THE PHANTOM TABLE

Woolf, Fry, Russell and the Epistemology of Modernism

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Contents

List of illustrations *page* viii
Preface ix
List of abbreviations xvii

1 Introduction: table talk 1

PART I: SUBJECT AND OBJECT AND THE NATURE OF REALITY

2 The geometry in the sensible world: Russell's analysis of matter 59

3 The world seen without a self: Woolf's analysis of matter 108

4 Solus ipse, alone in the universe 159

5 The dualism of death 213

PART II: PRINCIPIA AESTHETICA

6 Fry's granite and rainbow: post-impressionism and impressionism 245

7 How describe the world seen without a self? 294

8 The modern elegy 358

Notes 389
Bibliography 415
Index 427

Illustrations

1. Roger Fry, frontispiece to *The Cambridge Fortnightly*, 1888. By permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library. *page* 2
2. Nicéphore Nièpce, *La Table Servie*. Courtesy of the Société Française de la Photographie. 57
3. Roger Fry, portrait of Bertrand Russell, 1923. Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery, London. 61
4. Ernest Mach, "Figure 1," the view from Mach's left eye, *Contributions to the Analysis of Sensations*, 1890. By permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library. 161
5. Vanessa Bell, portrait of Virginia Woolf. © Estate of Duncan Grant, courtesy of Henrietta Garnett and Sotheby's, London. 215
6. Paul Cézanne, *Stilleben*, c. 1885. Courtesy of the Neue Pinakothek, Munich. 243
7. Bertrand Russell, map of a five-term complex, *Theory of Knowledge*, 1913 (reproduced upside down). 243
8. Vanessa Bell, Virginia Woolf at Asheham, 1912. © Estate of Vanessa Bell, courtesy of Henrietta Garnett and the National Portrait Gallery, London. 295

CHAPTER 1

Introduction: table talk

> He was a curious figure thus sitting often dead silent at the head of the family dinner table. Sometimes he was caustic; sometimes to Thoby especially instructive. He would ask what was the cube root of such and such a number; for he always worked out mathematical problems on railway tickets; or told us how to find the "dominical number" – when Easter falls was it? And mother would protest; no mathematics, she would say, at meals.
>
> (Woolf, *Moments of Being*, 111)

> "Andrew," she said, "hold your plate lower, or I shall spill it." . . . resting her whole weight upon what at the other end of the table her husband was saying about the square root of one thousand two hundred and fifty-three. That was the number, it seemed, on his watch."
>
> (Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 158–9)

The universe of Virginia Woolf's novels is a monadology whose plurality of possible worlds includes private points of space and time unobserved, unoccupied by any subject. Its principle of unity is not a pre-established harmony conferred ahead of time by authorial intention. It is constructed *ex post facto* via a style and an art. This art grounds itself on a philosophical system, a theory of knowledge. The theory begins with an analysis of the common-sense world. Objects are reduced to "sense-data" separable from sensations and observing subjects to "perspectives." Atomism multiplies these perspectives. Objects familiar because seen, heard, sensed, observed, tucked cosily into the observer's viewpoint, lose their familiarity once rendered unseen, unheard, unobserved, revealed to have a sensible existence independent of an observer. A perspectivized style records the vision mutely, imparting its strangeness to the vision. The first conclusion of this logic is the idea of death as the separation of subject and object. The second starts from that conclusion, deriving from it an

