressing only a regretful beauty'.²¹ Significant for my argument in this chapter is Cole's suggestion that 'to oppose the mystification and mythologization of violence, texts with such a goal often focus on a moment of bodily injury (and the consequences that ensue from that violation), drawing the reader or viewer back to the moment of destruction, rejecting the thematics of metamorphosis and the idea of a purifying or cathartic violence'.²² West's depictions of her characters' painful interactions with built environments in her early writings tally with Cole's characterisation of disenchanting violence as insisting on the 'bare, forked existence of [their] violated being'.²³ In doing so, representations of their painful situation with built environments aim to 'refuse that structure' of 'symbolic and cultural potency' so prominent in contemporary suffragette and modernist depictions of violence.²⁴

West's emphasis on the irredeemable nature of violence in *The Sentinel* and 'Indissoluble Matrimony' develops both from her reading and from her journalistic writing about the women's suffrage campaign and divorce law reform in the early 1910s. During this period, West's portrayal of pain is repeatedly tied to her scepticism about the politically or artistically redemptive value of violence. This relates to her belief that the Press, the public and specifically men are unmoved by the sight of the suffering female body. In the article 'An Orgy of Disorder and Cruelty: The Beginnings of Sex Antagonism', published in the *Clarion* on 27 September 1912, West complains that 'the Press has been silent' after 'a young Liberal of Dundee demonstrated his enthusiasm for retrenchment and reform by winding Miss Adela Pankhurst's scarf round and round her

²¹ Cole, p. 43.

²² Cole, p. 53.

²³ Cole, p. 43.

²⁴ Ibid.

throat until she nearly choked'.²⁵ In addition, she claims that 'there is no limit to what the public – the great mass of tired, weak souls, broken and killed by the capitalist struggle – will stand', whilst 'men take the assault of women so calmly we may judge that their self-sought task of the legislative protection of women will be done without zeal'.²⁶ Early feminists expounded the view that marriage rendered men equally insensitive to the suffering it caused women. Mona Caird argues in *The Morality of Marriage: And Other Essays on the Status and Destiny of Woman* (1897) that 'it is not the capability for pain or pleasure in others which arouses men's sense of responsibility, but the fact of belonging to his own division of creation'.²⁷ Moreover, West's articles on divorce law argue that pain and violence were endorsed by those committed to the status quo rather than reform.

In the first section of this chapter, I will argue that in *The Sentinel* West complicates the link made between violent suffering and political agency in suffragette fiction. This is elaborated via her representations of Adela's painful interactions with the built environment of her prison cell. West's comparison of Adela's painful perceptions with the Crucifixion references attempts made by writers to represent the suffragette's brutalised body as an agent of political change. Notwithstanding this, her subsequent depictions of pain draw upon actual suffragette accounts of imprisonment in the modernist journal *The New Age* (1907-1922) that question depictions of redemptive violence. I will call upon Scarry's theorisation of pain's 'obliteration of the contents of consciousness'²⁸ to show that these contemporary accounts stress pain's removal 'of any exercise of personal volition'.²⁹ This section demonstrates that West's depictions of

²⁵ Rebecca West, 'An Orgy of Disorder and Cruelty: The Beginnings of Sex Antagonism', in *The Young Rebecca*, ed. by Marcus, pp. 97-101 (p. 99).

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Mona Caird, *The Morality of Marriage: And Other Essays on the Status and Destiny of Woman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 196 <<https://archive.org/>> [accessed 19 July 2017].

²⁸ Scarry, p. 54.

²⁹ Helen Gordon Liddle, 'A Holiday in Gaol', *The New Age*, 8 June 1911, p. 140 <<http://www.modjourn.org/>> [accessed 19 July 2017].

painful interactions with the prison cell in *The Sentinel* draw attention to the inconsistencies between the propagandist portrayals of violence promoted by suffragette fiction and the accounts of suffragette prisoners.

In the second section of this chapter, I will suggest that ‘Indissoluble Matrimony’ calls into question modernist aesthetic theories that promote ferocity as fundamental to the regeneration of art. This is expressed through West’s representation of George’s painful interactions with the reservoir near his suburban home, in which he unsuccessfully attempts to dissolve his marriage. Her comparison of George’s painful experience with a ripped canvas can be interpreted as an allusion to John Middleton Murry’s suggestion in *Rhythm* that ‘Art is movement, ferocity, tearing at what lies before’.³⁰ However, West does not align herself with Murry’s theory of artistic ferocity and progress. Instead, her reference to Murry’s aesthetic theory is ironically grounded within a scene where violent immersion highlights the protagonist’s indissoluble commitment to his failed marriage. The scene elaborates West’s claim, made in her journalism, that the violence perpetuated by ‘indissoluble’ marriage undercuts the ‘symbolic and cultural potency’ accorded to it in Murry’s aesthetic theory.³¹ This section demonstrates that West’s depictions of George’s painful interactions with the reservoir elaborate her understanding of violence as an index of a reactionary society that precludes its role in modernist theories of aesthetic regeneration.

II. ‘Insistent Agonies’ in *The Sentinel*

The Sentinel traces the political awakening of the young science mistress Adela Furnival, who participates in hostile suffrage demonstrations and suffers brutal force-feeding in prison. Critics have suggested that *The Sentinel* is chiefly interesting for the

³⁰ John Middleton Murry, ‘Art and Philosophy’, *Rhythm*, 1 (Summer, 1911), pp. 9-12 (p. 10) <<http://www.modjourn.org/>> [accessed 19 July 2017].

³¹ Cole, p. 43.

way in which it combines a variety of contemporary historical texts and discourses. Laing's introduction to the novel characterises it as 'a palimpsest, even a modernist collage'; 'this earliest novel is itself composed of a tissue of texts, oral and written, fictional and journalistic, personal as well as public'.³² Moreover, the novel has been viewed as an apprentice piece which gives an important insight into West's early development as a writer. Rosalind Porter claims in her review for the *Times Literary Supplement* that *The Sentinel* is 'an astonishing piece of juvenilia'.³³ West's portrayal of Adela's painful incarceration indicates that *The Sentinel* needs to be reclaimed as a mature text in its own right. In addition to combining 'oral and written, fictional and journalistic' texts about the experience of imprisonment, the novel juxtaposes them in order to weigh up their conflicting approaches to violence.³⁴

Adela's responses to the built environment frame the exploration of female sexual awakening at the beginning of the novel. It is striking that Adela's first romantic attachment in *The Sentinel* is with Neville Ashcroft, an architect. Laing emphasises the importance of this architect figure in her explanatory notes for the novel, observing that 'the character appears in various guises in West's early fiction attempts, in 'The Minx' and 'Ellen Yaverland' fragments [...], in the posthumously published *Adela* and *The Judge*'.³⁵ In *The Sentinel*, Adela's response to the interior of Neville's apartment evokes his sexual desire for her: 'It was a room alien to her experience, but it gave her an impression of beauty and wellbeing, the same easeful feeling that had endeared its owner to her' (*TS* 16). Moreover, the interior also suggests that Neville is driven by desires which are debased: 'the wall was covered by several very good little pictures in

³² Laing, 'Introduction', p. xliv.

³³ Rosalind Porter, 'Rebecca West's Previously Unknown Novel, *The Sentinel* (1909-1911)', *Times Literary Supplement*, 28 February 2003, p. 24 <<http://www.mhra.org.uk/publications/West-in-date-order-with-reviews>> [accessed 19 July 2017].

³⁴ Laing, 'Introduction', p. xliv.

³⁵ Kathryn Laing, 'Explanatory Notes', in *The Sentinel: An Incomplete Early Novel by Rebecca West*, ed. by Kathryn Laing (Oxford: Legenda, 2002), pp. 253-274 (p. 255).

the modern minor key, which gained by the exquisite yellow shade of the wall-paper; a shade which, however artistic, a healthy man would not have lived with' (*TS* 16).

In addition to awakening Adela to the nature of Neville's sexual attention, her bodily responses to the built environment also inform her political awakening. The physical conditions Adela experiences at H.M.P. Holloway and the East End slums challenge her beliefs about the lower classes. Shortly after Adela's arrival at Holloway, the state 'indulged her human need of exercise and brief relief from the hellish torture of solitary confinement, it set her walking aimlessly round an asphalt yard' (*TS* 50). Forced to walk 'aimlessly' around the prison yard, Adela moves 'now in the dank blue shadow of the wall, now in the fierce yellow heat of the dusty sky' (*TS* 50). Following her release from prison, Adela visits the house of her new parlour-maid Agnes Kelly – an East End Jew from a family of Polish immigrants – in her slum dwelling at 'Bullseye Court, Soho' (*TS* 70). Here, the sensory conditions of the slum's 'reeking square of asphalt' (*TS* 71) are similar to those described during Adela's forced marches through Holloway's 'asphalt yard' (*TS* 50). At Holloway, Adela's body moves through 'the dank blue shadow of the wall, now in the fierce yellow heat of the dusty sky' (*TS* 50). Making her way up an 'unpleasant stairway' within the 'high walls of dwelling houses [...] studded with dull windows' of Agnes' home, Adela again feels an oscillation between the heat of the sun and the coolness of darkness: 'the broken windows let in garish mote-filled slabs of heat; every now and then there was an open door giving out darkness' (*TS* 71). Perhaps provoked by the sensory realities of the prison and the slum, 'Adela remembered with quivering shame how she and the Washed classes looked on this: how the domestic life of these sickly-circumstanced folk seemed to them unplanned, unpassionate procreation like the teemings of the mud layer of a pond bottom' (*TS* 73).

Juhani Pallasmaa proposes in *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses* that ‘the task of architecture is “to make visible how the world touches us”’.³⁶ Sketches completed by the artist Katie Gliddon (see Fig. 1 and Fig. 2 below) indicate that the cramped conditions of Holloway’s cells formed an important part of her attempt to show how the Edwardian world touched the imprisoned suffragette. West’s description of Adela’s incarceration at Holloway stress that the physical conditions of the prison specifically make visible the relationship between the citizen and state power. The young suffragette is sentenced to two-months in Holloway after being convicted of ‘tak[ing] a horse by the bridle and lead[ing] it towards the House of Commons’ (TS 46). Once inside the walls of Holloway, the enforced bodily conditions of the prison ‘destroyed Adela’s conception of the State, a conception of the Spencerian school’:

No longer was it a white and lofty temple, firm on the uplands, immutable to wind and sun, dignified and useless, isolated utterly from the kindly fields of daily life, but rather a vast dark perambulator into which the children of Humanity were dropped, to be harried or pelted by incoherent guardians of the law, yelping with self-importance. (TS 51)

Here, Adela’s revised conception of the state as a harrying ‘dark perambulator’ within which citizens are ‘pelted by incoherent guardians of the law’ replaces her formulation of the Edwardian state as an aloof ‘white and lofty temple [...] isolated utterly from the kindly fields of daily life’ (TS 51). Her image of the state as a ‘dark perambulator’ is clearly inspired by her forced marches around the asphalt prison yard (TS 51). Despite altering Adela’s conception of a benign Edwardian State, the narrator makes plain that her suffering is geared toward reforming it. Adela intends to become one of ‘the Suffragettes who cheerfully put their bodies to pain for the sake of humanity’ (TS 54).

³⁶ Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*, p. 46.

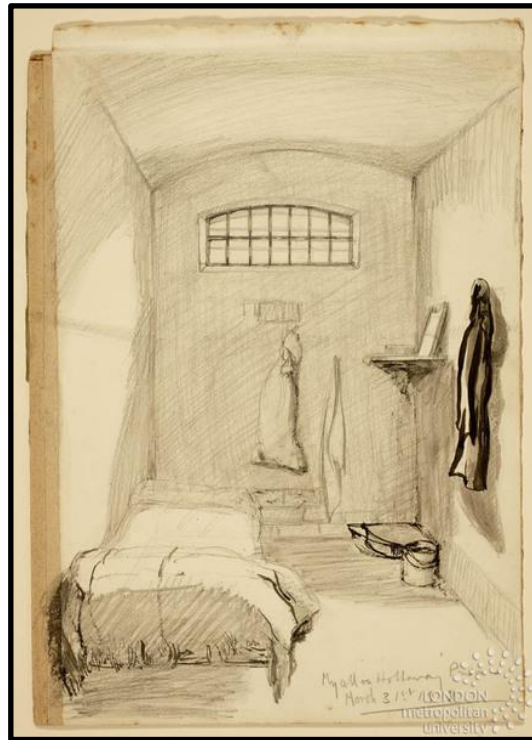


Fig. 1: Katie Gliddon, 'Holloway Prison Cell', 1912, *The Women's Library: Suffrage Collection*, London School of Economics <<https://vads.ac.uk/large.php?uid=184555&sos=2>> [accessed 9 March 2017].



Fig. 2: Katie Gliddon, 'Holloway Prison Cell', 1912, *The Women's Library: Suffrage Collection*, London School of Economics <<https://vads.ac.uk/large.php?uid=184554&sos=2>> [accessed 9 March 2017].

West's portrayal of Adela's attempt to put her body 'to pain for the sake of humanity' draws upon depictions of suffering that she had read in fictional portrayals

and actual accounts of suffragette imprisonment (*TS* 54). She never experienced life in prison at first hand. In a letter to her sister Letitia Fairfield in late December 1908, West recalls an invitation to serve time for the Cause at a WSPU meeting with some horror:

The dear dainty little Scots spoke too with Morag Burn Murdoch, Miss Chapman, and Cecilia Haig. The Scots are magnificent workers but have not the slightest sense of humour. They said to me very solemnly: "Could you not come to prison with us in July, Miss Fairfield? It would be so *nice* and *homelike* if we could all go together!"³⁷

Yet, by 1911, she could draw on a variety of fictional and actual accounts of suffragette imprisonment as she continued to work on her novel. The suffragette prison experience was fast becoming central to controversial Edwardian novels, newspapers and memoirs as West began writing *The Sentinel*. H.G. Wells' *Ann Veronica* (1909) features a chapter entitled 'Thoughts in Prison', in which the titular character meditates profoundly on the suffrage cause 'through several enormous cold hours'.³⁸ Lady Constance Lytton's infamous account of her time in Newcastle Gaol, 'The Treatment of Political Prisoners', was published on 4 February 1910 in the Suffragette newspaper *Votes for Women*. Moreover, Helen Gordon Liddle's Strangeways memoir *The Prisoner: A Sketch* was released in 1911.

We know from a reference to 'the sex obsession that lay clotted on *Ann Veronica* [...] like cold white sauce'³⁹ in West's review of *Marriage* (1912)⁴⁰ that she read Wells' novel, and that she read and sold copies of *Votes for Women* until at least the middle of 1909.⁴¹ In particular, it is likely that while still at work on *The Sentinel* West read the heated correspondence on the subject of suffragette prison conditions

³⁷ Bonnie Kime Scott, *Selected Letters of Rebecca West* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 7. Emphasis in original.

³⁸ H.G. Wells, *Ann Veronica* (London: J.M. Dent, 1943), p. 199.

³⁹ Rebecca West, 'Marriage by H.G. Wells', *The Young Rebecca*, ed. by Marcus, pp. 64-69 (p. 64).

⁴⁰ West's review was published in the *New Freewoman* on 1 August 1913.

⁴¹ See Laing, 'Introduction', p. xvi.

published in *The New Age* from 4 May to 22 June 1911. Sparked by Huntly Carter's review of Frederick Martyn's *A Holiday in Gaol* (1911) in the Literary Supplement to *The New Age* on 4 May 1911, subsequent issues feature numerous letters from leading suffragettes such as Lytton and Emily Davison which seek to clarify the physical conditions and effects of their imprisonment. In her analysis of the composition of *The Sentinel*, Laing notes that West 'borrowed directly' some of the key topics of the novel from *The New Age*.⁴² A 15 June 1911 letter by Cicely Fairfield (West's legal name) responding to a previous article on 'Historical Plays', which was published in the magazine as the prison conditions correspondence was still ongoing, indicates that West was paying particular attention to *The New Age* during this period.⁴³ *The Sentinel* is not based on her personal experiences. However, her portrayal of Adela's imprisonment in *The Sentinel* emerges during a period in which a broad range of imaginative and individual descriptions of prisons were available to her.

In *The Sentinel*, West specifically engages with the religious symbolism of violence developed by contemporary suffragette journalism and conversion narratives. This is signalled by her portrayal of the painful prison conditions of Adela and her fellow suffragettes in terms of the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Describing citizens as willing to 'cheerfully put their bodies to pain for the sake of humanity', the narrator claims that 'today is the proudest age of England, for never before did so many of her sons and daughters understand that the pale Galilean made his last journey to Calvary to warn his followers that a Crucifixion was their inevitable and honourable fate' (*TS* 54). Here, West's comparison of suffragette suffering to Christ's crucifixion follows a well-established political strategy of representation in suffragette writing. As Kabi Hartman notes in "'What made me a Suffragette": the New Woman and the new (?) conversion

⁴² Laing, 'Introduction', p. xxxvii.

⁴³ Cicely Fairfield, 'Historical Plays', *The New Age*, 15 June 1911, p. 166 <<http://www.modjourn.org/>> [accessed 19 July 2017].

narrative' (2003), 'suffragettes so consistently identified themselves with Jesus Christ that if, as [Emmeline] Pethick Lawrence wrote, "[t]he Woman's Movement means a new religion", then this new religion certainly bore a distinct relation to the old one'.⁴⁴

By appropriating this symbolism in *The Sentinel*, West demonstrates her awareness of the link between violent suffering and institutional reform that comparisons with Christ's crucifixion aimed to establish. Her portrayal of Adela's imprisonment is consistent with Hartman's claim that 'for the suffragettes [...] the "freedom and purity" of "the Christianity of Christ" was a powerful signifier for overarching cultural and social change, into which religious image they superimposed their gender politics'.⁴⁵ Adela's suffering is – like Christ's – 'for the sake of humanity' (TS 54). In "*The Transfiguring Sword*": *The Just War of the Women's Social and Political Union* (2015), Cheryl R. Jorgensen-Earp notes that 'the mobs that attacked the suffragettes were often equated with the mobs that yelled: Crucify Him! Crucify Him!'" and foregrounded 'the sense that the suffragettes were the advance guard of change'.⁴⁶ In *The Sentinel*, the narrator notes that Adela's Christ-like agonies correspondingly contribute to 'the salvation of the State' (TS 54). Discernible in this use of religious symbolism in suffragette fiction is what Cole characterises as 'an [enchanted] approach to violence that stresses its transformative value'.⁴⁷ At least initially then, West's situation of Adela's tortured body in relation to this symbolism seems to endorse this approach.

Notwithstanding the clear influence that these established modes of representation have on *The Sentinel*, the depictions of pain that lay at the heart of Adela's prison ordeal indicate that West had doubts about the power of violent

⁴⁴ Kabi Hartman, "'What made me a Suffragette': the New Woman and the new (?) conversion narrative", *Women's History Review*, 12.1 (2003), 35-50 (p. 35) <<http://www.tandfonline.com/>> [accessed 19 July 2017].

⁴⁵ Hartman, p. 38.

⁴⁶ Cheryl R. Jorgensen-Earp, "*The Transfiguring Sword*": *The Just War of the Women's Social and Political Union* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2015), pp. 108-109.

⁴⁷ Cole, p. 39.

experiences to initiate ‘overarching cultural and social change’.⁴⁸ Immediately following the narrator’s apparently determined belief that the Christ-like suffering of the Suffragettes might help reform the structure of the Edwardian State, she questions how effective this would be against the new social injustices that would inevitably emerge. Adela imagines a ‘social system reformed at the sword point of a Democracy that fought as hungrily for the salvation of the State as other classes had fought for the sake of famine and blood-lust’ (*TS* 54). Following this, the narrator relates that: ‘the battle won, from some mismatched and unsuspected interbreed of circumstances would leap forth another enemy of humanity, dead and longeval as those just slain. This unseen foe cannot be slain. Better let humanity fester and rot into nothingness than bruise body and soul in this futile war against sneering Omnipotence’ (*TS* 54-55).

Contemplating this loss of ‘hope and desire of the war of redemption’ and surrender to this ‘Injustice who is the Law of Life’, Adela links her doubts about the agency of her violent suffering with the painful conditions she endures in her cell:

She dimly suspected that her mind was darkened by the malady that disturbed the peace of the cell. At last, stabbed by more and more insistent agonies she turned away in terror from the contemplation of the tears and menaces of the Universe and sheltered in the vision of the anodyne of self-indulgence her newly acquired income had presented to her. (*TS* 55)

Preceding this incident, West’s representation of Adela’s bodily pain consciously appropriates and seems to endorse the enchanted approach emphasised by suffragette portrayals of violent suffering. ‘Stabbed by [the] more and more insistent agonies’ (*TS* 55) of the cell, however, Adela’s painful experience subsequently seems to stress a

⁴⁸ Hartman, p. 38.

disenchanted approach to violence that 'insist[s] on the bare, forked existence of the violated being'.⁴⁹

West's portrayal of Adela in this scene indicates that her ideas about the physical realities of pain sit awkwardly with the enchanted approach to violent suffering foregrounded in suffragette religious symbolism. 'Turned away in terror from the contemplation of the tears and menaces of the Universe' (*TS* 55) and engulfed in a cognitive 'abyss' (*TS* 63), Adela's experience of pain can be interpreted through Scarry's theorisation of the 'sixth element of physical pain' (discussed in the introduction to this chapter): 'its obliteration of the contents of consciousness'.⁵⁰ The 'more and more insistent agonies' (*TS* 55) of her cell mean that Adela struggles to maintain her complex 'conception of the State' (*TS* 51). Here, her physical relationship with her cell reflects Scarry's claim that 'pain annihilates not only the objects of complex thought and emotion but also the objects of the most elemental acts of perception'.⁵¹ 'Stabbed by more and more insistent agonies' (*TS* 55), Adela's painful relations with her cell also closely resemble Scarry's theorisation of a torture room which has been 'literally converted into another weapon, into an agent of pain'.⁵²

Scarry argues that 'the room, both in its structure and its content, is converted into a weapon, deconverted, undone, made to participate in the annihilation of the prisoners, made to demonstrate that everything is a weapon, the objects themselves, and with them the fact of civilization, are annihilated'.⁵³ As the narrative progresses, the physical conditions of Adela's cell also seem to 'participate in the annihilation of the prisoner'.⁵⁴ West notes that:

⁴⁹ Cole, p. 43.

⁵⁰ Scarry, p. 54.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Scarry, p. 40.

⁵³ Scarry, p. 41.

⁵⁴ Scarry, p. 41.

the mattress seemed to bruise her body and the bed-clothes slid hither and thither as she turned. A chill crept slowly up to her heart. She felt that the abyss lay once more before her and furiously urged her brain and heart into argument before she was submerged. Her mind, perceptive of the injustice and the ghastly results of her sex, had brought her to the battlefield and once there had told her that its agonies were not to be endured. (*TS* 63)

Despite sharpening her sense of ‘injustice and the ghastly results of her sex’, ‘the mattress [that] seemed to bruise her body’ destroys her political resolve to change them: ‘its agonies were not to be endured’ (*TS* 63). In addition to disrupting her political determination, the physical conditions of the cell also paralyse the prisoner’s cognitive faculties. During her period of incarceration in a Yorkshire prison near the end of the novel, the narrator states that Adela’s ‘mind had withdrawn: it was hibernating till more clement seasons for the flesh should recall it’ (*TS* 237).

West’s conflicting representations of the pain endured by Adela need to be situated alongside the complex contemporary response to portrayals of the imprisoned suffragette body. Initially grounded in a religious symbolism of violent suffering intended to locate suffragettes within the ‘advance guard of change’, Adela’s experience of pain is seemingly attributed with a positive political agency.⁵⁵ Such an emphasis on the political power of the incarcerated body is outlined in a prison account written by the suffragette Ada Cecile Wright:

By our action in breaking panes of glass in the cell windows, we initiated a pressing reform. In the prison cells of to-day, one small pane now opens directly to the outside. One can lift one’s face to the window and breathe the sweet air of

⁵⁵ Jorgensen-Earp, p. 109.

freedom. One can stand on a chair and put one's hand out through the small pane and one's hand is out of the confinement of the cell.⁵⁶

Here, Wright's literary connection between the suffragette's hand 'breaking panes of glass' and 'pressing reform'⁵⁷ is an example of suffrage writing constructed as 'a direct intervention in public and political debate' which is 'aimed at altering the structures of society', as described by Glenda Norquay in *Voices and Votes: A Literary Anthology of the Women's Suffrage Movement* (1995).⁵⁸

Though accounts like Wright's foreground the imprisoned body as an agent of 'pressing reform', contemporary representations of suffragettes could also challenge this construction.⁵⁹ Laura E. Nym Mayhall points out in her study of *The Militant Suffrage Movement: Citizenship and Resistance in Britain, 1860-1930* (2003) that pictorial representations of pain endured by suffragettes indicate that 'the embodiment of resistance [...] was both more complicated and more contentious than portrayals of heroic suffragettes undertaking the hunger strike would suggest'.⁶⁰ Mayhall posits that 'a kind of voyeuristic pleasure could be had in imagining the suffragette body in pain; popular graphic representations of suffragettes being forcibly fed presented these women as young and attractive, perhaps eliciting quite different responses in viewers than would reading personal accounts of their experiences'.⁶¹ In *The Sentinel*, there is no indication that West seeks to elicit voyeuristic pleasure from the reader. Nevertheless, her own graphic representation 'of the felt experience of pain' 'bestows [a] visibility'⁶² – to borrow Scarry's phrase – that also seems to complicate 'the embodiment of

⁵⁶ Ada Cecile Wright, 'Typed Biographical Account of Ada Cecile Wright', quoted in Barbara Green, *Spectacular Confessions: Autobiography, Performative Activisms, and the Sites of Suffrage, 1905-1938* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), p. 59.

⁵⁷ Wright, p. 59.

⁵⁸ Glenda Norquay, *Voices and Votes: A Literary Anthology of the Women's Suffrage Movement* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p. 3.

⁵⁹ Wright, p. 59.

⁶⁰ Laura E. Nym Mayhall, *The Militant Suffrage Movement: Citizenship and Resistance in Britain, 1860-1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 84.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Scarry, p. 41.

resistance'.⁶³ Though initially grounded in religious symbolism foregrounding the political agency of violent suffering, Adela's painful interaction with the cell subsequently reveals her lack of agency to the reader.

Given her explicit engagement with strategies of representation that stress the political agency of suffering in suffragette writings, it is likely that West gleaned her understanding of pain from contemporary accounts of prison experiences. One possible source for West appeared in the correspondence section of *The New Age* during the period in which we know she was reading the magazine. The cognitive 'abyss' that the 'bruis[ing]' mattress inflicts upon Adela's attempts to analyse social conditions is an experience that corresponds with one that the suffragette Helen Gordon Liddle described in a letter to *The New Age* on 8th June 1911 (TS 63). In this letter, Liddle stresses the stunted sense of mental and political agency engendered by the painful conditions of the cell:

The physical conditions are hard, unnecessarily so: the plank bed, the stool with no back, the intense cold in winter of the tiled floor, the heavy unwieldy clothing, the insufficient ventilation, are all open to improvement and react intensely on the mind. [...] I write from personal experience of the long solitary confinement, of the loss of personal identity, of personal responsibility, of any exercise of personal volition, of the sudden stoppage of any progressive movement of mind or thought.⁶⁴

The influence of Liddle's account of her imprisonment on *The Sentinel* has not previously been recognised in existing critical assessments of the novel. West's earlier incorporation of symbolic imagery was intended to present suffering as part of a process

⁶³ Mayhall, p. 84.

⁶⁴ Liddle, p. 140.

of ‘overarching cultural and social change’.⁶⁵ Here, her understanding of pain is based instead on prison accounts which emphasise its ‘stoppage of any progressive movement of mind or thought’.⁶⁶ The correspondences between West’s and Liddle’s understanding of painful experience imply that she shares the view that the cell’s physical conditions are politically disempowering rather than potentially empowering at a symbolic level.

West implicitly questions the political strategy which lay at the heart of suffragette fiction’s religious symbolism of violence by basing her depictions of pain on accounts published by suffragettes such as Liddle. Though scholars have noted that *The Sentinel* heavily appropriates other published representations of suffering, no critical attention has previously been paid to the ways in which West challenges them. In her introduction to the novel, Kathryn Laing notes that ‘the descriptions of Adela’s imprisonments [...] derive from personal testaments of suffragettes she knew and accounts she had read. Testimonies about a variety of experiences of violence, especially that of forcible feeding, were published in newspapers, suffrage journals, pamphlets and novels’.⁶⁷ Laing suggests that ‘West uses the journalistic, documentary material in two ways in the novel: either as a base on which to construct a scene imaginatively, or as a factual overlay on her fiction, creating a textual collage documenting the period’.⁶⁸ When we approach the differing representations of pain that are juxtaposed in *The Sentinel*, it is also clear that West consciously draws attention to the conflicting approaches to violence – those labelled as ‘enchanted’ and ‘disenchanted’ by Cole – that such a ‘textual collage’ suggests.⁶⁹

Based on Liddle’s testimony about the breakdown ‘of any exercise of personal volition’ brought about by the ‘physical conditions’ of the cell, Adela’s perception of

⁶⁵ Hartman, p. 38.

⁶⁶ Liddle, p. 140.

⁶⁷ Laing, ‘Introduction’, p. xxxii.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

pain undermines the narrator's earlier attempts to frame her suffering in terms of a religious symbolism that stresses its role in the enactment of institutional reform.⁷⁰ West indicates that the realities of physical pain described by figures like Liddle reveal the political strategies underpinning the suffragette symbolism of violent suffering to be misleading. In *Hating God: The Untold Story of Misotheism* (2010), Schweizer argues that the narrator's reference to 'the pale Galilean' (*TS* 54) is 'an allusion to Algernon Charles Swinburne's "Hymn to Proserpine" [1866]'.⁷¹ In Schweizer's reading, West 'employ[s] the motif of crucifixion, just as Swinburne did, to express the plight of oppressed and persecuted segments of humanity'.⁷² Juxtaposed with the narrator's emphasis on Adela's disempowering perception of pain in the cell, she also undermines the use of this motif to promote the representation of violent embodiment as a catalyst for social change.

West weighs up the symbolism and assumptions about violent suffering by basing Adela's interactions with her cell on two conflicting representations of pain that she read in contemporary writings about suffragette imprisonment. In her introduction to the novel, Laing argues that 'West's concern with aesthetics is as central to the novel as sex and violence'.⁷³ Responding to the novel's preoccupation with aesthetics, Laing argues that 'West's juxtaposition of poetry and feminist revolution [...] reveals her desire, maintained throughout her career, to combine a political agenda with an aesthetic one'.⁷⁴ In addition, she also seeks to demonstrate in *The Sentinel* that actual accounts of violent suffering can undermine the attempt 'to combine a political agenda with an aesthetic one' by juxtaposing two conflicting depictions of painful interaction with the

⁷⁰ Liddle, p. 140.

⁷¹ Bernard Schweizer, *Hating God: The Untold Story of Misotheism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 139.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Laing, 'Introduction', p. xv.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

built environment.⁷⁵ *The Sentinel* is initially grounded in an established religious symbolism of pain that seeks to present the suffering suffragette body as an agent of institutional reform. Subsequently, however, the brutal realism of Adela's pain undercuts its connection with political volition and agency. In 'An Orgy of Disorder and Cruelty', West's claim that suffragettes 'cannot win their cause by mere virtuosic exhibitions of courage' is put down to the insensitivity of the public, the Press and the male sex to the bodily pain of women.⁷⁶ In *The Sentinel*, she indicates that her doubts about the political agency of violence also emerge in response to the inconsistencies she discerned in the 'textual collage' of contemporary suffragette discourses of painful embodiment.⁷⁷

Whilst *The Sentinel* complicates the 'enchanted' attitude to violence in suffragette fiction, such an approach was increasingly being promoted in contemporary modernist theories about artistic development. One such theory, published in *The New Age* on 5 May 1910, is Wyndham Lewis' essay 'Our Wild Body'. In this essay, Lewis argues that we can harness the body's creative powers of 'imaginative vision'⁷⁸ and 'its eternal significance' in the service of great art by partaking in 'occasional good honest fighting'.⁷⁹ According to Lewis, 'Art is only worth anything when the artist is as vulnerable in it as in his body'.⁸⁰ In *Literature, Politics and the English Avant-Garde* (2000), Paul Peppis posits that Lewis' 'plan to un-tame the English [in 'Our Wild Body'] depends on a [...] general, biological essentialism [...] [and] a totalizing notion of human "instinct" [which] casts vitality as opposed to "civilization"; in short, [by

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ West, 'An Orgy of Disorder and Cruelty: The Beginnings of Sex Antagonism', p. 99.

⁷⁷ Laing, 'Introduction', p. xxxii.

⁷⁸ Wyndham Lewis, 'Our Wild Body', *The New Age*, 5 May 1910, pp. 8-10 (p. 8) <<http://www.modjourn.org/>> [accessed 19 July 2017].

⁷⁹ Lewis, 'Our Wild Body', p. 10.

⁸⁰ Wyndham Lewis, 'Our Wild Body', p. 9.

promoting] the very “primitive” qualities – desire, violence, pain’.⁸¹ In the next section of this chapter, I suggest that West’s depictions of George Silverton’s violent suffering in ‘Indissoluble Matrimony’ aim to complicate this connection between ‘violence, pain’ and artistic creativity.⁸²

III. Marital Ferocity in ‘Indissoluble Matrimony’

In *The Sentinel*, West tracks Adela’s attempts to reform the Edwardian State. ‘Indissoluble Matrimony’ revolves around the solicitor’s clerk George Silverton, a reactionary who is determined to break free from the shackles of marriage to his mixed-race wife Evadne. Evadne is portrayed as an exotic woman and a fledgling socialist speaker whom George suspects of having an affair with one of her prominent political colleagues. Following a row over his determination to prevent Evadne’s speech at a local socialist meeting, George’s wife storms out of their home in ‘Sumatra Crescent’ (*IM* 275). Desperate to be rid of the shackles of marriage, George pursues Evadne in the perverse hope of proving her part in an adulterous liaison, but is disappointed to find her innocently swimming at the nearby ‘Petrick reservoirs’ and a violent tussle ensues (*IM* 275). George’s determination to end his marriage reaches a climax when he attempts to drown his wife in the reservoir.

Recent scholarship has begun to highlight the complicated relationship that this short story has with the Vorticist aesthetic of *BLAST*. In *Race and the Modernist Imagination* (2010), for example, Urmila Seshagiri argues that the climax of the story ‘– the violent physical battle between George and Evadne – exemplifies vorticist principles of energy’.⁸³ Notwithstanding this, Seshagiri posits that ‘in making Evadne, rather than

⁸¹ Paul Peppis, *Literature, Politics and the English Avant-Garde* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 50-51.

⁸² Peppis, p. 205.

⁸³ Urmila Seshagiri, *Race and the Modernist Imagination* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), p. 93.

George, the text's sovereign character, "Indissoluble Matrimony" ironizes the primitivist tropes and discourses deployed by the avant-garde artists represented in *BLAST*'s pages'.⁸⁴ In addition to its ironic treatment of *BLAST*'s 'primitivist tropes and discourses', 'Indissoluble Matrimony' should also be read as a story that satirizes the magazine's emphasis on violent aesthetic regeneration.⁸⁵

The natural and the built environments depicted in this story both threaten and induce violent suffering. On the one hand, the natural environment which lay beyond the suburban area of Sumatra Crescent is likened to deadly weapons. George's pursuit of his wife takes him by 'the Whimsey pond' (*IM* 276-277):

[which is] sheltered from the wind by the high ridge so that the undisturbed moonlight lay across it like a sharp-edged sword. He looked about for some sign of Evadne. She could not be on the land by the margin of the lakes, for the light blazed so strongly that each reed could be clearly seen like a black dagger stabbing the silver. (*IM* 277)

On the other hand, the insanity of George's hunt for his wife is signalled by his painful bodily disregard for the built environment: 'He flung wide his arms in ecstasy: the left struck against stone. More pain that he had thought his body could hold convulsed him, so that he sank on the ground hugging his aching arm. He looked backwards as he writhed and saw that the hedge had stopped; above him was the great stone wall of the county asylum' (*IM* 276).

When George finally manages to locate his wife, an even more violent confrontation ensues which bizarrely seems to reaffirm his commitment to marriage. Falling 'body to body [with his wife] into the quarrelling waters', George is 'swallowed by a brawling blackness in which whirled a vortex that flung him again and again on a

⁸⁴ Seshagiri, p. 99.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

sharp thing that burned his shoulder. All about him fought the waters, and they cut his flesh like knives. His pain was past belief" (*IM* 282). George's attempt to dissolve the institution of marriage through suffering fails. Seemingly close to drowning 'on the instant his own fingertips seemed hot with blood and deeply cleft from clawing at the impregnable rock', George is saved when he spots 'the hard and merry light of a moon-ray striking on solid metal' (*IM* 282). His 'left hand clutched upwards at it, and he swung from a rounded projection. It was, his touch told him, a leaden ring hanging obliquely from the rock' (*IM* 283). In addition to preventing his bodily dissolution, George's 'clutch[ing] upwards' toward this 'leaden ring' symbolically stresses that this painful ordeal has merely re-affirmed the indissolubility of his marriage (*IM* 283).

The violent immersion described in this scene can be interpreted as a satire on the institution of marriage in pre-war Britain. West clearly outlines her view on marriage in the article 'Strindberg: The English Gentleman (2)', which was published in *The Freewoman* on 22 August 1912. She argues that 'every extension of the divorce law is a victory for the child. [...] The happy marriage, which is the only proper nursery, is indissoluble. The unhappy marriage, which perpetually tells the child a bogey-man story about life, ought to be dissolved'.⁸⁶ As Davida Pines explains in *The Marriage Paradox: Modernist Novels and the Cultural Imperative to Marry* (2005), the Government of the day did attempt to address this issue:

In Britain, a Royal Commission on Divorce was formed in 1909 in order to study the divorce laws, unchanged since the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857. Two women were appointed to serve on the committee of twelve – a historical gesture – and the testimonies of 246 witnesses on the current state of marriage and divorce were considered over three years. The committee sought to define

⁸⁶ Rebecca West, 'Strindberg: The English Gentleman (2)', in *The Young Rebecca*, ed. by Marcus, pp. 56-60 (p. 59).

marriage and marital failure in the modern era, weighing the ideal of lifelong monogamy against that of justice. In 1912, the commission's Majority Report recommended that women be permitted to sue for divorce on the same grounds as men, and that divorce be made cheaper and more accessible to the poor.⁸⁷

Despite these recommendations, however, in 'The Divorce Commission: A Report that Will Not Become Law' (1912)⁸⁸ West qualifies her praise for the report by suggesting that 'we must temper our elation with the thought that it will very likely never become law'.⁸⁹ Here, she acknowledges that the imperative to preserve the institution of marriage – however unhappy or painful – remained entrenched within British society.

George's immersion in the 'quarrelling waters' (*IM* 282) and grasping at the 'leaden ring' protruding from the reservoir wall express West's frustrations about the contemporary imperative to preserve unhappy or failed marriages (*IM* 283). Pines notes that 'the recommendations [of the report] were not made law until 1923, and throughout the early twentieth century the public remained deeply divided on the issue of divorce, with divorce opponents fearing for the institution of marriage, and divorce advocates blaming hasty unions for the increasing desire for divorce'.⁹⁰ On her side of the divide, West is unequivocal in stating that 'this desire to conserve the unhappy marriage is vicious'.⁹¹ Placed in this context, the 'brawling blackness in which whirled a vortex that flung [George] again and again on a sharp thing that burned his shoulder' can be read as an attempt to convey this viciousness (*IM* 282).

The specific attention that West gives to the perception and impact of pain in this scene respond to her contemporary views on the physical and artistic effects of

⁸⁷ Davida Pines, *The Marriage Paradox: Modernist Novels and the Cultural Imperative to Marry* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), p. 9.

⁸⁸ This article was published in the *Clarion* on 29 November 1912.

⁸⁹ Rebecca West, 'The Divorce Commission: A Report that Will Not Become Law', in *The Young Rebecca*, ed. by Marcus, pp. 124-127 (p. 126).

⁹⁰ Pines, p. 9.

⁹¹ West, 'Strindberg: The English Gentleman (2)', p. 59.

indissoluble marriages. Emphasising that George's 'pain was past belief' (*IM* 282), her portrayal of his agony corresponds with Scarry's suggestion that 'pain annihilates not only the objects of complex thought and emotion but also the objects of the most elemental acts of perception'.⁹² As in *The Sentinel*, this understanding of pain in 'Indissoluble Matrimony' can be specifically traced to West's engagement with contemporary discourses of embodiment. 'Indissoluble Matrimony' stresses the violent suffering that George endures before deciding to reach back for the 'leaden ring' of his marriage (*IM* 283). In 'Strindberg: The English Gentleman (2)', West comparably argues that the determination of conservative institutional figures to preserve unhappy marriages adversely affects the physical health of children:

The President of the Mother's Union, when she gave evidence before the Divorce Law Commission, adopted a tone which should have brought upon her the attention of the NSPCC. [...] It was nothing to her that the children of a marriage rendered hateful by incompatibility of temper should have their nerves shattered in their infancy. Certainly the ideals of English gentlemen and gentlewomen are not brilliantly sensible.⁹³

In her fictionalised portrayal of a 'marriage rendered hateful by incompatibility of temper'⁹⁴, George's 'nerves [are] shattered' by 'a vortex that flung him again and again on a sharp thing that burned his shoulder' (*IM* 282).

In 'So Simple', published in the feminist magazine *The Freewoman* on 12 October 1912, West further argues that the pain caused by the preservation of unhappy marriages hinders aesthetic expression: 'undoubtedly marriage eats like a cancer into the artistic development of women'.⁹⁵ 'Indissoluble Matrimony' subtly alludes to this link between marriage and stymied artistic development in her suggestion that George's

⁹² Scarry, p. 54.

⁹³ West, 'Strindberg: The English Gentleman (2)', p. 59.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Rebecca West, 'So Simple', in *The Young Rebecca*, ed. by Marcus, pp. 70-74 (p. 71).

pain is so great ‘that his consciousness was strained to apprehend it, as a too tightly stretched canvas splits and rips’ (*IM* 282). In a scene that elaborates her frustrations about the indissolubility of unhappy marriages, her depictions of pain also index her beliefs about its physically and artistically destructive consequences.

Several critics observe that the startling imagery used by West to express the effects of George’s indissoluble marriage is constructed in relation to an emerging early modernist aesthetics of violence. Outlining the key features of this imperative in *Modernism and the Aesthetics of Violence*, Sheehan notes that the modernist ‘desire for violence’ is ‘manifested in a range of ways’: antagonism towards both past and present; hostility directed at anything effeminate; sympathy with the idea (though not necessarily the harsh reality) of war; and even [...] actual physical aggression’.⁹⁶ Given its publication in *BLAST*, existing studies of ‘Indissoluble Matrimony’ most commonly read this scene alongside the magazine’s Vorticist aesthetic. Situated within this magazine, West’s story particularly invites a reading of its construction in relation to modernism’s fascination with the enchanted approach to violence. As Rod Mengham notes in his chapter ‘From Georges Sorel to *Blast*’ (1994): ‘both the Rebel Art Centre and the Vorticist project *BLAST* conducted their business in a dissident and apocalyptic register that is wholly compatible with Sorel’s articulation of the General Strike as the enabling myth of syndicalist activity’.⁹⁷ Seshagiri argues in her chapter on ‘Racial Politics, Modernist Poetics’ (2007) that ‘the formal aesthetics of this passage provide [...] a literary complement to the visual art printed in *BLAST*’, noting that West’s descriptions of the ““vortex” of water solid like rock and polished like knives’ recall

⁹⁶ Sheehan, p. 92.

⁹⁷ Rod Mengham, ‘From Georges Sorel to *Blast*’, in *The Violent Muse: Violence and the Artistic Imagination in Europe, 1910-1939*, ed. by Jana Howlett and Rod Mengham (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), pp. 33-44 (p. 34).

‘the “polished sides” that Wyndham Lewis describes and the ‘indivisible’ energy praised by Gaudier-Brzeska’.⁹⁸

Though critics understandably read this scene in relation to the Vorticist aesthetic of *BLAST*, the manuscript for the story – now held at the University of Tulsa’s McFarlin Library – indicates that it may have been written in response to the equally violent Fauvist aesthetic of the earlier modernist magazine *Rhythm*. West records at the end of the manuscript for ‘Indissoluble Matrimony’ that she wrote the story between August 1911 and April 1913 – over a year before the publication of *BLAST*.⁹⁹ She also notes that the story was ‘refused [...] by *The Blue Review*’, the reincarnation of John Middleton Murry’s earlier magazine *Rhythm*.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, the violent imagery with which she satirises marriage in this scene has much in common with the claim in the opening issue of *Rhythm* that ‘before art can be human it must learn to be brutal’, and particularly Murry’s emphasis on the necessary ferocity of art in the essay ‘Art and Philosophy’.¹⁰¹ George’s exposure to ‘a brawling blackness in which whirled a vortex that flung him again and again on a sharp thing that burned his shoulder’ (*IM* 282) recalls Middleton Murry’s theory that ‘Art is movement, ferocity, tearing at what lies before. It takes nothing for granted; and thrusts mercilessly, pitilessly’.¹⁰² Whether West’s story was written specifically with Murry’s aesthetics in mind or not, it draws much of its descriptive power from an engagement with the kind of imagery used in *Rhythm*.

⁹⁸ Urmila Seshagiri, ‘Racial Politics, Modernist Poetics’, in *Modernism, Vol. 1*, ed. by Ástráður Eysteinnsson and Vivian Liska (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2007), pp. 573-590 (p. 583).

⁹⁹ Rebecca West, ‘Indissoluble Matrimony’, Rebecca West Papers, Tulsa, McFarlin Library, Collection 1986-002, fol. 5.

¹⁰⁰ West, ‘Indissoluble Matrimony’, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Collection 1986-002, fol. 5.

¹⁰¹ [Anon], ‘Aims and Ideals’, *Rhythm*, 1 (Summer, 1911), p. 36 <<http://www.modjourn.org/>> [accessed 19 July 2017].

¹⁰² Middleton Murry, p. 10.

Though West's engagement with the modernist aesthetics of violence lends imaginative force to her portrayal of the viciousness of indissoluble matrimony, her portrayal of marriage's bodily and artistic effects challenge the emphasis on the artistically regenerative nature of ferocity. Whereas Murry aims in *Rhythm* to emphasise the redemptive value of violence in his theory of progressive art, *BLAST* 'sets out to be an avenue for all those vivid and violent ideas that could reach the Public in no other way'.¹⁰³ In 'Art and Philosophy', Murry's claim that 'Art is movement, ferocity, tearing at what lies before' forms part of his belief that it can 'force fresh paths for its progress across the waste of dull and dead matter which it vivifies'.¹⁰⁴ Contrasting this, the vortex depicted in 'Indissoluble Matrimony' generates a form of painful embodiment which connotes the destruction of art. Corresponding with West's belief that 'marriage eats like a cancer into [...] artistic development'¹⁰⁵, George's body is subjected to painful impacts which are bound up with the destruction of artistic composition: 'so great was his pain that his consciousness was strained to apprehend it, as a too tightly stretched canvas splits and rips' (*IM* 282). *Rhythm* and *BLAST* clearly place their faith in the enchanted approach to violence. By contrast, West's portrayal of ferocity bears out her belief in the physically and artistically disenchanting impact of 'vicious' marriages.¹⁰⁶

'Indissoluble Matrimony' – like *The Sentinel* – is clearly not a text that is open to the redemptive forms of embodiment explored by later modernist engagements with the aesthetics of violence. One particularly good example of this is F.T. Marinetti's 'Tactilism', which like West's story considers the perception and significance of violent tactile immersion between stone and water:

¹⁰³ [Anon], 'Great Preliminary Vortex', *BLAST*, 1, 20 June 1914, [Front Matter] <<http://www.modjournal.org/>> [accessed 19 July 2017].

¹⁰⁴ Middleton Murry, p. 10.

¹⁰⁵ West, 'So Simple', p. 71.

¹⁰⁶ West, 'Strindberg: The English Gentleman (2)', p. 59.