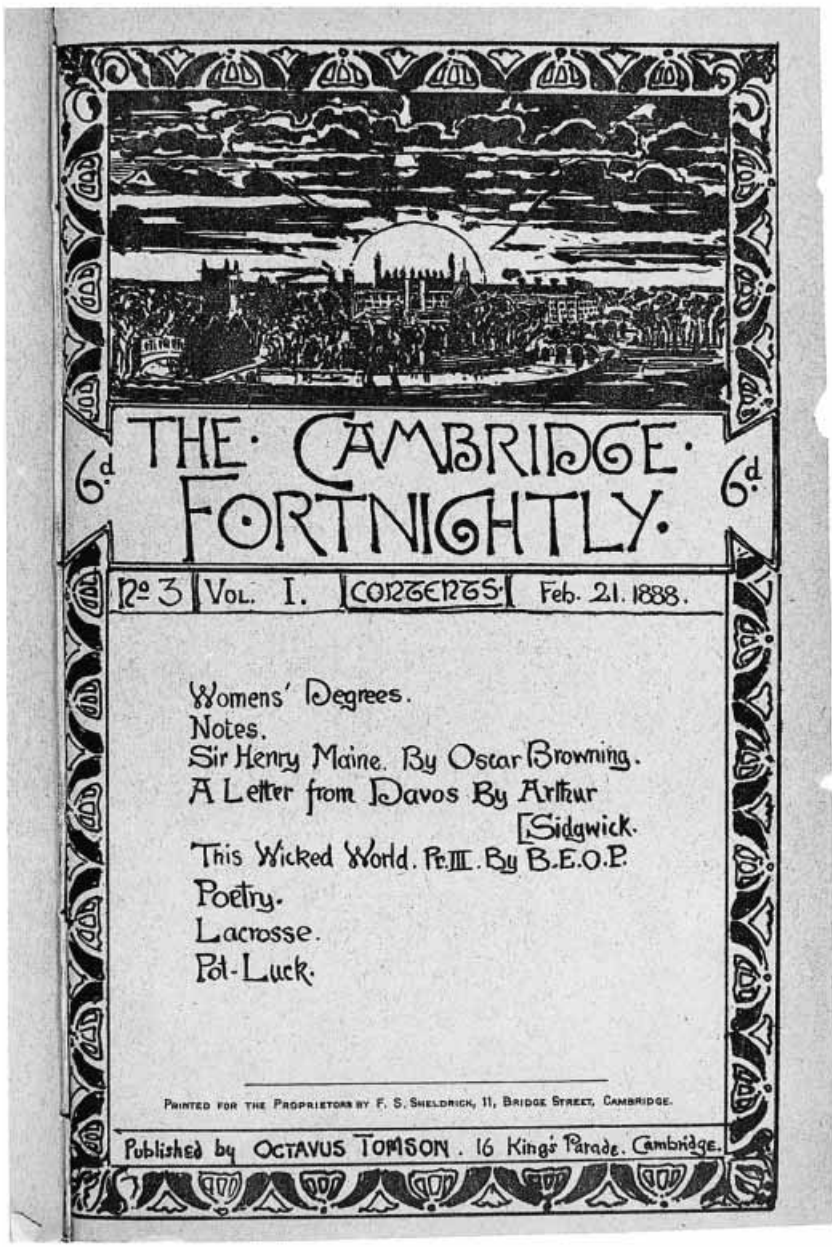

Figure 1. Roger Fry, frontispiece to *The Cambridge Fortnightly*, 1888.

elegiac form that is an adequate response to the world revealed by science.

THE LIGHT OF CAMBRIDGE

> They say the sky is the same everywhere . . . But above Cambridge . . . there is a difference . . . Is it fanciful to suppose the sky, washed into the crevices of King's College Chapel, lighter, thinner, more sparkling than the sky elsewhere? (Woolf, *Jacob's Room*, 31–2)

The origins of this theory of knowledge were in the pre-war Cambridge of Alfred North Whitehead, G. E. Moore and Bertrand Russell. "The student of British culture, like Virginia Woolf," Irma Rantavaara insists, "cannot escape Cambridge." (*Virginia Woolf and Bloomsbury*, 43). E. M. Forster's *The Longest Journey* (1907) begins abruptly with a dialogue evoking that Cambridge:

> "The cow is there," said Ansell . . . There, now . . ."
>
> "I have proved to myself that she isn't," said the voice. "The cow is *not* there." Ansell frowned and lit another match.
>
> "She's not there for me," he declared. "I don't care whether she's there for you or not. Whether I'm in Cambridge or Iceland or dead, the cow will be there."
>
> It was philosophy. They were discussing the existence of objects. Do they exist only when there is some one to look at them? Or have they a real existence of their own? . . . Hence the cow. She seemed to make things easier. She was so familiar, so solid, that surely the truths that she illustrated would in time become familiar and solid also. Is the cow there or not? This was better than deciding between objectivity and subjectivity. So at Oxford, just at the same time, one was asking, "What do our rooms look like in the vac?" (1–2)