I was naked in the silky water that was torn by rocks, foamy scissors knives razors, among the iodine-filled mattresses of seaweed. I was nude in the sea of flexible steel, which had a fertile and virile breathing. I drank from the goblet of the sea filled to the rim with genius. The sun, with its long roasting flames, vulcanised my body and bolted the keel of my forehead rich with sails.¹⁰⁷

Whereas the reservoir waters ‘cut [...] [George’s] flesh like knives’ (*IM* 282), the sea water in which Marinetti bathes is ‘torn by rocks, foamy scissors knives razors’.¹⁰⁸ George’s immersion in the reservoir aims to bring about the dissolution of his marriage. By contrast, Marinetti hopes that his watery transformation will ‘intensify the communication and the fusion of human beings’.¹⁰⁹ Despite their differing aims, George shares Marinetti’s belief that abandonment of the body to the violent ravages of water and rock will initiate a revolution in his existing state of being: ‘Suddenly the air was sweet on his mouth. The starlight seemed as hearty as a cheer. [...] His own weakness and loveliness induced enjoyable tears, and there was a delicious moment of abandonment to comfortable whining’ (*IM* 282).

Whilst Marinetti’s tactile exposure to watery knives is held to generate his desired transformation, George’s immersion bears out West’s view that indissoluble marriages leave the ‘nerves shattered’.¹¹⁰ Leaving his body ‘vulcanised’ and desensitised to pain, Marinetti’s tactile immersion fashions him into a vehicle for his desired transformation: the ‘sea of flexible steel’ and the sun’s ‘roasting flames’ forge and ‘bolt[...] the keel of [...] [his] forehead rich with sails’.¹¹¹ Conversely, George’s painful immersion brings about the ‘detrition of his personality’ in which the ‘one sharp fragment of intelligence [that] survived’ (*IM* 282) enables him to reach back for the

¹⁰⁷ Marinetti, p. 197.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ West, ‘Strindberg: The English Gentleman (2)’, p. 59.

¹¹¹ Marinetti, p. 197.

‘lead ring’ of his marriage (*IM* 283). In ‘Indissoluble Matrimony’, West draws upon the imagery of an emerging modernist aesthetics of violence. However, her depiction of George’s painful interaction with the built environment indicates that she does not accord it with the regenerative value foregrounded in the aesthetics of Murry and Marinetti.

IV. Conclusion

This chapter has established that West’s interest in haptic relations with various built spaces emerges in response to suffragette prison narratives and her own journalism on the institution of marriage. Tactile experiences in West’s early texts are most often painful experiences which are intended to evoke the violent nature of suffragette prison conditions and unhappy marriage. I have offered a reading of *The Sentinel* and ‘Indissoluble Matrimony’ which draws attention to the ways in which they develop a critical language of pain. The chapter situated West’s language of pain in these texts in relation to the representational strategies of suffragette fiction and the aesthetic theories of Wyndham Lewis, Murry and Marinetti. By reading West’s early fiction alongside the writings of these figures, I have shown that it shares their modernist interest in the ‘symbolic and cultural potency’ of violence.¹¹² At the same time, I have shown that her depictions of painful interactions with built environments often ‘refuse that structure’ of ‘symbolic and cultural potency’ accorded to violence in suffragette fiction and modernist magazines.¹¹³ In *The Sentinel* and ‘Indissoluble Matrimony’, West emphasises the destructive rather than the redemptive impact of violence on political activism and art by grounding them in forms of embodiment which bring about the ‘obliteration of the contents of consciousness’.¹¹⁴

¹¹² Cole, p. 43.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Scarry, p. 54.

In this first chapter, I have demonstrated that West's understanding of embodiment challenges the assumptions informing aesthetic representations of violence. In the next chapter, I will consider how the First World War engenders a shift in her understanding of embodiment and the ways in which this impacts upon her portrayals of artistic practice. Whereas West's early fiction draws upon accounts of embodied interactions with architecture that highlight the subject's lack 'of any exercise of personal volition', her wartime writings emphasise the importance of bodily volition in the built environment.¹¹⁵ As I will argue in the next chapter, this shift in West's writings can be understood in relation to her wartime focus on bodily practices associated with the First World War. In 'Hands That War: The Night Shift', published in the *Daily Chronicle* in early 1916, West notes that for the new breed of female munitions workers 'their whole life [is] concentrated in their leaping hands'.¹¹⁶ In Chapter Two, I will explore how her fascination with this embodied context shapes her depictions of the connections between tactile practice and aesthetic practice in the critical biography *Henry James* and the novel *The Return of the Soldier*.

¹¹⁵ Liddle, p. 140.

¹¹⁶ West, 'Hands That War: The Night Shift', p. 389.

Chapter 2: Tactile Practice and Aesthetic Practice in *Henry James* and *The Return of the Soldier*

I. Introduction

West's critical biography *Henry James* was published in 1916 as part of James Nisbet and Company's *Writers of the Day* series, which featured short assessments of the period's most prominent literary figures. Eric L. Haralson and Kendall Johnson note in their *Critical Companion to Henry James: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work* (2009) that, along with Ford Madox Ford's *Henry James: A Critical Study* (1913), West's study 'established James's critical reputation as a challenging writer who demanded much from his reader in emphasizing the characters' impressions of their European and American worlds'.¹ *The Return of the Soldier* was first published two years later in the February and March 1918 numbers of *The Century* magazine. This was one of the first modernist novels to portray a shell-shocked soldier of the First World War and to consider the impact of his return home on the domestic lives of family members.

In the previous chapter, I read *The Sentinel* and 'Indissoluble Matrimony' together as texts in which painful relations with built environments elaborate West's response to representations of violence. Written during the equally violent conditions of the First World War, *Henry James* and *The Return of the Soldier* can be productively read together as texts fascinated with the ways in which tactile practices – the attempt to open a door, the handling of ancient ruins, or the fingering of a cherished domestic interior – elaborate approaches to aesthetic practice. In *Henry James*, West adopts the unusual critical strategy of imagining the writer's attempt to artistically grasp the

¹ Eric L. Haralson and Kendall Johnson, *Critical Companion to Henry James: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work* (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2009), p. 376.

intellectual problems of the day in terms of his tactile relations with the built environment. In *The Return of the Soldier*, Jenny Baldry's tactile appreciations of Baldry Court's interior express her commitment to its beautification.

West's portrayal of tactile practices in these texts call into question James' and Jenny's aesthetic practice. West's metaphors of touch imply that James' approach to fiction fails to grasp the fundamental problems of the age. Jenny's tactile engagements with the objects that she and Kitty have painstakingly arranged at Baldry Court suggest that her attempts to beautify the domestic space are a facile activity. I want to suggest that this construction of touch in *Henry James* and *The Return of the Soldier* needs to be read alongside the evolving discussion about bodily activities that frame West's wartime journalism on the state of literature and munitions factories. Her interest in tactile habits which disrupt aesthetic processes in *Henry James* and *The Return of the Soldier* respond to her sense that the bodily conditions of the war challenge established assumptions about aesthetic practice.

This chapter draws out the significance of West's depictions of tactile activities in *Henry James* and *The Return of the Soldier* in dialogue with Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and bodily hexis, as expressed in *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1972). Bourdieu argues that 'the structures constitutive of a particular type of environment [...] produce habitus, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations'.² According to Bourdieu, a vital component of these 'structured structures'³ is 'the dialectical relationship between the body and a space' in which 'one finds the form par excellence of the structural apprenticeship which leads to the embodying of the

² Bourdieu, p. 72.

³ Ibid.

structures of the world, that is, the appropriating by the world of a body thus enabled to appropriate the world'.⁴ In *The Body in Pain*, discussed in the previous chapter, Scarry accepts Bourdieu's formulations of bodily practice as a starting point for her own theorisation of pain. Making reference to *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Scarry agrees that 'the presence of learned culture in the body' must 'at least in part be seen as originating in the body, attributed to the refusal of the body to disown its own circumstances, its mute and often beautiful insistence on absorbing into its rhythms and postures the signs that it inhabits a particular space at a particular time'.⁵ However, Scarry goes on to argue that these rhythms and postures are destroyed by 'the [torture] room, [which] both in its structure and its content, is converted into a weapon, deconverted, undone, made to participate in the annihilation of the prisoners, made to demonstrate that everything is a weapon, the objects themselves, and with them the fact of civilization, are annihilated'.⁶ As I argued in my discussions of the *Sentinel* and 'Indissoluble Matrimony', West also stresses that painful relations with the prison cell and reservoir obliterate her characters' learned rhythms and postures.

In *Henry James* and *The Return of the Soldier*, I explore the ways in which West's depictions of tactile habits within built space much more subtly disrupt the 'durable, transposable [aesthetic] dispositions' in James' fiction and for Jenny and Chris Baldry.⁷ I suggest that the manual operations depicted in these texts can be approached as examples of bodily hexis, which Bourdieu defines as the habitus 'em-bodied, turned into a permanent disposition, a durable manner of standing, speaking, and thereby of *thinking* and *feeling*'.⁸ By showing that these dispositions are expressed by disruptive forms of tactile pressure, I will suggest that West attempts to portray embodied conditions which call into question the viability of artistic processes. *Henry James* and

⁴ Bourdieu, p. 89.

⁵ Scarry, p. 109.

⁶ Scarry, p. 41.

⁷ Bourdieu, p. 72.

⁸ Bourdieu, p. 93. Emphasis in original.

The Return of the Soldier mark a crucial period for the place of touch in West's writings. *The Sentinel* and 'Indissoluble Matrimony' are centred on painful interactions with built environments which convey her hostility to aesthetic representations of embodied experience. In contrast, *Henry James* and *The Return of the Soldier* are the first texts in which the tactile body forms a vital part of West's attempts to interrogate aesthetic principles and systems.

West's emerging interest in the important connection between tactile practice and aesthetic practice can be traced to her experiences and writings of the First World War. In the early months of 1914, Geoffrey Scott emphasises the extent to which our aesthetic appreciations of built environments depend upon the ways in which our bodies interact with them in his influential study *The Architecture of Humanism: A Study in the History of Taste* (1914). Acknowledging the influence of Theodor Lipps' aesthetic theories on his ideas, Scott argues that 'space, in fact, is liberty of movement. That is its value to us, and as such it enters our physical consciousness. We adapt ourselves instinctively to the spaces in which we stand, project ourselves into them, fill them ideally with our movements'.⁹ There is no evidence to suggest that West read or was familiar with the ideas outlined in Scott's book. Nevertheless, West's memories of her time living in the secluded village of Braughing in late 1914 highlights her awareness of such an approach to the built environment. She remembered the farmhouse situated 'among elms on a Roman road and looking itself ancient and living like the trees', where she 'could stand at her porch under the white creeper and finger the rough sun-crumbled brick and look down the valley of green water-meadows and cherish once more the illusion of stability'.¹⁰ In West's recollection of herself caressing the brick of the farmhouse, her sense of touch feeds into and sustains her aesthetic appreciation of

⁹ Geoffrey Scott, *The Architecture of Humanism: A Study in the History of Taste* (London: Constable and Company Limited, 1924), p. 227.

¹⁰ Rebecca West, quoted in Gordon Ray, *H.G. Wells and Rebecca West* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1974), p. 60.

an idyllic corner of rural England. She follows Scott and Lipps and perhaps implicitly anticipates Merleau-Ponty's recognition in *Phenomenology of Perception* of the body's constitutive role in the experience of aesthetic objects: 'It is my body which gives significance not only to the natural object, but also to cultural objects like words [...]. Before becoming an indication of a concept it is first of all an event which grips my body'.¹¹

Remembering that her time at Braughing was spent cherishing 'the illusion of stability', West acknowledges that her tactile appreciations took place against the destabilising backdrop of the war.¹² Her wartime journalism draws attention to the ways in which the tactile conditions precipitated by the conflict disrupt previously established female aesthetic relationships with the built environment. In the early months of 1916, she produced a series of articles for the *Daily Chronicle* entitled 'Hands That War', which address and celebrate the working conditions of female munitions workers. West remarks in 'Hands That War: The Night Shift' that 'these girls work with a passionate diligence which one can only realise when one hears that in a certain shop four of them, who have been at work for only a few months, produce a larger output than four men who have been trained to this process for six years'.¹³ In these articles, West notes that the manual operations being carried out in the munitions factories destabilise existing notions of female domestic activities. She observes in 'Hands That War: The Cordite Makers' that in the munitions factories:

there is something distinctly domestic in the character of almost every process.

The girls who stand round the great drums in the hut with walls and floors awash

¹¹ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 273.

¹² West, quoted in Ray, p. 60.

¹³ West, 'Hands That War: The Night Shift', p. 387.

look like millers in their caps and dresses of white waterproof [...]. But, in fact, they are filling the drum with gun-cotton to be dried by hot air.¹⁴

In *Henry James* and *The Return of the Soldier*, West draws on this context in her depictions of manual interactions with built environments that disturb established conceptions of aesthetic practice. In place of women's old commitments to domestic processes, she stresses in her 'Hands That War' series that the munition workers' intimate tactile relations with the built environment are characterised by a heightened and unstable bodily relationship with the factory space. I intend to show that West uses images of bodily instability both in *Henry James* and in *The Return of the Soldier* to call into question the artistic processes bound up with the metaphors of the 'house of fiction' and the 'house beautiful'.

West's interest in the relationship between manual and aesthetic activities in *Henry James* and *The Return of the Soldier* implicate both texts in modernist concerns regarding the intersection between touch, modernity's technological conditions and artistic processes following the outbreak of the First World War. In *Modernism, Technology and the Body* (1998), Tim Armstrong identifies 'the automatic hand' as 'one of the prosthetic devices of Modernism' situated at this intersection.¹⁵ Armstrong argues that for modernists the automatic hand carries the promise (or threat) of an artistic approach to the world that transcends the limits of embodied consciousness: 'in automatic writing, it becomes a mechanism for the production of data whose authority is less certain'.¹⁶ He suggests that anxieties about the authority of aesthetic production can be discerned in Ezra Pound's essay on automatic painting, 'Affirmations II. Vorticism' (1915): 'the claim that "the painting is done without volition on their part,

¹⁴ Rebecca West, 'Hands That War: The Cordite Makers', in *The Young Rebecca*, ed. by Marcus, pp. 380-383 (p. 381).

¹⁵ Tim Armstrong, *Modernism, Technology and the Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 187.

¹⁶ Armstrong, p. 188.

that their hands are guided by “spirits”, or by some mysterious agency over which they have little or no control”, is itself troubling’.¹⁷ Both *Henry James* and *The Return of the Soldier* share the sense that the technological context of modernity places a heightened emphasis on the agency of the hand in the creative process. Pound sees in the automatic hand the potential for a new form of creative agency which transcends the perceived limitations of consciousness. By contrast, *Henry James* and *The Return of the Soldier* exploit West’s sense that hands that war made tactile volition a significant factor in the challenge that modernity posed to existing assumptions about creative agency.

In the first section of this chapter, I explore how West’s depictions of hands attempting to negotiate the built environment in *Henry James* express the artistic practice outlined in James’ ‘house of fiction’ metaphor. West imagines instances in which the writer applies feeble tactile pressure to features of the built environment as part of her accusation that James’ writing is lacking in intellectual sensitivity. By situating this imagery in relation to West’s contemporary journalism on the wartime literary scene, I will demonstrate that this criticism of James is influenced by her belief that the war necessitated a commitment to tactile forms of thinking. James’ tactile practices show him to be an artist who fails to “feel” an idea. Nevertheless, West’s depictions of James’ tactile activities enable her to elaborate her subtle criticism of the writer’s artistic principles. By tying James’ manner of thinking to metaphors of tactile pressure in the built environment, she “embodies” James’ emphasis on the will of the individual artist. West suggests that the writer’s theory of fictional composition results in an unstable disposition and disorienting way of thinking about the world by emphasising the feeble impact of James’ tactile appreciations of the Roman Theatre at Arles. This section demonstrates that West’s portrayals of touch in *Henry James* are

¹⁷ Ibid.

conditioned by her ideas about the connections between fictional composition and tactile modes of thinking necessitated by the war.

In the second section of this chapter, I examine how representations of manual activities in *The Return of the Soldier* form part of the system of aesthetic maintenance and appreciation which configures the domestic space of Baldry Court. West's portrayals of hands in this novel demarcate Jenny's and Chris's commitment to the artistic activities which Thorstein Veblen – in *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions* (1899) – identifies in the beautiful homes of the leisure class. *The Return of the Soldier* specifically interrogates the extent to which pressing hands disrupt the artistic processes of the house by subtly drawing attention to the fragility flagged up by tactile relations with the interior of Baldry Court. West's depictions of disruptive tactile pressures in *The Return of the Soldier* refer to the disturbing impact that manual activities initiated by munitions factories had on conceptions of artistic practice associated with the domestic space. I read her novel alongside the post-war fiction of D.H. Lawrence, which suggests that the tactile conditions of the war opened up transcendent forms of subjectivity. By contrast, this section demonstrates that the tactile environments of *The Return of the Soldier* exploit the ways in which the war created subversive forms of subjectivity.

II. Feeling the 'house of fiction' in *Henry James*

In *Henry James*, West conducts an astute survey of the breadth of James' oeuvre with a word-limit that forced her to be succinct. In a letter accompanying the copy of *Henry James* West sent to Arnold Bennett, she asked him to 'remember how hampered I was by lack of space'.¹⁸ In spite of the critic's complaints about the lack of space she

¹⁸ West, quoted in Rollyson, *The Literary Legacy of Rebecca West*, p. 18.

had to write about James, she evokes a variety of built spaces as part of her critical approach.

James' responses to the built environment frequently inform West's critical assessments of his work. Though West is mainly positive about James' writing, the inadequacies she perceives are often put down to his poor understanding of the past. In her assessment of *A Passionate Pilgrim* (1871), she quotes Clement Searle's expressed 'love of old forms and pleasant rites [...] [in a] world all hard lines and harsh lights' (*HJ* 26). West claims that in this passage 'you have the first statement of the persistent illusion, to which he was helped by his odd lack of the historic sense and which confused his estimate of modern life, that the past would have been a happier home for those who like himself loved fastidious living' (*HJ* 27). This 'lack of the historic sense', claims West, is illustrated by James' misunderstanding of the built environment: 'He had a tremendous sense of the thing that is and none at all of the thing that has been, and thus he was always being misled by such lovely shells of the past as Hampton Court into the belief that the past which inhabited them was as lovely' (*HJ* 27).

Aside from illustrating James' lack of historic sense, West refers to architecture in order to accuse James of misunderstanding the English, to describe the experience of reading his work and to emphasise its significance to his ideas about fictional practice. She argues that in *A Passionate Pilgrim* (1871), a novella focusing on the contrast between the Old World and the New, James mistakes the atmosphere of English church interiors as a symbol of a serene religious past. She notes that 'the calm of Canterbury Close appeared to him as a remnant of a time when all England, bowed before the Church, was calm; whereas the calm is really a modern condition brought about when the Church ceased to have anything to do with England' (*HJ* 27). In her analysis of *Lady Barbarina* (1884), 'which tells how a peer's daughter who marries an American millionaire refuses to live in America', West suggests that James wrongly equates

English architecture with English character (*HJ* 49). She argues that ‘we suspect Mr James of taking English architecture as an index of English character; he had still to grasp the paradox that the people who live in the solidities of Grosvenor Square are the best colonising and seafaring stock in the world’ (*HJ* 49-50). Though generally positive about *The Princess Casamassima* (1886), a novel about a young Londoner embroiled in radical politics and terrorist plotting, she nonetheless claims that the book’s ‘incidents and persons’ are ‘disconcertingly mere portals’ (*HJ* 75). Attempting to describe her experience of reading the book, she writes that ‘it is as though in a mad dream one found oneself passing through the arch in the mellow redness of Hampton Court and straightway emerged on the colonnade of St Paul’s, through whose little swing-doors one surprisingly stepped to the prim front of Kensington Palace’ (*HJ* 75). Underlying these references to buildings is West’s awareness of the importance of architecture to James’ statements about his fictional methods. She argues that *Washington Square* (1881), a novel about the ‘provincial life which went on behind the brown stone of old New York’ (*HJ* 55), is ‘evoked according to Turgenev’s method of calling his novels out of the inchoate real world’ (*HJ* 56-57). West illustrates this by quoting James’ description of this method in the ‘Preface’ to *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881): ‘I see [people] come together, I see them *placed*, I see them engaged in this or that act and in this or that difficulty. How they look and move and speak and behave, always in the setting I have found for them, is my account of them – of which I dare say, alas, *que cela manqué souvent d’architecture* [it often lacked architecture]...’ (*HJ* 58 Emphasis in original).

West specifically links James’ apparently distorted ‘historic sense’ to his tactile appreciations of the built environment (*HJ* 27). Assessing James’ travel book *A Little Tour in France* (1884), she laments that James ‘failed to envisage the Roman Empire save as a source of agreeable ruins [...] [whose] vastness did not impress him as the

merging-point of the geological record and history, but stirred in him that benevolence which is often aroused by clumsy largeness' (*HJ* 61). She claims that this 'benevolence' is exemplified by the manner in which James 'patted the Roman theatre at Arles as though it were a Jumbo at the Zoo' (*HJ* 61-62). Most obviously, this metaphor of superficial contact between James' fingers and the architectural ruins at Arles aims to express his failure to intellectually grasp their significance as the 'merging-point of the geological record and history' (*HJ* 61).

More specifically, West's choice of tactile analogy reinforces her accusation that James lacks intellectual sensitivity. Discussing Galen's founding contribution to hand metaphors in *On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body* (c. 130-200), Katherine Rowe points out in her fascinating introduction to *Dead Hands: Fictions of Agency, Renaissance to Modern* (2000) that 'the hand is linked by analogy as well as physiology to the faculty of reason: it is the instrument of reason and its material counterpart'.¹⁹ In *Henry James*, the superficial tactile pressure implied by James' 'pat[ting] [of] the Roman Theatre at Arles' (*HJ* 61-62) instead functions as an analogy for the writer's supposedly blunted 'faculty of reason'.²⁰ Following the introduction of this tactile metaphor, West explicitly draws attention to the inaccuracy of James' response to the Roman Theatre by reminding the reader of his conclusion that 'the pavement of coloured marble "gives an idea of the *elegance* of the interior"' (*HJ* 62 Emphasis in original). Tactile metaphors are used throughout to suggest that James' intellect is unable to grasp the complexities of the past.

In addition, these metaphors elaborate West's accusation that his approach to art hinders an effective comprehension of those in the present. Claiming that the middle-

¹⁹ Katherine Rowe, *Dead Hands: Fictions of Agency, Renaissance to Modern* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 5.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

aged James came to the ‘opinion that the artist should use his fancy work to decorate useful articles’, she imagines him saying:

I see them often enough in the shop-windows – the moral and philosophical problems so prodigiously produced by my age – and many times have tried the door, but to my touch it never opens, so I have to describe them as I see them through the glass, without having felt or known them with the intimacy of possession. (*HJ* 82-83)

West’s portrayal of James patting the ruins at Arles stresses his inability to grasp the significance of the Roman age. Imagining James’ futile attempts to push open the door of an imaginary building, her tactile metaphor now suggests that his approach to art cannot comprehend ‘the moral and philosophical problems so prodigiously produced by my age’ (*HJ* 83). According to West, the artist must “‘feel” an idea with the sensitive finger-tips of affection’ (*HJ* 53).

The connection that West makes between James’ lack of tactile intimacy and his intellectual insensitivity can be understood in relation to her contemporary belief in the tactile forms of thinking necessitated by the war. In ‘The Duty of Harsh Criticism’, published in *The New Republic* on 7 November 1914, she argues that in spite of the physical horrors threatened by the war ‘we shall not be safe if we forget the things of the mind’.²¹ If humanity is to save itself from these horrors, West argues that:

the mind must lead a more athletic life than it has ever done before, and must more passionately than ever practise and rejoice in art. For only through art can we cultivate annoyance with inessentials, powerful and exasperated reactions

²¹ Rebecca West, ‘The Duty of Harsh Criticism’, *The New Republic*, 7 November 1914, pp. 18-20 (p. 18). <<http://unz.org>> [accessed 19 July 2017].

against ugliness, a ravenous appetite for beauty; and these are the true guardians of the soul.²²

The same sentiment is articulated in 'The Novel of Ideas', published in *The New Republic* on 20 November 1915, in which she attempts to defend H.G. Wells' book *The Research Magnificent* (1915) against the hostile reception it received from literary critics. Claiming that the book 'has inspired the young to demand clear thinking and intellectual passion from the governing classes'²³, she argues that critics who have failed to appreciate this are guided by the 'dogma that ideas have no place in a novel'.²⁴ West ironically points out that the book's outline of 'a place of beauty where we can satisfy the human instinct of high endeavours' is 'revealed to us by the despised attribute, the intellect, which we are told should be taken from the hot grasp of the artist and left to the cold hands of the professor'.²⁵ By distinguishing the 'hot grasp of the artist' from the 'cold hands of the professor', West makes plain that the role of the artist must be to handle and seize hold of ideas passionately rather than abstractly.²⁶ In *Henry James*, she clearly feels that the writer's approach to fiction has more of the 'cold hands' about it than the 'hot grasp'.²⁷ James' passionless detachment is highlighted by his 'touch [...] [which] never opens' (*HJ* 83). Expressed using imagery of tactile pressure and passion which echoes her earlier articles, she indicates that James' approach to fiction is symptomatic of the contemporary critical attitudes toward ideas that she condemns.

Placed in the context of the tactile thinking advocated by West in her wartime journalism, *Henry James* further explores the ways in which James' manual activities

²² Ibid.

²³ Rebecca West, 'The Novel of Ideas', *The New Republic*, 20 November 1915, pp. 3-6 (p. 3). <<http://unz.org/>> [accessed 19 July 2017].

²⁴ West, 'The Novel of Ideas', p. 4.

²⁵ West, 'The Novel of Ideas', p. 6.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

call into question the writer's theory of fictional composition. Metaphors of tactile pressure in the built environment specifically establish a broader link between James' tactile and artistic practice. Also highlighting the striking metaphor of the 'sensitive finger-tips of affection' (HJ 53) in his study of *The Literary Legacy of Rebecca West*, Rollyson argues that this emphasises West's call 'for an attachment to ideas as passionate as what the majority of people reserve for personal relationships'.²⁸ In *Rebecca West's Subversive Use of Hybrid Genres, 1911-41*, Cowan addresses the issues attached to West's depiction of touch when she quotes West's claim that 'the profound truth that an artist should feel passion for his subject was naturally distasteful to one who wanted to live wholly without violence even of the emotions; a preference for passionless detachment was at that date the mode' (HJ 52). Cowan argues that West consciously 'enters into modernist literary debates' about impersonality and points out that T.S. Eliot's theory of the same would appear only three years later in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (1919).²⁹ In that essay, as Eugene Goodheart notes in *Modernism and the Critical Spirit* (1978), 'Eliot's tradition is an abstraction in which individual talent has lost all personality and become a mere catalyst'.³⁰ Indeed, West's image of James abstractedly patting the architecture at Arles resembles Eliot's claim that 'it is not the "greatness", the intensity, of the emotions, the components, but the intensity of the artistic process, the pressure, so to speak, under which the fusion takes place, that counts'.³¹ Notwithstanding the suggestive correspondence between West's metaphors in *Henry James* and Eliot's in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', it is important to remember that her critical study was published three years before Eliot's essay. Indeed, it seems even more plausible that West's metaphors of tactile pressure in the built

²⁸ Carl Rollyson, *The Literary Legacy of Rebecca West* (Lincoln, NE: iUniverse, 1998), p. 18.

²⁹ Cowan, *Rebecca West's Subversive Use of Hybrid Genres, 1911-1941*, p. 16.

³⁰ Eugene Goodheart, *Modernism and the Critical Spirit* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2000), p. 77.

³¹ T.S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', in *The Waste Land and Other Poems*, ed. by Joseph Black; Leonard Conolly; Kate Flint; Isobel Grundy; Don LePan; Roy Liuzza; Jerome J. McGann; Anne Lake Prescott; Barry V. Qualls; Claire Waters (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2011), pp. 84-92 (p. 89).

environment are constructed as an elaboration and critique of James' own ideas about 'the pressure of the individual will' in his earlier conception of the 'house of fiction'.³²

Analysing James' famous metaphor in *Literary Architecture: Essays Toward a Tradition* (1983), Ellen Eve Frank posits that 'it does not seem sufficient [...] to see James' architectural structures only as social symbols [...] or as psychological indices [...]: these structures refer, more importantly, to James' theory and practice of fiction-making'.³³ West's depictions of James' tactile pressure in the built environment in *Henry James* aim to elaborate the artistic 'practice of fiction-making' that he outlines in his famous metaphor of the house of fiction.³⁴ Published in his Preface to the 1908 edition of *The Portrait of a Lady*, James uses this striking architectural analogy to outline the nature of the artist's vision.³⁵ Characterising this vision as a description seen 'through the glass' (*HJ* 83), West invokes James' claim that 'the house of fiction has in short not one window, but a million – a number of possible windows not to be reckoned, rather; every one of which has been pierced, or is still pierceable, in its vast front, by the need of the individual vision and by the pressure of the individual will'.³⁶ She may have been influenced here by H.G. Wells' *Boon*, published in 1915, which features an equally mocking portrayal of James approaching his house of fiction:

And the chapter, the long, unresting, progressing chapter, expands and expands; it never jumps you forward, it never lets you off, you can't skip and you can't escape, until there comes at last a culminating distension of statement in which you realise more and more clearly, until you realise it with the unforgettable

³² Henry James, 'Preface', in *The Portrait of a Lady*, Vol. 1 (London: MacMillan and Co., 1921), pp. v-xxiv (p. xi) <<https://archive.org/>> [accessed 19 July 2017].

³³ Ellen Eve Frank, *Literary Architecture: Essays Toward a Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), p. 209.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ James, p. xi.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

certainty of a thing long fought for and won at last, that Mr. Blandish [James] has actually come upon the house.³⁷

Dorothy J. Hale draws attention to the passionless detachment characterising the house of fiction metaphor in *Social Formalism: The Novel in Theory from Henry James to the Present* (1998): '[the only thing] 'distinguish[ing] one viewer from another in the house of fiction is the "need" and "pressure" of the "individual will". No viewing position is privileged; no window offers a more accurate or more preferable understanding of life than another'.³⁸ Positioning the writer in front of her house of fiction, West's portrayal of James' 'touch [which] never opens' up 'the moral and philosophical problems so prodigiously produced by my age' captures this relativity of perspective (*HJ* 83). Moreover, James' refusal to privilege or commit to one 'viewing position'³⁹ in depth is referred to when she has the writer say 'I have to describe them as I see them through the glass, without having felt or known them with the intimacy of possession' (*HJ* 83).

In this way, West suggests that James' tactile practice expresses the principles that guide his aesthetic practice. We might read the principles of fiction-making outlined by James in his metaphor of the 'house of fiction' as an expression of his artistic habitus, using Bourdieu's term for 'systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures'.⁴⁰ Indeed, her attempt to elaborate this through her emphasis on 'the dialectical relationship between the body and a space' conforms to what Bourdieu notes is 'the form par excellence of the structural apprenticeship which leads to the embodying of the structures of the world'.⁴¹ It is important to note here that despite West's rather cruel depiction of James'

³⁷ H.G. Wells, *Boon* (London: T. Fisher Unwin Limited, 1920), p. 105 <<https://archive.org/>> [accessed 19 July 2017].

³⁸ Dorothy J. Hale, *Social Formalism: The Novel in Theory from Henry James to the Present* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 25.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Bourdieu, p. 72.

⁴¹ Bourdieu, p. 89.

tactile interaction with the architecture at Arles, the writer's own account of this trip in *A Little Tour of France* contains no mention of him actually touching the ruins. By embodying James' relationships with buildings through her tactile metaphors, West suggests that the artistic insensitivity highlighted by James' superficial sense of touch – he 'pat[s] the Roman Theatre at Arles' (*HJ* 61-62) and has a 'touch [which] never opens' (*HJ* 83) – constitutes 'bodily hexis': his aesthetic habitus 'realized, embodied, turned into a permanent disposition, a durable manner of standing, speaking, and thereby of *feeling* and *thinking*'.⁴² By the same token, West's metaphors of feeble tactile pressure in *Henry James* form a part of her attempt to undermine this 'permanent disposition'.⁴³

The association that West makes between the actions of James' hands and his theory of fictional composition signal the increasing significance she accorded to the sense of touch following the outbreak of the war. The artistic flaws flagged up by James' insensitive interactions with the built environment suggestively intersect with Scott's theories in *The Architecture of Humanism*, introduced at the beginning of this chapter. In opposition to what he terms as the 'fallacy'⁴⁴ of romantic, mechanical, ethical and biological theories of architecture, Scott argues that 'architecture must be perceived sensitively but simply; the "theories" of the art have blunted sensitive perception without achieving intellectual force'.⁴⁵ In *Henry James*, West draws attention to the ways in which James' 'blunted sensitive perception' elaborate a theory of aesthetic practice blighted by a lack of 'intellectual force'.⁴⁶ The connections that West establishes between James' tactile and intellectual insensitivity reinforce the repeated link that she delineates between tactile intimacy and intellectual incisiveness in her wartime journalism. In *Henry James*, however, West more ambitiously uses metaphors

⁴² Bourdieu, p. 93. Emphasis in original.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Scott, *The Architecture of Humanism*, [Front Matter].

⁴⁵ Scott, *The Architecture of Humanism*, p. 239.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

of touch to express and call into question the principles that inform James' theory of fiction.

Configured in opposition to West's contemporary connection between tactile/intellectual dexterousness, the flaws of James' theory of fictional composition in *Henry James* are characterised by tactile/intellectual insensitivity. Notwithstanding this apparently clear demarcation, the critic elsewhere acknowledges that the forms of embodied intimacy initiated by the war's technological conditions call this into question. In 'Reading Henry James in Wartime', published in *The New Republic* on 27 February 1915, she reviews James' late work of literary criticism *Notes on Novelists* (1915). West initially stresses that she 'had once felt it as an alienating quality of Mr. James' genius that his work showed an inhuman incapacity for enthusiasm, that he disliked and refused causes as coolly as other people dislike and refuse seed-cake'.⁴⁷ She goes on to suggest that this assessment of James had been altered by the experience of reading the writer in a basement during an air raid:

As the throb of the Zeppelin returned and I knew again the helpless rage of the non-combatant, the sick fear of instant death, I realized that enthusiasm was not so necessarily divine as I had thought. For those murderers by intent who were circling above my head in an attempt to locate the lightless town for purposes of butchery were probably burning with as pure and exalted a passion as they could conceive. This war has shown that every warm passion – loyalty, patriotism, ambition – can be perverted to obscene uses.⁴⁸

Here, she suggests that the hostile bodily actions enabled by the war disrupt her assessment of James' lack of intellectual passion: 'this war has shown that every warm

⁴⁷ Rebecca West, 'Reading Henry James in Wartime', *The New Republic*, 27 February 1915, pp. 98-100 (p. 100) <<http://unz.org/>> [accessed 19 July 2017].

⁴⁸ Ibid.

passion – loyalty, patriotism, ambition – can be perverted to obscene uses’.⁴⁹ In *Henry James*, she is adamant that a lack of bodily intimacy feeds into the flaws of James’ theory of composition. In this earlier article, however, West acknowledges that the ‘obscene uses’ of the body unleashed by the war could also complicate her emphasis on the importance of “feeling” ideas in art.⁵⁰ In *The Return of the Soldier*, she specifically draws attention to ‘obscene uses’ of the body which subvert conceptions of aesthetic processes associated with the domestic space.⁵¹

III. Handling the ‘house beautiful’ in *The Return of the Soldier*

The Return of the Soldier recounts the return of Chris Baldry, a shell-shocked soldier of the First World War, to his secluded country home at Baldry Court, Harrow Weald. Narrated from the perspective of his cousin Jenny, the novel charts how Chris’ shell-shock has induced amnesia which has suspended his memory of the previous fifteen years. Unable to fully recognise his upper-class wife, Kitty, Chris instead rekindles a love-affair with the working-class Margaret Allington and takes comfort in memories of his boyhood life at Baldry Court before his marriage.

Tactile relations with architectural space are crucial to the novel’s key thematic exploration of psychological trauma, inter-class relationships and class antagonism. One passage in *The Return of the Soldier* illustrates the therapeutic importance of Chris’ ability to handle the interior of Baldry Court: ‘Dipping his head he would glance sideways at the old oak panelling; and nearer things he fingered as though sight were not intimate enough a contact, his hand caressed the arm of his chair, because he remembered the black gleam of it, stole out and touched the recollected saltcellar’ (RS 67). As well as Baldry Court, Chris and Margaret speak of Monkey Island at Bray ‘as

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

though it were not a place, but a magic state which largely explained the actions performed in it' (*RS* 84). The Island functions as a kind of heterotopic space in which the aristocratic Chris can pursue a romance with Margaret, daughter of the landlord at Monkey Island Inn. Inside the Inn, the strength of Margaret's love for Chris spills over into a heightened tactile appreciation of the built environment: 'they went into the bar and drank milk, while she walked about fingering familiar things with an absurd expression of exaltation, as though that day she was fond of everything, even the handles of the beer engine' (*RS* 77-78). Jenny's descriptions of spatial boundaries at Baldry Court and 'Mariposa', Margaret's home in Wealdstone, highlight her belief that the lower orders of society are uncouth while the higher orders are refined (*RS* 80). 'The front garden' at Mariposa 'seemed to be imperfectly reclaimed from the greasy field' (*RS* 80). Conversely, the border of 'snowdrops and scillas and crocuses [...] that runs between the drive and the tangle of silver birch and bramble and fern' at Baldry Court 'proclaims that here we estimate only controlled beauty, that the wild will not have its way within our gates (*RS* 89-90). Jenny's fear that the 'wild' (*RS* 90) figure of Margaret threatens to undermine the controlled beauty of Baldry Court is palpable in her description of 'this woman who butted like a clumsy animal at a gate she was not intelligent enough to open' (*RS* 56).

Chris' wife Kitty and his cousin Jenny respond to the domestic upheaval caused by his departure to – and return from – the Western Front by attempting to shore up their positions within the domestic space. Jenny Baldry, the novel's narrator, states that the uncertainty created by the soldier's departure and return lead the inhabitants of Baldry Court to take solace in their contribution to the beautification of the building's spaces, surfaces and objects. Following Chris' posting to the Western Front, she had 'tried to build about [her] such a little globe of ease' and think 'of all that remained good in [their] lives though Chris had gone' (*RS* 49). Moreover, she claims that: 'By the

contriving of these gardens that lay, well-kept as a woman's hand, on the south side of the hill, Kitty and I had proved ourselves worthy of the past generation that had set the old house on this sunny ledge, overhanging and overhung by beauty' (RS 49).

Throughout the novel, West repeatedly draws attention to the ways in which characters' attempts to shore up their position within the home is bound up with their intimate tactile responses to the built environment. Jenny comfortingly relates that:

I could send my mind creeping from room to room like a purring cat, rubbing itself against all the brittle beautiful things that we had either recovered from antiquity or dug from the obscure pits of modern craftsmanship, basking in the colour that glowed from all our solemnly chosen fabrics with such pure intensity that it seemed to shed warmth like sunshine. (RS 49)

Alternatively, the war-ravaged Chris 'with both his hands' feels 'the old wood and st[ands] humming happily through his teeth' (RS 64). In *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*, Juhani Pallasmaa argues that 'there is a strong identity between naked skin and the sensation of home. The experience of home is essentially an experience of intimate warmth'.⁵² In West's novel, the sheer variety of intimate tactile appreciations described seem to bear this out: hands intimately 'finger', 'caress' and 'glide' (RS 67) over the surfaces of the property, while the thoughts of characters 'rub' (RS 49), 'brush' (RS 59) and 'butt' against them (RS 56).

A real-life architectural model for Baldry Court has never previously been proposed in the numerous scholarly discussions of *The Return of the Soldier*. In my reading, West's descriptions of Baldry Court and its surrounding environment strongly suggest that she based it on Grim's Dyke house in Harrow Weald, North London (see Fig. 3 below). A 'Tudor-Style house [...] designed by Norman Shaw in about 1870 for the painter Frederick Goodall', Grim's Dyke 'took its name from the original Grimes

⁵² Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*, p. 63.

Dike that ran from Harrow Weald Common to the edges of Pinner'.⁵³ Though the novel's descriptions of Baldry Court lack any reference to Grim's Dyke, a reference to the nearby Grimes Dike earthwork does occur during Jenny's walk in the grounds of the house when she says: 'I found a stream in the fields and followed it till it became a shining dyke embanked with glowing green and gold mosses in the midst of woods' (RS 95). Bonnie Kime Scott records in her chronology for *The Selected Letters of Rebecca West* (2000) that between 1914 and 1917 West lived a mere twenty-minute walk away from Grim's Dyke at "Quinbury", Alderton, Royston Park Road, Hatch End'.⁵⁴ It is therefore likely that she was aware of the house either before or during the composition of *The Return of the Soldier*.



Fig. 3: 'Grim's Dyke House', Harrow Weald, London <http://www.wikiwand.com/en/Grim's_Dyke> [accessed 9 March 2017].

More significant than the architectural style or topographical features of Grim's Dyke, however, is West's engagement with the house's connections to theatrical performance. Jenny's remark that Margaret Allington 'butted like a clumsy animal at a

⁵³ Michael Ainger, *Gilbert and Sullivan: A Dual Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 320.

⁵⁴ Bonnie Kime Scott, *The Selected Letters of Rebecca West* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), p. xxv.

gate she was not intelligent enough to open' highlights her class prejudice (*RS* 56). More specifically, the narrator's use of spatial metaphor here reveals her sense of the gender and class 'hierarchies' set up between things, persons, and practices' at Baldry Court which, according to Bourdieu, govern the 'inhabited space – and above all the house'.⁵⁵ Jenny wishes that 'this queer ugly episode' 'would dissolve and be replaced by some more pleasing composition in which we would take our proper parts' (*RS* 56). Here, West's reference to playing parts may draw inspiration from Grim's Dyke's most famous owner, the dramatist W.S. Gilbert, who lived in the house until his death in 1911.⁵⁶ In addition to highlighting Baldry Court's configuration around strict distinctions between social roles, West also draws upon the theatrical associations of Grim's Dyke to draw attention to its hierarchy of gender roles: 'It had lain on us, as the responsibility that gave us dignity, to compensate him for his lack of free adventure by arranging him a gracious life. But now, just because our performance had been so brilliantly adequate, how dreary was the empty stage....' (*RS* 52). Indeed, Jenny makes it clear that the inhabitants of Baldry Court will be criticised for failing to perform their 'proper parts' (*RS* 56). When Chris, unaware of the new steps added to the hall of house, 'stumble[s]', he is criticised by his wife: 'Kitty knitted her brows, for she hates gracelessness and a failure of physical adjustment is the worst indignity she can conceive' (*RS* 66).

Kitty's belief that 'a failure of physical adjustment is the worst indignity she can conceive' indicates that the domestic space of Baldry Court is configured around prescribed gender roles (*RS* 66). Within this structure, the inhabitants' tactile practices specifically demarcate their observance of a gendered system of aesthetic activities. At the outset of the novel, Jenny's remark that the architects had 'massaged the dear old

⁵⁵ Bourdieu, p. 89.

⁵⁶ Ainger notes in his dual biography of the dramatist and his artistic collaborator Arthur Sullivan, Gilbert (whose wife like Chris' was named Kitty) penned many of his librettos here – including 'a children's version of *The Mikado*'. See *Gilbert and Sullivan: A Dual Biography*, p. 423.

place into matter for innumerable photographs in the illustrated papers' emphasises a link between the sense of touch and the act of domestic beautification (RS 48). In *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study in the Evolution of Institutions*, Thorstein Veblen argued that 'in all grades and walks of life, and at any stage of the economic development, the leisure of the lady and of the lackey differs from the leisure of the gentleman in his own right in that it is an occupation of an ostensibly laborious kind'.⁵⁷ Within the domestic space, argued Veblen, this distinction is revealed by gendered differences in aesthetic practice. For women, leisure 'takes the form, in large measure, of a painstaking attention to the service of the master, or to the maintenance and elaboration of the household paraphernalia; so that it is leisure only in the sense that little or no productive work is performed by this class, not in the sense that all appearance of labour is avoided by them'.⁵⁸ In *The Return of the Soldier*, Jenny's tactile consciousness lovingly demarcates her commitment to 'the maintenance and elaboration of the household paraphernalia'.⁵⁹ 'Creeping from room to room like a purring cat' (RS 49), Jenny's mind goes 'rubbing itself against all the brittle beautiful things that [they] had either recovered from antiquity or dug from the obscure pits of modern craftsmanship' (RS 49). Jenny's sense of touch highlights her conversance in Baldry Court's system of aesthetic practice. In doing so, West's depiction of tactile engagement with built space anticipates Merleau-Ponty's later theory that the home 'remains a familiar domain round about me only as long as I still have 'in my hands' or 'in my legs' the main distances and directions involved, and as long as from my body intentional threads run out towards it'.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, ed. by Martha Banta (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 42.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 150.

Judging by the advertisements which surround *The Return of the Soldier* in the February and March issues of *The Century* magazine, this system of domestic leisure was still very much the norm during the war. In the February number an advert for 'House and Garden' magazine (see Fig. 4 below) promises readers: 'What *Vogue* has done for women of taste and discernment in matters of dress and accessories, *House and Garden* will do for you in matters of interior decoration, architecture, and the planning of your garden and grounds in a decorative yet thoroughly practical way'.⁶¹ In the March issue, meanwhile, an advert for 'The Hampton Shops: A Storehouse of Beauty' (see Fig. 5 below) promises to provide women with 'expert knowledge' which 'devises and carries out the most elaborate or decorative schemes'.⁶² Veblen emphasised that the continuance and value of such activities depended upon the aesthetic enjoyment that they provide to the man of the house: 'So far as these services conduce to the physical efficiency or comfort of the master or the rest of the household, they are to be accounted productive work'.⁶³ In *The Return of the Soldier*, Chris's intimate tactile traversals around the interior of Baldry Court seem to demonstrate this: 'his hand caressed the arm of his chair, because he remembered the black gleam of it, stole out and touched the recollected saltcellar' (RS 67).

⁶¹ Advertisement, 'House and Garden', *The Century*, February 1918, p. 46. My Emphasis.

⁶² Advertisement, 'The Hampton Shops: A Storehouse of Beauty', *The Century*, March 1918, p. 28.

⁶³ Veblen, p. 42.

In other seasons, perhaps, you could waste some money experimenting in your house, your garden. Not now! This year you must get every penny of value from every dollar you spend. Save yourself money; save yourself against costly mistakes, by consulting the experts of House & Garden.



Illustration from House & Garden: Such charming house fixtures as these are shown in every issue, and, if you wish, may actually be bought for your own home.

House & Garden

What Vogue has done for women of taste and discernment in matters of dress and accessories, House & Garden will do for you in matters of interior decoration, architecture, and the planning of your garden and grounds in a decorative yet thoroughly practical way.

Everything that goes into a garden is in House & Garden; its Spring Gardening, Spring Furnishing, and Garden Furnishing Numbers start the summer's work for you.

Everything that goes into the gracious and charming home is also in House & Garden; its New Furniture, House Building and Interior Decoration Numbers show you just what to do, how to do it, and—best of all, perhaps—just how it looks in other charming homes where it has been done.

HOUSE & GARDEN is a practical help to the home maker, a scientific economist on house expenditures, a final authority on the thousand and one problems of house building, furnishing, gardening, sanitation and the like, which at one time or another puzzle the owner of every house.

\$2 Invested in House & Garden
A tiny fraction of your loss on a single ill-chosen chair
Will Save You \$200

House mistakes are often very costly. You need the advice of experts in every important house expenditure. Hundreds of dollars—often thousands—may depend on a single decision and expert advice will be invaluable. May we, therefore, suggest that you take advantage of our special offer and plan your house expenditure this year with the help of House & Garden.

Special Offer—Nine Issues for \$2
Ten if you respond promptly

If you care to make your own house smart, distinguished, and representative of your personal taste, you will want to take advantage of our special offer of nine issues of House & Garden for \$2—ten, if you send the coupon now. Send no money now unless you wish to—but mail the coupon today.

HOUSE & GARDEN 10 West 44th St. New York City

Fig. 4: 'House & Garden', *The Century*, February 1918, p. 46.

The Hampton Shops A Storehouse of Beauty

MARVELOUS is a storehouse of all that helps make the home of today an abode of grace and beauty, the Hampton Shops offers even more.

The furniture, each piece distinguished by its remarkable finish, the soft and harmonious tones, the delicate porcelains and wrought metal-ware, the brilliant glass-ware and glowing pictures, all are selections of that expert knowledge which not only arranges them in a pleasing series of suggestive groupings, but creates and carries out the most elaborate of decorative schemes.

Hampton Shops
of Fine Furnishings
Selling in PARTNER'S Cathedral
CHURCH

Decorations Objets d'Art Furniture




Fig. 5: 'The Hampton Shops: A Storehouse of Beauty', *The Century*, March 1918, p. 28.

Although the intimate tactile practices of Baldry Court demarcate the gendered leisure customs which maintain the ‘house beautiful’, West’s depiction of touch call the efficacy of this system into question. On the surface, the feline ‘rubbing’ of Jenny’s thoughts elicited by the ‘beautiful things’ inside Baldry Court express her determination to bask in the ‘pure intensity’ given off by the objects that she and Kitty have arranged within the domestic space (RS 49). Jenny’s tactile relations with the domestic interior configure her acts of domestic beautification as ‘bodily hexis’: her aesthetic practice ‘realized, embodied, turned into a permanent disposition, a durable manner of standing, speaking, and thereby of *feeling* and *thinking*’.⁶⁴ Yet, in highlighting that these objects are also ‘brittle’, Jenny’s tactile traversals subtly cast doubt on the sustainability of these activities (RS 49). Jenny’s tactile interaction with the built environment recalls Scott’s idea in *The Architecture of Humanism* that ‘any unlooked-for failure of resistance in tangible objects defeats the vital confidence of the body; and if this were not already obvious, the pervasive physical disquiet which the mildest tremor or earthquake is sufficient to excite, might show how deeply organised in our nature is our reliance upon the elementary stability of mass’.⁶⁵ Correspondingly, Jenny’s rubbing against the ‘brittle beautiful things’ (RS 49) that she and Kitty have amassed in the house suggests a ‘failure of resistance’.⁶⁶ Rather than expressing the viability of her leisurely disposition, Jenny’s intimate tactile appreciations unsettle it. Here, West’s construction of tactility foreshadows the ‘law of touching’ outlined by Jean-Luc Nancy in *Being Singular Plural* (1996): ‘there is proximity, but only to the extent that it emphasizes the distancing it opens up’.⁶⁷ Equally disturbing are Chris’ intimate tactile appreciations. Jenny’s remark that ‘the nearer things he fingered as if sight were not intimate enough a contact’ masks the fact that the soldier’s amnesia restricts his

⁶⁴ Bourdieu, pp. 93-94. Emphasis in original.

⁶⁵ Scott, *The Architecture of Humanism*, p. 230.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Nancy, p. 5.

appreciations of sections of Baldry Court which date from before the improvements put into place by Kitty and Jenny (RS 67). Rather than feeling the ‘brittle beautiful things’ (RS 49) purchased by Kitty and Jenny, Chris looks to the ‘old oak panelling’ (RS 67). Related to this, Jenny indicates that Chris’s tactile traversals call into question rather than validate their artistic efforts in the house: ‘It was his furtiveness that was heartrending; it was as though he were an outcast and we who loved him stout policeman’ (RS 67).

Read in relation to West’s journalism of the early 1910s, her depictions of tactile habits in *The Return of the Soldier* can be interpreted as a subtle criticism of the shallowness that she found in this gendered system of domestic beautification. In ‘Cause of Women’s Restlessness: Suffragist’s Spirited Reply to Male Critics’, published in the *Manchester Daily Dispatch* on 23rd January 1913, West is scathing about the processes of domestic beautification adhered to by women like Jenny. She quotes the following description: ‘Rocking her child to sleep, she thinks how the flowers and the furniture should be arranged, what pattern of wallpaper would best become the room’.⁶⁸ She then comments that ‘this would be very nice if it were not that it is bad for children to be rocked asleep, that flowers take anybody but an idiot ten minutes to arrange, and that one neither changes the furniture nor re-papers a room every day, or every week, or even every month. As a programme for the occupation of all adult women it lacks depth’.⁶⁹ In her book chapter on ‘Rebecca West, Aestheticism, and the Legacy of Oscar Wilde’, Stetz has demonstrated that *The Return of the Soldier* can specifically be read both as a meditation and as an excoriation of ‘the Wildean ideal of the House Beautiful’.⁷⁰ ‘West knew even better than Wilde’, she writes, ‘[that] the creation and maintenance of domestic perfection fell to women, who rarely were

⁶⁸ Rebecca West, ‘Cause of Women’s Restlessness: Suffragist’s Spirited Reply to Male Critics’, in *The Young Rebecca*, ed. by Marcus, pp. 376-380 (p. 380).

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Stetz, pp. 160-161.

allowed other channels through which to express their sense of artistry or to feel the power of achievement fulfilled'.⁷¹

Certain critical assessments of *The Return of the Soldier* have also drawn attention to the ways in which the novel's depiction of hands directly relates to the destabilisation of existing gender hierarchies and spatial boundaries during the First World War. In 'The Lunacy of Men, the Idiocy of Women: Woolf, West and War' (2003), Marina McKay posits that in *The Return of the Soldier* 'the disembodied hand is an image that implicates women in war's horrors'.⁷² Analysing Jenny's remark that 'Kitty had come along and picked up [...] [Chris'] conception of normal expenditure and carelessly stretched it as a woman stretches a new glove on her hand' (RS 52), McKay notes that 'the hand, representative of feminine beauty and a metonym for agency itself, is an apt image to connect desire and violence, representing the collusion of women with World War I's apparently masculine cycles of destruction'.⁷³ Specifically attending to the novel's interest in tactile interactions with the built environment of Baldry Court, Garrington highlights in *Haptic Modernism* the text's connection between tactile pressure and the maintenance of social pretensions. 'Beyond the province of the manual', she posits, 'the term "manicured" is perhaps most often applied to lawns, suggesting that the massaging of Baldry Court relates to neatness, improvement and order, and contrasting in the strongest possible terms with "the brown rotteness of No Man's Land" where, in Jenny's fevered imagination, Chris steps on a severed hand in the mud of war'.⁷⁴ For Garrington, this incarnation of the hand in *The Return of the Soldier* draws attention to the fact that the inhabitants' commitment to the 'neatness, improvement and order' of Baldry Court conceal unpleasant truths: 'the manicure trope lead[s] the reader to suppose that the untended regions of Baldry Court

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Marina McKay, 'The Lunacy of Men, the Idiocy of Women: Woolf, West and War', *NWSA Journal*, 15.3 (2003), pp. 124-144, (p. 133) <muse.jhu.edu> [accessed 19 July 2017].

⁷³ McKay, p. 134.

⁷⁴ Garrington, pp. 14-15.

have a sincerity that is ill-masked by the overlay of a manicure'.⁷⁵ My reading of Jenny and Chris' intimate tactile relations with the built environment does not displace these readings. Instead, I suggest that the uneasy relationship between hands and Baldry Court's system of domestic beautification may refer to a specific environment in which women were implicated in the war's horrors.

Depictions of tactile activities which take place in the built environment of Baldry Court are alive with the same level of intimacy as those that West observed in a series of articles about munitions workers that were published while she was still writing the novel in early 1916. West's 'Hands That War' articles address the dangerous working conditions faced by female munitions workers which, as Schweizer and Charles Thorne record in their recent edition of *The Return of the Soldier*, were published in the *Daily Chronicle* between 17th February and 3rd June 1916, following tours of numerous munitions factories in Scotland and England.⁷⁶ Previous critical assessments of *The Return of the Soldier* have not explored the connection between these articles and the novel, which share its fascination with manual activities in the built environment. Whereas the appreciative hands described in *The Return of the Soldier* feel the domestic interior of Baldry Court, West's portrayal of labouring hands in the 'Hands That War' series stress their intimate relation with the workbenches of the munitions factory. In 'Hands That War I. In the Midlands', published on 17th February 1916, she observes that:

most strange and impressive was the quiet room where girls in mob caps and Holland gowns sat round a long table, like pupils of a religious community in a refectory, while a moving platform brought the shells along the middle of the

⁷⁵ Garrington, p. 15.

⁷⁶ 'Appendix C: World War I Prose', in *The Return of the Soldier*, ed. by Bernard Schweizer and Charles Thorne (Ontario: Broadview, 2010), pp. 149-171 (p. 164).

table so that the girls could apply touch after touch till it was finally filled with bullets and resin and handed over to the lacquerers.⁷⁷

West highlights in 'The Night Shift' the manual dexterity required for filling shells and fashioning fuses and that women's 'whole li[ves] [are] concentrated in their leaping hands'.⁷⁸ In *The Return of the Soldier*, Jenny's satisfied 'rubbing' against Baldry Court's 'brittle beautiful things' express her adherence to domestic processes resembling those that Veblen identified as central to the wealthy woman's position in the domestic space (RS 49). Conversely, West's description of the 'moving platform [that] brought the shells along the middle of the table so that the girls could apply touch after touch' in 'In the Midlands' marks out the workers' performance of a set of strictly prescribed factory procedures.⁷⁹

Despite these differences, her journalism foreshadows *The Return of the Soldier* in the way that it highlights regulated tactile procedures carried out in a built environment that 'defeats the vital confidence of the body'.⁸⁰ In 'The Cordite Makers', West recounts that at any moment a misplaced manual pressure could have disastrous consequences: 'the grey dust that lay on the bench in one of these huts was enough to raze great towns to the ground [...] one day a similar shop in Scotland went up in flames the moment after a robin flew in and pecked at the dust'.⁸¹ At Baldry Court, Jenny's conscious 'rubbing [...] against all the brittle beautiful things' indicates that this is a space in which manual pressure threatens to undermine the careful arrangement of the domestic interior – or at least expose the flimsiness of the endeavour (RS 49). Moreover, the novel's fascination with the potentially threatening consequences of touch also

⁷⁷ Rebecca West, 'Hands that War I. In the Midlands', Rebecca West Papers, Yale, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, GEN MSS 105, fol. 1305. This article has not previously been published in collections of West's journalism. A transcript of the article is supplied in Appendix A of this thesis.

⁷⁸ West, 'Hands That War: The Night Shift', p. 389.

⁷⁹ West, 'Hands That War I. In the Midlands', Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, GEN MSS 105, fol. 1305.

⁸⁰ Scott, *The Architecture of Humanism*, p. 230.

⁸¹ West, 'Hands That War: The Night Shift', p. 389.

frames Jenny's fear of class contamination. During her visit to Mariposa, Jenny relates that when Margaret 'came back into the parlour again she was wearing that yellowish raincoat, that hat whose hearse plumes nodded over its sticky straw, that grey alpaca skirt. I first defensively clutched my hands. It would have been such agony to the finger tips to touch any part of her apparel' (RS 83).

West's investment in the expressive potential of hands in *The Return of the Soldier* may be connected to these articles. Moreover, the emphasis that she places on the ways in which Chris and Jenny's tactile activities disrupt Baldry Court's established system of domestic beautification correspond with her thoughts about the impact of the embodied actions enforced by factory conditions. In 'The Cordite Makers', she has the uncanny sense that the dangerous activities being carried out by women new to the factory floor resemble the processes which Veblen suggested are strictly bound up in the domestic space. Noting that 'in these airy and isolated huts there is neither the orchestra of rattling machines nor the sense of a confined area crowded with tired people which make the ordinary factory such a fatiguing place', the girls working here 'look as if they were practising a neat domestic craft rather than a deadly domestic process'.⁸² West had made repeated attempts during the early 1910s to argue that the beautification of the household was a shallow occupation for women. She gleefully points out that the bodily conditions of the munitions factory dispel this illusion:

When one is made to put on rubber over-shoes before entering a hut it might be the precaution of a pernickety housewife concerned about her floors, although actually it is to prevent the grit on one's outdoor shoes igniting a stray scrap of cordite and sending oneself and the hut up to the skies in a column of flame.⁸³

⁸² West, 'Hands That War: The Cordite Makers', p. 381.

⁸³ Ibid.

As we have seen above, the tactile rubbing against the ‘brittle beautiful things’ subtly disrupts Jenny’s orientation within Baldry Court’s Veblenian system of domestic leisure (RS 49). Later on in ‘The Cordite Makers’, West suggests that it is the intimate tactile nature of the factory procedures carried out by the munitions workers which disrupts the notion that what they are carrying out is a domestic craft: ‘But how deceptive this semblance of normal life is; what extraordinary work this is for women and how extraordinarily they are doing it, is made manifest in a certain row of huts where the cordite is being pressed through wire mesh’.⁸⁴ Read alongside this article, the domestic disorientation that is flagged up by the tactile activities depicted in *The Return of the Soldier* specifically link this to the new bodily actions initiated by the First World War.

The ‘Hands That War’ series stresses the subversive consequences of female involvement in the war much more than contemporary writings about munitions workers. During the period that she published the series and was still at work on *The Return of the Soldier*, one contemporary poet fretted that the tactile intimacy involved in munitions work threatened to hinder women from carrying out their maternal responsibilities. In a poem of 1916 entitled ‘Women at Munition Making’, Mary Gabrielle Collins laments that those with ‘fingers [that] guide/ The rosy teat, swelling with milk/ To the eager mouth of the suckling babe’ are ‘coarsened in munitions factories’ and ‘bruised against the law/ to “kill”’.⁸⁵ Collins’ poem laments the damage that women’s direct contact with weapons of death does to their so-called traditional task of rearing new lives. More broadly, the entry of women into the munitions factories provoked anxieties about the increasing sense of individual agency that this work gave them. George Robb observes in his study of *British Culture and the First World War* (2014) that ‘behind the exaggerated, patriotic press accounts, there remained a hard

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Mary Gabrielle Collins, ‘Women at Munition Making’, in *Scars Upon My Heart: Women’s Poetry and Verse of the First World War*, ed. by Catherine Reilly (London: Virago Press Limited, 1981), p. 24.

reality of male prejudice against women's employment wherever it could be avoided, as well as alarm at the independence and good wages that munitions jobs gave young women'.⁸⁶ West's articles on female munitions workers celebrate the challenge that their manual labour posed to established notions of female bodily practice within the domestic space.

In response to these concerns, the Edwardian novelist and playwright Hall Caine attempted to frame the manual labour of munitions workers in terms of conventional female roles associated with the domestic space. In his book *Our Girls: Their Work for the War* (1916), Caine suggests that the manual dexterity of munitions workers was merely a transposition of their skill in winning and managing troublesome husbands into an industrial setting:

The machines themselves seem almost human in their intelligence, and, if you show a proper respect for their impetuous organisms, they are not generally cruel. So the women get along very well with them, learning all their ways, their whims, their needs and their limitations. It is surprising how speedily the women have wooed and won this new kind of male monster.⁸⁷

It is important to note that West herself was not immune to the anxieties that accompanied women taking up these new forms of embodied activity. In her article 'In the Midlands', for example, she frets about 'the girl who gave the shell the brushful of red lead that prevents premature explosions looked so young as she mixed this stuff that was like blood; and it was dreadful to see a child that it would be a gross over-statement to call small – a mere pinch of little girl that could fairly be taken between the thumb and forefinger – dipping her curls as she bent to add her touch to the instrument of

⁸⁶ George Robb, *British Culture and the First World War* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 69.

⁸⁷ Hall Caine, *Our Girls: Their Work for the War* (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1916), p. 22 <<https://www.hathitrust.org/>> [accessed 19 July 2017].

death'.⁸⁸ Notwithstanding these anxieties, however, she celebrates – rather than conceals – the fact that the tactile procedures carried out by munitions workers disrupt those that are bound up in the domestic space. In *The Return of the Soldier*, West exploits their subversive potential in her depictions of the processes of beautification which configure Baldry Court.

Along with modernists such as Marinetti, West finds in the spatial conditions of the war a reminder of the importance of touch in artistic processes. In the 1924 version of his 'Tactilism', discussed in the introduction to this thesis, Marinetti cites the geography of the trenches as the inspiration behind his awakening to the significance of touch in our aesthetic appreciation of objects:

One night during the winter of 1917 I was crawling on hands and knees down to my pallet in the darkness of an artillery battery's dugout. Hard as I tried not to, I keep hitting bayonets, mess tins, and the heads of sleeping soldiers. I lay down, but didn't sleep, obsessed with the tactile sensations I'd felt and classified. For the first time that night I thought of a tactile art.⁸⁹

Alternatively, the haptic geographies of the munitions factories paradoxically remind West of manual domestic artistry. She notes in 'Hands That War: The Cordite Makers' that the workers 'look as if they were practising a neat domestic craft'.⁹⁰ West's depictions of Jenny's 'rubbing' (RS 49) and Chris's 'caress[ing]' of Baldry Court's interior indicate that she inscribed this awareness about the necessarily manual nature of domestic beautification into *The Return of the Soldier* (RS 67).

Conversely, *The Return of the Soldier* also registers the ways in which the manual procedures necessitated by the war call this embodied process into question. West posits in 'The Cordite Makers' that her visit to 'a certain row of huts where the

⁸⁸ West, 'Hands That War I. In the Midlands', Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, GEN MSS 105, fol. 1305.

⁸⁹ Marinetti, p. 197.

⁹⁰ West. 'Hands That War: The Cordite Makers', p. 381.

cordite is being pressed through wire mesh' shows 'how deceptive this semblance of normal life is'.⁹¹ In *The Return of the Soldier*, the failure of resistance threatened by Jenny's potentially destructive 'rubbing' against the 'brittle beautiful things' (RS 49) also challenges the value of domestic beautification which govern her gendered conception of 'normal life' in the domestic space.⁹² West stresses that the manual labour carried out by women during the war contribute to what Spurr identifies in *Architecture and Modern Literature* as 'the breakdown of hierarchical and spatial effects' – specifically Veblenian hierarchies of domestic leisure.⁹³ Rather than securing characters within this system, the hands within Baldry Court instead signal that the *The Return of the Soldier* is a modernist novel which 'recasts the notion of dwelling as a continual process of displacement'.⁹⁴ Seeing Chris as 'an outcast' (RS 67) in his own home, Jenny laments that 'no one weeps for this shattering of our world....' (RS 98).

Read alongside her writings about the shifts initiated by women's bodily experiences of munitions factories, *The Return of the Soldier* forms part of a broader modernist exploration of the embodied subjectivities made possible by the sensory conditions of the war. In the post-war writings of D.H. Lawrence, depictions of tactile relations with domestic interiors either directly deal with or echo forms of touch enforced by wounds sustained in the trenches. For example, in his post-war story 'The Blind Man' (1922) Lawrence is fascinated by the tactile basis of Maurice Pervin's sensory relationship with the built environment after being 'blinded in Flanders'⁹⁵: 'Pervin moved about almost unconsciously in his familiar surroundings, dark though everything was. He seemed to know the presence of objects before he touched them. It was a pleasure to him to rock thus through a world of things, carried on the flood in a

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Spurr, p. 58.

⁹⁴ Spurr, p. 250.

⁹⁵ D.H. Lawrence, 'The Blind Man', in *England, My England* (New York, Thomas Seltzer, 1922), pp. 71-100 (p. 71) <<https://archive.org/>> [accessed 19 July 2017].

sort of blood-prescience'.⁹⁶ In the 'Death and Love' chapter of Lawrence's *Women in Love*, Gerald Crich's attempt to navigate his way to Gudrun Brangwen's bedroom through the darkness of her father's house forces him to rely on his tactile sense: 'Feeling his way forward, with the tips of his fingers, travelling rapidly, like a blind man, anxious lest Ursula should come upstairs, he found another door'.⁹⁷ Though critics note that Gerald is a veteran of the Boer War, the fact that he touches like 'a blind man'⁹⁸ indicates that his sensory relations with the built environment are shaped by Lawrence's interest in soldiers wounded in the Great War.

Critics of Lawrence have pointed out that the writer sees in the sense of touch a way to escape from or transcend a range of mental, emotional and technological limitations which allegedly stifle the modern subject. Das notes in the penultimate pages of *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature* that 'Lawrence ecstatically and passionately championed the sense of touch as the supreme of the senses; to him it could rescue the modern man from his cerebral, industrial crust, and put him back in contact with his inner, sensuous being'.⁹⁹ In her recent analysis of Lawrence's fascination with blind touch in the visual culture of the early twentieth century, Garrington states that 'Vision, for Lawrence, is misleading, and contemporary visual technologies offer only a petrification of the faults inherent in vision itself'.¹⁰⁰ Conversely, as Garrington's discussion establishes, in Lawrence's work 'the rendering of touch is most consistently used as a counterpoint or, more properly, a corrective to what the author views as a specious valorisation of the visual sense'.¹⁰¹ In 'Art and Morality' (1925), Lawrence signals that this understanding of touch also extends to tactile appreciations of the built environment when he praises men in ancient Egypt:

⁹⁶ Lawrence, 'The Blind Man', p. 83.

⁹⁷ D.H. Lawrence, *Women in Love* (London: Penguin Books Limited, 1996), p. 390.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ Das, p. 233.

¹⁰⁰ Garrington, p. 156.

¹⁰¹ Garrington, p. 156.

‘They fumbled in the dark. And didn’t quite know where they were, or what they were. Like men in a dark room, they only *felt* their own existence surging in the darkness of other existences’.¹⁰²

Contrasting Lawrence’s construction of tactile appreciation as a means by which modern man could be rescued from the perceived industrial limitations hindering subjectivity, *The Return of the Soldier* highlights the extent to which the sense of touch is itself implicated in the industrialised environments of the war. In Lawrence’s writings, the reliance on touch necessitated by darkened rooms enables the subject to move beneath the industrial crust of modern consciousness. In *The Return of the Soldier*, West’s subversive depictions of tactile traversals instead emphasise the disruptions that the war’s industrial conditions themselves posed to established conceptions of embodied subjectivity. Rather than figuring industrialised tactile activities as part of the constraints acting upon the modern subject, *The Return of the Soldier* exploits their subversive potential within the domestic space of Baldry Court.

IV. Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored the ways in which West’s depictions of manual activities within the built environment allow her to frame and subvert aesthetic practices associated with them. Whereas her use of tactile metaphors in *Henry James* elaborate a critique of James’ ‘house of fiction’ metaphor, her portrayal of hands in *The Return of the Soldier* undercut the principle of domestic beautification. In both texts, I have shown how the links between tactile and aesthetic procedures can be productively read alongside her journalism on the embodied conditions initiated by the First World War. In *Henry James*, the connection that West established between James’ tactile and intellectual sensitivity develops from the association that she makes between touch and

¹⁰² D.H. Lawrence, ‘Art and Morality’, *The Living Age*, 26 December 1925, pp. 681-684 (p. 683). Emphasis in original <<http://unz.org/>> [accessed 19 July 2017].

artistic production during wartime. In *The Return of the Soldier*, tactile activities have a disruptive impact on leisure practices associated with the domestic space which correspond with the effects of manual labour described in the ‘Hands That War’ series. Both texts draw upon West’s wartime belief that manual habits share an intimate relationship with aesthetic processes. At the same time, this chapter has demonstrated that in *Henry James* and *The Return of the Soldier* these tactile activities simultaneously subvert the artistic procedures which they demarcate. Read alongside her wartime journalism, *The Return of the Soldier* exploits West’s sense that the war’s technologically-induced tactile practices highlighted the limitations of aesthetic practices – and the forms of subjectivity which they presupposed.

West’s wartime writing registers the impact of manual procedures initiated by the conflict on aesthetic processes. In the next chapter, I’ll explore how depictions of haptic relations with built environments in *The Judge* and *Sunflower* conceptualise her concerns about the situation of women in post-war society. West’s wartime writings register the ways in which the tactile conditions of modernity call into question established aesthetic procedures. Her post-war writings reinvest in the sense of touch as crucial to her characters’ awareness of the threats posed by the patriarchal configuration of society and celebrity culture.

Chapter 3: Global Touch and Social Awareness in *The Judge* and *Sunflower*

I. Introduction

In the previous chapter, I examined how West uses depictions of tactile practice to subvert ideas about aesthetic practice in *Henry James* and *The Return of the Soldier*. Her fiction of the early 1920s portrays characters whose social awareness is shaped by experiences of tactile exposure within built environments. This chapter understands social awareness as an individual's mindfulness about their situation in relation to the power dynamics and behaviour norms of their group or society. In *The Judge*, Ellen Melville finds herself set before enormous windows at the top of a house on the Essex coast which activate her tactile sense. In *Sunflower*, the famous actress Sybil Fassendyll falls into a bizarre vision in which her fallen body is set before the grasping hands of tourists in the Roman Forum.

West's representations of the tactile nature of Ellen's and Sybil's bodily exposure foreground their sensitive awareness of their unequal situation within patriarchal society and celebrity culture. In *The Judge*, Ellen's sense of tactile exposure to the overwhelming natural beauty admitted by the windows of Yaverland's End prompt her awareness of its patriarchal configuration. In *Sunflower*, Sybil's statuesque subjection to the hands of tourists demonstrates her acute understanding of the public desires and compulsions which accompany her status as a famous beauty. Both experiences highlight Ellen's and Sybil's sense that they occupy a disproportionate position in post-war society.

In Chapter Two, I used Bourdieu's concept of embodied habitus and hexis to examine the relationship between tactile practice and aesthetic practice in *Henry James* and *The Return of the Soldier*. This chapter analyses the significance of tactile experience in *The Judge* and *Sunflower* in conversation with Paul Rodaway's theories about 'haptic geographies', as outlined in *Sensuous Geographies: Body, Sense and Place*.¹ Rodaway argues that haptic geographies position 'touch as an active sense [...] integrally involved with the locomotive ability of the body and [...] the perception of space and relations to place'.² He observes that 'haptic geographies are often overlooked, since the tactile experience is such a continuous and taken-for-granted part of everyday encounter with the environment'.³

Rodaway's approach to sensuous geographies partly develops on Bourdieu's argument that our bodily experience of space is 'the form par excellence of the structural apprenticeship which leads to the embodying of the structures of the world, that is, the appropriating by the world of a body'.⁴ He posits that 'in describing the structure of the [Berber] house and the meanings attached to these forms [Bourdieu] shows much insight into its sensuous geography'.⁵ Bourdieu's interest lies with bodily interactions with space that establish and express 'durable, transposable dispositions'.⁶ Developing on the sensuous insights of Bourdieu's approach, Rodaway attempts to emphasise the ways in which 'space and place [is] discerned, or mapped, haptically'.⁷ I intend to argue that Ellen's and Sybil's haptic mapping of architectural space elaborates how they are situated in society.

¹ Rodaway, p. 42.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Bourdieu, p. 89.

⁵ Rodaway, p. 77.

⁶ Bourdieu, p. 72.

⁷ Rodaway, p. 54.

In my discussion of *The Judge* and *Sunflower*, I want to suggest that Ellen's and Sybil's awareness of their place in the world is informed by their sense of global touch. According to Rodaway, 'global touch is the presence of the body in a context, a sense of itself within a world – this is related to Merleau-Ponty's body-subject concept. [...] This is generally a passive experience, a general feeling of one's body and its intimate environment'.⁸ Rodaway posits that 'this geography is not so much about distances and spatial relationships, as about a general presence such as feelings of uprightness or basic body orientation [...], temperature, humidity and perhaps the relative crowding or [sic] space in its most general sense'.⁹ My readings will argue that West elaborates her characters' unequal situation in patriarchal society and celebrity culture by emphasising Ellen's sensitivity to temperature and Sybil's feelings of crowding. This illustrates what Rodaway refers to as the unbalanced 'reciprocity of the haptic system'.¹⁰ He notes that 'to touch is always to be touched [...] – though the intention may be the preserve of only one party. Reciprocity is, in this sense, often asymmetrical and typically so in contacts with inanimate objects'.¹¹ The 'asymmetrical' nature of Ellen's and Sybil's experience of global touch prompts an awareness of their beleaguered status in patriarchal society and celebrity culture.¹²

West's portrayals of global touch in *The Judge* and *Sunflower* are constructed in response to her concern that women after the war were less aware of their imbalanced situation in society. In an article entitled 'On a Form of Nagging', published in *Time and Tide* on 31st October 1924, she defends women who read illustrated 'papers which concern themselves specifically with household matters'.¹³ However, West urges her female contemporaries not to lose sight of the inequalities that persist through the

⁸ Rodaway, p. 49.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Rodaway, pp. 44-45.

¹² Rodaway, p. 45.

¹³ Rebecca West, 'On a Form of Nagging', in Dale Spender, *Time and Tide Wait For No Man* (London: Pandora Press, 1984), pp. 58-63 (p. 59).

appeals of consumer culture: 'the woman [...] who does not realise that by reason of her sex she lives in a beleaguered city, is a fool who deserves to lose (as she certainly will) all the privileges that have been won for her by her more robustly-minded sister'.¹⁴ I will argue that Ellen's and Sybil's experiences of global touch within the built environment position them as figures who are 'robustly-minded' about the specific ways in which they live in 'a beleaguered city'.¹⁵

West's exploration of her characters' sense of global touch in *The Judge* and *Sunflower* adds to recent scholarship which demonstrates that the modernist consciousness is defined by and located within sensuous geographies. Important contributions to this discussion include Andrew Thacker's study *Moving Through Modernity: Space and Geography in Modernism* (2003) and the volume that Thacker co-edited with Peter Brooker: *Geographies of Modernism: Literatures, Cultures, Spaces* (2005). Thacker argues that the title of his book 'tries to capture the sense that modernist writing can be located only within the movements between and across multiple sorts of space. This is a movement through new material spaces and by means of the new machines of modernity, and which grounds a more abstract sense of flux and change that many modernist writers attempted to articulate in their texts'.¹⁶ Thacker and Brooker explain in their introduction to *Geographies of Modernism* that 'some of the essays [in the collection] argue strongly that material geography and the built environment operate as determining influences upon consciousness and conduct [in modernist writing]'.¹⁷ West's writings have not yet been included in this evolving scholarly dialogue. I want to demonstrate that *The Judge* and *Sunflower* strongly

¹⁴ West, 'On a Form of Nagging', p. 58.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Andrew Thacker, *Moving Through Modernity: Space and Geography in Modernism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 8.

¹⁷ Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker, 'Introduction: Locating the Modern', in *Geographies of Modernism: Literatures, Cultures, Spaces*, ed. by Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 1-5 (p. 5).

demonstrate the determining influence of the built environment's haptic geography on modern consciousness.

Thacker's study *Moving Through Modernity* explores 'how movement through a landscape by automobile or express train initiates a new set of sensory relations to the space perceived by the artist' in the work of Virginia Woolf.¹⁸ He argues that 'the motor car represents a much more haptic experience of modernity, shown in Elizabeth's bus-stop journey [in *Mrs Dalloway* (1925)], Orlando's furious drive through the city [in *Orlando* (1928)], or the role of the body in "Evening Over Sussex" [(1942)]'.¹⁹ In his chapter 'Voyages by Teashop: An Urban Geography of Modernism' (2005), Scott McCracken argues that the proliferation of teashop chains such as the Aerated Bread Company 'reorganized the visual perception of central London'.²⁰ McCracken posits that 'the multiple presence of dozens of outlets of the same chain creates the simultaneity of perception that later characterizes the visual montage of artists such as Robert Delauney or the Cubists. The chain as network amounts to a kind of modernist geography that engenders a radically new spatial apprehension of the city'.²¹ My readings of *The Judge* and *Sunflower* will contextualise West's representations of global touch alongside her journalistic discussions about the bodily impact of innovatory *mise-en-scène* in the theatre and her anxieties about celebrity culture.

West's interest in theatrical *mise-en-scène* can be traced to a series of little-read theatre reviews that were published in the feminist magazine *Time and Tide* during the early 1920s. Catherine Clay notes that 'West was one of *Time and Tide*'s earliest contributors, providing weekly theatre criticisms from May 1920 to August 1921 and

¹⁸ Thacker, p. 7.

¹⁹ Thacker, p. 184.

²⁰ Scott McCracken, 'Voyages by Teashop: An Urban Geography of Modernism', in *Geographies of Modernism*, ed. by Brooker and Thacker, pp. 86-98 (p. 89).

²¹ *Ibid.*

occasional articles thereafter'.²² In these reviews, she displays an acute sensitivity to the framing of scenic beauty and the bodily affect that it has on the actions of those conditioned by it. Key to this process, as West outlines it in an observation about the Kingsway Theatre in her review of *Hunky Dory* (1921), is 'a stage so rightly proportioned in relation to the auditorium that fine points of acting have every chance of getting home'.²³ She frequently complains in these reviews about the jarringly disproportionate and uneven relationship between *mise-en-scène* and the bodily movements of actors in performance. Conversely, *Sunflower* addresses concerns about the sordid and intrusive forms of spectatorship encouraged by the popular newspapers and cinema. Commenting on this period in her biography *Rebecca West: A Life* (1987), Victoria Glendinning highlights a sea journey 'on the *Berangaria* [during which] she felt that the other passengers "gawked" at her and had "this inexorable sense that I'm outside their world. I can't bear to feel that I will presently have to build up a position in the world simply by dominance, when I could have done it if anybody had let me simply by being a human being"'.²⁴

West's depictions of global touch in *The Judge* and *Sunflower* convey her characters' cultural situation. Thacker argues that Woolf's fascination with haptic experiences of motor-cars reveals 'a modernism committed to exploring and expanding what she called "that curious thing, the map of the world in one's mind"'.²⁵ West's emphasis on Ellen's and Sybil's haptic experiences in the built environment also aims to demonstrate a broadened sense of their situation in the world around them. McCracken notes how in Somerset Maugham's novel *Of Human Bondage* (1915) the sensory

²² Catherine Clay, 'Winifred Holtby, Journalist: Rehabilitating Journalism in the Modernist Ferment', in *Winifred Holtby, "A Woman In Her Time": Critical Essays*, ed. by Lisa Regan (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), pp. 65-88 (p. 76).

²³ Rebecca West, 'The Theatre: "Hunky Dory"', *Time and Tide*, 20 May 1921, pp. 483-485 (p. 483), London, The Women's Library@LSE, 5SPG/K.

²⁴ Rebecca West, quoted in Victoria Glendinning, *Rebecca West: A Life* (London: George Weidenfeld and Nicholson Limited, 1987), p. 110.

²⁵ Thacker, p. 184.

geography created by the teashop chain-as-network is linked to a reordering of existing hierarchies of gendered subjectivity. He argues that the novel explores both ‘the threat that this new constellation posed to a masculine subjectivity’²⁶ and the idea that it ‘permits a proliferation of the spaces in which an assertive femininity might be produced’.²⁷ By contrast, West’s representations of global touch in *The Judge* and *Sunflower* form part of her attempt to conceptualise her belief that ‘woman [...] by reason of her sex [...] lives in a beleaguered city’.²⁸

In the first section of this chapter, I will examine the ways in which Ellen’s experience of global touch in the built environment of Yaverland’s End highlight West’s concerns about women’s sensitivity to the patriarchal configuration of society. Ellen’s embodied sense of her disproportionate position within Yaverland’s End is influenced by West’s own critical considerations of beautiful *mise-en-scène* in her theatre criticism for *Time and Tide*. Invested with her own guarded approach to the scenic splendour of London theatres, West is keen to emphasise that Ellen is attuned to the implications of beauty for her identity. In addition, Ellen’s response to the built environment is deliberately constructed in relation to Edmund Burke’s idea of the sublime in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757). In doing so, West highlights Ellen’s awareness that the disconcertingly asymmetrical receptivity she experiences in the specific environmental conditions at Yaverland’s End mark it out as a site of patriarchal dominance. This section demonstrates that West’s depictions of global touch foreground female awareness of the threatening patriarchal nature of post-war society.

In the second section of this chapter, I will argue that depictions of global touch in *Sunflower* explore West’s concerns about women’s situation within the debased

²⁶ McCracken, p. 90.

²⁷ McCracken, p. 91.

²⁸ West, ‘On a Form of Nagging’, p. 58.

cultural and ethical environment of celebrity culture during the 1920s. Sybil's vision of herself as a fallen statue in the Roman Forum relates to her status as a media spectacle. West highlights Sybil's proximal sense of the specific public compulsions and desires that accompany this status by constructing her vision around eighteenth-century accounts of ruin-gazing and images of touch gleaned from Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726). I will suggest that Sybil's tactile vision is constructed in response to the anxieties about women's exposure to technologies of spectatorship – and the public desires that they encourage – which grip West's journalism on the infamous murder trial of Edith Thompson. I intend to argue that Sybil's sensitive understanding of spectacle contrasts with Gerty MacDowell's equally thoughtful spectacular performance in the 'Nausicaa' episode of *Ulysses*. Whereas Gerty's performance demonstrates her dexterous manipulation and containment of desire, Sybil's tactile vision shows that she feels helplessly overwhelmed by it in a degraded cultural environment. This section demonstrates that West's depictions of tactile experience promote a sensitive female response to the threats posed by the compulsions and desires of celebrity culture.

II. Global Touch and the Sense of Patriarchy in *The Judge*

Published in 1922, *The Judge* primarily explores how the legacy of male transgressions can result in damaging relationships between mothers and their children. As Marion, the mother who has given birth to one son, Richard, out of wedlock and another son, Roger, as the result of marital rape, states: 'Every mother is a judge who sentences the children for the sins of the father' (*TJ* 346). Following the death of her own mother in the first half of the novel, West's heroine Ellen Melville moves with Richard to Marion's home at Yaverland's End on the Essex coast. In an atmosphere pervaded by the tragedies of Marion's life and her subsequent reliance on her son for comfort, Ellen's relationship with Richard becomes overshadowed. Ellen, who herself

becomes pregnant out of wedlock at the end of the novel when Richard goes on the run for murdering his half-brother, seems doomed to suffer and repeat the tragedies of Marion's life at the hands of men.

Depictions of global touch in the built environment form an important part of West's attempt to elaborate the ways in which her characters' sense of spatial and emotional orientation are intertwined. At the beginning of the novel, she writes that Ellen 'had this rich consciousness of her surroundings, a fortuitous possession, a mere congenital peculiarity like her red hair or her white skin' (*TJ* 10). Shortly afterwards, West emphasises the close relationship between Ellen's sense of emotional and bodily intentionality in space. She describes the current of Ellen's thoughts about the 'countryside, towards which she had always previously directed her mind when she had desired it to be happy, as one moves for warmth into a southern-facing room' (*TJ* 14). Here, West's metaphor about the 'warmth' of a 'southern-facing room' grounds Ellen's emotional state in the haptic geography which characterises global touch (*TJ* 14). According to Rodaway, 'this geography is not so much about distances and spatial relationships, as about a general presence such as feelings of uprightness or basic body orientation [...], temperature, humidity and perhaps the relative crowding or space in its most general sense'.²⁹ Richard refers to this geography in order to express his sense of belonging at Yaverland's End. He remarks that 'though it's really rather exposed as houses go, hanging up here over the marshes, I feel when I come back to it as if I were creeping down into some hiding-place, into some warm, closed place where nothing horrible could ever find me' (*TJ* 341). West again refers to the temperature of the interior at Yaverland's End to convey Ellen's growing emotional distance from Richard following their move there. She writes that Ellen 'moved away from the heat of the fire and from that other heat which had so strangely been engendered by these contacts

²⁹ Rodaway, p. 49.

which always before engendered light, and went to the window and laid her forehead against the cold glass' (*TJ* 365).

In the most striking scene of *The Judge*, West highlights how Ellen's sense of global touch provokes her awareness of the personal disempowerment which will define her life at Yaverland's End. When Ellen first arrives at the house, Richard's mother is anxious for her thoughts on the newly renovated room at the top of the house. West notes that 'Marion was asking her now if she liked this room, or if she found it, as many people did, more like a lighthouse than a home' (*TJ* 240). Despite Ellen's immediate answer 'with a kind of secondary sincerity that she liked it very much', the 'room was convincing her of something she was too young and too poor ever to have proved before, and that was the possibility of excess' (*TJ* 240). She recognises 'that there was present an excess of beauty and an excess of being' (*TJ* 241). The causes of this uncomfortable sense of excessive beauty, as the narrator makes clear, are the architectural dimensions of the room itself:

The walls it turned to the south and west were almost entirely composed of windows of extravagant dimensions, beginning below the cornice and stopping only a couple of feet above the floor, so that as the two women sat by the wood fire they looked over their shoulders at the leaning ships in the harbour. (*TJ* 241)

Here, West may be thinking of 'Southcliffe', the coastal house on Marine Parade in Leigh-on-Sea that she moved to in 1917 (see Fig. 6 below). Indeed, the 'windows of extravagant dimensions' (*TJ* 241) depicted in *The Judge* conform to Lorna Gibb's description of Southcliffe as a building which 'towered above the Thames with panoramic views' in her recent biography *West's World* (2013).³⁰

³⁰ Lorna Gibb, *West's World: The Extraordinary Life of Dame Rebecca West* (London: Pan Macmillan, 2013), p. 66.



Fig. 6: “Southcliffe”, 20 Marine Parade, Leigh-on-Sea.

<<https://www.google.co.uk/maps/@51.5428388,0.6451969,3a,75y,5.19h,87.05t/data=!3m6!1e1!3m4!1sEt4XPrfsmkcA8YLzUk9RQ!2e0!7i13312!8i6656>> [accessed 29 April 2017].

The beautiful spectacle framed by these architectural dimensions activates Ellen’s sense of global touch. Her ‘flesh became inattentive to the heat of the fire and participated in the chill of the open air’ (*TJ* 241). Here, the built space of Yaverland’s End has an impact that Pallasmaa would later associate with the architecture of Alvar Aalto in *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*: ‘It incorporates dislocations, skew confrontations, irregularities and polyrhythms in order to arouse bodily, muscular and haptic experiences’.³¹ Rather than provoking enjoyment or identification with this scene, however, Ellen’s response prompts the realisation that her life at Yaverland’s End will be overwhelmed and dominated by the view. West notes that ‘all who sat within were forced to look out on the windy firmament and see the earth spread far below as the pavement of the clouds on which their shadows trod like gliding feet’; ‘all that existed within the room was dwarfed by the immensity that the glass let in upon it, like the private life of a man dominated by some great general idea’ (*TJ* 241); and that

³¹ Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*, p. 76.

‘the spectator must forget his own fate in looking on this fine ravaged landscape and wonder [...] what extremities of weather had made it what it was’ (*TJ* 242).

Most critics who analyse Ellen’s confrontation with the architectural spectacle at Yaverland’s End emphasise its overwhelming and dominating effect on her initially fierce sense of individuality. In an early study of the Gothic aspects of *The Judge*, Philip E. Ray argues in ‘*The Judge* Re-examined: Rebecca West’s Underrated Gothic Romance’ (1988) that ‘the effect on Ellen of residing in Yaverland’s End is devastating: she sheds her bright and perky manner, becomes passive and withdrawn, and seems no longer sure of what she ought to do or how to behave’.³² More recently, Shirley Peterson has posited in ‘Modernism, Single Motherhood and the Discourse of Women’s Liberation in Rebecca West’s *The Judge*’ (1997) that at Yaverland’s End West outlines ‘a force that seems to overwhelm and suffocate Ellen’.³³ On the one hand, Ray argues that Ellen’s dwindling personality in this scene fits with the conventions of the eighteenth-century Gothic genre: ‘the tendency of the hero or heroine to experience a weird distortion or diminution of personality is itself characteristic of Gothic fiction’.³⁴ On the other hand, Peterson identifies the intrusive spectacle of this scene as ‘a monolithic reminder of first-wave feminism’.³⁵ She suggests that ‘Marion’s overwhelming presence recalls the unyielding courage of the suffragettes and even Mary Queen of Scots. In the face of these maternal monuments of the past, Ellen flounders within the consequent reconfiguration of romance, politics, and sex’.³⁶ Notwithstanding the ‘diminution of personality’³⁷ which undoubtedly takes place in this

³² Philip E. Ray, ‘*The Judge* Re-examined: Rebecca West’s Underrated Gothic Romance’, *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*, 31.3 (1988), 297-307 (p. 302) <<https://muse.jhu.edu/>> [accessed 19 July 2017].

³³ Shirley Peterson, ‘Modernism, Single Motherhood and the Discourse of Women’s Liberation in Rebecca West’s *The Judge*’, in *Unmanning Modernism: Gendered Re-readings*, ed. by Elizabeth Jane Harrison and Shirley Peterson (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1997), pp. 105-132 (p. 111).

³⁴ Ray, p. 301.

³⁵ Peterson, p. 111.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Ray, p. 301.

scene, the acute awareness that Ellen displays in her response to the architectural and scenic spectacle of Yaverland's End complicates the notion that she is simply 'overwhelm[ed]' here.³⁸ Guided by her sense of global touch, Ellen recognises that her body and mind have become disproportionately 'inattentive to the heat of the fire and participate[s] in the chill of the open air' (*TJ* 241). This suggests that she possesses a sensitive understanding of the domineering environment that she inhabits.

Though West portrays Ellen as a figure whose embodied response to her environment is passive, she stresses that the protagonist is keenly aware of the implications that this has for her position within the domestic interior of Yaverland's End. Confronted with the disproportionate dimensions of the windows, Ellen demonstrates an environmental awareness that Rodaway identifies as crucial to 'global touch': 'the presence of a body in a context, a sense of itself within a world'.³⁹ The narrator's emphasis on the fact that the spectacle framed by the windows makes Ellen's flesh 'participat[e] in the chill of the open air' (*TJ* 241) indicates that her tactile experience conforms to Rodaway's definition of global touch as 'a passive experience, a general feeling of one's body and its intimate environment'.⁴⁰ West stresses that Ellen's body is acted upon by the interior of Yaverland's End: 'all who sat within were forced to look out' (*TJ* 241). However, Ellen recognises that this tactile experience is characterised by 'asymmetrical'⁴¹ reciprocity: 'to touch is always to be touched [...] – though the intention may be the preserve of only one party'.⁴² In doing so, Ellen demonstrates her sensitivity to the profoundly unbalanced and unequal nature of her tactile experience and, as a consequence, her own position within the domestic interior of Yaverland's End. Rodaway notes that 'the experience of this kind of global touch is

³⁸ Peterson, p. 111.

³⁹ Rodaway, pp. 48-49.

⁴⁰ Rodaway, p. 49.

⁴¹ Rodaway, p. 45.

⁴² Rodaway, pp. 44-45.

partly the result of specific environmental conditions'.⁴³ Despite stressing that she is dwarfed by the 'excess of beauty' (*TJ* 241) admitted by the windows, Ellen's experience of global touch also signals her embodied awareness of the 'specific environmental conditions' which frame her passivity.⁴⁴

Ellen's peculiar confrontation with the architecture at Yaverland's End partly reflects West's contemporary preoccupation with the 'specific environmental conditions' that configure responses to artistic spectacle.⁴⁵ Ellen's response to the built environment in *The Judge* recall West's own interest in the implications of scenic beauty in the theatre reviews that she wrote for the feminist magazine *Time and Tide*.⁴⁶ In her very first review, of a production of J.M. Barrie's *Mary Rose* (1920) at the Haymarket Theatre in London, West claims that 'if there is any art in which the public ought to be educated by now, if they are educable, it is the art of the *mise-en-scène*'.⁴⁷ In each of her reviews, West demonstrates an acute sensitivity to the framing of scenic beauty and the affect that it has on the actions of those conditioned by it. She observes in her review of *Mary Rose* that 'all sorts of people have been working for years to make scenery a significant and beautiful thing, so that by some relevance to the spirit of the play it helps the actors and actresses to make their points and by a general harmoniousness induces a mood of serene receptivity in the audience'.⁴⁸

⁴³ Rodaway, p. 49.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ West's emphasis on the tactile nature of Ellen's confrontation with built space may also have been influenced by contemporary attempts to stress the haptic aspects of architectural spectacle in the cinematic *mise-en-scène* of films such as *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920). Addressing 'the issue of haptic space' in the film's tableaux, extreme close-ups and jagged architecture, Noël Burch notes that 'the film's famous graphic style presents each shot as a stylized, flat rendition of deep space, with dramatic obliques so avowedly plastic, so artificially "depth-producing" that they immediately conjure up the tactile surface of the engraver's page somewhat in the manner of [the film director Georges] Méliès'. See Noël Burch, 'Primitivism and the Avant-Gardes: A Dialectical Approach', in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader*, ed. by Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 483-506 (p. 497).

⁴⁷ Rebecca West, 'The Theatre: "Mary Rose"', *Time and Tide*, 14 May 1920, pp. 10-11 (p. 11), London, The Women's Library@LSE, 5SPG/K.

⁴⁸ West, 'The Theatre: "Mary Rose"', p. 10.