Forster's fictional conversation could well be that which takes place in Jacob Flanders' rooms at Cambridge – one never recorded, however, in Woolf's *Jacob's Room*, because the observer-narrator, identified as a woman, is, it is implied, excluded from the conversation.[1] The novel's perspective on Jacob's rooms, "the window being open," is perforce distanced, limited, "legs issuing here," a "pipe was held in the air, then replaced," "lips opened," "a roar of laughter," "only gestures of arms, movements of bodies, could be seen shaping something in the room." So the question "Was it an argument?" (*JR*, 44) cannot be decided. Yet the subject of the debate Forster reproduces – our knowledge of the external world, the nature of perception – does enter Woolf's novels couched in

explicit philosophical language. "Subject and object and the nature of reality" is the subject of his father's books, Andrew Ramsay answers Lily Briscoe's inquiry in *To the Lighthouse*, for it is as philosopher obsessed by the problem of knowledge and not as literary critic that Woolf fictionally depicts her own father, who was both. "Think of the kitchen table when you're not there," (38) Andrew adds to illustrate the philosophical realist's position with an example like Forster's cow, "so familiar, so solid," "to make things easier" for the puzzled Lily. In *The Years*, Sara Pargiter is reading a version of the Idealist position:

> "This man," she said, tapping the ugly little brown volume, "says the world's nothing but thought, Maggie" . . .
>
> "The world's nothing but thought, does he say?" . . .
>
> "Would there be trees if we didn't see them?" said Maggie.
>
> "What's 'I'? . . . 'I' . . . [Woolf's ellipses]?" She stopped. She did not know what she meant. She was talking nonsense. (139–40)

With these explicit formulations, Woolf makes evident her familiarity with the terms in which British philosophy presents the problem. They are not incidental, however, as in Forster, but themes. Their full understanding requires an explication provided not simply by the parameters of what is after all an ancient debate – that between Realism and Idealism – but by a particular, historically localizable theory of knowledge. Underlying Woolf's work, albeit not always undisguisedly, it is the key to otherwise unexplained obsessions of the novels which, in isolation, remain puzzling, and it intersects with more familiar ones to make possible new readings.[2]

The Cambridge at the origin of this theory was one won over after 1898 by a new philosophical Realism. This was the "revolt" against Idealism of the young Moore and Russell. Its paradigm of reality in Russell and Whitehead was not first the external world, but mathematical and logical truth. If the conjunction of "some branch of mathematics or philosophy" (*TL*, 15) evokes the names of Russell and Whitehead, it had already marked the intellectual orientation of the philosophers of Woolf's father's generation.[3] "Stephen, Sidgwick, Clifford, Marshall and Venn all came to philosophy through mathematics and gravitated to empiricism . . . It was no accident that whereas Oxford at the end of the century became the home of German Idealism, Cambridge nurtured Bertrand Russell's logic which employed Boolean algebra" (Annan, *Godless Victorian*, 190).[4]

While, later, Oxford would read by the natural light of "ordinary language," the "light of Cambridge" included "the light . . . of symbols and figures" (*JR*, 42). An illustration in Russell's *ABC of Relativity* assigns hypothetical lawyers the view of simultaneity of "a person at rest on the earth" and not "the view of a person traveling in a train" by virtue of their "having been educated at Oxford." Russell dryly comments that "in theoretical physics no such parochial prejudices are permissible" (50).

Theory of knowledge was a further development of the new Realism, the result of the inroads of science at Cambridge at the beginning of the century. Here reality is physical reality. Stages in "the process of understanding" were "philosophy; science" (*W*, 249). The young men Peter Walsh is thinking of in *Mrs. Dalloway* as he passes the British Museum are "reading science, reading philosophy" (76). At "Cambridge . . . Greek burns there; science there; philosophy on the ground floor" (*JR*, 39). Philosophy was then the foundation, strengthened by logic and mathematics. Science's knowledge of the external world was only expressible logically and mathematically. "The thought which science evokes is logical thought," wrote Whitehead (*Aims*, 51).

But the growth and dissemination of theory of knowledge required a wider intellectual setting, a meeting-ground of philosophy not only with science, but, surprisingly, with a burgeoning artistic activity. Such, it is our first hypothesis, was Bloomsbury.