Rather than inducing a ‘mood of serene receptivity’, however, she frequently complains in these reviews of the jarringly disproportionate and uneven relationship between *mise-en-scène* and the performances or bodies of actors.⁴⁹ West’s review of plays staged at The Coliseum theatre on 13 August 1920 notes that ‘the inability of the human actors to expand in proportion to the floor space of the modern theatre leads to a good deal of acting that is a form of athleticism’.⁵⁰ This remark brings to mind Ellen’s feeling that ‘all that existed within the room was dwarfed by the immensity that the glass let in upon it’ at Yaverland’s End (*TJ* 241). In a review of *The Peddler’s Basket* (1921), West feels that the play’s beautiful *mise-en-scène* had a destructive impact on the actors’ performances when it should have provided a contrasting accompaniment. She argues that ‘Mr. MacDermott had evidently intended to double the effect by putting two sorts of beauty in juxtaposition, but actually they cancelled each other’.⁵¹ In *The Judge*, Ellen recognises that the ‘extravagant dimensions’ (*TJ* 241) of the sitting-room, in which ‘the spectator must forget his own fate in looking on this fine ravaged landscape’, will instead prevent her from comparing and contrasting events (*TJ* 242). She ‘would never be able to look at events for what they were in themselves and in relation to the destiny she was going to make with Richard’ (*TJ* 242). In her review of *Mary Rose*, West criticises the effect of the ‘bland backcloth’ on ‘the personality of Miss Fay Compton’ and finds it ‘highly alarming’ that ‘the audience should not know any better’.⁵² Ellen contemplates scenic beauty through the windows of a domestic space, rather than from the gloom of a theatre. Nevertheless, West invests Ellen with an equally acute bodily and critical sensitivity to the impact that the architectural framing of beautiful scenery can have on the bodies and actions of those situated within it.

⁴⁹ West, ‘The Theatre: “Mary Rose”’, p. 10.

⁵⁰ Rebecca West, ‘The Theatre: The Coliseum’, *Time and Tide*, 13 August 1920, pp. 285-287 (p. 285), London, The Women’s Library@LSE, 5SPG/K.

⁵¹ Rebecca West, ‘The Theatre: “The Peddler’s Basket”’, *Time and Tide*, 24 June 1921, pp. 603-604 (p. 603), London, The Women’s Library@LSE, 5SPG/K.

⁵² West, ‘The Theatre: “Mary Rose”’, p. 11.

Scholarship has yet to address the relationship between West's analysis of beautiful scenery in her theatre reviews and Ellen's response to beauty in *The Judge*. Read alongside the concerns outlined in these reviews, West's construction of Ellen's tactile experience as 'a general feeling of one's body and its intimate environment' emphasise awareness about the ways in which women are acted upon by beautiful spectacles.⁵³ West foregrounds a subjectivity that runs counter to the post-war (and largely male) prejudices about uncritical female theatregoers by structuring Ellen's tactile response around her own critically and aesthetically sensitive response to beautiful environments. In her chapter on 'Errant Nymphs: Women and the Interwar Theatre' (2000), Maggie B. Gale notes how 'for a time it was fashionable for theatre critics to adhere to the fearful view that the theatre was somehow being overtaken by women, that theatre was becoming feminised'.⁵⁴ In one such dismissive critique of interwar female theatre audiences, the poet Louis MacNeice specifically associates their uncritical responses to the theatre with their equally credulous consumption of beauty culture products. Women 'who use the theatre as an uncritical escape from their daily lives', complained MacNeice, are led by 'the same instinct [...] [to] spend all their savings on cosmetics, cigarettes and expensive underclothes'.⁵⁵ In *The Theatre in My Time* (1933), the prominent theatre critic and playwright St. John Ervine also condemned the so-called 'Gallery Girls' of the early post-war period. Ervine recalled that 'these girls, ignorant of any art of the theatre, worked themselves into a highly nervous state on seeing an actress fling herself violently about the stage or roar her head off in an attempt to portray passion [...]. Briefly but disturbingly, they agitated the

⁵³ Rodaway, p. 49.

⁵⁴ Maggie B. Gale, 'Errant Nymphs: Women and the Interwar Theatre', in *British Theatre Between the Wars, 1918-1939*, ed. by Clive Barker and Maggie B. Gale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 113-134 (p. 114).

⁵⁵ Louis MacNeice, *Selected Literary Criticism of Louis MacNeice*, ed. by Alan Heuser (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 87.

theatre'.⁵⁶ In contrast, the nervous state induced in Ellen by the windows at Yaverland's End instead provokes a critical response that echoes the 'robustly-minded' approach that West herself had championed as a female audience member.⁵⁷ This approach implicitly complicates MacNiece's and Ervine's portrayals of uncritical responses to theatrical spectacle.

Whilst Ellen's response to the architectural conditions of Yaverland's End are partly shaped by West's critical reactions to theatrical *mise-en-scène* and her concerns about alertness to spectacular innovations in popular theatre, it is also configured in relation to Edmund Burke's aesthetics of the sublime in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. In this work, Burke attempts to define, distinguish between and identify the causal structures of the "beautiful" and the "sublime". Rollyson notes in *The Literary Legacy of Rebecca West* that her 'primary intellectual guide was Edmund Burke, whom she also claimed as a family ancestor'.⁵⁸ In the more recent assessment of *The Judge* that Cowan conducts in *Rebecca West's Subversive Use of Hybrid Genres, 1911-1941*, she acknowledges the importance of 'Burke's theories of the sublime' to what she terms 'West's Romantic esthetic [sic]'.⁵⁹ However, the significance of these theories to this scene in particular has not until now been considered in any critical depth

Ellen identifies an 'excess of beauty' in the room, rather than the sublime (*TJ* 241). Notwithstanding this, the walls 'composed of windows of extravagant dimensions' allude to the causal structures of sublime architecture mentioned by Burke in the subsection on 'Magnitude in Building' (*TJ* 241). In this section, Burke posits that 'to the sublime in building, greatness of dimension seems requisite; for on a few parts, and

⁵⁶ St. John Ervine, *The Theatre in My Time* (London: Rich and Cowan, 1933), p. 140 <<https://archive.org/>> [accessed 19 July 2017].

⁵⁷ West, 'On a Form of Nagging', p. 58.

⁵⁸ Rollyson, p. 5.

⁵⁹ Cowan, p. 59.

those small, the imagination cannot rise to any idea of infinity. No greatness in the manner can effectually compensate for the want of proper dimensions'.⁶⁰ In addition to their corresponding causal structures, the architecture of the sitting-room also engenders a correspondingly asymmetrical reciprocity between spectator and spectacle. Ellen complains that the windows of the sitting-room meant that 'all that existed within the room was dwarfed by the immensity that the glass let in upon it' (*TJ* 241). In the *Enquiry*, Burke similarly implies that sublime architecture compels the imagination to ruminate on 'an idea of infinity'.⁶¹

Burke's theory of the sublime is characterised by a 'terror' and 'passion which always produces delight when it does not press too close', indicating that a suppressed sense of touch is key to maintaining the distance which sustains its pleasurable aspect.⁶² Indeed, Todd S. Presner's analysis of this passage in *Mobile Modernity: Germans, Jews, Trains* (2012) highlights that 'the physical encounter with the sublime, whether the Kantian nature or the Burkean titillation, is always predicated upon a zone of corporeal safety, a critical distance allowing a safe space for self-preservation'.⁶³ Contrasting this, the experience of global touch initiated by the architecture at Yaverland's End intrudes upon Ellen's 'zone of corporeal safety' and establishes a critical proximity which prompts her realisation that this is a space in which her personality is far from safe.⁶⁴

By configuring Ellen's asymmetrical tactile experience in relation to Burke's theory of sublime architecture, West specifically suggests that her sense of disempowerment relates to the patriarchal nature of architectural spectacle at Yaverland's End. Barbara Claire Freeman points out in her study *The Feminine Sublime: Gender and Excess in Women's Fiction* (1997) that 'Burke's understanding of the

⁶⁰ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (London: R. and J. Dodsley, 1757), p. 58 <<https://archive.org/>> [accessed 19 July 2017].

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Burke, p. 24.

⁶³ Todd S. Presner, *Mobile Modernity: Germans, Jews, Trains* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), p. 78.

⁶⁴ Presner, p. 78.

modes of aesthetic experience derives from assumptions about the nature of sexual difference and the proper relations between the sexes, commonly held preconceptions about the innateness and universality of sexual difference, which become the indispensable condition for the aesthetic theory he puts forward'.⁶⁵ She adds that these assumptions lead Burke to associate the sublime with 'the "masculine" passions'.⁶⁶ Ellen's sense that she is 'dwarfed' and 'dominated' by the 'vastness' and 'magnitude'⁶⁷ of the 'immensity that the glass let in upon it' (*TJ* 241), equivalently situate her in relation to an architectural spectacle configured around Marion's 'assumptions about the nature of sexual difference'.⁶⁸ Immediately before Marion shows Ellen the sitting-room at Yaverland's End, the two women disagree about 'the Feminist question' (*TJ* 241). Ellen indicates her belief in the equality of the sexes in her claim that women are 'maybe not as wonderful as Richard is [...] but as wonderful as any other man' (*TJ* 239). Rebutting this claim, Marion argues that whereas women are 'dependent on their weak frames and their personal relationships', 'men don't love us nearly as much as we love them, [so] that leaves them much more spare vitality to be wonderful with' (*TJ* 239). Shortly afterwards, Ellen's feeling that she is overwhelmed by the 'excess of beauty and [...] excess of being' (*TJ* 241) of the sitting-room place her in an environment structured around Marion's belief in the 'weak frames' of women and the 'spare vitality' of men (*TJ* 239). Apprehended in this way, Ellen's flesh not only 'participate[s] in the chill of the open air' but is also implicated in a domestic space that is constructed around Marion's gender politics (*TJ* 241).

By grounding Ellen's realisation about Marion's patriarchal politics in her sense of global touch, West elaborates a critically sensitive female situation within the

⁶⁵ Barbara Claire Freeman, *The Feminine Sublime: Gender and Excess in Women's Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p. 48.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

patriarchal dimensions of space. This can be interpreted as a direct response to the concerns that West and her fellow feminists outline in the early interwar years about the lack of awareness about the persistence of sex antagonism in post-war British society. In an article entitled 'Equal Pay for Men and Women Teachers', published in *Time and Tide* on 9 February 1923, West complains about 'the modern timidity about mentioning that there is such a thing as sex-antagonism'.⁶⁹ Acknowledging this trend, British feminist Ray Strachey later observed in *Our Freedom and Its Results* (1936) that:

Modern young women know amazingly little of what life was like before the war, and show a strong hostility to the word "feminism" and all which they imagine it to connote. They are, nevertheless, themselves the products of the women's movement and the difficult and confusing conditions in which they live are partly due to the fact that it is in their generation that the change-over from the old to the new conception of the place of women in society is taking place.⁷⁰

West's depiction of Ellen's disproportionate sense of touch in this scene can be read as part of an attempt to map the persisting sense of gender inequality within this 'new conception of the place of women in society'.⁷¹ Her bodily response to the built environment at Yaverland's End emphasises her critical sensitivity, proximity and indeed her vulnerability to patriarchy during a period in which feminists like West felt that 'modern young women know amazingly little of what life was like before the war'.⁷²

⁶⁹ Rebecca West, 'Six Point Group Supplement. Point No.3 Equality for Men and Women Teachers. Equal Pay for Men and Women Teachers', *Time and Tide*, 9 February 1923, pp. 142-143 (p. 142), London, The Women's Library@LSE, 5SPG/K.

⁷⁰ Ray Strachey, *Our Freedom and Its Results* (London: Hogarth Press, 1936), p. 10, quoted in Maria DiCenzo, Lucy Delap and Leila Ryan, *Feminist Media History: Suffrage, Periodicals and the Public Sphere* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 194.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

Six months after the publication of *The Judge*, from 6 December to 11 December 1922 West turned her attention to a spectacle of an entirely different sort: the infamous murder trial of Edith Thompson and Frederick Bywaters. In December 1922, Thompson and her lover Frederick Bywaters were put on trial for the murder of her husband Percy. With Bywaters freely admitting to the murder of Thompson's husband at the outset of the trial, the proceedings largely centred on ascertaining the extent to which Edith's references to the killing in a series of letters to her lover proved that she incited him to carry out the act. Following her attendance at the trial, West published two articles in which she claims that Thompson's inspiration to murder her husband came from daydreams inspired by her fascination with the cinematic *femme fatale*. In 'The Mind of Edith Thompson. Her Motives and Character Analysed. A Fantasy Builder', published in the *Daily News* on 13th December 1922, she argues: 'When Mrs. Thompson felt a restless passion for something better than her life she used to go upstairs, doubtless with a box of chocolates, and write letters to her romantic young adorer, making herself out a splendid sinner far beyond even the attainments of [the film star] Miss Gloria de Vere; describing how she had once again tried to murder her husband'.⁷³

As West herself was aware, the trial sparked a public discussion about the desires and impulses encouraged by mass and celebrity culture. In her article about 'The Trials and Tribulations of Edith Thompson: The Capital Crime of Sexual Incitement in 1920s England' (2008), Lucy Bland notes that 'the theme of incitement ran throughout the trial – not simply in relation to Edith's incitement of Freddy [...] but also in relation to mass culture's incitement of the public, particularly its female half, to consume the

⁷³ Rebecca West, 'The Mind of Edith Thompson. Her Motives and Character Analysed. A Fantasy Builder', *Daily News*, 13th December 1922, p. 5, London, British Library, General Reference Collection 1918-1928 MFM.MLD10* Microform.

sensational'.⁷⁴ Ironically, she observes that despite criticisms of this incitement one newspaper sensationalised Thompson as a celebrity in her own right:

To the *Daily Express*, "The woman in the dock was without question the personality of the court, attractively feminine in every way". When the trial transferred to the Old Bailey, the *Daily Express* was still waxing lyrical: "A thrill passed through the court as Mrs Thompson walked slowly down the steps of the dock". It was as if she was a starlet making an entrance on stage.⁷⁵

In the next section of this chapter, I suggest that West's representation of global touch within the architectural spectacle featured in *Sunflower* elaborate her anxieties about women's situation in relation to the incitements and public desires which characterise this emerging culture of celebrity.

III. Global Touch and the Sense of Celebrity Culture in *Sunflower*

Begun in 1925 and abandoned unfinished in 1928, *Sunflower* was eventually published posthumously in 1986. The novel has chiefly been discussed as an autobiographical account of her turbulent ten-year relationship with the writer H.G. Wells and her brief affair with the newspaper magnate Lord Beaverbrook. However, *Sunflower* should also be read for the striking way in which it explores the situation of women in the emerging celebrity culture of the 1920s. The novel's central concern is with the failed attempts made by the famous actress Sybil Fassendyll to sustain meaningful sexual relationships with Essington – who 'call[s] her Sunflower' – and Francis Pitt (*S* 20). For West's feminist readers, these relationships are problematically associated with what 'she recognised shamefacedly as the most fundamental emotion

⁷⁴ Lucy Bland, 'The Trials and Tribulations of Edith Thompson: The Capital Crime of Sexual Incitement in 1920s England', *Journal of British Studies*, 47.3 (July, 2008), 624-648 (p. 627) <<https://www.jstor.org/>> [accessed 19 July 2017].

⁷⁵ Bland, p. 629.

she ever knew: a desire to be passive which was acute as thirst. Indignantly she felt that she ought not to be calling on her own will and thought to find a way into this process. Someone ought to have done it for her' (S 34).

In *Sunflower*, representations of global touch are centred on Sybil's fascination with desired and unwanted states of passivity. Near the end of the novel, she fantasises about the emotional and sexual sustenance that her beautiful body will give to Francis Pitt. West notes that her 'beauty was not a weed, it was not a waste. It had made Francis Pitt say those things when she had turned her face to him in the moonlight, it had brought her life with Francis Pitt' (S 248). Sybil conceptualises the nourishment that her body will give by imagining its cutaneous surfaces as rich pasture trodden and nuzzled by livestock:

She was not a field cursed with charlock, she was good pastureland. Lying there, she fell into a dream of how it would feel to be a meadow, to have a body of smooth wet earth pricked upwards with a million blades of growing grass. Someone would open a gate, there would run a flock of young lambs, they would pound the wet earth with their strong little hooves, they would drop their little twitching muzzles to the grass and tug it up by the roots. (S 248)

Here, Sybil's imagined tactile experience corresponds with Rodaway's definition of global touch as 'a passive experience, a general feeling of one's body and its intimate environment'.⁷⁶

As well as highlighting Sybil's desire to be passively subjected to the needs of Francis Pitt, West's depiction of global touch also elaborates the disturbing sense of passivity which characterises her status as a celebrity in the public eye. She notes that the actress is feted by the popular press and is told by Mr Thursby Jingal, who writes

⁷⁶ Rodaway, p. 49.

‘the Spy-Glass in the *Daily Show*’, that she is ‘News’ (S 13). However, Sybil is extremely uncomfortable under the gaze of passers-by who stop to gawp at her. She feels ‘as they looked at her [that] there was a kind of grease on the surface of their gaze, a kind of scum of squalid feeling...’ (S 10). Sybil’s discomfoting situation within the public eye is evoked through an image of her exposure to increased spatial temperature, which Rodaway identifies as a vital aspect of the haptic geography defined by global touch. She notes that ‘being News was like living under a glass bell, a transparent prison, in whose walls the normal light of day was changed to heat that made every incident of one’s life grow to an unnatural size, an unnatural sappiness...’ (S 14).

Attempting to escape from the gaze of these celebrity-spotters, the actress experiences a nightmarish vision in which she registers her position in the public eye through another imagined experience of ‘global touch’.⁷⁷ Knowing that ‘her immense physical conspicuousness made her situation far worse’, Sybil imagines a scene in which her figure has metamorphosed from an unfeeling stone statue into a highly sensitive human body (S 13). West states that:

She could not quite see how; but there gleamed deep in her mind a picture of herself as a vast naked torso, but not of stone, of living, flushing flesh, fallen helpless on its side in some public place of ruins like the Forum in Rome, with ant-droves of tourists passing incessantly round her quickly, inquisitively, too close. (S 13)

Sybil’s vision of herself ‘fallen helpless’ (S 13) on her side is yet another ‘passive experience, a general feeling of one’s body and its intimate environment’.⁷⁸ In particular, her feeling that the tourists pass ‘too close’ (S 13) to her body indicate her

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

sense of the ‘relative crowding’ of the haptic geography framed by global touch.⁷⁹ West subsequently emphasises the abrupt changes in temperature and bodily violation which characterise Sybil’s imagined situation within the Forum:

Sometimes it was hot, and dry winds swung against her weakly like a tired arm, flung dust on her, and dropped again; and tourists crowding along in the shadow groins of her limbs put up their sweaty hands to experience her texture and stroked grit into her flesh. Sometimes it was wet, and her groins were runnelled with thick, shining ropes of water; and the tourists, going quicker than ever, rushed along her flanks and pricked them with the spokes of their umbrellas. (*S* 13)

Acknowledging that her status as ‘News’ and that Mr Thursby Jingal ‘had something to do with this picture’ (*S* 13), West associates Sybil’s imagined ‘feeling of one’s body and its intimate environment’ with her subjection to lurid public attentions promoted by the popular print media.⁸⁰ The debased desires that are hinted at by the tourists who ‘put up their sweaty hands to experience her texture’ (*S* 13) recall the ‘scum of squalid feeling’ which characterise Sybil’s sense of herself as an object of public spectacle (*S* 10).

Existing critical assessments of this scene in *Sunflower* note how Sybil’s vision of tactile degradation relates to her sense of violation as a celebrity spectacle. As part of her discussion of sexual modernity in *Sunflower*, Sue Thomas argues in ‘Questioning Sexual Modernity: Rebecca West’s *Sunflower*’ (1998) that West’s use of imagery in this scene is inspired by ‘highbrow surrealistic art’ and suggests that it ‘encapsulates [Sybil’s] sense of being violated both as Essington’s object and as News, a cultural icon, embodying both Venus and Cinderella’.⁸¹ In her recent assessment of this scene in

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Sue Thomas, ‘Questioning Sexual Modernity: Rebecca West’s *Sunflower*’, *A.U.M.L.A.*, 89.1 (1998), 99-120 (p. 108) <tandfonline.com> [accessed 19 July 2017].

Haptic Modernism, Garrington argues that ‘the helplessness of her position in the Forum relates in obvious ways to her sense that her living beauty is a matter for public contemplation, but the “ant-droves” of tourists [...] are also encroaching, [...] and in doing so impose on her individuated identity’.⁸² Garrington approaches the feelings of formation highlighted by the ‘ant-droves of tourists’ that swarm all ‘too close’ (S 13) to Sybil’s body as ‘one possible symptom of schizophrenia’⁸³, and suggests that ‘we can read this bizarre imagined scene as a battle for the right to a stable, single selfhood or identity [...] [and] the battle for the right of access to flesh’.⁸⁴ Whilst Sybil’s imagined tactile experience indeed elaborates her sense that her ‘single selfhood or identity’ are encroached upon, her vivid sense of the ways in which her flesh is accessed foregrounds her acute awareness both of the forms of desire and of the environmental conditions which configure her status as a celebrity spectacle.⁸⁵

The sense of public exposure which permeates Sybil’s nightmarish vision raises concerns that were common in the 1920s about the celebrity culture that was being promoted by high circulation publications. In *The Frenzy of Renown: Fame and Its History* (1986), Leo Braudy notes that ‘from the early days of film, the audience’s curiosity about who the performers were and what might be outside the filmed story spawned fan magazines, whose ersatz constructions put some version of the private lives of the stars on stage as well, until some became the shrivelled shells of their own publicity’.⁸⁶ Subject to the attentions of ‘Mr Thursby Jingal, who writes the Spy-Glass in the *Daily Show*’ (S 13), Sybil clearly feels that her celebrity status has led to an equally ‘ersatz construction’ of herself being offered up to the public gaze: ‘being News was like living under a glass bell [...] that made every incident of one’s life grow to an unnatural size, an unnatural sappiness...’ (S 14). Contemporary commentators also

⁸² Garrington, p. 59.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Leo Braudy, *The Frenzy of Renown: Fame and Its History* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), p. 579.

noted with horror that gossip columns like the *Daily Show* impinged upon the privacy of public figures. Addressing the ‘mania for printed paragraphs about private persons’, the theatre critic St. John Ervine complains in ‘The Invasion of Privacy’ (1927) that ‘all club-life becomes impossible, as, indeed, does all social life, if we cannot be sure that our conversation, especially when it is indiscreet, will be considered to be private’.⁸⁷ Sharing these concerns, Sybil’s vision of the ‘tourists crowding along in the shadow of her limbs [who] put up their sweaty hands to experience her texture’ conveys her sense that the celebrity-spotters are impinging upon her privacy (S 13).

Though highlighting some of the more obvious pitfalls of her celebrity status, Sybil’s tactile vision notably demonstrates her sensitivity to the specific compulsions and desires which she is exposed to as an object of public spectacle. Tormented by ‘ant-droves of tourists passing incessantly round her quickly, inquisitively, too close’, Sybil senses that the celebrity-spotters who torment her are motivated by compulsions associated with mass tourism (S 13). In part, Sybil notes that they are driven by what the sociologists John Urry and Jonas Larsen identify in *The Tourist Gaze 3.0* (2011) as the desire for ‘*physical proximity*, to be bodily in the same space as some landscape or townscape [...] much travel results from a powerful “compulsion to proximity” that makes the travel seem absolutely necessary’.⁸⁸ Sybil’s vision registers her sense that the celebrity-spotters’ compulsion to proximity is central to their gaze. Intimately aware of their need to be physically close to her, Sybil’s imagined exposure to the hands of tourists also elaborates her sense of disempowerment. William W. Stowe notes in *Going Abroad: European Travel in Nineteenth-Century American Culture* (1994) how nineteenth-century guidebooks often promote a gaze which ‘reduces individuals, institutions, artworks and landscapes to bits of knowledge and elevates tourists to the

⁸⁷ St. John Ervine, ‘The Invasion of Privacy’, *The Spectator*, 28 May 1927, quoted in Walter F. Pratt, *Privacy in Britain* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1979), p. 77.

⁸⁸ John Urry and Jonas Larsen, *The Tourist Gaze 3.0* (London: SAGE Publications Limited, 2011), p. 21. Emphasis in original.

position of authoritative knower'.⁸⁹ Fallen 'helpless' as tourists queue up to 'experience her texture' (S 13), Sybil's body is also subject to a 'way of knowing and controlling the world [...] [that] reduces complex objects, phenomena, and experiences to sets of graspable facts'.⁹⁰ She specifically associates her sense of disempowerment with her subjection to the erotic desires which accompany her status as 'News' by noting that the hands which grasp her are 'sweaty' (S 13).

Located 'in some public place of ruins like the Forum in Rome', Sybil's vision indicates that she is subject to the kinds of aesthetic response described by eighteenth-century visitors to Roman ruins (S 13). In her survey of the *Pleasure of Ruins* (1953), the writer Rose Macauley notes that these responses 'could be voluptuous: "when one looks on ancient buildings"', writes [Wilhelm] Heinse in 1780, "one has always the kind of feeling that one has before a beautiful naked body"⁹¹ Sybil is painfully aware that the glances of the celebrity-spotters are motivated by sexual rather than aesthetic curiosity by registering that these hands grasp for a torso made 'not of stone, [but] of living, flushing flesh' (S 13). Braudy argues that the technological spectacle of the cinema had a key role in fostering the often sexual compulsion to proximity that audiences directed towards the biggest movie stars of the 1920s:

The early audience hysterias over such stars as [Rudolf] Valentino, [Greta] Garbo, and even the now-forgotten George Bancroft is first a tribute to the power of the disembodied visual presence of those individuals. But it also marks the audience's new-found ability to observe people closely without them knowing it and thereby gain power over them. Voyeurism with its sexual connotation and eavesdropping with its implication of overheard secrets only

⁸⁹ William W. Stowe, *Going Abroad: European Travel in Nineteenth-Century American Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 48.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Rose Macauley, *Pleasure of Ruins* (London: Butler and Tanner Limited, 1984), p. 191.

indicate the most obvious features of the general urge to “know” that the movies cultivated.⁹²

In *Sunflower*, Sybil’s disturbing tactile vision indicates that West associated such compulsions with the readers of mass publications.

Sensitive to the media, compulsions and desires which define her place in celebrity culture, Sybil’s imagined tactile experience also highlights her broader sense of the moral and intellectual conditions in which this takes place. As well as invoking eighteenth-century aesthetic responses to Roman ruins, Sybil’s vision also echoes the tactile degradation endured by Lemuel Gulliver in Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726). Though the importance of Swift’s satire to *Sunflower* has not previously been recognised by West scholars, the tactile pressures applied to Sybil’s body recall those endured by Gulliver at the hands of the Lilliputians. Comparable with West’s depiction of Sybil as a torso ‘fallen helpless on its side’ (S 13) whose groins are ‘runnelled with thick shining ropes’ (S 13), Gulliver ‘likewise fe[els] several slender ligatures across [...] [his] body’ that fasten him to the ground on his first morning in Lilliput.⁹³ Evoking the ‘hundred arrows’ fired by the Lilliputians ‘which pricked [...] [Gulliver] like so many needles’⁹⁴, Sybil is ‘pricked [...] with the spokes of [...] [tourists’] umbrellas’ (S 13). K.M. Jan and Shabnam Firdaus argue in *Perspectives on Gulliver’s Travels* (2004) that ‘the very fact that Gulliver has done no harm to them but he is tied to the ground by strings and is attacked by arrows and spears implies that the physical size of the people in Lilliput is the measure of their intellectual and moral size’.⁹⁵ Sybil’s ‘immense physical conspicuousness’ relates to her public visibility and availability rather than her size, whilst the minification of the tourist ‘ant-droves’ refers to their reductive tastes as

⁹² Braudy, p. 577.

⁹³ Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver’s Travels* (London: Penguin Books Limited, 2009), p. 12.

⁹⁴ Swift, p. 13.

⁹⁵ K.M. Jan and Shabnam Firdaus, *Perspectives on Gulliver’s Travels* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2004), p. 25.

opposed to their reduced size (*S* 13). Yet, lying helplessly exposed as Gulliver is to the painful experience of fornication, Sybil's tactile experience correspondingly emphasises her exposure to the 'inferior moral and intellectual' attentions of a larger social group or State.⁹⁶ Depicting Sybil's body – 'runnelled with thick shining ropes' – as vulnerably bound as Gulliver's, West indicates that she feels as helpless in this culture of spectacle as Swift's protagonist is to the political and religious landscape of Lilliput (*S* 13). In critical assessments of *Gulliver's Travels*, Gulliver's bodily perceptions in Lilliput are commonly understood to form part of a satirical portrait of life in eighteenth-century Britain. In *Sunflower*, Sybil's vision of the 'sweaty hands' that 'prick' her body elaborate her own critical attitude to the conditions of celebrity spectacle in early twentieth-century Britain (*S* 13).

Sybil's disturbing vision responds to concerns about the impact of media spectacle that West had outlined in two articles she wrote on the trial of Edith Thompson. Bringing to mind Sybil's vision, the first of these articles was entitled 'The Mind of Edith Thompson: The Fantasy Builder', whilst 'Edith Thompson's Soul: Rebecca West on the Daydream Theory' appeared in *Reynolds's Newspaper* on 17 December 1922.⁹⁷ Agreeing with the argument put forward by Thompson's defence team, West claims in both of these articles that 'the idea of her husband's murder was her fantasy, but it was Bywaters' reality'.⁹⁸ Whereas Sybil's vision elaborates the ways in which the popular print media have exposed her to consumers, West claims that Thompson's daydream has been shaped by her participation in a whole range of technological media. In the first article, she goes into great detail about the 'cheapest of atmospheres' that have helped to form Thompson's so-called fantasy.⁹⁹ West posits that

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Printed copies of these articles are difficult to access in the United Kingdom. Copies of them are available to view on microfilm at the British Library's Newspaper Archive. Transcripts of both articles are included in Appendix B.

⁹⁸ West, 'The Mind of Edith Thompson. Her Motives and Character Analysed: A Fantasy-BUILDER', p. 5.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

‘one saw behind her a raw suburban vista; the Broadway when the lights go up; when the coloured lamps burn in the confectioners’ windows among the red crepe paper and the piles of cheap sweets; when the electric sign writes across the Cinema de Luxe, “Gloria De Vere in The Splendid Sinner”’.¹⁰⁰ In the second article, West adds that Thompson’s propensity ‘to spin her day-dream to the distant Bywaters’ has been fed by her addiction ‘to the less popular efforts of the cinema [...]. I am sure she greatly admired Pauline Frederick and Louise Glaum, and all those ladies who act the parts of “great sinners”’.¹⁰¹

The relationship between West’s articles on the Thompson trial and Sybil’s vision in *Sunflower* has not until now been explored. By constructing a vision which emphasises Sybil’s sensitivity to the impulses and desires promoted by popular media, West presents her as much more ‘robustly-minded’ than Thompson.¹⁰² Sybil’s vision and Thompson’s daydreams both draw upon an imagery of touch which reveals the ways in which they are besmirched by the compulsions encouraged by an equally cheap atmosphere of mass spectatorship. In a letter categorised as ‘Exhibit 60’, used as evidence against Thompson in her trial, the description of her sexual relationship with Bywaters recalls the peculiar mix of tactile degradation and helplessness that pervade the Forum scene in *Sunflower*:

It seems like a great welling up of love – of feeling – of inertia, just as if I am wax in your hands – to do with as you will and I feel that if you do as you wish I shall be happy, it’s purely physical and I can’t really describe it – but you will understand darlint [sic] won’t you? You said you knew it would be like this one

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Rebecca West, ‘Edith Thompson’s Soul: Rebecca West on the Daydream Theory. Probing the Secrets of the Guilty Ilford Wife’, *Reynolds’s Newspaper*, 17 December 1922, p. 2, London, British Library, General Reference Collection 1851-1923 Microform. MFM.MLD43.

¹⁰² West, ‘On a Form of Nagging’, p. 58.

day – if it hadn't would you have been disappointed. Darlingest [sic] when you are rough, I go dead – try not to be please.¹⁰³

Whereas Sybil's vision demonstrates an acute sensitivity to the damaging implications of these compulsions, West's descriptions of the 'fantasy-builder' on trial at the Old Bailey suggest that she is incapable of recognising them.¹⁰⁴ Observing Thompson's 'normal expression' in the court room at the Old Bailey, West describes it as 'at once loose, wandering, and secretive'.¹⁰⁵ She argues that her 'expression is, in fact, the outward and visible sign of a mind that has given up reality in disgust and is making itself a world of dreams; that all day long is inventing stories in which it plays a leading part, and never encounters any of those defeats which are what it fears from participation in real life'.¹⁰⁶

Notwithstanding the awareness that Sybil shows in *Sunflower*, the disturbing asymmetrical experience of touch which dominates her vision articulates a very different response to issues of spectacle and spectatorship than that found in canonical modernist literature. Sybil's imagined tactile experience in the Forum mark her out as a woman who is as acutely aware about the nature of her spectacular appeal as her more famous modernist contemporary: Gerty MacDowell. In the 'Nausicaa' episode of *Ulysses*, Joyce stages a famous scene in which Gerty is subject to the admiring gaze of Leopold Bloom whilst reclining on the beach. Like Sybil, Gerty is an attractive young woman suffering from impaired movement who is subject to the erotic attentions of a stranger. Both women seem to have sex appeal which is decidedly sculptural. Whereas Sybil pictures herself as a fallen statue of stone turned to flesh, Gerty has 'hands [...] of

¹⁰³ 'Appendix I: Exhibit 60', in *The Trial of Frederick Bywaters and Edith Thompson*, ed. by Filson Young (Glasgow and Edinburgh: William Hodge and Company, 1923), p. 214.

¹⁰⁴ West, 'The Mind of Edith Thompson. Her Motives and Character Analysed: A Fantasy-Builder', p. 5.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

finely veined alabaster with tapering fingers'¹⁰⁷ which invite Bloom to 'drink[...] in her every contour'.¹⁰⁸ In *James Joyce, Sexuality and Social Purity* (2003), Katherine Mullin argues that 'Gerty MacDowell is acutely conscious of herself as an enticing sight, not only removing and replacing her hat to display her "unusually fine head of hair", but also tilting it so she can monitor the effect of her display on Bloom'.¹⁰⁹ As we have seen above, West's imagined tactile experience indicates that she is equally 'conscious of herself as an enticing sight'.¹¹⁰ Notwithstanding these correspondences, Sybil and Gerty differ in the way that their imagined tactile experiences frame contrasting reactions to their status as an object of spectacle. Gerty's remark that she 'could almost feel [...] [her admirer] draw her face to his and the first quick hot touch of his handsome lips' illustrates that she is clearly delighted by the fact that she is being watched.¹¹¹ By contrast, the 'ant-droves of tourists' who raise 'their sweaty hands to experience [...] [Sybil's] texture and stroked the grit into her flesh' evoke her sense of violation under the strangers' gaze (*S* 13).

The response to mass spectatorship outlined in *Sunflower* indicates that West felt women were becoming overwhelmed by the kind of public that it cultivated. Permeating Sybil's acute sensitivity to the compulsions and desires which accompany her celebrity status is the sense that she is unable to contain or control them. Her vision consistently emphasises that 'to touch is always to be touched [...] – though the intention may be the preserve of only one party'.¹¹² Indeed, the 'ant-droves of tourists passing incessantly round her quickly, inquisitively, too close' demonstrate that this is an overwhelming and asymmetrical tactile experience (*S* 13). In *The Judge*, Ellen's unbalanced bodily

¹⁰⁷ Joyce, p. 333.

¹⁰⁸ Joyce, p. 345.

¹⁰⁹ Katherine Mullin, *James Joyce, Sexuality and Social Purity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 143.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ Joyce, p. 333.

¹¹² Rodaway, pp. 44-45.

interaction with the built environment of Yaverland's End emphasise West's sense of the female disempowerment in the patriarchal society of the post-war period. In *Sunflower*, Sybil's overwhelming tactile experience in the Forum registers her sense of abandonment to the unchecked desires and compulsions encouraged by popular media. Braudy highlights the psychological strain experienced by 1920s film stars who lived in the public eye. He notes that 'when the actual audience moved too close, without proper supervision, such a star might become reasonably fearful about injury to the fragile private self that somehow came across so powerfully in film'.¹¹³ In *Sunflower*, Sybil's tactile subjection to tourists who come 'too close' instead conveys her sense of paralysis under the glances of the celebrity-spotters (S 13).

Sybil implies that this paralysis relates to her situation within a media culture increasingly characterised by the unchecked sexual desires of the masses. The portrayal of sexual desire in this scene evokes the one outlined by West in her articles on the Thompson trial. In one article, she complains that there is 'no way of closing the court in cases like this to persons who wish to enter it simply for amusement' and suggests that 'between these sightseers and Edith Thompson there is hardly a pin to choose, for their mental state is very much the same'.¹¹⁴ Moreover, West argues that the 'sightseers' in the court room are driven by 'a lust for excitement that can find no outlet in the creative world of art or good deeds, and searches for substitutes'.¹¹⁵ A correspondingly out-of-control sexual curiosity is attributed to the 'tourists [who] put up their sweaty hands' onto Sybil in *Sunflower* (S 13).

Positioned as a figure that is helplessly overwhelmed by the compulsions and desires of her public admirers, Sybil's tactile experience conveys West's belief that the increasingly public forms of desire promulgated by the technologies of mass

¹¹³ Braudy, p. 577.

¹¹⁴ West, 'The Mind of Edith Thompson. Her Motives and Character Analysed: A Fantasy-Builder', p. 5.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

spectatorship needed to be contained. Both Joyce and West strikingly explore the ways in which control of what Garrington calls ‘the right of access to flesh’ elaborate the degree to which women can harness or contain the desires unleashed by technologies of mass spectatorship.¹¹⁶ In Mullin’s reading, Joyce presents Gerty as a woman who is able to harness the desires that they encouraged. Conversely, West depicts Sybil as a woman unable to escape them. Mullin argues that Gerty willingly ‘masters the strategies, conventions and choreography of sexual display in the mutoscope’s “cinema of attraction”, prudently allying herself, in her desperate bid to gain some little economic security, with a particularly successful machine for the commodification of sexuality’.¹¹⁷ In contrast, Sybil is sensitive to the fact that her own commodification as ‘News’ (*S* 13) has laid her open to a ‘subjugating gaze [that] reduces individuals [...] [and] artworks [...] to bits of knowledge and elevates the[m] [...] to the position of authoritative knower’.¹¹⁸ Mullin notes that crucial to Gerty’s fantasy of the ‘first quick hot touch’ of her admirer’s lips is her ability to provoke but also strategically contain Bloom’s desire for sexual contact.¹¹⁹ She suggests that ‘Gerty [...] is in full control of her performance, allowing Bloom to look but not to touch, promoting yet containing desire, keeping him guessing’.¹²⁰ In *Sunflower*, Sibyl can seemingly do nothing to escape her exposure to the attentions of her admirers. She is ‘fallen helpless’ and exposed like Gulliver to ‘sweaty hands’ which are free to explore their sexual desires (*S* 13).

Sybil’s vision further implies a connection between her sense of helpless abandonment to the public ‘lust for excitement’ over ‘art’ and the State’s failure to

¹¹⁶ Garrington, p. 59.

¹¹⁷ Mullin, p. 169.

¹¹⁸ Stowe, p. 48.

¹¹⁹ Joyce, p. 333.

¹²⁰ Mullin, p. 170.

provide this ‘outlet in the creative world of art or good deeds’.¹²¹ In ‘The Mind of Edith Thompson’, West claims that ‘the Thompson case is a symbol of what happens to a State which attains to a certain degree of material prosperity, but lacks a general passion for art and religion’.¹²² She tempers her condemnation of Thompson’s personal ‘appetite for romance’¹²³ by attributing it to a State which has failed to provide her with “healthier” outlets of cultural consumption. West writes that ‘there is nothing in her that is not in us [...] Humanity has its need to dream. And if you do not give humanity the good music, the good pictures, the good books that will set it dreaming right [...] it will dream bad dreams that lead to lies and death’.¹²⁴ West indicates that Sybil’s bodily exposure also forms part of a wider failure on the part of governmental powers to adequately regulate or police the desires and compulsions of its citizens. She is located ‘in some public place of ruins like the Forum in Rome’ (*S* 13). Again, West’s construction of this imagined scene deals with concerns that she had previously outlined in her articles on the Thompson trial.

By arguing that the State must take a more active role in providing humanity with ‘the good music, the good pictures, the good books that will set it dreaming right’, West provoked a conversation about the ways in which the bad dreams promoted by the popular cinema could be contained.¹²⁵ In an article entitled ‘Mushy Sentimentality About Edith Thompson: A Reply to Miss Rebecca West’, published in *Reynolds’s Newspaper* on 24 December 1922, Harrison Owen agrees with West’s “daydream theory” but insists that the new era of mass spectatorship necessitates a greater level of individual self-control rather than State intervention. Owen argued that ‘the ordinary decent citizen controls a tendency to day-dreaming, just as he or she controls a craving

¹²¹ West, ‘The Mind of Edith Thompson. Her Motives and Character Analysed: A Fantasy-Builder’, p. 5.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ West, ‘Edith Thompson’s Soul: Rebecca West on the Daydream Theory: Probing the Secrets of the Guilty Ilford Wife’, p. 2.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

for opium or desire of another's wife or husband'.¹²⁶ Numerous readers sent in letters to *Reynolds's Newspaper*. Though some correspondents agreed with West's theory, others concurred with Owen's assessment.

Placing her reading of the beach scene in the context of Joyce's well-documented battle with censorship, Mullin suggests that Gerty's ability to contain Bloom's desire implies that she 'does not need the kind of questionable "protection" social purity groups attempted to impose, a protection easily interpreted as a covert form of control'.¹²⁷ In *Sunflower*, West instead points to what can happen 'if we disobey [...] the laws of mental hygiene'.¹²⁸ The 'grit' that is stroked into Sybil's flesh implies that her admirers are driven by debased desires that flourish in the absence of 'the good music, the good pictures, [and] the good books' that could set Edith Thompson 'dreaming right' (S 13).¹²⁹ Gerty challenges the view that the State should police its citizens' exposure to the technologies of mass spectatorship by willingly exploiting popular and commodified conventions of sexual display in her attempt to secure a marriage to Bloom. Mullin posits that the 'Nausicaa' episode 'supplies a particularly arch and resonant subversion of social purity premises and rhetorical strategies'.¹³⁰ Conversely, Sybil's vision highlights what can happen when the State cedes its responsibility for the maintenance of a 'general passion for art and religion' in the general population.¹³¹

Though Sybil's vision is dominated by a tactile experience which shows that she is overwhelmed by the public created by celebrity culture, *Sunflower* does begin to

¹²⁶ Harrison Owen, 'Mushy Sentimentality About Edith Thompson: A Reply to Miss Rebecca West', *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 24 December 1922, p. 2, London, British Library, General Reference Collection 1851-1923 Microform. MFM.MLD43.

¹²⁷ Mullin, p. 170.

¹²⁸ West, 'Edith Thompson's Soul: Rebecca West on the Daydream Theory: Probing the Secrets of the Guilty Ilford Wife', p. 2.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ Mullin, p. 141.

¹³¹ West, 'The Mind of Edith Thompson. Her Motives and Character Analysed: A Fantasy-Builder', p. 5.

explore haptic experiences which frame much less domineering engagements with the world. In what can be read as a kind of re-staging of West's account of the Thompson trial early on in the novel, Sybil decides to attend the 'Assizes at Packbury' to observe the hearing of Alice Hester – a woman accused of bigamy (*S* 25). Contrasted with the dominating modes of spectatorship that West associates with the sightseer, Sybil calls upon a method 'she had discovered [...] in the course of her struggle with her profession' in her attempt to empathically engage with the moral qualities of the defendant (*S* 30). She 'had found out that if she imitated the facial expression and bodily motions of a really good actor she began to experience feelings that were evidently what he was feeling since they were not her own and made her understand his conception of the part' (*S* 30). When she 'assumed the pose [of Alice Hester]', however, Sybil's employment of this theatrical method of bodily imitation instead clarifies the defendant's moral superiority. West notes that 'the sense of its rightness flowed through her body like water' (*S* 30).

Rather than being rendered helpless by this process of empathic imitation, it creates a 'sense of [...] rightness' that enables Sybil to orient herself within the defendant's system of moral values: 'it meant that about those things concerning which it is right to be proud and hard the old woman was proud and hard, and about those things concerning which it is right to be humble and soft she was utterly humble and soft' (*S* 30). Here, Sybil's bodily motions recall the methods of the dancer Isadora Duncan, who believed that imitating the bodily attitudes of ancient statues could allow the observer to empathise with the emotions that they are intended to express. In *Modernism's Mythic Pose: Gender, Genre, Solo Performance* (2011), Carrie Preston explains that 'beginning her research in the British Museum after arriving in London in 1899, Duncan wrote detailed observations of the statues, searching for "the feelings that

their gestures symbolised”’.¹³² Notwithstanding West’s exploration of these possibilities, Garrington notes in her discussion of *Sunflower* that Sybil ‘los[es] the battle for the right to self-definition’ in this novel.¹³³ In the next chapter, I intend to explore the ways in which depictions of empathic appreciations of the built environment are crucial to the model of aesthetic self-definition that West outlines in ‘The Strange Necessity’ and *Harriet Hume: A London Fantasy*.

IV. Conclusion

This chapter has established how West’s depiction of haptic responses to architectural spectacle are constructed in response to her concerns about women’s awareness of patriarchy and celebrity culture during the 1920s. Haptic relations with built environments in *The Judge* and *Sunflower* are defined by experiences corresponding to what Rodaway defines as global touch, which foreground female characters’ critical sensitivity to their place within their respective socio-political and cultural contexts. I have offered readings of two key scenes in these novels which demonstrated how their emphasis on the asymmetrical reciprocity of global touch convey women’s unequal situation within these contexts. In order to draw out the specific threats and implications elaborated by West’s representations of global touch, I have interpreted them in relation to concerns she outlines in her theatre reviews and mainstream journalism of the early 1920s. In addition, I have suggested that West drew inspiration from her reading of eighteenth-century aesthetics and fiction. My reading of global touch in these texts indicates that West needs to be placed alongside Woolf as a writer whose work illustrates the importance of haptic geographies to modernism’s concern with consciousness. Ellen’s embodied response to the sublime architectural

¹³² Carrie J. Preston, *Modernism’s Mythic Pose: Gender, Genre, Solo Performance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 156.

¹³³ Garrington, p. 71.

dimensions of Yaverland's End demonstrates that West is 'committed to exploring and expanding what [Woolf] called "that curious thing, the map of the world in one's mind"'.¹³⁴ My discussion of the Forum scene in *Sunflower* has shown that Sybil demonstrates an equally active – albeit a less comfortable – awareness of her spectacular appeal as does Gerty MacDowell in *Ulysses*. In *The Judge*, the sense of global touch initiated by Ellen's response to the architectural spectacle at Yaverland's End prompts her realisation that she is situated within a domestic space defined by patriarchal beliefs. Ellen's awareness of the implications of scenic beauty reflect West's belief that women needed to maintain a 'robustly-minded' sense of their unequal position in society – in spite of the appeals of beauty culture.¹³⁵ In *Sunflower*, Sybil's sense of global touch reveals her awareness of the desires and compulsions to which she is subject as an object of celebrity spectacle. Sybil's imagined vision registers West's concern that women were being overwhelmed by the desires and compulsions encouraged by mass media.

In the next chapter, I will explore the ways in which West pursues her interest in embodied forms of empathy in the various responses to the built environment which frame the aesthetic speculations of 'The Strange Necessity' and *Harriet Hume*. Published during the latter part of the 1920s, these texts place aesthetic theories of bodily empathy at the heart of West's attempt to foreground a much more balanced model of social orientation than is evident in *The Judge* and *Sunflower*.

¹³⁴ Thacker, p. 184.

¹³⁵ West, 'On a Form of Nagging', p. 58.

Chapter 4: Empathy and the Function of Aesthetic Experience in ‘The Strange Necessity’ and *Harriet Hume*

I. Introduction

West’s book-length essay ‘The Strange Necessity’ was published in 1928 alongside some of her selected journalism in *The Strange Necessity: Essays and Reviews*. In this essay, she interweaves a critical assessment of James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, his then-recently published poetry collection *Pomes Penyeach* (1927) and her own theory about the strange necessity of art with recollections of a day walking the streets, shops and museums of Paris. Appearing the year after ‘The Strange Necessity’ in 1929, West’s novel *Harriet Hume: A London Fantasy* charts the disastrous relationship between the politician Arnold Condorex and the musician Harriet Hume. The tale focuses on how Arnold’s personal ambitions and determination to rise in the political world drives him apart from Harriet, who prioritises artistic and domestic pursuits.

In the previous chapter, I read *The Judge* and *Sunflower* as texts in which Ellen’s and Sybil’s experiences of global touch define their sense of social awareness during the early 1920s. By contrast, ‘The Strange Necessity’ and *Harriet Hume* both emphasise the haptic and empathic nature of characters’ aesthetic experiences. In ‘Still Life: The Experience of Space in Modernist Prose’ (2007), Frederik Tygstrup argues that ‘aesthetic experience can [...] be understood either as an experience *of* the aesthetic, or as an experience *through* the aesthetic, considering art either as an *object* of experience or as a *medium* of experience’.¹ Tygstrup contends that in experiences of the aesthetic the artwork ‘stands out in a realm of its own where one can approximate a liminal

¹ Frederik Tygstrup, ‘Still Life: The Experience of Space in Modernist Prose’, in *Modernism, Vol. 1*, ed. by Ástráður Eysteinnsson and Vivian Liska (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2007), pp. 253-269 (p. 256). Emphasis in original.

experience'.² In contrast, this chapter argues that West's representations of empathy foreground experiences through the aesthetic, in which the artwork is 'a medium that communicates a certain experiential content' and a 'medium that through its formal principles organizes this material in specific ways'.³ For example, in 'The Strange Necessity', West's empathic response to the sculptures of the Parisian built environment enable her to imagine the epoch that built them: 'one feels as if one were a stone woman, a caryatid beside a door, a mocking head under a gable, on whom a ray of light had lit so brightly that it became a ray of life. As much as that does one feel a part of the age that built these streets' (*SN* 184).

The *OED* defines empathy as 'a physical property of the nervous system analogous to electrical capacitance, believed to be correlated with feeling', and acknowledges its use in aesthetics as a term which denotes 'the quality or power of projecting one's personality into or mentally identifying oneself with an object of contemplation, and so fully understanding or appreciating it'.⁴ Though the English psychologist E.B. Titchener is credited with coining the word in 1909, the *OED* also lists West's essay 'The Strange Necessity' as one of the texts which contributed to the definition of aesthetic empathy: "'R. West" *Strange Necessity* 102. The active power of empathy which makes the creative artist, or the passive power of empathy which makes the appreciator of art'.⁵ The term had been a central part of continental aesthetic debate since the latter decades of the nineteenth century. Vernon Lee and Clementina Anstruther-Thomson note in *Beauty and Ugliness and Other Studies in Psychological Aesthetics* (1912) that, until the appearance of their article 'Beauty and Ugliness' in the October and November issues of the *Contemporary Review* in 1897, *Einfühlung* or "feeling-into" was largely understood as 'a mental phenomenon accompanying all

² Ibid.

³ Tygstrup, p. 257.

⁴ 'Empathy', *Oxford English Dictionary Online* <<http://www.oed.com>> [accessed 16 March 2017].

⁵ Ibid.

spatial contemplation, however much our very familiarity has made us overlook it'.⁶ Partly inspired by the aesthetic theories of Theodor Lipps, Lee and Anstruther-Thomson also follow the claim of the German psychologist Karl Groos that 'in complete aesthetic enjoyment there are present motor phenomena of an imitative character, and that these show the sympathy in question [...] to be a bodily participation'.⁷

As I noted in the thesis introduction, West's explanatory note in the first edition of 'The Strange Necessity' acknowledges that her understanding of aesthetic empathy is influenced by the writings of Lipps and Lee:

Certain persons concerned with the preparation of my manuscript have accused me of using in "empathy" a word that is absent from most dictionaries. I imagine, however, that it is familiar to most people, as a term to express our power of entering into the experience of objects outside ourselves, through its presence in the pages of Lipps (as *Einfühlung*) and Vernon Lee; and though I have modified it to suit my own purposes I hope those modifications are justified by the context.⁸

Moreover, West argues in 'The Strange Necessity' that empathic appreciations of art involve the haptic sense modality. Midway through the essay, she claims that:

if a drawing of realistic pretensions representing a human body is shown to a person of ordinary powers of observation, he immediately feels either a calm sense of rightness which analysis will show to be the result of the conviction that this particular body is represented in an attitude within normal human capacity; or he feels an unhappy sense of wrongness, which analysis will show is due to the conviction that this particular body is represented in an attitude outside normal human capacity. (SN 100)

⁶ Vernon Lee and Clementina Anstruther-Thomson, *Beauty and Ugliness and Other Studies in Psychological Aesthetics* (London: John Lane, 1912), p. 21 <<https://archive.org/>> [accessed 19 July 2017].

⁷ Lee and Anstruther-Thomson, *Beauty and Ugliness and Other Studies in Psychological Aesthetics*, p. 23.

⁸ West, 'Explanation', p. 7.

She suggests that this ‘sense of rightness’ and ‘sense of wrongness’ (*SN* 100) comes from the fact that ‘we all have a certain body-consciousness that packs away a great deal of latent information about how we feel when we move, and also gives us a working knowledge of what we can do with our muscles and our nerves and all other physical possessions’ (*SN* 99-100). This reference to a ‘body-consciousness’ which registers ‘how we feel when we move’ (*SN* 99) brings to mind what Garrington calls ‘kinaesthesia (the body’s sense of its own movement)’ in *Haptic Modernism*.⁹

Existing scholarship has little to say on the importance of empathy to West’s theorisation of the aesthetic. In ‘Rebecca West’s “Strange Necessity”: Literature, Love, and the Good’ (2006), Nattie Golubov argues that ‘for West, this is, in terms of literature, a relatively uncomplicated process of identification between writer and reader’.¹⁰ Moreover, Cowan’s analysis of *Harriet Hume* in *Rebecca West’s Subversive Use of Hybrid Genres, 1911-1941* speculates that, read alongside ‘The Strange Necessity’, ‘Harriet’s psychic skills could be extreme versions of “empathy”’.¹¹ This chapter explores how West’s depictions of ‘the active power of empathy which makes the creative artist’ and ‘the passive power of empathy which makes the appreciator of art’ aim to validate her distinctions between “good” and “bad” art (*SN* 102).

For West, “good” art fosters aesthetic experiences which establish a balanced bodily orientation in the world, whereas “bad” art initiates responses which encourage an imbalanced or solitary orientation. I intend to demonstrate that this theory of art depends on her belief in the empathic nature of aesthetic experience. Near the end of ‘The Strange Necessity’, West recounts a feeling of ‘wild exhilaration such as one might feel after whirling in a dance, that used to come on me when I climbed to a certain low peak of the Estorel [sic] Mountains’ (*SN* 189). Reminiscent of her walk

⁹ Garrington, p. 16.

¹⁰ Nattie Golubov, ‘Rebecca West’s “Strange Necessity”: Literature, Love and the Good’, in *Rebecca West Today*, ed. by Schweizer, pp. 206-222 (p. 215).

¹¹ Cowan, p. 80.

around Paris, she describes how her aesthetic identification with coastal forms initiates a sense of bodily poise within the natural environment:

I was holding my attention to that curiously gabled cliff and bidding it accept that shape, I was hurling it down to spread itself over the flat field of the sea and bidding it cover the whole space with its acceptance, I was forcing it to keep in mind both cliff and water and seeing how it could balance them both and what a composition that made. (*SN* 190)

By contrast, as I will show, Arnold's empathic response to landscape architecture induces a state of disorientation.

Glendinning observes in her biography of West that 'she seemed to find insufficient comfort in the thought that the world might exist at all only because opposing forces are held in equilibrium and that nothing can exist without a notional opposite. Only the existence of art persuaded her of the possibility of any equilibrium at all, which was why art mattered so much'.¹² In 'The Strange Necessity', the 'balance' established by West's empathic appreciations of sea and cliff convince her of this possibility: 'By feeling such terror and such worship in those proportions I was finding a new and satisfactory equilibrium for my will to live and my will to die' (*SN* 190). By contrast, Arnold's powers of empathy are disorienting because they reinforce his belief in the singular will: 'there is no room in the world of spirits for opposites. It is as vast as the universe, but it is small as a pin-point. Believe me, it has room for only one will. There is not a particle of accommodation for opposites' (*HH* 204).

West's emphasis on the empathically orienting and disorienting basis of aesthetic experience in these texts is particularly developed in dialogue with the empathy theory outlined in Lee and Anstruther-Thomson's article 'Beauty and Ugliness' (previously discussed in the thesis introduction). Lee and Anstruther-

¹² Glendinning, p. 212.

Thomson both ask ‘why should a specific kind of condition, either agreeable or disagreeable, accompany the recognition of those co-related qualities of form called respectively Beauty and Ugliness’.¹³ In their study of agreeable and disagreeable responses to art’s aesthetic beauty and ugliness, the authors prefigure West by suggesting that ‘part of the perception of Form’ involves our haptic sense modality: ‘altered breathing, senses of tension, and altered balance’.¹⁴ Here, Lee and Anstruther-Thomson seem to be describing something similar to ‘proprioception (the body’s sense of its orientation in space)’ and ‘the vestibular sense (that of balance, reliant on the inner ear)’.¹⁵ In *Sensuous Geographies* (discussed in Chapter Three), Rodaway’s concept of ‘imagined touch, [...] a haptic experience rooted in the memory and expectation’ reiterates Lee and Anstruther-Thomson’s emphasis on the involvement of our haptic sense in the perception of aesthetic form: ‘this rich touch imagination permits us to experience an intimacy with people and places which may be a great distance from our present location, in time and/or space, or which we have never actually experienced, such as the evocation of tactile experiences in dreams or when reading’.¹⁶ However, Lee and Anstruther-Thomson specifically anticipate West’s representation of empathic responses to architecture which provoke states of equilibrium and/or uplift in the perceiver. Describing their response to ‘a slightly uneven-sided arch, like those of good Gothic work’, Lee and Anstruther-Thomson argue that it ‘affects us as extremely interesting, for we see the two sides of the arch actively pressing against each other, and this at once calls up in us active sensations of equilibrium’.¹⁷ By contrast, they argue that ‘pointed arches are perceived by an adjustment which feels as if the breath of both lungs were running simultaneously upwards in a point’, which ‘produces a state of

¹³ Lee and Anstruther-Thomson, ‘Beauty and Ugliness’, p. 546.

¹⁴ Lee and Anstruther-Thomson, ‘Beauty and Ugliness’, p. 550.

¹⁵ Garrington, p. 16.

¹⁶ Rodaway, p. 54.

¹⁷ Lee and Anstruther-Thomson, ‘Beauty and Ugliness’, p. 567.

being analogous to that of solitary and Quixotic resolves, forced upon us by the very nature of our surroundings'.¹⁸

This configuration of embodied aesthetic experience both implicitly and directly challenges ideas about detached and disinterested responses to art promoted by I.A. Richards and Clive Bell. Richards has long been recognised as one of the fathers of New Criticism. In *Literature Against Itself: Literary Ideas in Modern Society* (1979), Gerald Graff notes that 'no idea of the New Critics inspired more protests than their assumption of the "objective" nature of the literary text, their view that a poem is an object whose meaning can be analysed by a detached, ideally disinterested critic'.¹⁹ In 'The Strange Necessity', West's interweaving of her considerations about *Ulysses* with her empathic participations in the built environment instead proposes that the pursuit of aesthetic meaning can never be detached from the process of "feeling-into" art. Bell and his contemporary Roger Fry are acknowledged for their development of a formalist approach to painting, which Pam Meecham and Julie Sheldon observe in *Modern Art: A Critical Introduction* (2013) 'privileges the aesthetic response as mediated through the sight alone. Visual sensibility accordingly is a prerequisite of art appreciation, and a genuine aesthetic experience is both self-sufficient and disinterested'.²⁰ In *Harriet Hume*, the connection that West establishes between empathy and political conduct suggest that the necessarily haptic basis of the perceiver's response to art mean that it can never be disinterested.

This chapter also situates 'The Strange Necessity' and *Harriet Hume* as texts which contribute to the ongoing scholarly revision of the relationship between empathy and modernism. The concept of empathy was introduced to early modernists such as T.E. Hulme and Wyndham Lewis through their reading of Wilhelm Worringer's

¹⁸ Lee and Anstruther-Thomson, 'Beauty and Ugliness', pp. 564-565.

¹⁹ Gerald Graff, *Literature Against Itself: Literary Ideas in Modern Society* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 129.

²⁰ Pam Meecham and Julie Sheldon, *Modern Art: A Critical Introduction* (Routledge: London, 2013), p. 27.

critique of it in *Abstraction and Empathy: A Contribution to the Psychology of Style* (1908). Gleaning his idea of aesthetic empathy in large part from the writings of Lipps, Worringer argues that 'aesthetic enjoyment is objectified self-enjoyment. To enjoy aesthetically means to enjoy myself in a sensuous object diverse from myself, to empathize myself into it'.²¹ He further posits:

Whereas the precondition for the urge to empathy is a happy pantheistic relationship of confidence between man and the phenomena of the external world, the urge to abstraction is the outcome of a great inner unrest inspired in man by the phenomena of the outside world; in a religious respect it corresponds to a strongly transcendental tinge to all notions. We might describe this state as an immense spiritual dread of space.²²

Michael H. Whitworth notes in his guide to *Modernism* (2007) that 'Modernist writers distinguish between abstraction and empathy, often claiming to prefer the former. In the novel, the means by which earlier generations of writers would have allowed readers to identify with a character are eschewed or radically revised'.²³ West's approach to empathy is different. 'The Strange Necessity' considers the extent to which aesthetic empathy helps to encourage or unsettle the 'relationship of confidence between man and the phenomena of the external world'.²⁴

'The Strange Necessity' has not featured in recent studies that have begun to stress the importance of empathy to literary modernism. Suzanne Keen helped to initiate this re-evaluation by arguing in *Empathy and the Novel* (2007) that the 'Modernist reaction against it never eliminated empathy from the novel as a part of composition or a goal of representation: modern novelists considered it part of their craft and an

²¹ Wilhelm Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy: A Contribution to the Psychology of Style* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1948), p. 5.

²² Worringer, p. 15.

²³ Michael H. Whitworth, 'Introduction', in *Modernism*, ed. by Michael H. Whitworth (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), pp. 3-60 (p. 14).

²⁴ Worringer, p. 5.

ingredient in their relationships to both their inventions and their readers'.²⁵ Pursuing this line of thought, Kirsty Martin has posited in *Modernism and the Rhythms of Sympathy: Vernon Lee, Virginia Woolf, D.H. Lawrence* (2013) that though 'neither Woolf nor Lawrence used the term "empathy", [...] their language of feeling for others in their work incorporates shades of "feeling for" and "feeling with"'.²⁶ More recently, Meghan Marie Hammond has suggested in *Empathy and the Psychology of Literary Modernism* (2014) that 'empathy and modernism work together to usher in narrative paradigm shifts'.²⁷ Hammond discerns in 'inward-looking modernist literature' a 'shift from sympathetic models to empathic models' of experience associated with Lipps and Lee.²⁸ I want to make the case that 'The Strange Necessity' and *Harriet Hume* need to form a part of this evolving conversation. Whereas Martin and Hammond suggest that empathy plays an important role in modernist representations of "feeling with" others and interiority, West situates aesthetic empathy as central to her concepts of aesthetic value and experience.

In the first section of this chapter, I will explore West's promotion of "good" aesthetic experiences which facilitate orientation in relation to the complexity of art and the environment in 'The Strange Necessity' (SN 17). I intend to argue that West legitimates this notion of aesthetic experience through accounts of her empathic responses to the built environment. Her attempt to model the orienting value of "good" art in this way is significantly indebted to theories of aesthetic empathy developed by Lee and Anstruther-Thomson in 'Beauty and Ugliness'. In part, West's empathic appreciations of buildings aim to distinguish between ideal forms of aesthetic experience elicited by the "good" architecture of Paris and damaging aesthetic

²⁵ Suzanne Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 60.

²⁶ Kirsty Martin, *Modernism and the Rhythms of Sympathy: Vernon Lee, Virginia Woolf, D.H. Lawrence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 9-10.

²⁷ Meghan Marie Hammond, *Empathy and the Psychology of Literary Modernism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), p. 26.

²⁸ Hammond, p. 177.

experiences that she associates with the “bad” aspects of Joyce’s *Ulysses*. Moreover, her balanced empathic responses to aesthetic form are also intended to validate her demonstration of composed female interaction with diverse cultural stimuli. By reading West’s account of empathic participation alongside that given by I.A. Richards, I will argue that ‘The Strange Necessity’ promotes the importance of empathic identification – rather than a detached attitude – for the apprehension of aesthetic complexity. This section demonstrates that West’s depictions of empathic responses to the built environment are crucial to her theory of valuable and damaging responses to art.

In the second section of this chapter, I will suggest that depictions of aesthetic empathy in *Harriet Hume* aim to highlight the disorienting impact of formalist theories of aesthetic disinterestedness. This is elaborated through West’s depictions of Arnold Condorex’s empathic appreciations of landscape architecture in Hyde Park. She establishes a connection between Arnold’s uplifting bodily responses to significant forms and his determination to rise up in the hierarchy of British politics. Arnold’s empathic responses to significant forms aim to validate West’s ideas about the relationship between solipsistic responses to art and dysfunctional social conduct, which are outlined in the latter half of ‘The Strange Necessity’. She uses Arnold’s responses to take aim at Bell’s theory that the aesthetic emotion caused by significant form is disembodied and detached from questions of conduct. Instead, West associates Bell’s aesthetic theory with art that enables solitary and disorienting behaviours in the moral and political spheres. The section concludes by comparing Arnold’s empathic realisations of landscape architecture with Richards’ notion of aesthetic disinterest and Lawrence’s construction of disinterested touch in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* (1928). Whereas Richards and Lawrence outline empathic and tactile experiences that suspend or transcend particular standpoints and personality traits, West argues that they are in fact intimately connected. This section demonstrates that representations of empathy in

Harriet Hume challenge formalist theories of disembodied (and embodied) disinterestedness by emphasising their disorienting impact on spatial, political and moral conduct.

II. Empathy and Aesthetic Equilibrium in ‘The Strange Necessity’

In ‘The Strange Necessity’, West intertwines an assessment of James Joyce’s *Ulysses* and the importance of art with an account of her empathic responses to the architectural, aesthetic and consumer stimuli that she feels ‘there, on the Rue di Rivoli’ and other areas of the Parisian built environment (SN 50). In a December 1927 letter to her publisher Jonathan Cape, she supplies a synopsis of the essay’s primary concerns. Initially, West explains, the piece sets out to provide a critically balanced ‘discussion of James Joyce’s *Ulysses* which is probably the first estimate to be done neither praying nor vomiting’.²⁹ Subsequently, she indicates that her composed assessment of the ‘incompetent’ and ‘necessary’ aspects of *Ulysses* moves into a broader discussion about ‘this “strange necessity, art” which is so inclusive of opposites – as for instance the paintings of Ingres and the books of James Joyce’.³⁰

The opening sentence of ‘The Strange Necessity’ stresses that West’s account of her physical experiences among the streets and buildings in the French capital will play a big part in the essay’s primary concerns:

I shut the bookshop door behind me and walked slowly down the street that leads from the Odéon to the Boulevard St. Germain in the best of all cities, reading in the little volume which had there been sold to me, not exactly pretentiously, indeed with a matter-of-fact briskness, yet with a sense of there being something on hand different from an ordinary commercial transaction: as they sell pious whatnots in a cathedral porch. (SN 13)

²⁹ Scott, *The Selected Letters of Rebecca West*, p. 98.

³⁰ Ibid.

West's visit to this bookshop, which she later reveals to be Sylvia Beach's Shakespeare and Company, is significant to her discussion of James Joyce as the establishment that first published *Ulysses* in 1922. The essay's intertwining of her considerations about *Ulysses* with accounts of her visit to a dressmaker, a milliner's and a restaurant 'at the end of the Ile St. Louis' must partly be inspired by the intersecting sensory and psychological stimuli that define Leopold Bloom's passage through the streets of Dublin (SN 51). Taking care to situate herself on the Rue de l'Odéon, West also emphasises the equal importance of her own responses to the Parisian built environment for her critical project. Indeed, the labels on the front of the holograph draft of 'The Strange Necessity' – now held at Yale University's Beinecke library – show that West purchased them from 'A. Roques. 1 & 3 Rue de Condé & 4 Rue de l'Odéon', suggesting that she really did consider Joyce whilst walking the streets of Paris (see Fig. 7 below). Walking 'slowly down the street that leads from the Odéon to the Boulevard St. Germain', West initiates a trend in which her attempt to develop an even-handed criticism of James Joyce, as well as her broader interrogation of art's strange necessity, will be informed by her bodily perceptions of the Parisian built environment and those further afield (SN 13).

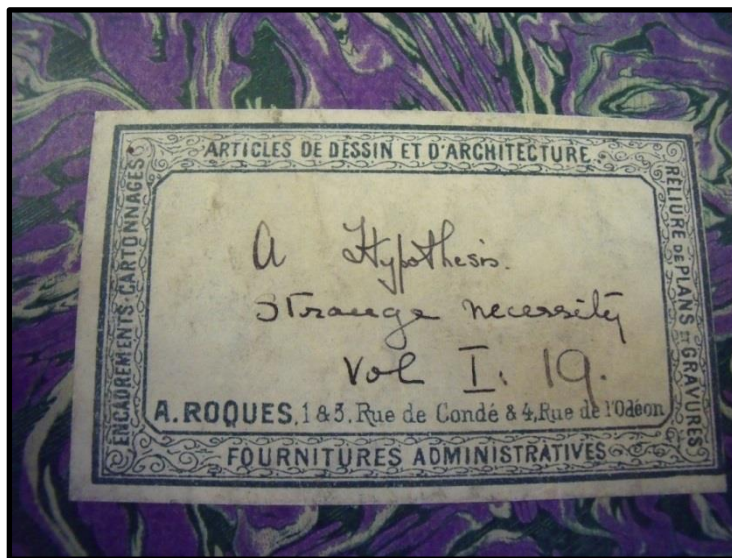


Fig. 7: Rebecca West, 'The Strange Necessity: Holograph Draft', Rebecca West Papers, Yale, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, GEN MSS 105, fols 1261-1262.

After shutting the door of Beach's bookshop at the beginning of 'The Strange Necessity', West refers to what she later defines as 'the active power of empathy which makes the creative artist' and 'the passive power of empathy which makes the appreciator of art' in order to critically assess Joyce's writings (SN 102). In Chapter Three, I noted that her interest in empathy can be traced to Sybil's visit to the Packbury Assizes in *Sunflower*: 'she had found out that if she imitated the facial expression and bodily motions of a really good actor she began to experience feelings that were evidently what he was feeling since they were not her own and made her understand his conception of the part' (S 30). In 'The Strange Necessity', West begins an assessment of Joyce's poem 'Alone' (1917) by foregrounding her 'passive power of empathy' (SN 102) on the Rue de l'Odéon. Noting the flight of 'a dove that was bridging the tall houses', West claims: 'I felt that interior agreement with its grace, that delighted participation in its experience, which is only possible when one is in a state of pleasure' (SN 13). Here, her experience seems to anticipate Merleau-Ponty's claim in the working notes for *The Visible and the Invisible* that 'between [the world] and us there is *Einfühlung*', and 'that means that my body is made of the same flesh of the world (it is a perceived), and moreover that this flesh of my body is shared by the world'.³¹ In her subsequent attempt to distinguish between the allegedly "sentimental" aspects of Joyce's poem and the "non-sentimental" artist, West stresses the importance of the 'active power of empathy' in space (SN 102). She argues that the non-sentimental artist 'must balance irregularity with irregularity' (SN 16). Strikingly, this creative balancing act is associated with the "non-sentimental" artist's active powers of bodily empathy in space: 'the artist who has identified with his theme feels this as almost automatic an adjustment as a movement of his own body' (SN 17). West claims that 'in *La Princesse de Clèves* [(1678)], in *Adolphe* [(1816)], in the pages of Stendhal', 'each writer has

³¹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 248.

passed the theme and its characters through the imagination and knows the value of each character as one knows the weight of an object one has held in one's hand' (SN 17). As a result, she argues, in these works 'there is established a perfect equilibrium' (SN 17).

Later in the essay, West indicates that her passive empathic participation in the movements and forces suggested by the architecture of Notre-Dame cathedral inform her 'consider[ation] of the ground plan of *Ulysses*' (SN 40). Approaching Notre-Dame, she contrasts her sense of the bodily-spiritual movement suggested by Leopold Bloom with an appreciation of the bodily-spiritual movement suggested by the cathedral façade:

Simply he stands before us, convincing us that man wishes to fall back from humanity into the earth, and that in that wish is power, as the façade of Notre-Dame stands above us, convincing us that man wishes to rise from humanity into the sky, and in that wish is power. (SN 44)

It is important to acknowledge here that West doesn't explicitly state that her body empathically participates in the bodily-spiritual movement suggested by the façade, as she does with the movement of the dove. However, her definition of empathy as 'our power of entering into the experience of objects outside ourselves' (outlined in the explanatory note at the beginning of the essay) encourages the reader to interpret her response to the cathedral in this way.³²

The key accusation that West seeks to level at Joyce in this passage is that, because 'nothing is suggested in the course of the book which would reconcile him to the nobility of life', *Ulysses* does not provide 'adequate indications of the factors in man that are not Leopold Bloom' (SN 43-44). She elaborates her claim by empathically identifying with the architectural distribution of forces evoked by the cathedral and

³² West, 'Explanation', p. 7.

those suggested by Joyce's portrayal of Bloom. In part, the supposed inadequacies of Joyce's characterisation of Bloom are brought home to West by Notre-Dame's 'two towers, richly carved to suggest the elaboration of life which will inevitably co-exist with its elevation, sturdily proportioned to suggest that elevation is mechanically possible, can endure in the real world where there is pull and stress' (*SN* 44). In addition, she also refers to 'the naves and the transepts and the baptistery, and the whole body of the church, built reasonably high to show that when man worships he has already risen higher than when he sits by his fireside or in his little shop, but built lower than the towers, to show he has not yet risen very far' (*SN* 44). Here, West's understanding of touch continues what Derrida calls the "haptocentric tradition" of regarding the tactile sense as 'the one bringing us the greatest certainty'.³³ By contrast, West argues that 'behind Mr. Joyce's Leopold Bloom there are no such expositions by proportion' (*SN* 44). Instead, 'it is as if behind the façade of Notre-Dame there were another couple of towers leaning over at an angle of sixty degrees and then behind them another couple lying almost flat with the ground' (*SN* 44).

West's empathic participation in the various movements and forces at work in the cathedral are intended to model her belief that, contrary to Joyce's representation of Bloom, man is dynamically poised between opposing wills. Her imagined engagement in Notre-Dame's skewed distribution of architectural force implies that Bloom's desire 'to fall back from humanity into the earth' is equally crooked and unbalanced (*SN* 44). In contrast, her sense of the contrasting forces of 'elevation' and 'pull and stress' balancing in the upright towers imply that man is dynamically poised between the will to rise and fall (*SN* 44). As West puts it later on in 'The Strange Necessity', 'it is useful and not inconsistent with reality to conceive [of man] as the battleground of two opposing forces: the will to live and the will to die' (*SN* 59). Glendinning notes in her

³³ Derrida, p. 41.

biography of the author that she was ‘a Manichaeian in spirit’ whose ‘own cosmology was a matter of eternal duals – between light and darkness, good and evil, life and death, female and male’.³⁴ In West’s account of her attempt to balance sea and cliff in her consciousness at the end of the essay (which I discussed in the introduction to this chapter), she finds ‘in those proportions [...] a new and satisfactory equilibrium for my will to live and my will to die’ (*SN* 190). At the beginning of the essay, she correspondingly feels this ‘satisfactory equilibrium’ between man’s ‘will to live’ and ‘will to die’ in the forces at work in Notre-Dame’s architectural proportions (*SN* 190).

By elucidating her dualistic understanding of spiritual bearing in ‘The Strange Necessity’ through empathic appreciations of a Gothic cathedral, West’s essay echoes the kind of buildings and responses described by Lee and Anstruther-Thomson in ‘Beauty and Ugliness’. In this essay, the authors attempt to give ‘to the phenomena of aesthetics an explanation different from that furnished by recent mental science, but an explanation more really consonant with the psychological thought of our day’.³⁵ In contrast, West’s alternative account of the ‘phenomena of aesthetics’³⁶ represented by James Joyce and the strange necessity of art in general draws upon the contemporary psychological work of ‘Professor Pavlov’s *Conditioned Reflexes*’, which was published the year before her essay in 1927 (*SN* 73). West’s assessment of Joyce also calls upon her empathic responses to the façade and other architectural features of Notre-Dame, in addition to the more cosmopolitan sites of the Rue di Rivoli, the Louvre, a hat shop and a restaurant on the Ile St. Louis. By contrast, Lee and Anstruther-Thomson’s explanation of aesthetic experience draws upon their empathic responses to ‘[Leon Battista] Alberti’s façade of Santa Maria Novella in Florence’³⁷ and the ‘cathedrals [...]

³⁴ Glendinning, p. 211.

³⁵ Lee and Anstruther-Thomson, ‘Beauty and Ugliness’, p. 544.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Lee and Anstruther-Thomson, ‘Beauty and Ugliness’, p. 560.

of Amiens and of Cologne'.³⁸ In 'The Strange Necessity', West's account of art's strange necessity is concerned with finding out what broader condition causes 'objects so utterly different as a book and a picture [...] [to] have anything like the same effect' (SN 56) through a set of defined questions: 'What is the meaning of this mystery of mysteries? Why does art matter? And why does it matter so much? What is this strange necessity?' (SN 58). Conversely, Lee and Anstruther-Thomson make it clear in their essay that 'the explanation we hope to give refers to the question: Why should a specific kind of condition, either agreeable or disagreeable, accompany the recognition of those co-related qualities of form called respectively Beauty and Ugliness [...]?'³⁹

Notwithstanding the differences between these essays, West's empathic response to Notre-Dame cathedral in 'The Strange Necessity' corresponds with those outlined by Lee and Anstruther-Thomson in 'Beauty and Ugliness'. Her understanding of empathy as 'our power of entering into the experience of objects outside ourselves'⁴⁰ is likely shaped by Lee and Anstruther-Thomson's theory that 'the perception of Form [...] implies an active participation of the most important organs of animal life, a constant alteration of vital processes requiring stringent regulation for the benefit of the total organism'.⁴¹ In 'Beauty and Ugliness', Lee and Anstruther-Thomson argue that when stood in front of Santa Maria Novella's façade 'the great expanse of surface in front of us makes us feel both widened out and drawn up far beyond ordinary life'.⁴² Correspondingly, the narrator of 'The Strange Necessity' notes that 'the façade of Notre-Dame stands above us, convincing us that man wishes to rise from humanity into the sky, and in that wish is power' (SN 44). In their analysis of 'the aesthetic wonder and beauty of a great French cathedral', Lee and Anstruther-Thomson argue that the 'Gothic builders [...] juggled, so to speak, with visible lines and made the beholder

³⁸ Lee and Anstruther-Thomson, 'Beauty and Ugliness', p. 562.

³⁹ Lee and Anstruther-Thomson, 'Beauty and Ugliness', p. 546.

⁴⁰ West, 'Explanation', p. 7.

⁴¹ Lee and Anstruther-Thomson, 'Beauty and Ugliness', p. 544.

⁴² Lee and Anstruther-Thomson, 'Beauty and Ugliness', p. 561.

realise a whole organism of active and opposing movements, quite independently of the constructive necessity of the case'.⁴³ As we have seen in 'The Strange Necessity', West equivalently 'realise[s]'⁴⁴ the opposing forces of 'elevation' and 'pull and stress' balancing in the architecture of Notre-Dame's towers (SN 44). Lee and Anstruther-Thomson conclude that 'a slightly uneven-sided arch, like those of good Gothic work, affects us as extremely interesting, for we see the two sides of the arch actively pressing against each other, and this at once calls up in us active sensations of equilibrium'.⁴⁵ West's empathic participation in Notre-Dame's opposing forces calls up what she later describes as a state of 'satisfactory equilibrium' (SN 190).

Though brief scholarly attention has been paid to the affinities between Lee and West as aesthetic theorists, existing scholarship has not recognised the formative influence of 'Beauty and Ugliness' on 'The Strange Necessity'. In his study of *Fateful Beauty: Aesthetic Environments, Juvenile Development and Literature, 1860-1960* (2008), Douglas Mao suggests that West 'distantly' recalls in her essay Lee's theories about 'the adaptive advantage conferred by aesthetic sensitivity' in her crediting of 'art with enhancing our desire to live' – but makes no mention of her theory of empathy.⁴⁶ Rather than implying a distant reference to Lee's theories, the close correlation between West's empathic realisation of Notre-Dame's architectural forces and those outlined in 'Beauty and Ugliness' suggest their central importance to West's critical and aesthetic project in 'The Strange Necessity'. As West's response to Notre-Dame demonstrates, Lee and Anstruther-Thomson's theories provide her with a model of aesthetic experience that seems to justify her claim that man holds this 'desire to live' in balance with a desire to die.⁴⁷

⁴³ Lee and Anstruther-Thomson, 'Beauty and Ugliness', p. 567.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Douglas Mao, *Fateful Beauty: Aesthetic Environments, Juvenile Development and Literature, 1860-1960* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), p. 197.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

More broadly, West's incorporation of Lee and Anstruther-Thomson's empathic responses to Gothic architecture are intended to ground her assessment of *Ulysses* in her broader theory about art's ability to strengthen and weaken our orientation in relation to the complicated phenomena which make up the world. Perhaps her central argument about the strange necessity of art in the essay is that, in support of a human cortex that is 'overburdened with experiences', it serves 'to pick out of the whole complexity of the environment those units which are of significance, and to integrate those units into an excitatory complex' (SN 175). Conversely, she claims that 'manifestations of bad art [...] do not represent processes of analysis and synthesis of experience terminating in the creation of excitatory complexes, but are attempts to make excitatory complexes out of the crude factual elements of experience' (SN 181). Her empathic response to the cathedral is intended to outline the aspects of the book which hinder this job. Interpreted within this framework, West's empathic 'realis[ation of] a whole organism of active and opposing movements'⁴⁸ in Notre-Dame mark it out as an example of "good" art which has successfully managed to create an 'excitatory complex' (SN 175). It is important to note here that West sees it as 'imperative if I am to get on with my biological job of adapting myself to my environment that I should read *Ulysses*' (SN 181). However, her identification with the imaginary cathedral representing the bodily-spiritual movement suggested by Bloom associate it with "bad" art which 'attempts to make excitatory complexes out of the crude factual elements of experience' (SN 181). West claims that 'there are, as a matter of fact, some pretty bad holes in Mr. James Joyce's façade, for again and again Leopold Bloom is represented as receiving impressions directly in the form of gibberish, without any translatory efforts on his part' (SN 45).

In addition to distinguishing between the excitatory responses elicited by "good" and "bad" art, West's empathic realisation of Notre-Dame's architectural forces also

⁴⁸ Lee and Anstruther-Thomson, 'Beauty and Ugliness', p. 567.

elaborate their supposedly contrasting impact on mental health. Near the end of the essay, she claims that: ‘Never, I perceive, am I a more healthy, sane, non-neurotic animal than when I let art dictate my reactions’ (SN 186). Conversely, she argues that ‘bad art is maintained by the neurotic’ (SN 183). In an attempt to account for ‘people who like bad novels’, for example, she claims that ‘plainly their power of empathy is not working on real people’ (SN 116). Lee and Anstruther-Thomson boldly argue in ‘Beauty and Ugliness’ that the ‘very subtle equilibrium which has thus been forced on us by architecture’ exemplifies art’s ability to improve mental health and our cognitive abilities:

It brings us a feeling of clear-headedness such as we rarely felt before, and we feel as if there were nothing we could not understand. This illusion of mental lucidity seems due to an unusual activity in the back of the head, produced by the unusual demand on our balancing powers.⁴⁹

Read alongside this idea, it is possible that West’s account of her empathic sensations of architectural equilibrium aim to demonstrate such a feeling of balanced ‘clear-headedness’ – both in her assessment of the cathedral and *Ulysses*.⁵⁰ By contrast, her association of Bloom’s desire ‘to fall back from humanity into the earth’ with an imagined participation in Notre-Dame’s skewed distribution of architectural force model the neurotic empathic appreciation of fantasy she associates with “bad” art (SN 44).

West’s response to the cathedral also enables her to distinguish between “good” art which helps the perceiver to go on living and “bad” art that encourages them to turn away from life. She argues that “good” art ‘creates a proportionately powerful excitatory complex [...] which [...] halts in front of some experience which if left in a crude state would probably make one feel that life was too difficult, and transform[s] it

⁴⁹ Lee and Anstruther-Thomson, ‘Beauty and Ugliness’, p. 568.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

into something that helps one to go on living' (SN 197). By contrast, West suggests that "bad" art is maintained by the person 'who is deadly afraid of authentic art because it inspires him to go on living, and he is terrified of life' (SN 183). As I noted above, Mao has recognised the influence of Lee on West's belief that art has a crucial role in 'enhancing our desire to live'.⁵¹ Indeed, Lee and Anstruther-Thomson argue that with the 'feeling of clear-headedness' initiated by the realisation of architectural equilibrium 'we seem to be living at twice our normal rate, and life, for no definable reason, seems twice as much worth living'.⁵² Crucial to their claim that this made life 'worth living' is the sense of 'keen excitement' they felt was created by our bodily participation in the opposing forces at work in the Gothic arch.⁵³ Correspondingly, in 'The Strange Necessity' West associates the life-affirming quality of "good" art with its tendency to create a 'feeling of realized potency, of might perpetuating itself' (SN 197). Stood in front of Notre-Dame, her realisation of the balancing forces of 'elevation' and 'pull and stress' in its upright towers model this feeling of potency (SN 44). As a figure who is distinguished from her responses to the cathedral proper, West suggests that Bloom fails to elicit such a realisation.

Many aspects of the empathic identification that West uses to interpret *Ulysses* in terms of her notions of "good" art overlaps with the discussion of aesthetic empathy carried out in the modernist aesthetics of I.A. Richards. In *The Foundations of Aesthetics* (1922), Richards, along with his collaborators C.K. Ogden and James Wood, prefigures West's later endorsement of Lipps' empathy theory in their claim that:

Space, is an object of aesthetic perception "only inasmuch as it is a space which has been given life", and is thus the vehicle of inner tension; and it is the mission

⁵¹ Mao, p. 197.

⁵² Lee and Anstruther-Thomson, 'Beauty and Ugliness', p. 568.

⁵³ Ibid.

of the arts of beautiful spatial form to increase this interchange of activities and to diversify it.⁵⁴

Moreover, Richards and his co-authors appear to have appropriated Lee and Anstruther-Thomson's theory of empathic engagement with architecture: 'By such feelings [of empathy] we transform the inert masses of a building into so many limbs of a living body, a body experiencing inner strains which we transport back into ourselves'.⁵⁵ West's response to Notre-Dame as a series of balancing forces of 'elevation' and 'pull and stress' (*SN* 44) equivalently frames the cathedral as a 'vehicle of inner tension'.⁵⁶ Her realisation of these forces models the 'satisfactory equilibrium' between her 'will to live' and 'will to die' that she extols near the end of the essay (*SN* 190). Though West never acknowledges or mentions Richards' writing in 'The Strange Necessity' (she does reference other modernist art critics including Clive Bell and Roger Fry), the correspondences between their response to buildings suggest that her theories about the experience of "good" and "bad" art may have been influenced by his ideas.

Notwithstanding the apparent resemblances between their descriptions of empathy, West diverges from Richards by using her identification with architecture as a 'vehicle of inner tension' to acknowledge the role that empathy plays in the orienting power of complex art. Like West, Richards suggests that aesthetic empathy helps the perceiver to appreciate environmental balances which are condensed in artworks: 'there is undoubtedly a sense in which certain relations of formal symmetry, a certain distribution of weight, the even interplay of qualities and intensities, may lead to a mere judgment of balance on the perceptual level, the balance being usually judged to be in the work of art'.⁵⁷ However, he subsequently argues that the 'superficial balances' appreciated through empathy merely 'create a predisposition towards the more

⁵⁴ I.A. Richards, C.K. Ogden and James Woods, *The Foundations of Aesthetics* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1925), p. 67.

⁵⁵ Richards, Ogden and Woods, pp. 65-66.

⁵⁶ Richards, Ogden and Woods, p. 67.

⁷⁴ Richards, Ogden and Woods, p. 71.

important forms of appreciation'.⁵⁸ The more important form of aesthetic appreciation referred to by Richards and his collaborators is 'synaesthesia', an equilibrious experience of 'particular sets of impulses [which] are felt in relation to other sets' that causes 'our individuality [to] become[...] differentiated or isolated from the individualities of things around us' and 'less 'mixed into' other things'.⁵⁹ They affirm that 'this is the explanation of that detachment so often mentioned in artistic experience'.⁶⁰ According to Richards, 'through no other experience can the full richness and complexity of our environment be realised'.⁶¹ By contrast, the 'feeling of realized potency' (*SN* 197) demonstrated by West's identification with the actual and imagined architectural forces of Notre-Dame emphasise empathy's role in enabling her perception and comprehension of the 'particular sets of impulses' suggested by the cathedral in relation to *Ulysses*.⁶² In *Theory and Cultural Value* (1992), Steven Connor has observed that the synaesthetic experience of equilibrium is held to detach us from the 'dominance of identification' in Richards' criticism because he elsewhere associates this with 'popular pleasure' – which was associated with getting uncritically "lost in a book" or artwork.⁶³ Influenced by Lee and Anstruther-Thomson's empathy theory, West instead marks out her heightened identification with – rather than her detachment from – equilibrious architectural forces as the crucial factor in her argument that "good" art helps to orient the perceiver in relation to the 'complexity of our environment'.⁶⁴

West's incorporation of Lee and Anstruther-Thomson's theory of empathic engagement with Gothic architecture enables her to assess *Ulysses* in terms of her own theories about the experiences which characterise "good" and "bad" art. As the narrator of 'The Strange Necessity' walks away from the cathedral and reaches the Rue di

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Richards, Ogden and Woods, p. 79.

⁶⁰ Richards, Ogden and Woods, p. 78.

⁶¹ Richards, Ogden and Woods, p. 91.

⁶² Ibid, p. 79.

⁶³ Steven Connor, *Theory and Cultural Value* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p. 49.

⁶⁴ Richards, Ogden and Woods, p. 91.

Rivoli, her empathic realisation of its dynamically composed architectural forces seem to justify and enable her increasingly complex attempts to balance participations in the experience of Marion Bloom and a painting by Ingres:

As I continued on my way along the Rue de Rivoli, still full of that sense of peace and satisfaction and reassurance which rested on me like a pencil of brightness, proceeding from the rhapsodic figure of Marion – from meeting any of whose equivalents in the real world may the merciful Powers preserve me! – I was conscious of another pencil of brightness now searching for my breast [...]. It proceeded almost visibly from certain grey walls, garlanded with stone that has taken on the variegation of living matter [...]; from the Museum of the Louvre. (SN 55-56)

Moving on from her discussion of *Ulysses*, West's body has now become balanced between the experiences represented by different artists and art-forms: 'How in the world could two artists so entirely unlike in every way as Ingres and James Joyce [...], whose approach to the spectator is along such different sensory avenues, [...] have anything like the same effect[?]' (SN 56). Here, her earlier bodily realisation of the opposing architectural forces of Notre-Dame give way to her position between tactile 'pencil[s] of brightness' that reach her breast 'along such different sensory avenues' (SN 56). Moreover, the physically 'active sensations of equilibrium'⁶⁵ that West realises in Notre-Dame's towers are replaced by a state of composure defined by the 'sense of peace and satisfaction and reassurance' (SN 55).

The transposition of the equilibrious state elicited by the cathedral to West's consideration of varying aesthetic stimuli which she 'felt [...] there, on the Rue de Rivoli', indicate that the theory of aesthetic empathy outlined in 'Beauty and Ugliness' also structures her balanced aesthetic experiences within the broader cultural

⁶⁵ Ibid.

environment (SN 50). Lee and Anstruther-Thomson argue that the empathic realisation of equilibrious forces in Gothic architecture creates the sense that our balance operates across a range which extends beyond the limits of the body:

We are indeed always balancing ourselves more or less; nay, but for this fact, we should not be bipeds at all, or possess most of our human characteristics, and we are therefore so accustomed to this fact as scarcely to notice it in ordinary life. But as soon as we see something else adjusting equilibrium, our own balance seems to swing on a wider scale, and this wider balancing brings a sense of our limits being enlarged in every direction, and of our life being spread over a far wider area.⁶⁶

By noting that she is poised between ‘pencil[s] of brightness’ whose ‘approach to the spectator is along such different sensory avenues’ (SN 56), West deliberately situates her balancing aesthetic experiences on the ‘wider scale’ of Paris.⁶⁷ In Chapter Three, I explored how the architecture of Yaverland’s End in *The Judge* elicits an overwhelming haptic response which suggests a correspondingly asymmetrical reciprocity between spectator and the culture of spectacle. By contrast, the ‘active sensations of equilibrium’ felt on the ‘sensory avenues’ (SN 56) of Paris suggest empathic realisations of aesthetic stimuli ‘whose approach to the spectator’ (SN 56) establishes a much more proportionate reciprocal relationship.⁶⁸

That this composed ‘sense of peace and satisfaction and reassurance’ is specifically felt on the Rue de Rivoli indicates that West’s empathic experience is calculated to contest the prejudice that women were passive participants in consumer culture (SN 55). Her situation on the ‘sensory avenues’ of Paris demonstrate an awareness that, in the decades leading up to the 1920s, the city’s topography was

⁶⁶ Lee and Anstruther-Thomson, ‘Beauty and Ugliness’, p. 567.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

beginning to become inextricably associated with the desires and paraphernalia of consumer culture (SN 56). David H. Walker has noted in *Consumer Chronicles: Cultures of Consumption in Modern French Literature* (2011) that ‘the creation of wide new avenues [...] brought about in particular a reconfiguration of the city’s commercial geography, fostering a new network of shopping streets focused on the *grands boulevards*: the boulevard de Sébastopol, the avenue de l’Opera, the rue de la Paix and the Rue de Rivoli’.⁶⁹ Rita Felski has persuasively argued in *The Gender of Modernity* (1995) that ‘the emergence of a culture of consumption’ on such commercial thoroughfares ‘helped to shape new forms of subjectivity for women, whose intimate needs, desires, and perceptions of self were mediated by public representations of commodities and the gratifications that they promised’.⁷⁰ In contemporary complaints about this supposed ‘feminization of modernity’, adds Felski, ‘women are portrayed as buying machines, driven by impulses beyond their control to squander money on the accumulation of ever more possessions’.⁷¹ Indeed, Samuel Beckett’s argument in ‘Dante...Bruno. Vico...Joyce’ (1929) that West was guilty of carrying out a ‘continuous process of intellectual salivation’ in ‘The Strange Necessity’ reveals that the author was herself not immune to the sort of prejudices highlighted by Felski.⁷² Of course, the ‘pencil[s] of brightness’ felt by West represent the influence of high art rather than consumer culture (SN 55). Nevertheless, her remark that she ‘greedily promised [her]self [...] a deep draught’ of Ingres indicates that she also comprehends her dynamically balanced identification with aesthetic stimuli as a composed act of consumption (SN 56).

⁶⁹ David H. Walker, *Consumer Chronicles: Cultures of Consumption in Modern French Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 22-23.

⁷⁰ Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 62.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Samuel Beckett, ‘Dante...Bruno. Vico...Joyce’, in Samuel Beckett et al, *Our Exagmination Round His Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), 5-13 (p. 10).