(SOME MAIN) PROBLEMS OF PHILOSOPHY: A BLOOMSBURY EPISTEMOLOGY

> [H]ow are we to bridge over the gulf between two contradictories? (Leslie Stephen, *History of English Thought*, 25)

The turn to theory of knowledge coincided with a nascent philosophy of science in the first decades of the century. Its epistemological urgency arose from what Russell called "the gulf between the world of physics and the world of sense" or "the transition from perception to science" (*Matter*, 222). These problems became acute with the breakthroughs of physics in the last decades of the nineteenth century on the kinetic theory of gases and the wave theory of light, Max Planck's discovery of the quantum in 1900, the confirmation and application of Niels Bohr's theory of the atom between

1913 and 1925, Einstein's formulation of the special theory of relativity in 1905 and of the general theory in 1915 and the discoveries of de Broglie, Heisenberg, P. Jordan, Dirac and Schrödinger on wave and particle theories in 1925–6, spanning the years Woolf is writing her first novels. "The new situation in the thought of today arises from the fact that scientific theory is outrunning common sense," wrote Whitehead (*SMW*, 106). The theme prefaces various of Russell's attempts to formulate a theory of knowledge. He elaborated on it in the opening of his 1926 Tarner Lectures on the Philosophy of the Sciences given at Cambridge:

> All empirical evidence consists, in the last analysis, of perceptions, since it is the latter which supplies the evidence of the laws of physics. In the time of Galileo, this fact did not seem to raise any very difficult problems, since the world of physics had not yet become so abstract and remote as subsequent research has made it. But already in the philosophy of Descartes the modern problem is implicit, and with Berkeley it becomes explicit. The problem arises because the world of physics is, prima facie, so different from the world of perception that it is difficult to see how one can afford evidence for the other. (*Matter*, 6)

Russell's conclusion, in the 1914 "The Relation of Sense-Data to Physics," that "it would seem, the correlation with objects of sense, by which physics was to be verified, is itself utterly and for ever unverifiable" (*ML*, 140), echoes Leslie Stephen's conclusion "that matter cannot be brought into relation to spirit, whilst all scientific knowledge rests on their mutual connection" (*HET*, 25–6).

Thus it was a philosophy which addressed the seeming incommensurability of two versions of a knowledge of the external world, one direct apprehension of it through the senses and the other scientific knowledge, chiefly modern physics, that Woolf, with her acknowledged limits in this area, came to know as philosophy. Both versions made empirical claims about the world. All we ever know immediately is not matter, but our own sensations. The object of science is beyond immediate knowledge. But sensation remains the evidence for it. The empirical basis for objective knowledge thus rests on subjective foundations. Yet science means to formulate a knowledge ideally independent of the subject. Hence a solution to the problem of knowledge within the framework of empiricism must be an answer to Idealism, whether Berkeley's or F. H. Bradley's Hegelianism.

Russell's work on the theory of knowledge is concentrated in the

period 1910 to 1914. Its history after 1910 – the relevant texts including not only *Our Knowledge of the External World* and "The Relation of Sense-Data to Physics," but the manuscript posthumously published as *Theory of Knowledge*, all of 1914, – has only recently been recounted.[5] Its major influences are the Moore of "The Refutation of Idealism" and *Some Main Problems of Philosophy*, with ever in the background Whitehead's and Russell's monumental work on logic and the foundations of mathematics. Together Moore, Russell and Whitehead define the contours of philosophy as Bloomsbury understood it. Leonard Woolf singles out this triumvirate as the major philosophical influence for his generation:

> When I came up to Trinity, [J. McT. E.] McTaggart, though regarded with respect and amused affection as an eccentric, had completely lost his intellectual and philosophical influence. The three other philosophers' reputation was great and growing, and they dominated the younger generation. In 1902 Whitehead was forty-one years old, Russell thirty, and Moore twenty-nine. (*Sowing*, 134)

The years 1911–13 are also those in which the young Wittgenstein entered the English philosophical scene, those of the intense exchange between him and Russell. The profound crisis created for Russell by Wittgenstein's criticisms led to Russell's abandonment of the *Theory of Knowledge* text. Wittgenstein as a philosophical influence sets, according to one dominant assessment of the course of philosophy in the twentieth century, a kind of *terminus ad quem* to the period of the theory of knowledge by making "epistemology. . . peripheral," in the words of Michael Dummett, who "points out," Brian McGuinness writes,