Rather than being ‘driven by impulses beyond [her] control’⁷³, West’s poised identification with differing aesthetic ‘pencil[s] of brightness’ is intended to buttress the essay’s insistence on the possibility of composed female aesthetic and cultural engagement (*SN* 56). Kathryn Laing has suggested in ‘Addressing Femininity in the Twenties: Virginia Woolf and Rebecca West on Money, Mirrors and Masquerade’ (1997) that ‘the image of women as passive consumers through associations with spending and dressing is overturned by West’s combination of shopping and fashion in a work designed to be “technical and highbrow”’.⁷⁴ Notwithstanding this, Laing detects in the ‘repeated assertions of the logicity of her argument [...] [an] uncertainty which forms part of her analysis’.⁷⁵ Alternatively, West’s emphasis on her ability to balance empathic identifications with differing aesthetic stimuli on the Rue de Rivoli establishes the ‘logicity’ of aesthetic engagement which allows her to be certain about women as active consumers of art.⁷⁶ She argues that ‘the part of the individual which partakes of continuity with the rest of the universe rejoices in the salvation of its substance’ and provides ‘confirmation of my personal experience’ (*SN* 55). West’s appropriation of Lee’s and Anstruther-Thomson’s idea that empathic realisations of architectural forces can cause ‘active sensations of equilibrium’ correspondingly aims to confirm the possibility of balanced female cultural consumption.⁷⁷

West’s understanding of aesthetic empathy as an experiential model for balanced female acts of cultural consumption help to explain her divergence from the hostile approach to empathy developed in the writings of modernist contemporaries such as Wyndham Lewis. Influenced by Worringer’s idea that aesthetic empathy entails

⁷³ Felski, p. 62.

⁷⁴ Kathryn Laing, ‘Addressing Femininity in the Twenties: Virginia Woolf and Rebecca West on Money, Mirrors and Masquerade’, in *Virginia Woolf and the Arts: Selected Papers from the Sixth Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf*, Diane F. Gillespie and Leslie K. Hankins (New York: Pace University Press, 1997), 66-75 (p. 73).

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Lee and Anstruther-Thomson, ‘Beauty and Ugliness’, p. 567.

“losing oneself” in the contemplation of a work of art’, Lewis suggests that ‘feeling-into’ the experience of the other causes a contamination or breach of the individual self.⁷⁸ In ‘The New Egos’, published in the first issue of *BLAST* on 20 June 1914, he posits:

We all to-day [...] are in each other’s vitals – overlap, intersect, and are Siamese to any extent [...] All clean, clear-cut emotions depend on the element of strangeness, and surprise and primitive detachment.

Dehumanization is the chief diagnostic of the Modern World.⁷⁹

Mengham has argued that this ‘dehumanizing project is seen to best effect in Lewis’s own fiction in the strategic unmanageability of the body’, which aims to block any desire to empathise with a fictional character.⁸⁰ In ‘The Meaning of the Wild Body’ (1927), he describes a ‘fat but active man’ shakily boarding a train on the tube: ‘his running, neat, deliberate, but clumsy embarkation, *combined with the coolness of his eye*, had a ludicrous effect, to which several of us responded’.⁸¹ By contrast, Lee and Anstruther-Thomson’s conception of empathy supplies West with a conception of aesthetic response through which she could contest contemporary prejudices about the ‘unmanageability of the body’ supposedly displayed by women ‘driven [or overwhelmed] by impulses beyond their control’.⁸² Whereas Lewis argues that aesthetic empathy results in a blurring of the self in the experience of the other, West follows Lee and Anstruther-Thomson in embracing it as a means of finding self-confirmation in the complexity of aesthetic stimuli.

⁷⁸ Worringer, p. 24.

⁷⁹ Wyndham Lewis, ‘The New Egos’, *BLAST*, 1, 20 June 1914, p. 141 <<http://www.modjourn.org/>> [accessed 19 July 2017].

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Wyndham Lewis, ‘The Meaning of the Wild Body’, in *The Wild Body: A Soldier of Humour and Other Stories* (London: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1928), 244-251 (p. 250). Emphasis in original <<https://archive.org/>> [accessed 19 July 2017].

⁸² Felski, p. 62.

Following the publication of 'The Strange Necessity', West turns her attention to empathic engagements with the built environment around her home at 80 Onslow Gardens in Kensington, London. In 'A London Letter', published in the May 1929 issue of the *Bookman*, West complains that she passes 'no buildings which are not either old or designed to harmonize with old neighbors [sic]. Not one single architect has dared anywhere in those two miles a façade that has had any reference to modern life'.⁸³ She notes how this aged architecture enables her to empathically inhabit her younger self: 'I passed buildings beyond number which recall memories of my childhood so vividly that it very easily seemed to me as if I had shrunk to a trifle under four feet and were trotting along beside the tall ghosts of my father and my uncles'.⁸⁴ However, the lack of any allusion to modern life in these buildings frames an experience which prevents her from acknowledging her orientation in the present-day world: 'in fact, when I am in the mood to slip out of life into fantasy, London enables me to pass in the drooping of an eyelid into a mere re-enactment of the past: and I can disregard, and dislike for their incursions on my reverie, the people in the streets, who happen to be the age in which I live'.⁸⁵ Here, West's account recalls a theory she outlines in the latter half of 'The Strange Necessity' about the 'disordered fantasies of conduct' created in those whose response to art fails to 'provide any real guidance as to the nature of experience' (*SN* 168). *Harriet Hume: A London Fantasy* is set in the same area that West describes in 'A London Letter'. In the next section of this chapter, I will explore how this novel uses depictions of empathic responses to the built environment to emphasise the social disorientation caused by modernist theories of disinterested aesthetic perception.

⁸³ Rebecca West, 'A London Letter', *The Bookman*, May 1929, pp. 288-293 (p. 288). <<http://unz.org/>> [accessed 19 July 2017].

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ West, 'A London Letter', pp. 288-289.

III. Empathy and Aesthetic Disinterest in *Harriet Hume: A London Fantasy*

In her 1929 article ‘A London Letter’, West argues that ‘all the best imaginative productions of the last decade in England – Walter de la Mare’s *Memoirs of a Midget* [(1921)] David Garnett’s *Lady Into Fox* [(1922)], Sylvia Townsend Warner’s *Mr. Fortune’s Maggot* [(1927)], A.E. Coppard’s *Best Short Stories* and Virginia Woolf’s *Orlando* [(1928)] – have all been in the nature of fantasies’.⁸⁶ *Harriet Hume: A London Fantasy* is West’s contribution to this contemporary revival of the genre. West’s biographer Glendinning describes the novel as ‘a fable for adults, a vehicle chiefly for entertainment but also for the conveying of social and psychological observations’.⁸⁷ Rex Whistler’s rarely seen cover design for the first edition of the novel, in which key characters and sites in *Harriet Hume* are depicted underneath an arch, anticipates the ways in which the novel frames these observations using appreciations of built environments (see Fig. 8 below). Debra Rae Cohen has discussed the ways in which characters’ aesthetic responses to architecture in *Harriet Hume* outline West’s aesthetic theory in ‘Sheepish Modernism: Rebecca West, the Adam Brothers, and the Taxonomies of Criticism’ (discussed in the thesis introduction). Cohen notes that ‘Arnold’s Adam Brothers-designed house serves as a kind of proof text whose “readings” by Arnold and Harriet function as opposing theories of tradition, creativity and canonization’.⁸⁸ This section argues that Arnold’s empathic identification with landscape architecture aim to validate West’s conception of disorienting art.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Victoria Glendinning, ‘Introduction’, in *Harriet Hume: A London Fantasy* (London: Virago Press Limited, 1980), pp. i-viii (p. i).

⁸⁸ Cohen, p. 143.

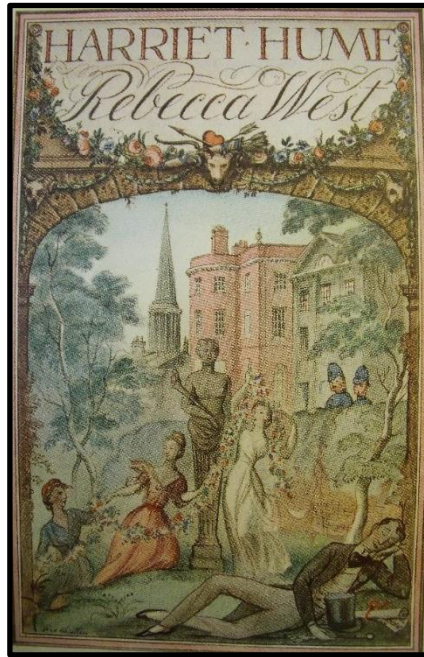


Fig. 8: Rex Whistler, 'Harriet Hume Cover Design', Rebecca West Papers, Yale, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, GEN MSS, 105 fol. 1242.

Appreciations of architecture in *Harriet Hume* are crucial to the novel's commentary on the social and psychological significance of space. At the beginning of the novel, the narrator discerns the socio-political values of residents in Kensington through descriptions of the architectural features of their houses. 'Their stockade of area railings' are said to be 'boasting with their lance-heads that there were points, such as the purity of cooks and the sacredness of property, concerning which the neighbourhood could feel with primitive savagery' (*HH* 8). Conversely, a description of Harriet's dwelling within Blennerhassett House highlight how social pressures following the First World War challenged these social values: 'So hastily had the old house been converted to feed the house-hunger that raged after the Great War, so far faster than any fast bowler had the contractor hurled in staircases and partitions of wood' (*HH* 13).

Moreover, Harriet and Arnold's readings of built environments stress that architectural features can help to orient (and disorient) human beings in time and space. Harriet argues that the interior of Arnold's home at Portland Place, designed by the

eighteenth-century architects the Adam Brothers, consolidates her position in the world: ‘See how he decorates the curve of the arch with a golden border so that we think of the sun on its journey through the day; and how he the cuts the half-circle into twelve golden slices by a very orderly design, as if to say we must break the day into hours and gild each with beauty!’ (*HH* 132). By contrast, the buildings on ‘the grey curve of Regent Street’ exacerbate Arnold’s disorientation in space: ‘I wish this had not happened to me here, in view of this architecture that bears the stamp of no age at all. I feel I am lost among the centuries as well, and if all time is my labyrinth, then I must be lost forever!’ (*HH* 238).

Most significantly, Harriet and Arnold’s responses to the built environment reflect their contrasting commitment to life in the private and the public sphere. Midway through the novel, the two lovers outline differing interpretations of the Adam Brothers interior at Portland Place. Harriet suggests that ‘the pilasters on each side of the shelves claim that if we constrict our lives by the sound and temperate exercise of the faculties, as the ancients showed us, we shall not be crushed by the sky, but shall support it so that it is the less likely to fall!’ (*HH* 132). By contrast, Arnold claims to have found ‘great inspiration’ in this interior for his ‘political work’ (*HH* 132). Harriet’s suggestion that the pilasters instruct us to ‘constrict our lives by the sound and temperate exercise of the faculties’ shows that her life is oriented around the pursuits of the private sphere (*HH* 132). Earlier in the novel, the musician declares that she ‘cannot be interested in anything that does not touch my life, and see nothing as real that does not hold a clue which leads back to me in my little house’ (*HH* 29). Conversely, the ‘great inspiration’ that Arnold finds in the interior demonstrate that his life revolves around his need to succeed in the public sphere (*HH* 132). At numerous points during the novel, he repeats the imperative that ‘a man must rise in the world!’ (*HH* 56).

West's depictions of 'the active power of empathy which makes the creative artist' and 'the passive power of empathy which makes the appreciator of art' show that these opposing orientations are reinforced by empathic responses to the built environment (*SN* 102). Harriet is most satisfied when Arnold constricts his life to the private pleasures of the domestic sphere: 'I was standing by my kitchen table, putting a knife to the string round the jam-pot, and thinking very tenderly of you as you rested here on my couch' (*HH* 26-27). She uses her active power of empathy to realise the bodily well-being that he enjoys here: 'I could feel that you were pulling back the curtains, and then that you felt a need for rhythm, that you wanted to enjoy a sense of ebb and flow without greatly exerting yourself' (*HH* 27). In contrast, the passive powers of empathy which define Arnold's appreciations of the landscape architecture of Hyde Park reinforce his determination to rise in the world. Taking a stroll through the park in Winter, Arnold revels in the fact that he is 'well on his way to rise in the world to a height that all would have to note' because 'once or twice [he] had taken a firm and fearless line, careless of public opinion, that had proved very popular' (*HH* 77). His political stance is seemingly validated by the equally firm lines presented by the landscape architecture of the park: "It can all be done in a single line," Winter was saying of the trees, "if one is careful to keep the point of the pen on the paper, and charges it discreetly with the Indian ink. And line, of course, is the thing" (*HH* 77-78). His aesthetic appreciation of these sharp lines causes him to empathically realise a sense of physical uplift which also seems to authorise his ambition of rising in the world: 'the tree-trunks themselves, which at other times are the least spectacular forms of growth, created such a feeling of resolute increase as is given ordinarily by some prodigious show of leaf or flower or fruit' (*HH* 78). West suggests that this 'feeling of resolute increase' caused by the clear lines of the winter trees result from Arnold's bodily realisation of their upward movement: 'They might have been black flames thrusting

upwards through the effete soil [...]. The scene, full as it was of a sense of the life of earth in spite of being crowded with signs of the suspension of all opulence, suggested a plutonic energy that could work exultantly in spite of receiving none of these encouragements which man considers necessary to sweeten his toil' (*HH* 78-79).

In *Harriet Hume*, West places a particular emphasis on the bodily disorientation caused by Arnold's empathic participations in Hyde Park's landscape architecture. The politician's ambition leads him to pursue corrupt practices that result in his political downfall towards the end of the novel. Nevertheless, Arnold reiterates his ambition to rise in the world by addressing the tree: 'I must tell you that it is my salvation that you are lifting to the skies' (*HH* 248). That his empathic realisations of landscape architecture still validate his determination to rise in the world is indicated by the fact that they encourage him to keep 'his neck stiffly uplifted' (*HH* 249). Notwithstanding this, West indicates that Arnold's supposedly reassuring empathic participation in the uplifting lines of the trees have brought about a total bodily disorientation in space. The politician complains: 'I cannot see anything up there save some stars that have caught in your branches! Is it conceivable that you have not one dead leaf to show me, and not one bud! Then I am lost, I am lost!' (*HH* 249). Arnold further claims that 'it is worse to be lost in time than in space, for it is not known what happens! If I were wandering on the desert I should presently die and become a heap of bones to appal the later traveller; but for all I know I may be wandering as irretrievably away from death as towards it. And am I perhaps moving in a circle?' (*HH* 250).

West's depictions of Arnold's empathic realisations correspond with Lee and Anstruther-Thomson's descriptions of disagreeable aesthetic responses to architecture. In contrast with the agreeable sensations of equilibrium that Lee and Anstruther-Thomson associate with Gothic architecture they value, the authors also outline 'emotions connected with Gothic churches [...] which are not aesthetically satisfactory,

at Cologne as much as at Amiens'.⁸⁹ Lee and Anstruther-Thomson argue that 'these emotions are explicable by the fact that acutely pointed arches are perceived by an adjustment which feels as if the breath of both lungs were running simultaneously upwards in a point'.⁹⁰ In contrast, Arnold's 'feeling of resolute increase' is realised in the trees which seem to be 'thrusting upwards' (*HH* 78-79). Lee and Anstruther-Thomson argue that 'the act of breathing far higher up, both by its unusualness and by the strain it imposes, produces a state of being analogous to that of solitary and Quixotic resolves, forced upon us by the very nature of our surroundings'.⁹¹ Correspondingly, Arnold's empathic realisation reinforces his determination to 'rise in the world to a height that all would have to note' through the adoption of 'a firm and fearless line, careless of public opinion' (*HH* 77). The authors of 'Beauty and Ugliness' posit that when perceiving acutely pointed arches 'mystic ideas seem the only natural ones, for we have lost the sense of firm ground under our feet, and seem, in a way, to hang from the sky'.⁹² At the end of *Harriet Hume*, Arnold's aesthetic responses to landscape architecture instead indicate that he has lost his sense of orientation in time and space: 'am I perhaps moving in a circle?' (*HH* 250).

West's engagement with Lee and Anstruther-Thomson's ideas about disagreeable aesthetic emotions in *Harriet Hume* needs to be read alongside the theories she outlines in 'The Strange Necessity' about the relationship between aesthetic experience and the cultural orientation of the individual. Midway through 'The Strange Necessity', West argues that our aesthetic responses to art have a key role in shaping and orienting individual conduct in society. She suggests that Roman Catholicism in Italy is a 'community art-form' which helps to shape positive social conduct (*SN* 160):

⁸⁹ Lee and Anstruther-Thomson, 'Beauty and Ugliness', p. 564.

⁹⁰ Lee and Anstruther-Thomson, 'Beauty and Ugliness', pp. 564-565.

⁹¹ Lee and Anstruther-Thomson, 'Beauty and Ugliness', p. 565.

⁹² *Ibid.*

A child brought up within the zone dominated by this work of art, who therefore never hears or reads a word that is not the product of a mind equally dominated by it, must receive an impression of the excitatory complex which is the result of its analysis and synthesis. That must involve a suggestion of the profound undesirability of committing murder. (*SN 162*)

By contrast, West claims that individuals who become separated from this community art-form, such as the Italian-American gangster Al Capone, will receive no such suggestion as to the 'undesirability of committing murder' (*SN 162*). Instead, she argues that Capone's infamously murderous conduct in Chicago is characterised by a solipsistic sense of the aesthetic: 'There must be a capacity for seeing time and space as a canvas on which to place a valid design of crime which is like a considerable part of the process of art. But there was information as necessary to him as that given by his observation, his imagination, and his sense of design' (*SN 159*).

According to West, Capone's sense of design is flawed because it detaches him from the moral influence passed down by the cultural traditions of Roman Catholicism in Italy: 'only the past could give it, and from him the past was obliged by lack of contact to withhold it' (*SN 159*). 'Deprived thus of any real guidance as to the nature of experience, except what he himself can find out', West posits that Capone's sense of design encourages conduct which is culturally disorienting rather than orienting: 'the exile dashes about from experience to experience, trying to do, trying to make, but in a state of ignorance as to what making or doing are, and to what end they should lead. Hence Scarface Capone, symbol of the disaster of such exiles, engages in his disordered fantasies of conduct' (*SN 168*).

West's incorporation of Lee and Anstruther-Thomson's notion of disagreeable empathic responses to architecture enable her to establish a corresponding link between Arnold's 'disordered fantasies of conduct' (*SN 168*) and his culturally disorienting sense

of the aesthetic. It is important to acknowledge that West attributes Capone and Arnold with a very different sense of design. The discussion of Capone's 'valid design of crime' in 'The Strange Necessity' indicates a link between his solipsistic sense of the aesthetic and the murderous conduct of his criminal empire (*SN* 159). Conversely, West emphasises the link between the 'feeling of resolute increase' (*HH* 78) caused by Arnold's empathic realisation of the firm upward lines of the trees and the 'solitary and Quixotic resolves' which characterise his political conduct.⁹³ Capone's sense of design is solipsistic due to its separation from the history and traditions which have shaped the community art form of religion. In contrast, Arnold's aesthetic response is solipsistic because it encourages him to take 'a firm and fearless line, careless of public opinion' (*HH* 77).

Notwithstanding this, both men are attributed with a sense of design that reinforces culturally disorienting conduct which provides no 'real guidance as to the nature of experience' (*SN* 168). In 'The Strange Necessity', West argues that Capone's sense of design cause him to 'dash about from experience to experience, trying to do, trying to make, but in a state of ignorance as to what doing or making are, and to what end they should lead' (*SN* 168). 'What Al Capone lacks', as Golubov argues in her essay on 'The Strange Necessity', 'is a moral and cultural framework within which to orientate himself'.⁹⁴ Equivalently, Arnold's empathic identification with landscape architecture reinforces conduct which is accompanied by his bodily disorientation in space: 'Am I perhaps moving in a circle?' (*HH* 250).

In 'The Strange Necessity', Capone's disordered fantasies of conduct are attributed to a vague 'sense of design' (*SN* 159). In *Harriet Hume*, Arnold's disorienting empathic realisations of landscape architecture specifically result from movements suggested by their 'line' (*HH* 77). Here, Arnold's empathic experiences are subtly

⁹³ Lee and Anstruther-Thomson, 'Beauty and Ugliness', p. 565.

⁹⁴ Golubov, p. 218.

associated with Clive Bell's theory of significant form. In *Art*, Bell seeks to outline and isolate the 'one quality without which a work of art cannot exist'⁹⁵ in architecture, sculpture, ceramics, textiles and painting: 'What is this quality? What quality is shared by all objects that provoke our aesthetic emotions? What quality is common to Sta. Sophia and the windows at Chartres, Mexican sculpture, a Persian bowl, Chinese carpets, Giotto's frescoes at Padua, and the masterpieces of Poussin, Piero della Francesca, and Cézanne?'⁹⁶ Corresponding with Arnold's aesthetic 'care for line' (*HH* 78), Bell argues that 'only one answer seems possible – significant form': 'lines and colours combined in a particular way, certain forms and relations of forms, [which] stir our aesthetic emotions'.⁹⁷ In *Harriet Hume*, as we have seen, Arnold's aesthetic emotion is characterised by a 'feeling of resolute increase' and austere exhilaration 'that could work exultantly in spite of receiving none of these encouragements which man considers necessary to sweeten his toil' (*HH* 78-79). In *Art*, Bell outlines a correspondingly uplifting response in his description of 'the superb peaks of aesthetic exaltation': 'And let no one imagine, because he has made merry in the warm tilth and quaint nooks of romance, that he can even guess at the austere and thrilling raptures of those who have climbed the cold, white peaks of art'.⁹⁸

The connection between Bell's theory of significant form and Arnold's empathic identification with landscape architecture has not been considered in existing scholarship on *Harriet Hume*. There is concrete proof that Bell read West's essay. In an undated letter to the author he refers to 'your brilliant essay'.⁹⁹ It is likely that, as with her incorporation of the aesthetic theory of Lee and Anstruther-Thomson, West's engagement with Bell's theory stems from the composition process of 'The Strange

⁹⁵ Clive Bell, *Art* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1914), p. 7.

⁹⁶ Bell, p. 8.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Bell, pp. 32-33.

⁹⁹ Clive Bell, 'Letter to Rebecca West', Rebecca West Papers, Yale, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, GEN MSS 105, fol. 128.

Necessity'. She never refers to Bell's theory of significant form in this essay. However, West does refer to a passage from *Art* in a brief remark that appears midway through the essay, indicating that she was familiar with Bell's ideas. In that essay, she observes that 'Mr. Clive Bell has somewhere expressed disapproval of [...] Palaeolithic artists for their preoccupation with exact representation, which, he says, makes them rank somewhere above Sir Edward Poynton and below Lord Leighton' (*SN* 131). Here, West is paraphrasing Bell's comment, which appears in a footnote to his main aesthetic hypothesis on significant form in *Art*, that the work of Palaeolithic draughtsmen ranks aesthetically 'a little higher than that of Sir Edward Poynter and a little lower than that of the late Lord Leighton'.¹⁰⁰ On this point, West disagrees with Bell's interpretation of Palaeolithic art: 'they did not by any means give the unpleasant impression which is given by bad art' (*SN* 131). Furthermore, West's association of Arnold's empathic experience with significant form in *Harriet Hume* can be interpreted as an attempt to contest some of the key tenets of Bell's aesthetic theory.

Arnold's empathic experiences seem to specifically challenge Bell's formalist theories about disinterested aesthetic responses. Noel Carroll observes in his discussion on 'Aesthetic experience, Art and Artists' (2013) that 'Bell's conception of the aesthetic emotion is clearly a descendant of Kant's idea of disinterestedness, since the aesthetic emotion – Bell's name for aesthetic experience – is defined as discontinuous with any other sort of experience, most notably any of the kind that contributes to the life of individuals and/or of society'.¹⁰¹ Moreover, Meecham and Sheldon note in *Modern Art: A Critical Introduction* that a vital aspect of Kant's theory of disinterestedness is the assumption that the 'aesthetic response transcends the corporeal and the contingent'.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Bell, *Art*, p. 23.

¹⁰¹ Noel Carroll, 'Aesthetic Experience, Art and Artists', in *Aesthetic Experience*, ed. by Richard Shusterman and Adele Tomlin (London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 145-165 (p. 147).

¹⁰² Meecham and Sheldon, p. 27.

The influence of this assumption can be discerned in Bell's remark about 'the austere and thrilling raptures of those who have climbed the cold, white peaks of art'.¹⁰³

In part, Arnold's empathic reactions are intended to challenge Bell's notion that aesthetic responses to significant form are largely disembodied and detached from our orientation in time and space. In *Art*, Bell famously claims that 'Art transports us from the world of man's activity to a world of aesthetic exaltation' in which we 'are shut off from human interests; our anticipations and memories are arrested; we are lifted above the stream of life'.¹⁰⁴ He indicates that our aesthetic sense is primarily cerebral by invoking the 'state of mind' of 'the pure mathematician rapt in his studies'¹⁰⁵: 'Before we feel an aesthetic emotion for a combination of forms, do we not perceive intellectually the rightness and necessity of the combination?'¹⁰⁶ Conversely, Arnold's empathic 'feeling of resolute increase' stresses the participation of his body in his perception of significant form (*HH* 78). Bell's emphasis on the abstractly intellectual nature of our relationship to art forms a part of his broader claim that our aesthetic responses to significant form are autonomous from temporal and spatial demands: 'great art remains stable and unobscure because the feelings that it awakens are independent of time and place'.¹⁰⁷ In contrast, the feeling of physical uplift that Arnold shares with the tree-trunks that are 'lifting to the skies' (*HH* 248) bear out West's belief that aesthetic responses to art have a decisive impact on our orientation in space. At the end of *Harriet Hume*, Arnold's aesthetic emotion contributes to his complete temporal and spatial disorientation: 'Is it conceivable that you have not one dead leaf to show me, and not one bud! Then I am lost, I am lost!' (*HH* 249).

In particular, Arnold's empathic experiences challenge Bell's theory that aesthetic responses to significant form are disinterested from political and moral

¹⁰³ Bell, *Art*, p. 33.

¹⁰⁴ Bell, *Art*, p. 25.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ Bell, *Art*, p. 26.

¹⁰⁷ Bell, *Art*, p. 37.

concerns. Bell argues that ‘to associate art with politics is always a mistake’.¹⁰⁸ In contrast, Arnold’s aesthetic appreciation of the lines presented by the trees provokes an aesthetic emotion which directly reinforces his political commitments. The ‘feeling of resolute increase’ roused in Arnold by the significant forms of the tree-trunks only exacerbate his determination to rise in the world (*HH* 78). Bell suggests that art which is bound up with politics does not provoke an autonomous aesthetic emotion because it aims to be informative: ‘Futurist pictures are descriptive because they aim at presenting in line and colour the chaos of the mind at a particular moment; their forms are not intended to promote aesthetic emotion but to convey information’.¹⁰⁹ Conversely, West argues in ‘The Strange Necessity’ that a sense of design which does not provide ‘any real guidance as to the nature of experience’ will still encourage ‘disordered fantasies of conduct’ (*SN* 168). Consequently, Arnold’s empathic identifications with significant form in *Harriet Hume* are held to inform his increasingly disorienting political actions. Bell further claims that ‘Art is above morals, or, rather, all art is moral because [...] works of art are immediate means to good’.¹¹⁰ In contrast, Arnold’s ‘solitary and Quixotic’¹¹¹ realisation of significant form is associated with an immoral political determination to act ‘careless of public opinion’ (*HH* 77). Here, his empathic experience is intended to validate West’s argument in ‘The Strange Necessity’ that ‘works of art are immediate means to good’¹¹² only when they assist our orientation in – rather than autonomy from – the ‘community’ (*SN* 160).

In addition to challenging the disembodied disinterestedness promoted by Bell’s theory of aesthetic emotion, Arnold’s empathic experiences also diverge from modernist concepts of bodily disinterestedness. In *Modernism, Mass Culture, and the Aesthetics of Obscenity* (2000), Alison Pease discusses the accommodation of the obscene in

¹⁰⁸ Bell, *Art*, p. 21.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Bell, *Art*, p. 20.

¹¹¹ Lee and Anstruther-Thomson, ‘Beauty and Ugliness’, p. 565.

¹¹² Bell, *Art*, p. 20.

modernist criticism. Pease argues that ‘Richards explicitly positioned his ideal reading practice in opposition to Kantian principles’ and ‘attack[ed] the notion of disinterest’.¹¹³ Notwithstanding this, in *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924) Richards argues that ‘the ground-plan of the most valuable aesthetic responses’ is characterised by a disinterested state of being:

To respond, not through one narrow channel of interest, but simultaneously and coherently through many, is to be *disinterested* in the only sense of the word which concerns us here. A state of mind which is not disinterested is one which sees things only from one standpoint or under one aspect.¹¹⁴

For Richards, the body forms part of an aesthetic response which suspends definite impulses and thoughts in favour of holding numerous possible impulses and thoughts in balance. In contrast, Arnold’s empathic responses to landscape architecture model West’s theory in ‘The Strange Necessity’ that aesthetic responses to art can direct our positive and negative impulses. Rather than tempering his firm and fearless line, the politician’s empathic realisation reinforces it.

In the chapter entitled ‘Being Disinterested: D.H. Lawrence’, Pease posits that ‘the disinterest [which] in the aesthetic tradition of Shaftesbury and Kant was fostered through aesthetic form is in Lawrence’s work already located within one’s body’.¹¹⁵ In an analysis of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, Pease argues that the gamekeeper Oliver Mellors is given a ‘disinterested mode of loving [which] transcends boundaries of class and personality’.¹¹⁶ In the novel, Mellor’s tactile sense forms a crucial part of this embodied activity: ‘He took no notice of Constance or of Lady Chatterley; he just softly

¹¹³ Alison Pease, *Modernism, Mass Culture, and the Aesthetics of Obscenity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 179.

¹¹⁴ I. A. Richards, *Principles of Literary Criticism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Limited, 1966), p. 251. Emphasis in original.

¹¹⁵ Pease, p. 136.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

stroked her loins or her breasts'.¹¹⁷ In contrast, West's emphasis on the relationship between Arnold's empathic responses and his orientation in the temporal, spatial and social environment of London reinforce her argument in 'The Strange Necessity' that the body is involved in defining and discerning these boundaries. West argues in that essay that 'so large a part of man's knowledge and control of his environment is derived from the perception and handling of form and colour that any sensitiveness of the nerves which makes him take pleasure in them is of the greatest practical use to him and is bound to be highly developed' (*SN* 186). Whilst West makes this remark about Paris, the reassurance that Arnold finds in the forms of Hyde Park demonstrate that this also applies to London. Pease suggests that *Lady Chatterley's Lover* 'proposes the body as a bulwark, almost a pure space, against cultural codification and sees in its actions and motivations a disinterested mode of being'.¹¹⁸ Conversely, West's depictions of aesthetic empathy in *Harriet Hume* suggest that the body is intimately involved with the manner in which Arnold codifies his model of political conduct.

IV. Conclusion

This chapter has explored how West's depictions of haptic relations with built environments in her writings of the late 1920s emerge from her interest in aesthetic empathy. I have offered a reading of 'The Strange Necessity' and *Harriet Hume* which draws attention to the ways in which their portrayal of empathy are used to buttress her theories about art and aesthetic experience. I have demonstrated that West's ideas about empathy in these texts are developed in relation to the empathy theory outlined by Lee and Anstruther-Thomson in their article 'Beauty and Ugliness'. Moreover, I have situated West's approach to empathy in 'The Strange Necessity' and *Harriet Hume*

¹¹⁷ D.H. Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover and A Propos of "Lady Chatterley's Lover"*, ed. by Michael Squires (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 121.

¹¹⁸ Pease, p. 136.

alongside writings by Joyce, Wyndham Lewis, Richards, Bell and Lawrence. By reading 'The Strange Necessity' and *Harriet Hume* alongside the work of Joyce and Bell, I have shown that West uses depictions of aesthetic empathy to ground her assessments of modernist writing in her own theorisations about the orienting and disorienting impact of art. By emphasising the central role that empathic identification plays in responses to art, West contests Bell's and diverges from Richards' formalist promotion of detached and disinterested aesthetic responses. In 'The Strange Necessity' and *Harriet Hume*, West stresses that art always provokes the empathic capacities of the body in a way that either orients or disorients the perceiver in their cultural environment.

In Chapter Four, I showed how West depictions of aesthetic empathy supports her theories about the function and impact of aesthetic experience. In the next chapter, I will consider how her interest in the haptic aspects of sacred architecture influences her struggle to articulate a redemptive form of embodied consciousness. West's fiction of the late 1920s draws upon aesthetic responses to religious and landscape architecture which stress the impact of art on the orientation of the modern subject in modernity. In contrast, her writings of the 1930s and early 1940s explore aesthetic responses and ritual engagements with sacred architecture which are held to transcend the religious limitations she believed were hindering the development of modern subjectivity. As I will argue in the next chapter, this shift in West's approach to built space can be understood in relation to her writings about the disciplinary influence of the 'Augustinian complex' on the spiritual, mental and bodily actions of European men and women.¹¹⁹ She argues in *St Augustine* that his formulation of the Atonement doctrine is 'the ring-fence in which the modern mind is prisoner'.¹²⁰ In Chapter Five, I will explore how West's investment in the haptic aspects of ritual architecture are crucial to her

¹¹⁹ West, *St. Augustine*, p. 162.

¹²⁰ West, *St. Augustine*, p. 162.

elaboration of mental and bodily operations which will enable individuals to transcend this ring-fence in *A Letter to a Grandfather* and *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*.

Chapter 5: Reach-Touch and Ritual Action in *A Letter to a Grandfather* and *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon: A Journey Through Yugoslavia*

I. Introduction

In the preceding chapter, I explored the ways in which representations of aesthetic empathy elaborate West's ideas about the function of aesthetic experience in 'The Strange Necessity' and *Harriet Hume*. In her writings of the 1930s and early 1940s, she becomes fascinated with the haptic aspects of ritual actions framed by sacred architecture. Following Catherine Bell in *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (2009), I suggest that ritual action involves 'the body moving about within a specially constructed environment, simultaneously defining (imposing) and experiencing (receiving) the values ordering the environment'.¹ In *A Letter to a Grandfather*, which I propose to use as one of two linked texts here, the authoress "C.B." is compelled by the ruins of her ancestor's abbey into a state of consciousness that imitates the outstretched arms of Jesus Christ on the cross. In the other text *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, West observes Bektashi Muslim women performing a pillar-ritual which requires them to extend their arms as far as possible. These connected scenes demonstrate that haptic experiences are closely associated with her responses to the spaces of religious belief.

West's representations of these ritual actions are intended to illustrate her conviction that modern consciousness and bodily conduct continue to be influenced by the doctrine of the Atonement – as set out by St. Augustine. West claims in her psycho-biography *St. Augustine* that:

Augustine took as his subject-matter, with a far greater simplicity and definiteness and vigour than any earlier Christian writer, a certain complex of ideas which are at the root of every primitive religion: the idea that matter, and

¹ Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 82.

especially matter related to sex, is evil; that man has acquired guilt through his enmeshment in matter; that he must atone for this guilt to an angry God; and that this atonement must take the form suffering, and the renunciation of easy pleasure.²

According to West, this ‘Augustinian complex’ created a ‘ring-fence in which the modern mind is prisoner’.³ In *A Letter to A Grandfather*, C.B. claims that the premises of this complex are re-enacted in her bodily response to the cruciform structure of the abbey, the logic of contemporary modernist figures – such as Evelyn Waugh – who converted to Roman Catholicism and Left-Wing apologists for the Soviet Union. In *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, West argues that the same complex of ideas conditions the ritual actions of the Muslim women performing the pillar-ritual, Neville Chamberlain’s appeasement of Hitler and the endurance of sacrificial rituals in Yugoslavia.

Despite illustrating the influence of the Augustinian complex on modern subjects, West indicates that the acts of reach-touch which form a part of these ritual actions enable them to transcend it. In *Sensuous Geographies* (first discussed in Chapter Three), Rodaway defines ‘reach-touch’ as:

the touch of the hands and arms, fingers and toes. It is exploring touch which reaches out to, takes hold of or feels the characteristics of objects and their relationship to the environment around us. This is active and generally grounded in intention.⁴

According to Rodaway, ‘reach-touch is more than just the exploration of objects held in the hand, it can involve the entire body actively “sizing up” and “interacting” with

² West, *St. Augustine*, p. 160.

³ West, *St. Augustine*, p. 162.

⁴ Rodaway, p. 50.

tactile space'.⁵ To illustrate this, Rodaway reproduces John M. Hull's account of his tactile response to the sacred space of Iona Abbey in *Touching the Rock: An Experience of Blindness* (1990):

It was bigger than me and much older. There were several places on the polished surface which were marked with long, rather irregular indentations, not cracks, but imperfections of some kind. Could it have been dropped? These marks felt like the result of impact. The contrast between the rough depressions and the huge polished areas was extraordinary.⁶

The transcendent capacities of reach-touch are commented on in Mark Paterson's more recent book *The Senses of Touch: Haptics, Affects and Technologies* (2007). Paterson argues that the reaching hand 'extends the brain, it helps the brain reach out in space to extend beyond the confines of its spatial fixity, and creates a new orientation of the organism to its environment'.⁷

I want to suggest that West's depictions of the exploratory and active nature of reach-touch models mental and bodily operations that she believes will help reorient the modern subject away from the 'ring-fence' of the Atonement.⁸ I will establish this in conversation with Michel de Certeau's theory of spatial practice, as expressed in *The Practice of Everyday Life*. In this book, which responds to Michel Foucault's analysis of spaces that create docile bodies in *Discipline and Punish* (1975), de Certeau attempts to identify bodily 'ways of operating' which 'manipulate the mechanisms of discipline and conform to them only in order to evade them'.⁹ According to de Certeau, 'these "ways of operating" constitute the innumerable practices by means of which users

⁵ Rodaway, p. 52.

⁶ John M. Hull, *Touching the Rock: An Experience of Blindness* (London: SPCK Publishing, 1990), p. 163.

⁷ Mark Paterson, *The Senses of Touch: Haptics, Affects and Technologies* (Oxford: Berg, 2007), p. 74.

⁸ West, *St. Augustine*, p. 162.

⁹ De Certeau, p. xiv.

reappropriate the space organized by techniques of sociocultural production'.¹⁰ Key to these ways of operating are spatial practices: 'microbe-like, singular and plural practices which [the] urbanistic system was supposed to administer or suppress'.¹¹ De Certeau claims that 'spatial practices in fact secretly structure the determining conditions of social life'.¹² It is necessary to explicitly recognise here that de Certeau's theory of spatial practice refers to actions such as walking in the city and travelling by train, rather than ritual actions. Moreover, he attends to the ways in which these practices evade the disciplinary mechanisms of the 'Concept-city' rather than sacred architecture.¹³ Nevertheless, I want to suggest that we can interpret West's depictions of ritual actions in *A Letter to a Grandfather* and *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* as operations which adhere to architectural 'mechanisms of discipline' associated with the Augustinian complex.¹⁴ Framed in this way, I will argue that West represents the reach-touch involved in these actions as 'ways of operating' which manipulate these 'mechanisms of discipline and conform to them only in order to evade them'.¹⁵

I will contextualise the transcendent power that West accords to the sense of reach-touch in these rituals in relation to the numerous writings that she published about religious belief and revelation during the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s. As she explains in 'I Believe' (1940), West does not subscribe to established religious doctrine. She stresses that she has 'no faith, in the sense of a store of comforting beliefs'.¹⁶ For West, the problem with the established religions is that they offer the individual a final explanation of the universe. She claims that:

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ De Certeau, p. 95.

¹⁴ De Certeau, p. xiv.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Rebecca West, 'I Believe', in *I Believe: The Personal Philosophies of Twenty-Three Eminent Men and Women of Our Time* (London: George Allen and Unwin Limited, 1941), pp. 369-390 (p. 372).

They pretend to explain the total universe in terms comprehensible to the human intellect, and that pretension seems to me bound to be invalid. I feel this as strongly about the non-Christian and anti-Christian creeds as about the Christian creeds, in so far as they make the statement, which seems to me the lie of lies, that seeks to cut down the growing tree of life before it has borne fruit, "All is now known".¹⁷

West argues that under the influence of the doctrine of the Atonement, 'civilization cancels its own advance; so that it is more often than not a half-forgotten idea instead of a developing theme'.¹⁸ In contrast, she does have a 'faith in a process', which places 'an ultimate value [...] [on] the efforts of human beings to do more than merely exist, to choose and analyse their experiences'.¹⁹ I will attempt to demonstrate that depictions of reach-touch – provoked by sacred architecture – are held to exemplify mental and bodily 'process[es]' that she believes will enable humanity to develop beyond the influence of the Augustinian complex.²⁰

An analysis of reach-touch in *A Letter to a Grandfather* and *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* contributes to recent scholarship which has begun to re-examine the connection between modernism and religious experience. This scholarship has comprehensively challenged the long-standing view that modernist literature was driven by a secularising impulse. Key works in this field include Pericles Lewis's *Religious Experience and the Modernist Novel* (2010), Suzanne Hobson's *Angels of Modernism: Religion, Culture, Aesthetics, 1910-1960* (2011) and Erik Tønning's *Modernism and Christianity* (2014). Each of these scholars convincingly demonstrate that existing accounts of modernist literature have taken its secularisation for granted. Lewis argues that 'the modernists did not accept secularization as inevitable or embrace a world

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ West, 'I Believe', p. 388.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

emptied of the sacred. They sought instead to understand religious experience anew, in the light of their own experience of modernity and of the theories of their contemporaries'.²¹ Hobson explores 'the modernist use of the angel as a lens through which to magnify the hopes and anxieties of a generation which perceived itself to be awkwardly situated between ages of belief and disbelief'.²² Tønning posits that 'the role of Christianity is intrinsic to any coherent account of Modernism'.²³

More recently, in *Modernist Women Writers and Spirituality: A Piercing Darkness* (2016), scholars have begun to consider 'how women's writing addresses the dogma, divinity and mystery of Christian theology'.²⁴ In their introduction to this collection, Elizabeth Anderson, Andrew Radford and Heather Walton briefly cite 'the feminist vitalism and Wordsworthian epiphanies explored in West's short essay "My Religion" [...], *St. Augustine* [...], *[A] Letter to a Grandfather* [...] and "I Believe"', but her engagement with religious dogma are not explored in any depth.²⁵ My analysis of reach-touch in *A Letter to a Grandfather* and *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* will demonstrate that these texts need to form a much more central part of these emerging considerations about the response to Christian theology in modernist women's writing. Anderson, Radford and Walton identify West as one of the female authors for whom this theology 'furnishes a substantial "body of traditional legend and lore, to serve us in metaphor [...] to provide us with that shorthand of symbolism which tells us what we want to know by a single reference"'.²⁶ Though West's representations of reach-touch certainly draw upon this shorthand of symbolism, I want to argue that they also

²¹ Pericles Lewis, *Religious Experience and the Modernist Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 19.

²² Suzanne Hobson, *Angels of Modernism: Religion, Culture, Aesthetics, 1910-1960* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 13.

²³ Erik Tønning, *Modernism and Christianity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 1.

²⁴ Elizabeth Anderson, Andrew Radford, and Heather Walton, 'Introduction: The Intricate Persistence of Strange Gods', in *Modernist Women Writers and Spirituality: A Piercing Darkness*, ed. by Elizabeth Anderson, Andrew Radford, and Heather Walton (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 1-20 (p. 3).

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

elaborate her attempt to articulate and promote symbolic operations which she believes will help the subject move beyond a theological epistemology.

This chapter suggests that *A Letter to a Grandfather* and *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* follow modernist texts, such as T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922), in which the quest for ultimate meaning is bound up with considerations about the power of sacred architecture. Lewis argues that 'the works of several major modern novelists include scenes in which lone wanderers [...] visit churches and brood over the question of just what sort of power remains when [...] even disbelief no longer motivates their view of religion'.²⁷ He argues that 'modern novelists focus their attention on church architecture and terminology [...] as a way of avoiding theological questions [...] [and] as a way of finding traction for questions about ultimate meaning, transferring them from the ethereal spiritual realm to the solid world of architectural forms and language'.²⁸ Lewis suggests that this shift toward architectural forms and language forms part of an attempt to consider the extent to which the modern novel can replace the church as a revelatory space: 'The question posed in each of these churchgoing scenes is whether the novel can in some way sate the "hunger in [one's] self to be more serious" that [Philip] Larkin associates with the sacred ground of the church – whether the novel too can become a site that is "proper to grow wise in"'.²⁹

By contrast, the attention given to sacred architectural forms in *A Letter to a Grandfather* and *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* emphasises their ability to mobilise mental and bodily operations which enable the individual to grow wise. In her essay 'My Religion', for example, West argues that 'Christianity must be regarded not as a final revelation but as a phase of revelation'.³⁰ Citing 'the doctrine of the Atonement',

²⁷ Lewis, p. 5.

²⁸ Lewis, p. 6.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Rebecca West, 'My Religion', in Arnold Bennett et al, *My Religion* (New York: D. Appleton, 1926), pp. 19-24 (p. 22).

she posits that ‘certain forms which Christianity had to take to satisfy the need of the man of [...] [a previous] age are unsuited to the man of this age’.³¹ Notwithstanding these criticisms, she admits that she still attends ‘Roman Catholic churches at times, for the sake of the ritual’.³² West claims that the ritual ‘seems to me to be of great value, because it draws a picture of spiritual facts which human language still finds it difficult to express adequately or in a form equally comprehensible by all kinds of people’.³³ In my discussion of *A Letter to a Grandfather* and *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, I want to explore the reasons why she specifically suggests that the acts of reach-touch involved in architectural rituals help to create and define the character of this value.

In the first section of this chapter, I will argue that in *A Letter to a Grandfather* West accords the exploratory process of embodied consciousness a crucial importance in C.B.’s movement beyond the Augustinian idea of suffering. This is strikingly expressed via depictions of reach-touch triggered by C.B.’s response to her ancestor’s abbey. C.B.’s visit to the abbey initiates a state of consciousness which recalls the crucified posture of Jesus Christ and his suffering on the cross. Notwithstanding this, West notes that the reach-touch provoked by the abbey engenders an exploratory consciousness which exceeds a mere enactment of the Atonement. In doing so, she indicates that the exploratory capacities of the body and not the Atonement doctrine ‘serves the purpose of furnishing each human soul with access to the avenue along which it can advance farthest toward the comprehension and mastery of human life’.³⁴ She suggests that these capacities are crucial to the literary genius of work by Lawrence, Proust and Joyce. I will posit that C.B.’s reaction to sacred architecture is made possible by the empathy theory of Lee and Anstruther-Thomson, which argues that the individual’s aesthetic response to sacred architecture is distinct from their reaction to its

³¹ West, ‘My Religion’, p. 23.

³² West, ‘My Religion’, p. 21.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ West, ‘I Believe’, p. 373.

theological meaning. Reading C.B.'s haptic experience of sacred ruins alongside the Perilous Chapel stanza in *The Waste Land*, I argue that *A Letter to a Grandfather* constructs its approach to religious belief in opposition to that taken in Eliot's poem. This section demonstrates that West's depictions of reach-touch express her faith that the individual's exploratory powers can transcend the influence of St. Augustine's idea of suffering.

In the second section of the chapter, I will explore how in *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* West suggests that acts of bodily vigour enable Yugoslavians to escape the Augustinian idea of renunciation. This is emphasised in her account of an Easter fertility ritual, in which four veiled Muslim women attempt to stretch their arms as far as possible around a tall black stone and make their fingers meet. In West's telling, the pillar ritual choreographs acts of reach-touch which seem to enact the Augustinian gesture of renunciation. Notwithstanding this, she suggests that these acts simultaneously mobilise a form of physical exertion and assertion that paradoxically subverts the purposes of the rite. I intend to show that West's depiction of the ritual is shaped by her attempt to assert the progressive value of hedonism over that of renunciation. The section concludes by comparing her figuration of hedonism in *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* with Martin Pargiter's hedonistic enjoyment of St. Paul's Cathedral in *The Years* (1937). Whereas Woolf's novel suggests that the conditions of modernity frequently disrupt the transformative potential of haptic hedonism, West more hopefully argues that it is crucial to the development of the modern subject. This section demonstrates that West's depictions of reach-touch in *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* express her belief in the transcendent power of somatic pleasure.