> that since the time of Descartes epistemology had been the basic part of philosophy:
>
> "The whole subject had to start from the question, 'What do we know and how?' . . . Descartes's perspective continued to be that which dominated philosophy until this century, when it was overthrown by Wittgenstein, who in the *Tractatus* reinstated philosophical logic as the foundation of philosophy, and relegated epistemology to a peripheral position."
>
> . . . Russell, who came to philosophy before the change signalized by Dummett, perhaps never realized that it had taken place. Despite all his own discoveries in logic and philosophical logic, he tended to think that the Cartesian question was the one with which philosophy began. (*Wittgenstein: A Life*, 83)[6]

The displacement of epistemology marks the break between Russell's dominance and Wittgenstein's.

BLOOMSBURY: THE HOME UNIVERSITY

"Why dont you contribute to the Queen's dolls House, Virginia?" "Is there a W. C. in it, Vita?" "You're a bit hoity toity, Virginia." Well, I was educated in the old Cambridge School. "Ever hear of Moore?" "George Moore the novelist?" "My dear Vita, we start at different ends." (to Clive Bell, *Letters VW*, III, 85–6)

[T]here is still a gulf . . . in which, possibly, literature may crash . . . England has crammed a small aristocratic class with Latin and Greek and logic and metaphysics and mathematics . . . She has left the other class, the immense class to which almost all of us must belong, to pick up what we can in village schools; in factories; in workshops; behind counters; and at home. When one thinks of that criminal injustice one is tempted to say England deserves to have no literature. (*CE* II, 180)

Bloomsbury was both a place and a moment. As a place, it was created by the displacement of two distinct groups from two other places: it was Cambridge and centrally Cambridge philosophy moved to London and it was the private household of the young Stephens moved from Hyde Park Gate to Bloomsbury. "The colour of our minds and thought had been given to us by the climate of Cambridge and Moore's philosophy," Leonard Woolf wrote (*BeAg*, 25). "Bloomsbury grew directly out of Cambridge," he said; it was "intimate friends who had been at Trinity and King's and were now working in London" (*Sowing*, 156). Since the Stephen brothers reached Bloomsbury via Cambridge, the Stephen sisters' arrival defined the specific influence of the Hyde Park Gate contingent: the arts were the sisters' arts; philosophy belonged to the brothers. The Cambridge brothers' philosophy had, moreover, a formal embodiment in that "Fratrum Societati" known as the Cambridge Apostles (Lowe, *Alfred North Whitehead*, I, 120). Although not all of Bloomsbury's nucleus, and notably not the Stephen brothers, were members, its influence was paramount.[7] We can give many names to the conjunction of Cambridge and Hyde Park Gate, but here we will call it the "Home University."

As a moment, Bloomsbury's intellectual history coincides with the work on knowledge. It divides into three sections. The first takes in the formative years 1900 to 1904–5, when Bloomsbury's male members were Cambridge undergraduates. Leonard Woolf pro-

nounced that "1903 was an *annus mirabilis* for Cambridge philosophy, for in that year were published Russell's *Principles of Mathematics* and Moore's *Principia Ethica*" (*Sowing*, 133–4). 1903 also has a landmark in "The Refutation of Idealism," which places sensible and physical reality alongside the mathematical reality of Russell's *Principles*. The second period covers the years 1905 to 1910, those of the first Bloomsbury. The third, from 1910 at least to the outbreak of the War or to Russell's "Logical Atomism" lectures of 1918, includes "the three years 1912 to 1914," when Leonard Woolf remembers "Bloomsbury came into existence," (it for him not having existed during his absence in Ceylon from 1904–11), and when Woolf is writing her first novel, completed in 1913.

Bloomsbury's preoccupation with epistemological questions thus places it squarely within the period of Russell which ends with Wittgenstein's ascendancy. Leonard Woolf, explaining why Virginia had not attended Wittgenstein's lectures, says "nor did I and I don't think many of the older people did" (*LettersLW*, 539). We can thus take the rise of Wittgenstein's influence as a kind of cut-off point for the philosophical background of Bloomsbury. This does not prevent the *Tractatus* from playing a role in our reconstruction of Bloomsbury's intellectual world. It came out of the period of Russell's theory of knowledge, and its conceptions, language and dominant metaphors find their counterparts in Woolf, not because she came under its influence, but because she shared its ways of thinking.