II. Reach-Touch and the Idea of Suffering in *A Letter to a Grandfather*

Commissioned by Leonard and Virginia Woolf for the Hogarth Press in 1931, *A Letter to a Grandfather* was the last instalment in a twelve-part series that creatively addressed the artistic, social and political issues of the 1930s. Other contributions included E.M. Forster's *A Letter to Madan Blanchard* (1931), L.A.G. Strong's *A Letter to W.B. Yeats* (1932), Virginia Woolf's *A Letter to a Young Poet* (1932) and Louis Golding's *A Letter to Adolf Hitler* (1932). Responding to Woolf's request for a submission to the series in a letter of 26 November 1931, West states that her contribution will constitute an imaginary 'letter to a grandfather, from a woman whose family has the power of seeing visions and who has just seen what is this age's form of what would have in other ages been a vision of the Gadama or Christ'.³⁵ According to Golubov, the name of the woman composing the letter – C.B. – stands for 'C. Beauchamp (a translation of West's name, Cicely Fairfield)'.³⁶ She begins by reporting the religious visions produced by her ancestors about the ages that they lived through, which have been manifested in various art-forms: Philippe de Beauchamp's medieval abbey, Sir John Beauchamp's medieval painting and Richard Beauchamp's Renaissance religious poem (among others). C.B. ends by outlining her vision of the current age, which is disclosed to her through the hand gestures of a merry-go-round operator at the Fête de Neuilly near Paris. Each of these visions is situated against a backdrop of spiritual, social and political uncertainty that C.B. discerns in the interwar period. She notes that 'people are tired and disoriented, they do not follow any road to truth, they stand still and gabble' (*LG* 35). In part, C.B. uses these visions to argue for 'the persistence of the life of the spirit' throughout the cycles and upheavals of history (*LG* 25). In addition, they are held to promote the value and necessity of a continued artistic

³⁵ Scott, *The Selected Letters of Rebecca West*, p. 131.

³⁶ Golubov, p. 212.

pursuit of truth and ‘a reaching out from ordinary limited knowledge into the experience of infinity and eternity’ (LG 14).

In light of C.B.’s emphasis on ‘the persistence of the life of the spirit’ in *A Letter to a Grandfather*, existing scholarship has tended to read the work as one that celebrates spirituality (LG 25). However, critics have been tentative in their assessment of how this relates to Christian theology. West’s biographer Glendinning, in *Rebecca West: A Life*, defines *A Letter to a Grandfather* as ‘a religious essay’ which nevertheless encourages a faith in ‘the survival of the human spirit’.³⁷ Whilst Rollyson suggests in *The Literary Legacy of Rebecca West* that C.B.’s vision is ‘a vision of God’³⁸, he also points out that she is ‘careful not to say that in fact she believes, merely that the idea of the spirit has been resurrected’.³⁹ By analysing the configuration of reach-touch in the most significant visions described by C.B., it is possible to discern in West’s complex notion of spirituality an attempt to shift from a theological to an experiential model of the spiritual.

Though the form and content of these visions vary, C.B. notes that they each prominently feature or recall depictions of reach-touch – ‘exploring touch which reaches out to, takes hold of or feels the characteristics of objects and their relationship to the environment around us’.⁴⁰ Sir John Beauchamp’s painting depicts ‘the Holy Spirit in the form of an English dove, but with a wider stretch of wing, more like to a sea-bird’ (LG 13). Richard Beauchamp’s ‘poem about Saint Catherine is own brother to the panel on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel [...] which shows God stretching out His forefinger to Adam and infecting him with life’ (LG 18). C.B.’s own vision is revealed to her by the merry-go-round operator who ‘with the first finger and thumb of his left hand [...] described a circle, and into this circle shot the first finger of his right hand’ (LG 41).

³⁷ Glendinning, p. 145.

³⁸ Rollyson, p. 92.

³⁹ Rollyson, p. 97.

⁴⁰ Rodaway, p. 50.

Most significant is C.B.'s account of her visit to the ruined medieval abbey of her ancestor Philippe de Beauchamp, which cause her to ruminate on the outstretched arms of Jesus Christ on the Cross.⁴¹ She notes that 'it dominated all my youth, that chapel, and the Abbey which was not there: the kind of architecture, worked in blackish stone, that would have put into the mind the idea of a man stretched on a cross' (*LG* 11). C.B. suggests that her own vision corresponds with Philippe de Beauchamp's: 'In his faith he saw a gaunt figure extended on a cross. In my faith, which seems to some unfaith, so did I' (*LG* 43). She refers to her family's 'hereditary faculty of vision' as 'a sort of perpetual Crusade, an inalienable right of recourse to the Holy Grail' (*LG* 8). As Darian Leader reminds us in *Hands* (2016), 'the depiction of the Grail is so often accompanied by that of a hand stretching out towards it'.⁴²

The importance of Phillippe de Beauchamp's architectural vision for C.B. partly emerges out of West's preoccupation with the significance of Romanesque and Gothic churches in the years before she composed *A Letter to a Grandfather*. In Chapter Four, I demonstrated how in 'The Strange Necessity' empathic realisations of Notre-Dame's architectural forces are crucial to her assessment of *Ulysses* and her theory of art. Following the publication of this essay, her journalism and diaries indicate a continuing fascination with French religious architecture. In 'A Letter from Abroad', published in the October 1929 issue of *The Bookman*, West describes visits to the Romanesque church at Tournus, Dijon Cathedral and 'the famous church of Brou'.⁴³ She describes their architectural features in order to discern the differences between the medieval and the modern mind. West argues that these buildings demonstrate that 'death [...] was the subject matter of medieval man's art and thought to an extent that is almost

⁴¹ De Certeau, p. xiv.

⁴² Darian Leader, *Hands* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2016), p. 40.

⁴³ Rebecca West, 'A Letter from Abroad', *The Bookman*, October 1929, pp. 193-199 (p. 196). <<http://unz.org/>> [accessed 19 July 2017].

incomprehensible to the modern mind'.⁴⁴ Moreover, her diary for 1930 records visits to the cathedrals at Beauvais, Rouen and Amiens on 20th and 21st April.⁴⁵ There is no evidence to suggest that Philippe de Beauchamp's abbey in *A Letter to a Grandfather* is modelled on these religious buildings. By contrast, C.B.'s reference to the 'high stone houses of Becham Charterhouse' nearby indicates that the abbey is a Carthusian Charterhouse (LG 9). C.B.'s claim that the abbey 'would have put into the mind the idea of a man stretched on a cross' may refer to the motto of the Carthusian order: *stat crux dum volvitur orbis* (LG 11). In *Gender and Emotions in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Destroying Order, Structuring Disorder* (2016), Susan Broomhall translates this as 'the cross stands still while the world turns'.⁴⁶

The act of reach-touch provoked by C.B.'s visit to the abbey suggests that her embodied consciousness adheres to both the doctrinal beliefs and the ritual actions associated with its architectural layout. C.B. is specifically ruminating on the Christian doctrine of the Atonement, which holds that Christ suffered and sacrificed himself on the cross in reparation for the sins of humanity. In *Space in the Medieval West* (2016), Fanny Madeline notes that 'the various elements of the composition [in cruciform churches] engage in what amounts to an everlasting re-enactment of the Atonement'.⁴⁷ Strikingly, the theological doctrine re-enacted by the abbey's architecture compels C.B.'s consciousness to imitate Christ's bodily posture of suffering at the Atonement. She recalls that:

The arches and doorways and sanctuaries give such a sense of breadth that the consciousness strains itself to follow right and left as far as it can, like

⁴⁴ West, 'A Letter from Abroad', p. 195.

⁴⁵ Rebecca West, 'Diary: 1930', 'Diary: 1930', Rebecca West Papers, Yale, Beinecke Rare Books and Manuscript Library, GEN MSS 105, fols 1404-1410.

⁴⁶ Susan Broomhall, *Gender and Emotions in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Destroying Order, Structuring Disorder* (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 101.

⁴⁷ Fanny Madeline, *Space in the Medieval West: Places, Territories and Imagined Geographies* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), p. 90.

outstretched arms; the vaults rise to such a height that the consciousness strains up and down, like a torso stretched so that the muscles are gnarled in the recess under the ribs. But a man cannot stretch more than a certain distance from his head and belly; and that makes him a tense and interesting pattern worked on the surface of infinity. (LG 11)

Here, West indicates that C.B.'s embodied consciousness conforms to the abbey's ritual 'mechanisms of discipline'.⁴⁸ The 'sense of breadth' which makes C.B.'s consciousness strain 'itself as far as it can, like outstretched arms', recalls the ritual practice of *Imitatio Christi*, or Imitation of Christ, which was common among early Christians (LG 11). In his chapter on '*Imitatio Christi* and the Early Worship of Jesus' (1999), David Capes notes that 'the act of stretching out the hands meant primarily a confession of faith in Christ'.⁴⁹ C.B.'s reaching consciousness initially appears to suggest just such an act of faith.

The peculiar reaching consciousness depicted in this scene echoes West's belief that ancient religious doctrine continued to shape the thinking of the modern mind. In her psycho-biography of the early church father *St. Augustine*, published in the same year as *A Letter to a Grandfather*, West places a particular emphasis on the influence of the Atonement on contemporary patterns of thought. She posits that the early church father 'accepted [...] and intellectualised [...] with all the force of his genius'⁵⁰ the idea that 'atonement must take the form of suffering, and the renunciation of easy pleasure'.⁵¹ West claims that 'to-day, fifteen hundred years after Augustine's death, after a raking attack on the supernatural and a constant search for a rational philosophy

⁴⁸ De Certeau, p. xiv.

⁴⁹ David Capes, '*Imitatio Christi* and the Early Worship of Jesus', in *The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism: Papers from the St. Andrews Conference on the Historical Origins of the Worship of Jesus*, ed. by Carey C. Newman, James R. Davila and Gladys S. Lewis (Boston, Brill, 1999), pp. 293-307 (p. 303).

⁵⁰ West, *St. Augustine*, p. 161.

⁵¹ West, *St. Augustine*, p. 160.

lasting several centuries', great artists (including D.H. Lawrence, James Joyce and Marcel Proust) 'still restrict themselves to his subject matter'.⁵² 'It is', according to West, 'the ring-fence in which the modern mind is prisoner'.⁵³ In *A Letter to a Grandfather*, she implies that the idea of atonement through suffering also lay behind the 'lickerish liking of the harsh effort of Russia' by the British Left during the inter-war years:

They are in love with cancer, they want the love of man and woman by sadism and masochism. That justice should be done without passion and stripes would disappoint them, they have not got out of the fateful ring-fence of primitive ideas where every good must be paid for by pain and sacrifice. (LG 35-36)

Placed in this context, the cruciform nature of C.B.'s reaching consciousness implies that, like Lawrence, Proust and Joyce, her mind is also still a prisoner within the 'ring-fence of primitive ideas' laid down by the Atonement doctrine (LG 36).

Though the abbey's architecture prompts C.B.'s consciousness to perform a ritual action which indicates a 'confession of faith in Christ', it also initiates an exploratory awareness that reaches beyond the meaning of the cross.⁵⁴ Despite putting into C.B.'s mind 'the idea of a man stretched on a cross' (LG 11), West indicates that this re-enactment enables her to 'manipulate [its] mechanisms of discipline only in order to evade them'.⁵⁵ C.B.'s response to the ruins indicates that her reaching consciousness does not limit itself to a re-enactment of the crucifixion. Instead, the 'sense of breadth' given by 'the arches and doorways and sanctuaries' initiates an embodied awareness that 'strains itself to follow right and left as far as it can' beyond the attitude of faith associated with the ritual space of the abbey (LG 11). Here, West

⁵² West, *St. Augustine*, p. 161.

⁵³ West, *St. Augustine*, p. 162.

⁵⁴ Capes, p. 303.

⁵⁵ De Certeau, p. xiv.

suggests that C.B.'s conscious re-enactment of the crucifixion awakens the exploratory powers of her sense of reach-touch, which prefigures Paterson's idea that the reaching hand 'extends the brain, it helps the brain reach out in space to extend beyond the confines of its spatial fixity, and creates a new orientation of the organism to its environment'.⁵⁶ Later on in *A Letter to a Grandfather*, West again emphasises C.B.'s faith in the exploratory powers of reach-touch in the vision she experiences at the 'Fête de Neuilly' in Paris (*LG* 37). In this vision, she imagines 'a gaunt figure extended on a cross, and if the cross was mere existence the pattern was the glorious same, there was the same tension, there was the same heroic attempt to cover all, to know all, to feel all, although fixed to one point in the universe, and thereby pinned to ignorance' (*LG* 43-44). In Chapter One, I demonstrated that West's depictions of painful haptic experiences in *The Sentinel* challenge the idea of transformative violence implied by the use of crucifixion imagery in suffragette fiction. By contrast, *A Letter to a Grandfather* seems to suggest that haptic experience help C.B. to transcend the idea of violent suffering developed from Augustine's interpretation of the crucifixion.

By stressing that the architectural features of the abbey mobilise C.B.'s exploratory powers of reach-touch in this scene, West suggests that C.B.'s reaching consciousness both re-enacts and re-appropriates the religious 'mechanisms of discipline' it imposes on the mind.⁵⁷ Existing scholarship on *A Letter to a Grandfather* tends to suggest that this scene elucidates West's concerns about the limited temporal and spatial reach of human consciousness. In his analysis of *The Literary Legacy of Rebecca West*, Rollyson posits that the Christ on the cross image 'reminds [C.B.] of the limitations of the self, of its inability to measure the world, to grasp the unity behind appearances' and awakens 'a yearning for an experience that transcends the suffering of

⁵⁶ Paterson, p. 74.

⁵⁷ De Certeau, p. xiv.

such limitations'.⁵⁸ In *Rebecca West's Subversive Use of Hybrid Genres, 1911-1941*, Cowan highlights the temporal limits exposed by C.B.'s "'stretched consciousness"'.⁵⁹ She argues that 'it [...] extends through time beyond the limitations of its fixed position to attain affinity or eternity' and yet 'is [also] determined by West's sense of her "fixed point" in time'.⁶⁰ In addition, C.B.'s reaching consciousness also elaborates West's belief that the Atonement doctrine placed limitations on the self. Notwithstanding this, the exploratory sense of reach-touch which characterises this stretching consciousness indicates that the abbey mobilises a response which will enable the self to go beyond these limitations.

West posits that the exploratory aspects of C.B.'s reaching consciousness are initiated by her empathic response to the abbey's aesthetic forms rather than its re-enactment of the Atonement. Her 'sense of breadth' is prompted by 'the arches and doorways and sanctuaries' (*LG* 11). West's suggestion that this allows C.B. to manipulate and evade the 'mechanism[s] of discipline' inscribed into the abbey's ruins likely depends on her earlier engagement with the empathy theory of Vernon Lee and Clementina Anstruther-Thomson.⁶¹ In 'Beauty and Ugliness', Lee and Anstruther-Thomson make a distinction between the aesthetic response to architecture and our knowledge of it. C.B.'s reaching consciousness, which 'strains itself to follow right and left as far as it can', corresponds with the response that characterises Lee and Anstruther-Thomson's appreciation of architectural equilibrium in 'Beauty and Ugliness' (*LG* 11). As they express it: 'as soon as we see something else adjusting equilibrium, our own balance seems to swing on a wider scale, and this wider balancing brings a sense of our limits being enlarged in every direction'.⁶² In *A Letter to a Grandfather*, the abbey's 'arches and doorways and sanctuaries' also initiates an

⁵⁸ Rollyson, *The Literary Legacy of Rebecca West*, pp. 92-93.

⁵⁹ Cowan, p. 109.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ De Certeau, p. xiv.

⁶² Lee and Anstruther-Thomson, 'Beauty and Ugliness', p. 567.

expansive awareness (a ‘sense of breadth’) which is wholly at odds with a simple re-enactment of the Atonement doctrine (*LG* 11). Here, it is likely that West’s configuration of C.B.’s reaction to architecture proceeds from Lee and Anstruther-Thomson’s argument that ‘we can take the greatest aesthetic pleasure in architecture without any knowledge of building; and because our aesthetic impressions are often at variance with what knowledge of building would reveal’.⁶³ In Chapter Four, I showed that Lee and Anstruther-Thomson’s emphasis on the haptic experiences involved in empathy are crucial to West’s theories about the impact of aesthetic perception on the social orientation and disorientation of the modern subject. In *A Letter to a Grandfather*, their ideas shape her attempt to articulate a form of consciousness which she believes will help subjects to reorient themselves within the disciplinary mechanisms that define their relation to the world.

West foregrounds the ability of C.B.’s exploratory reach-touch to re-appropriate the abbey’s spatial mechanisms of discipline in part because it exemplifies her belief that the power of art offers humanity a stronger prospect of revelation than religion. C.B.’s aesthetic response to the abbey in *A Letter to a Grandfather* reinforces West’s contemporary theorisation of art as a force that always extends our awareness of the world beyond existing religious and moral limits in search of new revelations. In *St. Augustine*, she criticises those that ‘declare that art is reprehensible unless it has an explicit moral and religious content’.⁶⁴ For her, ‘this is just what authentic art never has – since its business is to press ahead and discover the yet unformulated truths which can afterwards be formulated in terms of religion and morals’.⁶⁵ Initiated by the architecture of the abbey in *A Letter to a Grandfather*, C.B.’s reaching consciousness models this

⁶³ Lee and Anstruther-Thomson, ‘Beauty and Ugliness’, p. 565.

⁶⁴ West, *St. Augustine*, p. 48.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

determination to 'press ahead' beyond the 'moral and religious' content of the Atonement doctrine that West criticises.⁶⁶

In particular, the exploratory aspects of reach-touch in this scene buttress West's belief that works of genius in contemporary literature are driven by this ambition to 'press ahead'.⁶⁷ In 'The Classic Artist', first published in the *New York Herald Tribune* on 11th September 1927 (and re-produced by West in *The Strange Necessity: Essays and Reviews*), she reviews Willa Cather's novel *Death Comes to the Archbishop* (1927). As in *A Letter to a Grandfather*, West suggests that the doctrine of the Atonement configures the protagonist's thoughts: 'he blots out his own pain in meditating on the Passion of our Lord [...] [and] suffering is held to have been proved of greater value than anything else in the world, the one coin sufficient to buy man's salvation' (SN 215). She compares the 'Stone Lips' chapter of *Death Comes to the Archbishop* with D.H. Lawrence's *Mornings in Mexico* (1927), noting with disappointment that Cather records but does not attempt to reach beyond the reactive perceptions of the sensorium: '[she] passes through this experience responding sensitively and powerfully to its splendid portentousness, but she stays with the Bishop the whole time. Mr. Lawrence, on the other hand, would have been through the hole in the wall after the snake' (SN 223-224). West asks whether Lawrence's 'ambition to extend consciousness beyond its present limits and elevate man above himself [...] entitle[s] his art to be ranked as more important than that of Miss Cather?' (SN 224). In *A Letter to a Grandfather*, C.B.'s exploratory sense of reach-touch displays this 'ambition to extend consciousness beyond its present limits and elevate man above himself' (SN 224). Moreover, West suggests that such an ambition is evident in Marcel Proust's *A La Recherche du Temps Perdu* (1913-1927) and Joyce's *Ulysses* by comparing them to reaching hands:

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

[The preferences of the young lead], for example, to the exaltation of James Joyce over Marcel Proust, although *A La Recherche du Temps Perdu* is like a beautiful hand with long fingers reaching out to pluck a perfect fruit, without error, for the accurate eye knows well it is growing just there on the branch, while *Ulysses* is the fumbling of a horned hand in darkness after a doubted jewel. (SN 224)

Placed in this context, C.B.'s haptic response to the abbey models a bodily-cognitive attitude to the world that West sees operating in canonical works of modernist literature.

C.B.'s reaching consciousness suggests that West reaches a very different conclusion about the status of religious belief in modernity than the one arrived at in T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. In *A Letter to a Grandfather*, C.B. explicitly opposes her spiritual vision to that presented in Eliot's poem: 'I feel that in my spiritual apotheosis the nice thing would have been for me to be like the clergyman's mournful widow, muttering about my Waste Lands' (LG 43). With this connection in mind, C.B.'s response to the abbey can be read as a kind of alternative approach to the empty chapel described by Eliot in the 'What The Thunder Said' section of his poem. In this section of *The Waste Land*, the speaker notes:

There is the empty chapel, only the wind's home.

It has no windows, and the door swings,

Dry bones can harm no one.

Only a cock stood on the rooftree

Co co rico co rico

In a flash of lightning. Then a damp gust

Bringing rain⁶⁸

In this stanza, Eliot's image of the chapel is based upon his reading about the Grail myth of the Perilous Chapel, as described in Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* (1920). Whilst the speaker's description of the empty chapel is commonly interpreted as a lament on the state of religious disbelief that Eliot identifies in modern society, the lightning and rain imagery which immediately follows it suggests a rebirth of religious faith.⁶⁹ Conversely, the reaching consciousness provoked by the ruined abbey in *A Letter to a Grandfather* indicates that the question of religious belief is beside the point. Instead, the ambiguous nature of C.B.'s 'outstretched' consciousness stresses both the continuing influence of religious doctrine on the modern mind and a mental attitude that might help to transcend it (LG 11).

In this way, C.B.'s engagement with the abbey in *A Letter to a Grandfather* enhances our understanding of modernist churchgoing. C.B.'s reaching consciousness, which both re-enacts and evades the spatial mechanisms of discipline inscribed into the abbey's architectural layout, elaborates West's sense that the modern mind was both shaped by and attempting to move beyond the influence of the Atonement doctrine. This indicates that she sought to outline engagements with the world that transcended what Anderson, Radford and Walton describe as Christian theology's epistemological 'shorthand of symbolism which tells us what we want to know by a single reference'.⁷⁰ C.B.'s response to the abbey suggests that the value West attributes to religious architecture depends on its ability to mobilise the investigative faculties of the individual. Lewis claims that modernists attend to religious architecture 'as a way of finding traction for questions about ultimate meaning, transferring them from the

⁶⁸ T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land: Authoritative Text, Contexts, Criticism*, ed. by Michael North (W.W. Norton and Co., 2001), p. 18.

⁶⁹ For example, Leon Surette argues that the speaker's description of the Perilous Chapel is intended to 'stress the state of disbelief in which he and his age found themselves'. See *The Modern Dilemma: Wallace Stevens, T.S. Eliot and Humanism* Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 2008), p. 148.

⁷⁰ Anderson, Radford and Walton, p. 3.

ethereal spiritual realm to the solid world of architectural forms and language'.⁷¹ In *A Letter to a Grandfather*, the exploratory reach-touch prompted by C.B.'s situation within the abbey resituates the pursuit for ultimate meaning within the consciousness of the individual.

C.B.'s reaching consciousness highlights operations that West deemed crucial to a successful negotiation of the mental ring-fence that the Atonement doctrine had purportedly imposed on the modern mind. In the years following its publication, West begins to discern the enduring influence of this doctrine in the field of human action and behaviour. In 'I Believe', she again considers 'attempts to develop a doctrine to account for the crucifixion of Christ as an atonement for the sins of man instead of a demonstration of them'.⁷² Though reiterating in this essay that 'it is the intellect which performs this perversion', she argues that 'we see it also directly inscribed on life by conduct, notably in connection with sex and politics'.⁷³ In her monumental book *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, West also detects the influence of this doctrine on the attitude of Neville Chamberlain's administration towards Fascism. 'When Mr Chamberlain spoke at Birmingham after the German annexation of Czechoslovakia in March 1939', notes West, 'we were in the power of the abominable fantasy which pretends that bloodshed is peculiarly pleasing to God, and that an act of cruelty to a helpless victim brings down favour and happiness on earth' (*BLGF* 1121). In the next section of this chapter, I will explore how West's depictions of reach-touch in *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* crucial to her construction of bodily actions which evade the inscriptions of the Augustinian complex on human conduct.

⁷¹ Lewis, p. 6.

⁷² West, 'I Believe', p. 386.

⁷³ West, 'I Believe', p. 387.

III. Reach-Touch and the Idea of Renunciation in *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon: A Journey Through Yugoslavia*

First published in 1941, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* is the result of three springtime trips that West made to Yugoslavia in 1936, 1937 and 1938. Though most often classed as a travelogue, the text has long been recognised as a multi-generic and genre-crossing work of non-fiction that defies easy categorisation. The book is much more than an amalgamated record of West's journey through Yugoslavia. This ambitious text also undertakes a history of the country and its people, an exposition of her own anti-fascist political agenda at a time of geopolitical uncertainty, and a broader meditation on the spiritual condition of humanity itself. Glendinning describes *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* as a '500,000-word work not only of history, archaeology, politics, conversation, folklore, prophecy, and the evocation of landscape, but [also] the work in which Rebecca West formulated her views on religion, ethics, art, myth and gender'.⁷⁴ The enormous range of nationalities, historical events, individuals, texts and buildings discussed make it difficult to isolate the key themes of West's book. However, the title of the book foregrounds the ritual sacrifice of the black lamb that she had witnessed in Macedonia and the poem she had heard about the grey falcon (Saint Elijah) who encourages the self-sacrifice of the Serbian Tsar Lazar at the catastrophic Battle of Kosovo in 1389. West interprets the ritual slaughter of the lamb as a testament to the influence of Christian theological ideas about the value of sacrifice on human conduct: 'Its rite, under various disguises, had been recommended to me since my infancy by various religious bodies' (*BLGF* 827). She argues that the poem highlights the influence of the related theological principle of self-surrender and renunciation: [It promotes the view that] "I will be the lamb and be sacrificed by the priest" (*BLGF* 914). By foregrounding these two examples, West indicates that *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* is

⁷⁴ Glendinning, p. 154.

centrally concerned with demonstrating how the lives of Yugoslavians are (and have been) shaped by the Augustinian complex of suffering and renunciation.

There is evidence to suggest that West viewed the section in which she describes the lamb sacrifice, 'St. George's Eve', as the crucial illustration of the relationship between this complex and the lives of Yugoslavians. In a letter sent to Alexander Woollcott in April 1941, she urges him to 'hunt about in the latter part of the book – the last section – and find a section called "St George's Night". I think this one of the strangest experiences [...] {a human being could have in} passing through different levels of being'.⁷⁵ Moreover, the section was included as part of the writings that were reproduced in *The Essential Rebecca West* (1977), a collection that West herself helped to compile.⁷⁶ Janet Montefiore, in *Men and Women Writers of the 1930s: The Dangerous Flood of History* (2003), is one of many critics who tend to solely focus on West's account of the lamb sacrifice in this section. In doing so, Montefiore argues that in this 'religious scene' West interprets the ritual actions involved as guided by the religious doctrine of Atonement through suffering: 'the blood sacrifice of the lamb is at once a re-enactment of the Crucifixion and an interpretation of it'.⁷⁷ However, her account of this sacrifice highlights only one aspect of the way in which she frames the relationship between ritual action and religious ideas. In one of the less-discussed rituals described earlier on in this crucial section of *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, West's representation of reach-touch frames her attempt to highlight ritual actions which transcend the influence of theological doctrine.

Recent scholarship has begun to highlight the importance of the bodily movements described in *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*. In 'An Epic of Atmosphere:

⁷⁵ Scott, *The Selected Letters of Rebecca West*, p. 169.

⁷⁶ See Rebecca West, *The Essential Rebecca West* (London: Penguin Books, 1983), pp. 677-696.

⁷⁷ Janet Montefiore, *Men and Women Writers of the 1930s: The Dangerous Flood of History* (London: Taylor and Francis e-Library, 2005), p. 195.

Rebecca West, *Black Lamb, and Reflex*' (2015), Timothy Wientzen explores the opposition that the text sets up between the physical actions of Yugoslavians and 'the "grooves" of thought promoted by the atmosphere of fascism'.⁷⁸ Wientzen argues that 'the single predominating impression West gives of fascism is of a political system intent on perfectly mechanizing the reflexes of the populace; citizens are nothing but the cognitive grooves enforced by their milieu – automata incapable of thinking or doing in volitional ways'.⁷⁹ In contrast, Wientzen suggests, 'West limns a different version of politicized reflex in her depiction of Yugoslavia, one that depends upon the embodied traditions fashioned over centuries and millennia'.⁸⁰ This section argues that, in addition to promoting embodied traditions which contrast fascism's grooves of thought, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* should also be read as a text in which bodily actions are opposed to the much more long-standing "ring-fence" of the Augustinian complex.

West's unpublished 'Diary of 2nd Yugoslavian Trip' (1937), now held in the Beinecke Library at Yale University, indicates that her bodily experiences of Balkan architecture had a profound impact on the ideas that she develops in *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*. The diary contains embryonic accounts of many of the events and sites described in *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*. West's diary is rarely discussed in existing scholarship on the text and the significance of the numerous annotated illustrations of religious buildings included within it has not yet been considered.⁸¹ On her drawing of the Monastery at Sveti Naum, Macedonia, West labels the 'living rock' of the 'thick pillar' (see Fig. 9 below).⁸² On another drawing of an unnamed church, she mentions

⁷⁸ Timothy Wientzen, 'An Epic of Atmosphere: Rebecca West, *Black Lamb, and Reflex*', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 38.4 (Summer, 2015), 57-73 (p. 68) <<https://muse.jhu.edu/>> [accessed 19 July 2017].

⁷⁹ Wientzen, p. 64.

⁸⁰ Wientzen, p. 66.

⁸¹ Janet Montefiore discusses the similarities and differences between the diary and *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* in *Men and Women Writers of the 1930s: The Dangerous Flood of History*. See pp. 204-210.

⁸² Rebecca West, 'Diary of 2nd Yugoslavian Trip. Holograph Notebook', Rebecca West Papers, Yale, Beinecke Rare Books and Manuscript Library, GEN MSS 105, fols 1219-1220

the 'rough stone' of the walls and pillars (see Fig. 10 below).⁸³ In the chapter which West devotes to Sveti Naum in *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, she claims that 'the existence of such places is one of the determining factors in history' (*BLGF* 746). She posits that 'the argument here, in Sveti Naum, which has been recognized for a thousand years, is a persuasion towards sanity; a belief that life, painful as it is, is not too painful for the endurance of the mind, and is indeed essentially delightful' (*BLGF* 747).

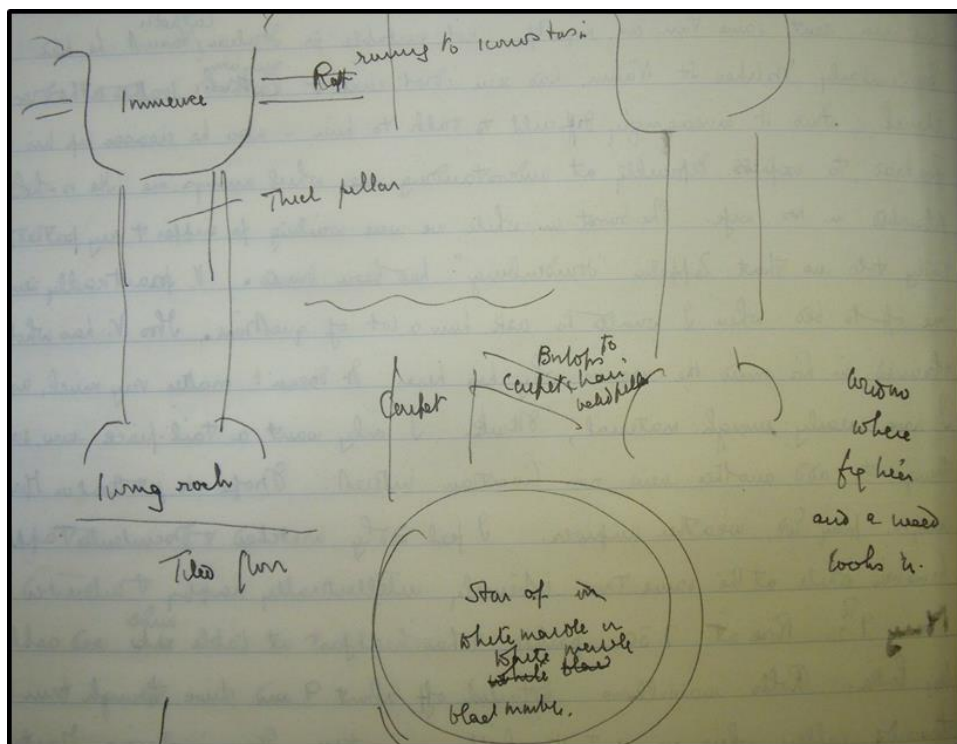


Fig. 9: Rebecca West, 'Monastery of Sveti Naum', in 'Diary of 2nd Yugoslavian Trip. Holograph Notebook', Rebecca West Papers, Yale, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, GEN MSS 105, fols 1219-20.

⁸³ Ibid.

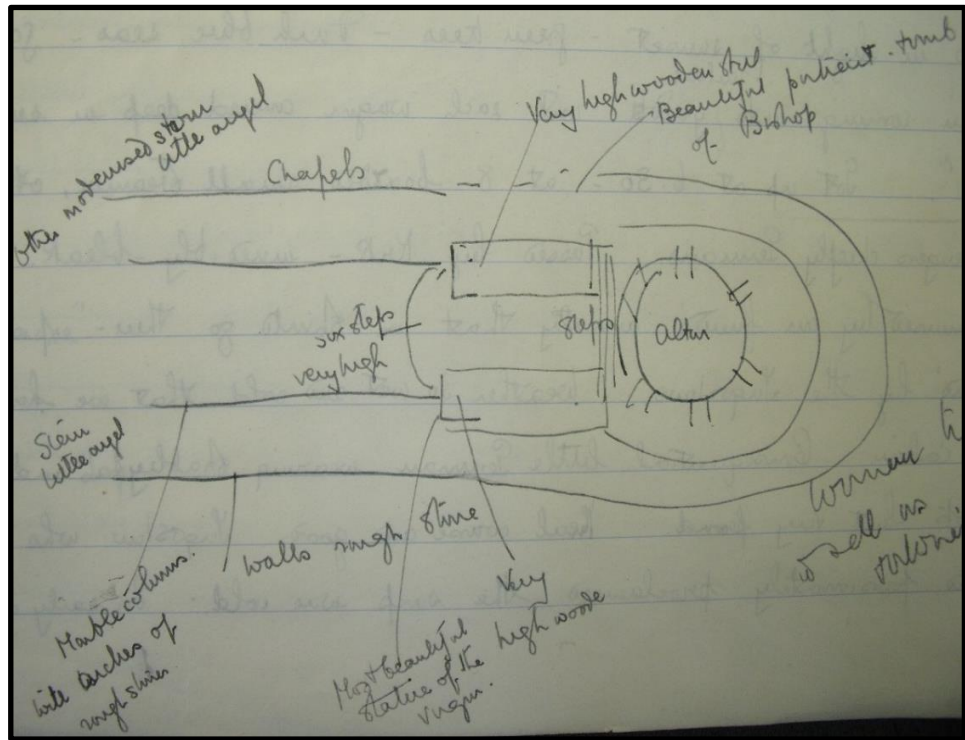


Fig. 10: Rebecca West, 'Unknown Church', in 'Diary of 2nd Yugoslavian Trip. Holograph Notebook', Rebecca West Papers, Yale, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, GEN MSS 105, fols 1219-20.

As in *A Letter to a Grandfather*, West emphasises the importance of reach-touch in the ritual actions performed in the sacred spaces that she visits during her travels through Yugoslavia. During a visit to a mosque in Jajce, Bosnia, West observed Muslims performing their evening prayers. She recounts that 'through the dim light we could see their arms stretch up in aspiration, and then whack down till their whole bodies were bowed and their foreheads touched the floor in an obeisance that was controlled and military, that had no tinge of private emotion about it' (*BLGF* 414). In addition, West is attentive to the role of reach-touch in a series of Easter fertility rituals that she describes in the 'St. George's Eve: I' chapter. In the first of these rituals, which takes place at a Sufi Muslim shrine of the Bektashi order in the mountains above Skopje, Macedonia, she observes four Muslim women who embrace a 'tall black stone standing in the middle of the room' and attempt to make their fingers meet in order that their wish for a child be granted (*BLGF* 813). West notes that 'four times a black body

pressed itself against the black stone, four times black sleeves spread widely and arms stretched as far as possible round its cold girth' (*BLGF* 813). In an analysis of this ritual in 'The Mycenaean Tree and Pillar Cult and its Mediterranean Relations' (1901), the archaeologist Arthur J. Evans observes that this stone is 'an object of veneration not only to the native Moslems but to many Christians from the surrounding regions, who made it an object of pilgrimage on St. George's day'.⁸⁴ Evans also usefully supplies two illustrations of the shrine (see Fig. 11 and Fig. 12 below). The last of these rituals, which takes place in the Sheep's Field at Ovche Polye, involves the sacrifice of a lamb on a cowherd's rock. West notes how 'the man who was holding the lamb took it to the edge of the rock and drew a knife across its throat. [...] The gipsy had caught some [blood] on his fingers, and with this he made a circle on the child's forehead' (*BLGF* 824). In a letter to her husband Henry Andrews on 15th May 1938, she describes 'the sacrifice on the stone [...] [as] the clou of my book'.⁸⁵

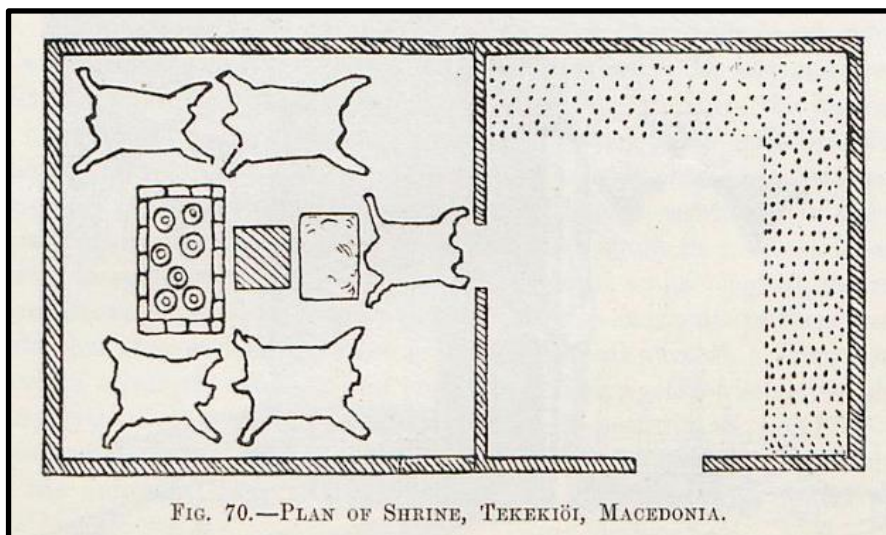


Fig. 11: Arthur J. Evans, 'Sacred Pillar in Shrine, Tekkekioi, Macedonia', in 'Mycenaean Tree and Pillar Cult and Its Mediterranean Relations', *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 21 (1901), 99-204 (p. 201)

<<http://www.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/helios/digi/digilit.html>> [accessed 19 July 2017].

⁸⁴ Arthur J. Evans, 'Mycenaean Tree and Pillar Cult and Its Mediterranean Relations', *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 21 (1901), 99-204 (p. 202) <<http://www.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/helios/digi/digilit.html>> [accessed 19 July 2017].

⁸⁵ Scott, *The Selected Letters of Rebecca West*, p. 166.

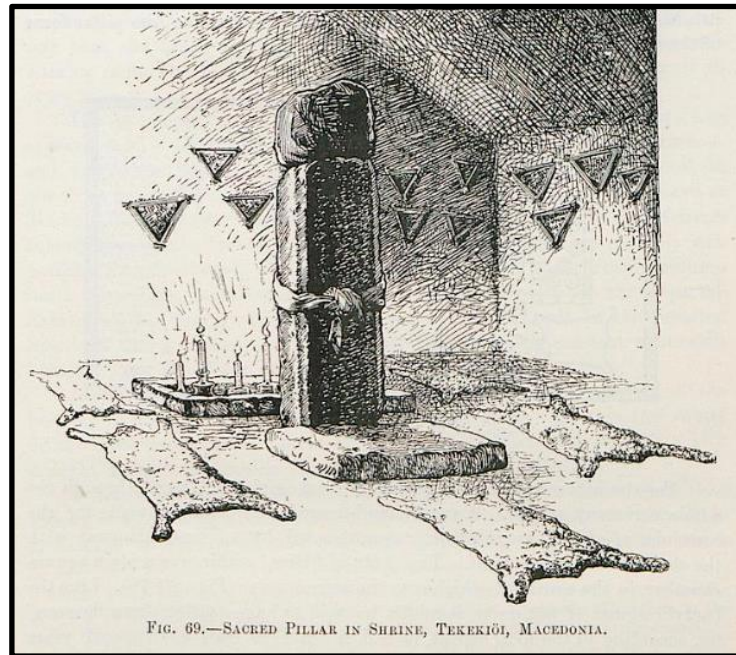


Fig. 12: Arthur J. Evans, 'Plan of Shrine, Tekkekioi, Macedonia', in 'Mycenaean Tree and Pillar Cult and Its Mediterranean Relations', *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 21 (1901), 99-204 (p. 202)
<<http://www.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/helios/digi/digilit.html>> [accessed 19 July 2017].

West describes the sacrifice on the stone as the central event of her book largely because she believes it constitutes a living example of her belief that the Augustinian complex is 'directly inscribed on life by conduct'.⁸⁶ In 'Rebecca West's Philosophy of History and the Critique of Postmodernism' (2006), Schweizer notes that '*Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* is written to the thesis that St. Augustine and his doctrine of the Atonement has poisoned Western civilization with the collective desire to play into the hands of death'.⁸⁷ Following her account of the lamb sacrifice on the Sheep's Field, West interprets it as a kind of ultimate enactment of the Atonement doctrine: 'I knew this rock well. All our Western thought is founded on this repulsive pretence that pain is the proper price of any good thing. Here it could be seen how the meaning of the Crucifixion had been hidden from us, though it was written clear' (*BLGF* 827).

⁸⁶ West, 'I Believe', p. 387.

⁸⁷ Bernard Schweizer, 'Rebecca West's Philosophy of History and the Critique of Postmodernism', in *Rebecca West Today*, ed. by Schweizer, pp. 223-244 (p. 234).

By contrast, West suggests that the Bektashi shrine prompts ritual actions which exemplify the Augustinian idea of renunciation. She figures the shrine as an architectural ‘mechanism of discipline’⁸⁸ which determines the women’s bodily movements:

The women’s belief, it could be seen by watching them, lay in the degree of effort they put into the embrace; they must put all their strength, all their passion, into stretching as far as possible, and take to themselves all they could of the stone. Then they must give it their extreme of homage, by raising their veils to bare their lips and kissing it in adoration that makes no reserves. It struck on the mind like a chord and its resolution, this gesture of ultimate greed followed by the gesture of ultimate charity and abnegation. (*BLGF* 814)

Here, West’s interpretation of the women’s gestures demonstrates her understanding of the spiritual meaning of this rite. In *Sufi Ritual: The Parallel Universe* (2014), Ian Richard Netton argues that ‘Sufi rituals actively direct themselves towards the goal of [...] asceticism, abnegation and, thus, alienation’.⁸⁹ Within the thesis about the impact of Augustinian ideas that shapes *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, West may also be framing the women’s ritual actions as bodily re-enactments of St. Augustine’s ‘renunciation of easy pleasure’.⁹⁰ She observes that the ritual involves ‘the gesture of ultimate greed followed by the gesture of ultimate charity and abnegation’ (*BLGF* 814).

Though the Bektashi shrine provokes ritual gestures which seem to enact an Augustinian renunciation, West implies that the acts of reach-touch it mobilises subvert the meaning of the ritual. Despite forming part of a ritual which directs itself toward the goal of bodily abnegation and alienation, she suggests that the reach-touch involved enables them to ‘manipulate [its] mechanisms of discipline only in order to evade

⁸⁸ De Certeau, p. xiv.

⁸⁹ Ian Richard Netton, *Sufi Ritual: The Parallel Universe* (London: Routledge, 2014), p. 180.

⁹⁰ West, *St. Augustine*, p. 160.

them'.⁹¹ Her remark that the ritual requires the women to 'put all their strength, all their passion, into stretching as far as possible, and take to themselves all they could of the stone' prefigures Rodaway's definition of reach-touch as 'active and generally grounded in intention'.⁹² Rather than conforming to the idea of bodily renunciation, West argues that this aspect of the ritual asserts what Merleau-Ponty describes in *Phenomenology of Perception* as our 'momentum of existence towards others, towards the future, towards the world'.⁹³ Here, West's emphasis on the power of touch to dislocate the intended meaning and function of spatial practice recall the disruptive tactile practices discussed in Chapter Two. Rather than figuring touch as a strictly disruptive sense, however, she suggests in her account of the Bektashi ritual that it illuminates the women's distinct individualities:

These four had actually disclosed their nature to the room and its shadows, and each of these natures was highly individual; from each pair of sleeves had issued a pair of hands that was unique as souls are. One pair was ageing and had come near to losing hope; one pair was young but grasped the stone desperately, as if in agony lest hope might go; one pair grasped the stone as desperately but with an agony that would last five minutes, or even less, if she saw something to make her laugh; and one pair made the gesture with conscientious exactitude and no urgency. (*BLGF* 814)

As in *A Letter to a Grandfather*, West indicates that the value of this sacred architecture depends on its ability to draw out the exploratory faculties of the individual rather than its ability to reinforce religious faith.

Read in this way, West's depiction of the Bektashi ritual can be interpreted as a foil to the Augustinian sacrifice on the stone that she regards as the central event of her

⁹¹ De Certeau, p. xiv.

⁹² Rodaway, p. 50.

⁹³ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 191.

book. Existing scholarship on this scene in *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* has tended to argue that the Bektashi ritual either has little significance in relation to the Augustinian complex that West sees at work in the sacrificial ritual carried out on the Sheep's Field, or that it merely re-enacts it. In his chapter on 'Constructing the "Balkans"' (2000), John B. Allcock argues that West's 'scepticism regarding the efficacy of the black stone is never concealed: [...] it may as well have been the Blarney Stone for all the real meaning it contained'.⁹⁴ In contrast, Allcock suggests that West accords much more meaning to the sacrifice on the rock: 'It seems that she cannot express strongly enough her opprobrium for it and everything associated with it: and yet, strangely, her identification with the occasion shines through powerfully'.⁹⁵ In *The Crucifixion: Understanding the Death of Jesus Christ* (2015), Fleming Rutledge posits that the ritual 'seems to contradict her vehement antipathy toward the sacrifices on the rock'.⁹⁶ However, West's description of the way in which the women embrace the stone leads Rutledge to ask: 'what is this if not sacrifice?'⁹⁷ Conversely, the transcendent power that she attributes to reach-touch in the Bektashi ritual suggests that she views this ritual as an antidote to the Augustinian complex which determines the sacrifice on the stone.

In part, West highlights reach-touch in this ritual because it models the exploratory attitude that she identifies as crucial to transcending the 'ring-fence' of the Augustinian complex in *A Letter to a Grandfather*.⁹⁸ Her remark that the women are 'stretching as far as possible' (*BLGF* 814) reiterates her faith in man's 'ambition to extend consciousness beyond its present limits and elevate man above himself' (*SN* 224). West's identification of this ambition in the Bektashi ritual may have been

⁹⁴ John B. Allcock, 'Constructing the "Balkans"', in *Black Lambs and Grey Falcons: Women Travelling in the Balkans*, ed. by John B. Allcock and Antonia Young (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2000), pp. 217-240 (p. 238).

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ Fleming Rutledge, *The Crucifixion: Understanding the Death of Jesus Christ* (Cambridge: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), p. 273.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ West, *St. Augustine*, p. 162.

influenced by her reading about the spiritual principles of the order. In his section on the Bektashi order in *Macedonia: Its Races and Their Future* (1905) (a book which West lists in the bibliography of *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*), H.N. Brailsford describes their commitment to a form of spirituality which moves beyond doctrinal barriers: ‘The ethics of the Bektashis is rather a spiritual creed which attempts to supersede an external morality of precepts and commandments by substituting for them some more universal principle of love and charity’.⁹⁹

Despite the correspondences between her depiction of the Muslim women’s stretching in *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* and C.B.’s consciousness in *A Letter to a Grandfather*, West’s account of the Bektashi ritual places a particular emphasis on bodily effort. In *A Letter to a Grandfather*, C.B.’s ‘sense of breadth’ within the abbey specifically causes her ‘consciousness [to] [strain] itself to follow right and left as far as it can’ (LG 11). Conversely, in *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* West argues that the significance of the Bektashi women’s ritual actions ‘lay in the degree of effort they put into the embrace’ (BLGF 814). Intriguingly, the emphasis that she places on the physical effort involved in this ritual is absent from her initial description of it in her ‘Diary of 2nd Yugoslavian Trip’. It will be instructive to directly compare the account of the ritual in West’s diary with the printed version that features in *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*. In the diary, she writes:

In middle tall stone shone with flat shine. Laid across the top. String around it in which pieces of stuff were hanging. Veiled women came in – black figures all dropped money in box and embraced stone – men said they must make fingers meet to get wish granted women obviously do not believe this. We stood opposite the stone on the other side. Five women did it, each time they showed

⁹⁹ H.N. Brailsford, *Macedonia, Its Races and their Future* (London: Methuen and Co., 1905), p. 246 <<https://archive.org/>> [accessed 19 July 2017].

entirely different temperament by the way they put out their hands. The sleeves fell back. Each did the prayer of _____ + whispering through their hands.¹⁰⁰

Contrasting West's muted reference to 'the way they put out their hands'¹⁰¹ in the diary, her description of the Bektashi women in *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* much more clearly stresses the unique and varying degrees of vigour that characterise their reaching:

One pair was ageing and had come near to losing hope; one pair was young but grasped the stone desperately, as if in agony lest hope might go; one pair grasped the stone as desperately but with an agony that would last five minutes, or even less, if she saw something to make her laugh; and one pair made the gesture with conscientious exactitude and no urgency. (*BLGF* 814)

Judging by the account of the ritual in the diary, we can deduce that West consciously exaggerates the bodily intentionality of the Bektashi women in the depiction which features in *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*.

The exaggerated emphasis and value that West places on the bodily vigour of the women's reaching arms may be an attempt to read the ritual in terms of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century theories about the physical aspects of religious experience. In *The New Spirit* (1890), for example, Havelock Ellis argued that 'the field of the soul's liberation is a large one [...] and the simplest functions of physiological life may be its ministers'.¹⁰² According to Ellis, 'in all countries and in all ages, some form of physical enlargement – singing, dancing, drinking, sexual excitement – has been intimately associated with worship. Even the momentary expansion of the soul in

¹⁰⁰ West, 'Diary of 2nd Yugoslavian Trip. Holograph Notebook', Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, GEN MSS 105, fols 1219-1220.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Havelock Ellis, *The New Spirit* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1921), p. 275 <<https://archive.org/>> [accessed 19 July 2017].

laughter is, to however slight an extent, a religious exercise'.¹⁰³ In *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, West correspondingly emphasises the sense of 'physical enlargement' created by the women 'stretching as far as possible' (*BLGF* 814).¹⁰⁴ More importantly, her suggestion that these physical acts of stretching enable the women to transcend the Augustinian complex of the ritual depends upon a separation of religious actions from religious doctrine that had first been theorised by William James. In *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), James famously posited that:

Religion [...] shall mean for us *the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine*. Since the relation may be either moral, physical, or ritual, it is evident that out of religion in the sense in which we take it, theologies, philosophies, and ecclesiastical organizations may secondarily grow.¹⁰⁵

Corresponding with James's theory, West's emphasis on the 'degree of effort' that the Bektashi women 'put into the embrace' asserts that the primary significance of religious experience lies in its associated physical acts rather than theologies (*BLGF* 814).

The amplified 'degree of effort' which West foregrounds in the Bektashi women's acts of reach-touch is particularly intended to model her contemporary belief that hedonistic experiences could counter the Augustinian idea of renunciation (*BLGF* 814). In her essay 'I Believe', West argues that 'renunciation [...] is not a process we can count upon'.¹⁰⁶ She claims that 'the belief that all higher life is governed by the idea of renunciation poisons our moral life by engendering vanity and egotism. It is actually the case with most of us that we are creatures of limited potency, with hardly enough

¹⁰³ Ellis, pp. 275-276.

¹⁰⁴ Ellis, p. p. 275.

¹⁰⁵ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1902), p. 31. Emphasis in original <<https://archive.org/>> [accessed 19 July 2017].

¹⁰⁶ West, 'I Believe', p. 375.

capacity to carry out the regular routine to fulfil the responsibilities to which we were born'.¹⁰⁷ West suggests that the process of renunciation should be countered by:

Good experiences as come from good food and wine, exercise, the physical act of love-making, the practice of a beloved craft or art or science, a happy marriage, the care of children or the sick or old by those who enjoy it, the service of valid ideas or the administration of worthy institutions or the pursuit of art or science.¹⁰⁸

In *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, West attempts to identify the Bektashi ritual as one of these 'good experiences'¹⁰⁹ by placing an emphasis on the 'strength' and 'passion' displayed by the women embracing the stone (*BLGF* 814). In an analysis of her theory of hedonism in *Rebecca West: Heroism, Rebellion and the Female Epic* (2002), Schweizer notes that 'her advocacy of pleasure is not an end in itself, as in Epicurus, but a moral principle that leads her to welcome both political action and the fulfilment of bodily pleasures as valid means to an advancement of life and liberty'.¹¹⁰ Indeed, in 'I Believe', West argues that indulgence in pleasurable experiences 'serves the purpose of furnishing each human soul with access to the avenue along which it can advance farthest toward the comprehension and mastery of life'.¹¹¹ By encouraging the women to '[stretch] as far as possible' (*BLGF* 814), she indicates that the reach-touch involved in the ritual make it 'a valid means to an advancement' beyond the Augustinian idea of renunciation.¹¹²

West's attempt to demonstrate that hedonistic acts can help to reorient subjectivity away from the Augustinian ring-fence of ideas in this scene outlines a much more hopeful theory of haptic experience than is present in contemporary modernist

¹⁰⁷ West, 'I Believe', p. 376.

¹⁰⁸ West, 'I Believe', p. 373.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Bernard Schweizer, *Rebecca West: Heroism, Rebellion and the Female Epic* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2002), p. 70.

¹¹¹ West, 'I Believe', p. 373.

¹¹² Schweizer, *Rebecca West: Heroism, Rebellion and the Female Epic*, p. 70.

writing. In the '1914' chapter of Virginia Woolf's novel *The Years*, for example, Martin Pargiter enjoys a haptic engagement with sacred architecture (St. Paul's Cathedral) that engenders an equally hedonistic experience:

He crossed over and stood with his back against a shop window looking up at the great dome. All the weights in his body seemed to shift. He had a curious sense of something moving in his body in harmony with the building; it righted itself: it came to a full stop. It was exciting – this change of proportion. He wished he had been an architect.¹¹³

Making 'all the weights in his body [...] shift', the Cathedral appears to provoke an empathic participation that recalls the theories outlined by Lee and Anstruther-Thomson in 'Beauty and Ugliness'.¹¹⁴ Notwithstanding this, Martin's somatic pleasure is never really presented as a 'valid means to an advancement of life and liberty'.¹¹⁵ Though momentarily enabling him to imagine the thrill of becoming an architect, this experience is characteristically disrupted in Woolf's novel by the incessant movement of the city: 'He stood with his back pressed against the shop trying to get the whole of the Cathedral clear. But it was difficult with so many people passing. They knocked against him and brushed in front of him'.¹¹⁶ In *The Years*, the ease with which Martin's bodily enjoyment is disturbed by people who 'knocked against him' suggest that for Woolf it forms too fragile a basis from which to break free of the ring-fences hindering the modern subject.¹¹⁷ Situated within the Augustinian influence that seems to dominate the lives of Yugoslavians described in *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, the reaching arms

¹¹³ Virginia Woolf, *The Years*, ed. by Hermione Lee (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 216.

¹¹⁴ Woolf mentions 'Vernon Lee's books on aesthetics' in 'A Room of One's Own' (1929). See Virginia Woolf, 'A Room of One's Own', in *A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 1-86 (p. 60).

¹¹⁵ Schweizer, *Rebecca West: Heroism, Rebellion and the Female Epic*, p. 70.

¹¹⁶ Woolf, p. 216.

¹¹⁷ Woolf, p. 216.

of the Bektashi women are instead presented as vital evidence of somatic pleasure's transcendent power.

IV. Conclusion

This chapter has examined representations of reach-touch in West's writings of the 1930s. I have conducted readings of *A Letter to a Grandfather* and *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* which explore how their depictions of reach-touch elaborate West's attempts to negotiate the influence of the Augustinian complex. Using de Certeau's theories on the bodily relationship with space in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, I have approached West's portrayals of reach-touch as spatial practices that 'manipulate the [Augustinian] mechanisms of discipline' inscribed into sacred architecture and 'conform to them only in order to evade them'.¹¹⁸ I have illustrated this by grounding West's representations of reach-touch in relation to the empathy theory of Lee and Anstruther-Thomson, as well as the theories of religious experience developed by Ellis and James. I have shown that West emphasises the exploratory and vigorous aspects of reach-touch provoked by sacred architecture as part of an attempt to place an 'ultimate value [...] [on] the efforts of human beings [...] to choose and analyse their experiences'.¹¹⁹ West's representations of embodied responses to sacred architecture in *A Letter to a Grandfather* and *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* position her as one of many 'modernists [who] did not accept secularization as inevitable or embrace a world emptied of the sacred'.¹²⁰ Just as significantly, her representations of reach-touch also elaborate her attempt to conceptualise cognitive and bodily forms of embracing the world which could enable the modern subject to move beyond some of the ring-fences she felt that the sacred imposed.

¹¹⁸ De Certeau, p. xiv.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Lewis, p. 19.

Conclusion

Haptic engagement with built space is crucial to the ways in which West's characters orient, disorient and reorient themselves in relation to key political, social, aesthetic and spiritual contexts of the early twentieth century. Anticipating Pallasmaa in *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*, she suggests that a haptic interaction with 'architecture enables us to perceive and understand the dialectics of permanence and change, to settle ourselves in the world, and to place ourselves in the continuum of culture and change'.¹ However, West also stresses that this form of embodied response to architectural space has the potential to subvert the subject's place in the world.

Across her writings from the period 1909-1941, West's emphasis on the orienting, disorienting and reorienting nature of tactility indicates that she does not subscribe to a consistent philosophical theorisation of touch. Her understanding of the haptic oscillates between a Merleau-Pontian and a Nancian philosophy of touch. Derrida locates Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological emphasis on the presence, immediacy and identification of touch within a broader haptocentric tradition. West's representations of violence, aesthetic practice and aesthetic perception also emphasise tactile presence, immediacy and identification to stress the haptic sense modality's defining role in shaping the subject's orientation in the world. She argues that the overwhelming immediacy of pain contests the idea of transformative violence and that James' lack of tactile immediacy contributes to his disorienting aesthetic appreciation of the world. Moreover, West posits that 'the presence of the body in a context' created by global touch informs the social awareness of Ellen Melville and Sybil Fassendyll and that empathic identification with art shapes moral and political conduct.² Notwithstanding this, her portrayals of touch also operate in accordance with Nancy's 'law of touching':

¹ Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*, p. 71.

² Rodaway, p. 49.

‘there is proximity, but only to the extent that it emphasizes the distancing it opens up’.³ West’s representations of disorienting aesthetic practices and the reorienting power of ritual actions are grounded in distancing forms of touch. Whereas tactile practices at Baldry Court indicate discordance between the inhabitants and the building’s prescribed system of domestic beautification, ritual actions initiated by sacred architecture are attributed with a form of touch that reaches beyond the meaning of the rites in question. West’s writings anticipate both Merleau-Ponty’s and Nancy’s differing figurations of touch, emphasising its confirmative and distancing power in her attempt to demonstrate the significance of haptic relations with built space for the situation of the modern subject.

Notwithstanding the shifting ways in which touch is figured in West’s writings from 1909 to 1941, her representations of haptic relations with built environments are consistently central to the development and achievement of her public voice. Chapter One demonstrated that West’s critique of the assumptions about violence promoted in suffragette fiction and in modernist magazines depend on her strategic juxtaposition of transformative and destructive representations of pain. Her subversions of systems of aesthetic practice, discussed in Chapter Two, are articulated through imagery of tactile pressure in the built environment. Chapter Three explored how West’s attempt to foreground a robustly-minded female awareness about the patriarchal nature of post-war society and the threatening aspects of celebrity culture is articulated through portrayals of global touch within the built environment. In Chapter Four showed that she elaborates and validates her theories about the function and impact of aesthetic experience through descriptions of empathic participations in the movements suggested by religious and landscape architecture. Lastly, Chapter Five established how West’s attempts to identify mental and bodily operations that could advance individuals beyond

³ Nancy, p. 5.

the ring-fence of the Augustinian complex are expressed through her depictions of reach-touch provoked by sacred architecture.

West's persistent grounding of her public voice in representations of haptic relations with built space provide her with an alternative frame through which to her articulate her evaluation of the subject's place in relation to the political, aesthetic, social and religious contexts of modernity. Distinctive features observable in the work of two of the modernist writers addressed in this study can be traced back to the intellectual opportunities that were afforded to them by their university education. In *James Joyce A-Z: The Essential Reference to the Life and Work* (1996), A. Nicholas Fagnoli and Michael Patrick Gillespie note that Joyce's 'degree in modern languages' – awarded by University College Dublin – 'prepared Joyce for the linguistic excursions that from *Dubliners* to *Finnegans Wake* become an increasingly central feature of his writing'.⁴ Tracing the source of Eliot's engagement with Dante in poems such as *The Waste Land*, Alzina Stone Dale notes in *T.S. Eliot: The Philosopher-Poet* (2004) that the writer 'was introduced to [the Italian poet] about 1910 by the casual "Harvard" system' at Harvard University.⁵ By contrast, as Scott notes in *Refiguring Modernism*, the education of West 'owed much more to reading than to formal instruction'.⁶ In the same year that Eliot began reading Dante, West 'grew impatient with the courses offered at her secondary school, a working women's college', and abandoned the prospect of a formal university education at age nineteen in favour of drama school.⁷ Rather than constructing her public voice around an engagement with European languages and medieval poets, West's developed out of the reading choices that she made as a young suffrage activist, her journalistic assignments and, later, her engagement with Lee and Anstruther-Thomson's theory of aesthetic empathy. Taken

⁴ A. Nicholas Fagnoli and Michael Patrick Gillespie, *James Joyce A-Z: The Essential Reference to the Life and Work* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 226.

⁵ Alzina Stone Dale, *T.S. Eliot: The Philosopher-Poet* (Lincoln, NE: iUniverse, 2004), p. 36.

⁶ Scott, p. xxxix.

⁷ Ibid.

together, a significant number of these influences emphasised how imagined haptic relations with built space could help her to develop an effective way of creatively and critically conveying the nature of modern subjectivity.

In part, West's re-imagining of haptic interactions central to the established representational strategies of suffragette fiction, real-life accounts and those which featured in her journalism helped her to forge a public voice that would be recognisable to a contemporary audience. Chapter One established how West's critique of violence in *The Sentinel* is achieved through her juxtaposition of real and imagined accounts of the suffragette prison experience that she (and her fellow activists) had read in *The New Age* and popular suffragette fiction. Chapter Two examined how her figuration of tactile pressure as an act which subverts the established domestic system of aesthetic practice in *The Return of the Soldier* is inspired by her journalistic observations of female manual labour in munitions factories – a topic that was much discussed during the war. Sybil's imagined tactile vision, discussed in Chapter Three, bears a striking resemblance to Edith Thompson's epistolary fantasies of tactile degradation – which were widely reported on by the tabloids who covered her murder trial.

The other key influence on West's imagining of haptic interactions with buildings provided her with a crucial example of how representations of the haptic could help to facilitate a public voice for a female writer. Chapters Four and Five showed that West's theory of aesthetic experience and her notions of progressive ritual actions rely on her appropriation of Lee and Anstruther-Thomson's theories about aesthetic empathy. Neither Lee nor Anstruther-Thomson received a formal university education and their theory of aesthetics is primarily based on gallery diaries in which they recorded their own bodily impressions of art, rather than on academic art historical methodologies. Correspondingly, in 'The Strange Necessity', West refers to the

evidence provided by her own sensorium to justify and elaborate her arguments about the aesthetic.

Most importantly, from the period of West's early development as a writer onwards these influences shaped her decision to use imaginary haptic engagements with architectural space as a crucial frame through which she could publicly contest, explore and theorise the situation of the modern subject. In her first and unfinished novel, West's attentive reading of writings associated with the Women's Suffrage Campaign made her sensitive to the fact that debates about the political agency of suffragette exposure to violent pain centre around representations of – and real-life accounts about – their experience of the prison space. In *The Sentinel*, therefore, the imagined prison space enables her to juxtapose and critically consider the conflicting theories of violence that suffragette writings adopt. Though *The Sentinel* remained unfinished, West's use of imagined architectural engagements are crucial to the critique of violence that she sought to express in her first published piece of fiction. In 'Indissoluble Matrimony', George's painful buffeting against the reservoir wall enables West to powerfully juxtapose representations of transformative violence promoted by early modernist magazines with her own sense that the contemporary determination to preserve unhappy marriages demonstrated the non-transformative nature of violence. In her early writings, West's representations of haptic relations with built environments provide a frame through which she can stress that the agonies engendered by the preservation of the institutional status quo undermine aesthetic representations of violence as a progressive force.

Whereas representations of haptic relations with built space in West's early writings enable her to weigh up conflicting discourses about violent embodiment, portrayals of the tactile in her wartime work allowed her to develop a critical language through which she could articulate her interrogation of established aesthetic practices. In

Henry James, West is sensitive to the fact that James' ideas about the 'house of fiction' are bound up with an imaginary architectural space. By articulating her critical appraisal of the author in *Henry James* through metaphors of tactile interaction with buildings, she is able to symbolically express what she sees as the faults of James' theory of aesthetic practice. Imagined tactile relations with architecture also enable West to draw attention to the flaws she perceives in the domestic system of aesthetic practice portrayed in *The Return of the Soldier*. West had strongly criticised in her pre-war journalism the shallowness of the domestic roles and aesthetic practices that society encouraged women to adopt. In her wartime journalism, West observed the ways in which the manual practices of female munitions workers seemed to reinforce her critique. In *The Return of the Soldier*, corresponding images of tactile practice allow her to symbolically highlight the superficiality of these artistic and domestic operations in her fiction. The architectural metaphor associated with James' theory of aesthetic practice encouraged West to express her evaluation of it via metaphors of architectural engagement. By basing the symbolic imagery of *The Return of the Soldier* on her first-hand observations of wartime female interactions with built space, she likely felt that her critique was validated by contemporary conditions of female embodied practice.

Whilst imagined tactile engagements with buildings in West's wartime writings allowed her to symbolically express her appraisals of contemporary aesthetic practice, her post-war fiction uses representations of the haptic to model and foreground the kind of attuned female social awareness that she had been calling for in her contemporary journalism. In West's pre-war and wartime writings, her public voice is articulated through imaginary architectural interactions due to the fact that the notions of violence and practice that this tackles themselves revolve around buildings such as the prison and munitions factory. West's writings of the early 1920s find in eighteenth-century architectural aesthetics experiential models which enable her to construct characters

imbued with an acute sense of disempowerment. In *The Judge*, the sense of tactile exposure that shapes Ellen's awareness of the diminution that she will suffer within an environment configured around patriarchal principles is based on Burke's theory of the architectural sublime. In *Sunflower*, the imagined experience of tactile violation in the Forum which demonstrates Sybil's awareness of the debased desires and compulsions that accompany her celebrity status reflect eighteenth-century notions of ruin-gazing. In these writings, West's public voice continued to be shaped by notions of touch and architectural engagement that she explored in her journalism. That she also bases this on eighteenth-century responses to built space highlights that during this period she was beginning to construct her public voice in relation to a broader intellectual tradition of architectural aesthetics.

Whereas in West's earlier writings haptic-architectural imagery primarily inform and support the expression of her public voice, 'The Strange Necessity' and *Harriet Hume* explicitly emphasise this form of engagement in order to validate her public voice. Her engagement with theories of aesthetic empathy is vital to her theorisation of the function of art and aesthetic experience. In 'The Strange Necessity', West's descriptions of her empathic participations with the architectural forces of Notre-Dame Cathedral are intended to buttress her theories about responses to art which help to orient and disorient the perceiver in the world. This essay's frequent insistence on Lee and Anstruther-Thomson's notion of haptic participation in the forces suggested by architectural forms provided West with the empirical basis and justification that she required for her own theory of art. By the same token, this enabled her to offer an aesthetic theory which was distinct from that of male modernist art critics – such as I.A. Richards – who equated valuable aesthetic experience with detached attitudes. Lee and Anstruther-Thomson's empathy theory is again referred to as justification for West's attempt to highlight in *Harriet Hume* that solipsistic responses to art encourage

dysfunctional forms of social conduct. In this text, West's incorporation of Lee and Anstruther-Thomson's theory of aesthetic empathy provide her with a model of aesthetic experience that enables her to contest Clive Bell's theory of disinterested aesthetic emotion.

Whilst West's writings of the late 1920s incorporate Lee and Anstruther-Thomson's haptic-architectural aesthetics in order to validate her own theorisations of aesthetic experience, her writings of the 1930s and early 1940s use descriptions of the tactile as part of her attempt to elaborate an embodied philosophy of the haptic. Anticipating the tactics employed by Maurice Merleau-Ponty in his book *Phenomenology of Perception*, West's representations of touch in *A Letter to a Grandfather* and *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* aim to stress the fundamentally haptic basis of knowledge acquisition and comprehension. In *A Letter to a Grandfather*, the outstretched consciousness provoked by the architectural forms of C.B.'s ancestral abbey allow West to argue that the exploratory capacities of the hand enable the investigative powers of the mind. In *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, West's emphasis on the bodily vigour displayed by the reaching arms of Bektashi women are presented as evidence for her conviction that hedonistic experiences encourage a mental effort to advance human understanding beyond existing philosophical epistemologies. Her portrayals of imagined and actual tactile relations with built environments that she had observed in Yugoslavia are, therefore, intended to illustrate her belief in the fundamentally exploratory nature of bodily intentionality. In doing so, West is able to emphasise the progressive potential of actions that take place in and are conditioned by architectural spaces which are structured around what she perceives to be a regressive Augustinian complex of ideas. West's own public voice was significantly established and consolidated through her construction of imagined tactile interactions with architecture. She never suggests that the reaching actions performed by the Bektashi

women help them to achieve the same. Nevertheless, her determination to read their actions as illustrative of her progressive philosophy of embodiment stress that real-life touch could follow her depictions of imagined touch in helping marginalised individuals (particularly women) to actively intervene in and better comprehend the world around them.

West's grounding and elaboration of her public voice in representations of haptic relations with built environments emphasise an interrelationship between female literary production and architectural engagement that is absent from the work of more securely canonical modernist women writers such as Woolf. In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf famously argues that the production of great writing by women is partly contingent upon their having access to a private architectural space: 'give her a room of her own and five hundred a year, let her speak her mind [...] and she will write a better book one of these days'.⁸ For Woolf, however, the autonomy that an architectural space such as the study can provide is more important for the literary development of the woman writer than bodily engagements with its structure. Indeed, *A Room of One's Own* highlights architectural structures like Cambridge University as sites that have hindered the literary development of women: 'this was the turf; there was the path. Only the Fellows and Scholars are allowed here; the gravel is the place for me'.⁹ By contrast, West's literary career was significantly shaped by her engagement with and production of writings in which portrayals of – albeit painful and dangerous – haptic interactions with architecture formed an integral part of women's demand for a greater public voice (suffragette writers) and their achievement of a bigger public role (munitions workers). Such influences meant that West's development of a powerful public voice as a modernist critic and writer also went hand-in-hand with representations of these interactions. As a result of this, West's attempts to consider, challenge and negotiate

⁸ Woolf, 'A Room of One's Own', p. 71.

⁹ Ibid, p. 5.

modernist preoccupations with violence, aesthetic practice, consumer culture, aesthetic experience and religious belief are expressed by characters who display correspondingly lively tactile engagements with architectural space.

In doing so, she insists on the dynamic intersection between embodied architectural interaction and modern subjectivity more forcefully than her female modernist contemporaries. In the modernist writings of Woolf and Jean Rhys, for example, direct interactions with architectural space are often eschewed either because they are deemed to reinforce fixed and outmoded notions of self or because buildings are believed to lack the solidity required for its mediation. In 'Street Haunting: A London Adventure' (1927), Woolf suggests that the movement between architectural spaces initiated when we 'step out of the house on a fine evening between four and six' causes us to 'shed the self our friends know us by and become part of that vast republican army of anonymous trampers, whose society is so agreeable after the solitude of one's own room'.¹⁰ By contrast, she argues that her almost haptic sense of interaction with the domestic interior buttresses the notion of a rigid self: 'as we approach our own doorstep again, it is comforting to feel the old possessions, the old prejudices, fold us round'.¹¹ In West's early writings, and particularly in her portrayals of Jenny, Chris and Ellen, imagined haptic relations with architecture instead symbolically highlight subjectivities which contest and subvert established notions of selfhood. In Rhys' novel *Quartet* (1928), the frequently displaced protagonist Marya Zelli inhabits a liminal space which cannot act as the 'necessary background' against which she can establish some sort of foothold in Paris: 'A bedroom, a balcony and *cabinet de toilette* in a Montmartre hotel cannot possibly be called a solid

¹⁰ Virginia Woolf, 'Street Haunting: A London Adventure', in *Collected Essays, Vol. 4* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1967), pp. 155-166 (p. 155).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

background'.¹² In contrast, West's later writings increasingly represent built space as exactly the sort of 'solid background' which draws out the orienting and reorienting haptic experiences of characters she created and individuals that she observed.¹³ Though West's imagined architectural engagements enable her to acknowledge with Woolf and Rhys the often problematic relationship between built space and modern subjectivity, her work demonstrates a distinctive willingness to view architectural interactions as a crucial aspect of both the situation of the modern subject and of their ability to negotiate or renegotiate the conditions of modernity. Shaped by her contact with texts and spaces in which figurations of the tactile sense supported her own literary re-evaluation of existing configurations of self, society, spirituality and art, West's modernist writings give us a unique understanding of the mediatory possibilities that she and other women found in bodily relations with architectural space during the first half of the twentieth century.

My decision to focus my discussion around close readings of specific scenes in West's writings has meant that it has not been possible to attend to every instance where representations of haptic interactions with built space configure her public voice. For example, West's pronouncements about the best ways to interpret sculpture in *A Letter to a Grandfather* and *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* are grounded in her endorsement and performance of tactile appreciation. In a remark made near the end of *A Letter to a Grandfather*, C.B. claims that 'it's very wise to get on such terms with museum authorities that one is allowed to enjoy sculpture in the proper way, which is not by looking at, but by feeling it' (LG 37). This advice is acted on in West's account of her visit to a Mithraic altar midway through *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*. She notes that 'it was so dark that even by candlelight one could see little but the best way to see sculpture is not with the eyes but with the finger-tips. I mounted on the plinth and ran

¹² Jean Rhys, *Quartet* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p. 10.

¹³ *Ibid.*

my hands over the god and the bull' (*BLGF* 409). Here, as in Lee and Anstruther-Thomson's aesthetics, West relies on and refers to her own tactile forms of engagement in order to validate and articulate her own interpretations of art.

West's representations of haptic relations with built environments also frame her public voice in writings which fall beyond the chronological scope of this thesis. In 'Parthenope' (1959), a short story first published in *The New Yorker*, the narrator recounts how her uncle's tactile engagement with religious sculpture offers him bodily and spiritual reassurance about the fate of his soul:

When he went to the church, it was a long time before he unlocked the door, for there was a beautiful tympanum in the porch, representing the Last Judgement. It was clear-cut in more than one sense. There was no doubt who was saved and who was damned: there was a beatific smile on the faces of those walking in Paradise, which made it seem as if just there a shaft of sunlight had struck the dark stone. Also the edges of the carving, though the centuries had rubbed them down, showed a definition more positive than mere sharpness. Often my uncle played games when he was alone, and now he climbed on a wooden stool which was in the porch, and shut his eyes and felt the faces of the blessed, and pretended that he had been blind for a long time, and that the smiles of the blessed were striking into his darkness through his fingertips.¹⁴

The exploratory embodied philosophy outlined by West in *A Letter to a Grandfather* and *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* is put forward as a means of escape from the perceived ring-fences imposed on humanity by established religious epistemology. However, the attempt at feeling 'the smiles of the blessed' in this passage from 'Parthenope' indicates that West later sought to express a bodily yearning for religious

¹⁴ Rebecca West, 'Parthenope', in *The Only Poet and Short Stories*, ed. by Antonia Till (London: Virago Press Limited, 1992), pp. 221-251 (p. 238).

systems of belief in which there was no absence of ‘doubt [about] who was saved and who was damned’.¹⁵ Given that this thesis has focused on work produced during West’s “modernist” period and designated – following scholars such as Cowan – 1941 as the year in which this ended, an in-depth analysis of such passages in her later writings fall beyond the remit of this project.

This thesis has demonstrated the importance and evolution of tactility in West’s modernist writings and uncovered some of the ways in which her representations of touch respond to a range of modernist concerns. Pallasmaa argues that when encountered through the body ‘a building is not an end in itself; it frames, articulates, structures, gives significance, relates, separates and unites, facilitates and prohibits’.¹⁶ Sharing this positive understanding of architecture, West’s imagined tactile engagements with built space enable her to frame, articulate and give significance to the situation of the modern subject. Though framing experiences which both strengthen and interrupt her characters’ place in the world, her modernist writings demonstrate that ‘the task of architecture is “to make visible how the world touches us”’.¹⁷ In doing so, West was better able to express, validate and achieve a distinctive public voice that powerfully addressed the key political, aesthetic, social and spiritual concerns of the early twentieth century.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*, p. 68.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 46.

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Appendix A

A.1: Rebecca West, 'Hands That War I. In The Midlands', *Daily Chronicle*, 17 February 1916, Rebecca West Papers, Yale, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, GEN MSS 105, fol. 1305.

All of us realise how wonderful it is that even the most ill-used sorts of common men, the drapers' assistants, not very fit after years of "living in", the stunted factory hand, the underfed agricultural labourer, should have joined the Army. Why should those for whom England has done so little do so much for England? But the other day I visited a provincial town and discovered a host of defenders of a different sort, whose kindness in this returning good for evil has not yet been sufficiently realised by England. It was not a town in which one would expect to find any exceptional bloom of patriotism. It had apparently been built by an architect infatuated with the loveliness of the slag-heap, and it is ugly with more than mere physical ugliness, for very plainly it was designed by capitalists for people they did not love. And least of all, if social investigators have written truly, did they love the women workers that lived there. But then before the war the woman who was a producer instead of a consumer was in most places treated with contempt; it was a kindness to employ her; the fewest shillings one chose to pay her were more than her "economic worth".

To-day things are different. In that town I found a little city of white workshops where there sit 3,000 women who are engaged in work whose vital importance to the community is symbolised by the armed guards at its gates. You will find them sitting there for ten hours a day, for they work for two stretches of five hours on end. This girl is picking up cartridge caps and tossing them aside to be remelted if they show the most infinitesimal flaw of surface; this girl is feeding cartridges into a chute that carries them down to two steel fingers that indent them at each end; this girl is gauging the cartridges

by passing them under bars that reject them if they are one-thousandth of an inch too long or short; this girl, who has been sitting at one of the heavier machines while it is being set by a skilled male operator, leaps to her feet, and an instant later a stream of cartridges spurts on to the floor beneath. There are cartridges everywhere, they leap from the girls' fingers, they dash out of the machines, they are heaped up in barrels all over the floor, hundreds of cartridges, thousands of cartridges, millions of cartridges, enough to kill every man in the German Empire. That is what these women are doing for the army, and for us.

“In the Munition Trenches”

They are doing it, too, at a cost to themselves. It is true that they are making what is good money for a woman worker, for none make less than a pound a week, and some earn £2 10s. But they lose all the sunshine, for they come at dawn and leave at dusk. And the processes are so simple and automatic that the work is monotonous past the endurance of any educated woman. Worst of all, they are the victims of a house famine. There were only 500 women working in this factory before the war, and the problem of housing the 2,500 that have come to work during the last 18 months seems insoluble. The firm is full of good will, as it has shown by building a splendid canteen. But the factory stands in what even in peace-time was a congested district, and there is as little chance of getting land for new houses as there is of getting the timber and labour for them. And thus it is that many of the women go home at night that a worker on night shift has just left, and many more are tired out when they sit down at their machines by an hour's journey by tram or rail.

But the cartridges have to be made, so they put up with these discomforts, just as the Army puts up with trench life. We must bear this parallel in mind, and remember that it will be as disgraceful if we do not alter these conditions after the peace as it would be if we left our soldiers to live in dug-outs for the rest of their lives.

That is only one factory out of thousands. In the same town I found another which was, in its bricks and mortar, an even more wonderful example of the way industrial England has risen to the emergency. Where there were green fields a year ago there is now a factory where 8,000 hands, including 3,500 women, are engaged in the 600 processes which go to the making of shell-fuses. Here the housing problem is not so acute, for the War Office has commandeered an estate of 260 houses for the employees; and it is well, for the work is heavier.

In a vast workshop where great flags hanging from the ceiling tremble perpetually in the draught of thousands of whirling pulleys, women turn the capstan lathes, operate delicate drilling and milling machines, stand for ten hours a day before machines that crash down on red-hot rounds of steel and flatten them into fuse caps. It accords with the irony of the situation whereby England is being defended by her least regarded citizens that the heaviest of these last machines have, since the nerves of the young girls cannot bear the noise, to be operated by women who have already served the State, and not been very well rewarded for it, as housewives and mothers.

“Among the Shell Makers”

From that factory I went on to a motor works that is now producing shells. Here there were 500 women working, and there was much heavy work going on, such as the cutting and turning and pressing on to the shell of the copper driving band. But most strange and impressive was the quiet room where girls in mob caps and Holland gowns sat round a long table, like pupils of a religious community in a refectory, while a moving platform brought the shells along the middle of the table so that the girls could apply touch after touch till it was finally filled with bullets and resin and handed over to the lacquerers. The girl who gave the shell the brushful of red lead that prevents premature explosions looked so young as she mixed this stuff that was like blood; and it

was dreadful to see a child that it would be a gross over-statement to call small – a mere pinch of little girl that could fairly be taken between the thumb and forefinger – dipping her curls as she bent to add her touch to the instrument of death.

But among the lacquerers, who are doing work that no man can learn to do efficiently and which is of the highest importance, since the coat of varnish preserves the shell as water-glass preserves an egg, one found a figure that reconciled one to this terrible use of womanhood. She had the face and body of a mother; but she smiled down on her work and seemed rapt, as though she were whispering to herself the cry of the Psalmist, “Blessed be the Lord my strength, which teachest my hands to war and my fingers to fight”. She was a Belgian refugee and knew what thing these girls were averting by their work, what evil they were labouring to undo.

I was told by managers, foreman and Government officials that these 7,000 women whom I saw working in the five hours of my visit to this provincial town could not have been bettered for workmanship, discipline and timekeeping. But even more wonderful than their perfection is the fact that they form only one regiment of the great army that has been recruited in the last year from the despised and disfranchised sex.

Appendix B

B.1: Rebecca West, 'The Mind of Edith Thompson. Her Motives and Character Analysed. A Fantasy Builder', *Daily News*, 13 December 1922, p. 5, London, British Library, General Reference Collection 1918-1928 MFM.MLD10*

Microform.

I was forced to attend in the way of business, part of the trial of Mrs. Thompson and Frederick Bywaters. There could be nothing more horrible than to sit and watch that pale young man who was quite motionless save for the movement in his cheeks as he swallowed and swallowed without cease, that pale young woman who drooped and swayed in a drowse of fear.

There is, of course, no way of closing the court in cases like this to persons who wish to enter it simply for amusement; but they ought to be engaged in conversation by officials who should suggest that as they have such strong nerves, they should volunteer for certain trying duties such as attendance on patients suffering from delirium tremens and give the paid staff who do those things a holiday. Between these sightseers and Edith Thompson there is hardly a pin to choose, for their mental state is very much the same.

Theirs is a lust for excitement that can find no outlet in the creative world of art or good deeds, and searches for substitutes. I am convinced that there was nothing else the matter with Edith Thompson.

TRUTH AND CAMOUFLAGE

I am quite certain that whenever Mrs. Thompson's evidence was incredible it was true. I think very few people in court, and still fewer outside, believed her assertion that her letters in which she described her attempts to kill her husband were all lies. But I am sure that that was the literal truth. I do not believe her explanation of why she

wrote those lies that Bywaters has suggested that she should poison her husband, and that she was anxious to keep his affection by seeming to fall in with these suggestions. That was camouflage. Even in moments of extremity the deformed soul endeavours to hide its deformity.

The truth is that Mrs. Thompson was a fantasy-builder. Those letters were simply a novel she was writing about herself, so that she could feel she was being a dramatic and exciting personality in Bywaters's eyes.

That theory is borne out by the evidence. After all, the prosecution have not produced anybody who witnessed these attacks of illness on the part of Mr. Thompson, which these letters allege occurred, and which certainly would have occurred if she had done all she said she did.

But the real support for it lies in Mrs. Thompson's normal expression, which is at once loose, wandering, and secretive. It is one that a great many of us have probably noticed when we were at school on the faces of girls about the age of 14 to 17 who, after showing considerable promise, gradually became difficult and inattentive and dreamy. It is one that, worn in adult life, usually betokens an oddness and remoteness often of a repellent sort.

MAKING A DREAM WORLD

The last time I saw it was on the face of a woman of about 30, who turned up in London on holiday from a provincial town and made friends with an acquaintance of mine. She told a moving story of how she had an unhappy home-life, as her parents were not on speaking terms owing to a domestic quarrel over her brother, and how she was thinking of making a loveless marriage with a rich old man in order to escape.

My friend was greatly touched, until she met someone from the same town, and found that the whole story was a lie. The girl's family was a happy and united one, and

the only trouble was this girl's moodiness and occasional lapses into untruthfulness; and there was no rich old suitor. That expression is, in fact, the outward and visible sign of a mind that has given up reality in disgust and is making itself a world of dreams; that all day long is inventing stories in which it plays a leading part, and never encounters any of those defeats which are what it fears from participation in real life.

APPETITE FOR ROMANCE

Normally this state of mind leads to ineffectiveness if it is prolonged into adult life (For it is, of course, a healthy process of childhood, and by holding up pictures of triumphs to come encourages the child to tackle the responsible job of growing up). But in Mrs. Thompson it was especially dangerous, because everything about her that fed her dreams was unwholesome food.

There was the cheapest of atmospheres about the poor little thing. One saw behind her a raw suburban vista; the Broadway when the lights go up; when the coloured lamps burn in the confectioners' windows among the red crepe paper and the piles of cheap sweets; when the electric sign writes across the Cinema de Luxe, "Gloria De Vere in 'The Splendid Sinner'". It is not good enough for this appetite for romance. It caused a strange form of indigestion.

When Mrs. Thompson felt a restless passion for something better than her life she used to go upstairs, doubtless with a box of chocolates, and write letters to her romantic young adorer, making herself out a splendid sinner far beyond even the attainments of Miss Gloria de Vere; describing how she had once again tried to murder her husband, whom she had left downstairs, as likely as not, with a kind word, read his Sunday paper and digesting his dinner, which was all she had given him.

MORAL FOR SOCIETY

That was probably all there was to it. It does not, of course, affect the question of her guilt. The idea of her husband's murder was her fantasy, but it was Bywaters' reality. But nevertheless the truth of the matter ought to be noted, because it has a moral for society.

It has, of course, its moral for educationists. If I were a headmistress, I should certainly take the older girls of the ages when they are likely to contract the habit of day-dreaming, and address them on the subject of the Thompson case (about which they would certainly know everything already) and inform them that this habit may become a vice like opium-smoking. But it has a broader moral than that. Here was Mrs. Thompson, child (though we often forget it) of a favoured age; one of those new well-fed, well-dressed young women that the suburbs have produced in the last twenty years; educated up to a point; given an opportunity to realise what a wonder she is (and, indeed, being a human being she is a wonder) by being allowed to hold a responsible post in commerce, and being paid a salary for it that would have made her grandmother swoon. She was now at the stage when she developed an imagination.

Then, when what she needed was God and William Shakespeare, she was given cheap sweets and Gloria de Vere.

The Thompson case is a symbol of what happens to a State which attains to a certain degree of material prosperity, but lacks a general passion for art and religion.

B.2: Rebecca West, 'Edith Thompson's Soul: Rebecca West on the Daydream Theory. Probing the Secrets of the Guilty Ilford Wife', *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 17 December 1922, p. 2, London, British Library, General Reference Collection 1851-1923 Microform. MFM.MLD43.

In this striking and provocative article, Rebecca West, perhaps the most brilliant journalist of the day, takes a point of view that will certainly not be shared by many women. Our readers are invited to express their own opinions in "Reynolds's Post Office".

Whenever I go to a trial in the Law Courts, no matter what the case may be, I always find that the same person is being tried. It is always Me that is standing in the dock. Me with just a little difference.

I have sat at an Assizes and watched a procession of Me's pass through the dock. Me's with a little less kick to them, who had tried to commit suicide. Me's a little more muddle-headed and credulous and worried about money, who had embezzled money to put it on a "dead cert"; Me's who had stuck at three years old and wandered about committing petty thefts, and who smiled awkwardly up at the judge like a child caught out in an uncomprehended fault. But it is always fundamentally the same Me, that laughs in happiness and cries in grief; the same human animal that loves and hates, and is noble and tells lies and cheats, and is good and is bad, all in the same skin. I find this even in cases of great criminals. Ronald True was me who had been born with a wrongly-shaped head and had exaggerated this handicap later in life by taking morphia.

And you would find the same thing. It is always You who stand in the dock. There is no specific criminal type, no special creation of wicked people. There are just ordinary people who, because of some twist in them, commit crimes.

WAS SHE DIFFERENT?

But about Edith Thompson even I felt a doubt. Surely this was a master of evil, not kin at all to the commonplace folk who walk about the streets. Those were revolting letters, in which she told how, day after day, she had tried to kill her husband. I thought, before I went to the Old Bailey, that this was a remarkably loathsome example of that numerous class of crimes that are committed for the sake of respectability.

There are human beings who are withered in the core of their being so that they lack pity and do not feel the natural revolt at the idea of taking another life, but who at the same time have an exaggerated respect for the judgment of society. Rather than give up their place as respected members of the community they will kill.

Armstrong poisoned his weakly, pitiful wife rather than forfeit his position as premier solicitor in an obscure country town by deserting her. Dr. Crippen killed his exceptionally tiresome wife, with whose vagaries he had patiently borne till then, rather than face social displeasure with Miss Le Neve. Mrs. Maybrick poisoned her husband because she was afraid of being divorced.

Even so, I thought that Mrs. Thompson had conspired to murder Mr. Thompson because she could not face leaving him and outraging Ilford society. I believe that many people hold that theory. But there is nothing in it. That I saw when I went to the Old Bailey and looked at Edith Thompson.

NEUROTIC

It was very obvious that she was what doctors call a “neurotic” woman. That it, that her mind worked in an unhealthy way, which frequently interfered with the steady procedures of her body. Even for a person in her position her collapse was excessive. Her face was grey. It was plain that often she could not see out of her eyes, that sometimes she was speaking into what seemed to her black space. She fell into what looked like utter exhaustion, and then, when something caught her attention, rose

suddenly into animation; and yet the exhaustion had been unfeigned. And above all there was about everything that she did, even when she was most genuine, a curious theatricality.

ACTING ALL THE SAME

When she leant back in a fainting condition and had to be given smelling salts, she was really faint, and she really needed the smelling salts; but at the same time she acted being a woman who was in a fainting condition, and had to be given smelling salts. When she had to leave the witness box she could not rise for a moment, and clung on to one of the wooden pillars that rises on each side of the box. It was true that she was unable to rise; but she clung on to the pillar in a way which, though it looked pathetic, could not possibly have afforded her the smallest support.

It was partly this puzzling mixture of real anguish and the dramatic assumption of it which caused the atmosphere of the court to be charged with chilly hostility against Mrs. Thompson; and partly to the expressions which wrote in her face its tale of her permanent state of mind, quite apart from the distortions caused by this crisis – an expression which told that she was a woman who would come out into the real world only when there was gaiety and admiration around her, and who would spend the rest of her days wrapped in unwholesome day-dreams.

THE WHOLE OF THE TROUBLE

Day-dreams have been the whole of the trouble. It is day-dreams that have sent Percy Thompson to his cruel and sudden death; that have brought Edith Thompson and Bywaters to the condemned cell. The facts of the case are inexplicable on any other supposition.

Day-dreaming is one of the commonest kinks in the human mind. All children do it, picturing themselves as being made King of England for bravery on the field, or Queen of England for stopping the leak in the Embankment wall which otherwise would have let in the Thames and flooded London. It is recognised as a childish occupation, but grown-ups often persist in it in secret.

I wonder how many women who read this have written love-letters to themselves? They probably burned them as soon as they were written; and they will certainly blush to remember that they were ever so foolish. But they will understand me when I say that Edith Thompson's letters in which she described her attempts to poison her husband had not a particle of foundation in fact. They were simply day-dreams that she was sharing with an appreciative listener.

THE AGE OF DISCONTENT

Mrs. Thompson had arrived at a stage when she might likely feel discontented with real life. She was getting near thirty, and might have fretted at the loss of her youth. She had been Mrs. Thompson for some years, long enough to get over the novelty of being a married woman, and she probably regretted the passing of early sweethearting days without being a big enough woman to embark on the real business of making an enduring love out of ordinary hum-drum married life. She had been at work for a long time, and was probably beginning to get tired of that. There was nothing in the world for the poor limited little thing to do but turn inward and indulge in day-dreams. But, having tasted something of life, solitary day-dreaming was not enough.

When the romantic young silly, Frederick Bywaters, came by, it was the very thing for which she had been looking. Here was somebody to whom she could tell the tale of what a wonderful and entrancing and altogether exceptional human being she

was; and who could give her real rapturous applause, which was very much better than the applause of imagined crowds.

HER REAL HEROINES

But unfortunately her conception of what constituted a wonderful and entrancing and altogether exceptional human being was low. She was, poor child, a shocking little piece of rubbish, and her mental furniture was meagre. She read “Belladonna”; but I am certain that she was addicted to the less popular efforts of the cinema. I am sure that she greatly admired Pauline Frederick and Louise Glaum, and all those ladies who act the parts of “great sinners” in impressive ballgowns. That is why when she sat down, as she did whenever life seemed very dull, to spin her day-dream to the distant Bywaters, she posed as “a great sinner”, and told tale after tale of how, day after day, she was making brutal and heartless attempts to kill her cruel husband.

Of course, it was not true! If she was trying to poison him with drugs and broken glass, he would have been ill, as she said he was. But Percy Thompson had friends and business associates. They had a servant. Yet the prosecution has failed to produce one witness who saw him being ill.

WHY SHE DID NOT GO

Mrs. Thompson also alleged that her husband had complained about his attacks, and expressed his suspicions to his mother. Yet the prosecution failed to produce this witness. People have said again and again during this trial, “But why, if she wanted to get rid of her husband, and was making £6 a week, didn’t she walk out of the front door instead of poisoning him?” These facts explain why. She wasn’t poisoning him, and she didn’t seriously dislike him. She was only spinning daydreams.

You may be sure that she spun more dangerous day-dreams when she had tea with Bywaters at Fuller's that afternoon; Lord knows what pathetic tales of ill-treatment at the hands of her husband, what magnificent picture of a splendid Judith plotting vengeance against Holofernes. I don't suppose she worried at all about the effect it was having on her hearer. She was probably not conscious of anything but the glowing adoration of his dark eyes.

She was so far away in her imaginary world ever to guess that this fantasy of hers might have consequences in the real world. She was not to guess that he was laying up this story in his heart and would ponder over it till he could no longer bear it, and went into the night with his knife to lie in wait for his enemy.

A DREAM COME TERRIBLY TRUE

Edith Thompson's life has been horrible from that time. Think of that first moment of anguished confusion when she realised as the two men struggled that her lovely, exciting day-dream had become a terrible fact; those long hours when she sat in court and listened to those letters being read and felt her daydreams forming a rope around her neck.

I am not asking for sympathy for Mrs. Thompson. She is a poor, flimsy, silly, mischievous little thing. I am asking you to note that even she is You and Me. There is nothing in her that is not in us, and if we disobeyed the laws of mental hygiene and gave ourselves up to morbid daydreaming we might find ourselves where she is. And I ask you to note that she is there because she dreamed the wrong dreams. She was an efficient worker in commerce, but that is not enough. Humanity has its need to dream. And if you do not give humanity the good music, the good pictures, the good books that will set it dreaming right, and start it trying to make its dreams come true in the real world, it will dream bad dreams that lead to lies and death.