Woolf saw as an inaugural moment for Bloomsbury the turning of the century's first decade. In a famous passage, she wrote that "in or about December 1910 human character changed" (*CE*, I, 320). It marked for her a significant shift in what she calls "atmosphere," Leonard's "climate." We can venture certain hypotheses as to what change Woolf had in mind and what events led her to date it so precisely.

The change was a turn to the "external world"; it was "changing from the general to the particular," as Woolf says of early Bloomsbury conversation (*MB*, 192), echoing the Russellian vocabulary. "The external world" had for Cambridge two embodiments. It was first, we saw, the physical world of science. But the "external world" had a social dimension as well. It was the world outside the narrow circle of Cambridge. For there were other lights than Cambridge. Among the most important was the strong Mediterranean sunlight of a new art, "its light (whether Rossetti's on the wall, or Van Gogh

reproduced . . .)'' (*JR*, 40–1), to which Cambridge was blind, for ''none of that could show clearly through the swaddlings and blanketings of the Cambridge night'' (*JR*, 45).[8] Significant for our history, this incompleteness was felt with a new urgency by the philosopher-logician himself. His intensest labor was over, and in the interval which opened up almost as a void, new questions suddenly became visible, new contacts were sought and made. Leslie Stephen, Woolf thought, had remained ''ignorant of all depressions and elevations but those that high philosophy bred in him'' (*MB*, 37). The philosopher of 1910 turns from ''the world of universals'' to the world of ''particulars,'' discovering, despite a ''temperament'' for ''the one,'' ''that both have the same claim on our impartial attention'' (*PP*, 100).

In December 1910, the first volume of *Principia Mathematica*, which Russell had spent the previous ten years writing with Whitehead, finally appeared. It marks a watershed. The logicist project – the claim that pure mathematics was deducible, via ''chains of deductions'' (*PofM*, xvi), ''from a very small number of fundamental logical principles'' (xv) – had arrived at a critical point, both of achievement and exhaustion. The story of Russell's post-*Principia* exhaustion is notorious. He recounted it to many, including Woolf herself.[9] But his personal odyssey is emblematic of Cambridge philosophy's shift in direction at that moment. In 1910, Whitehead moved from Cambridge to London (Lowe, *Alfred North Whitehead*, II, 2), abruptly ending his thirty-year association with Trinity College.[10] In 1911, Russell, finally separated from his first wife, would also take a flat in London, though he was still lecturing at Cambridge. These events mark the end of something. Unlike the parochial Oxford mind of Russell's *The ABC of Relativity*, his Cambridge-educated mind is a mind in motion, with its ''view of a person traveling'' at high speed, its direction outwards.

1910 also marked new beginnings. From the completion of *Principia Mathematica* can be dated the new interest in the old problem of knowledge that Moore's ''The Refutation of Idealism'' initiated and Forster already echoed in 1907. In the winter of 1910–11, Moore delivered twenty lectures in London on ''the problem of the external world and the problem of general ideas'' which became *Some Main Problems of Philosophy* (Wisdom, ''Foreword,'' 5). The revival of interest in knowledge led Russell to extend logic's methods into new terrain, not an imperialist extension but a testimony to the incompleteness of

pure logic alone. Logic, redirected to reality, was completed only when its framework was filled in by a reference to the external world. Whatever the reason for the turn to knowledge circa 1910, the fact that the revived interest met a response beyond philosophy is indicative of a climate receptive to it. The turn is philosophy's expression of some more general shift.

One sign is the shift to a new aesthetic, "Post-Impressionism."[11] 1910 was the year that Roger Fry organized the First Post-Impressionist Exhibition; it opened on November 8 and closed on January 15, 1911, partly overlapping with Moore's lectures. This event is the generally accepted explanation for Woolf's locating a change around December, 1910. Fry entered Bloomsbury when he met Vanessa and Clive Bell in January 1910 (Spalding, *Roger Fry*, 123). Woolf makes the year the most natural date for the meeting: "It must have been in 1910 I suppose that Clive one evening rushed upstairs" having "had one of the most interesting conversations in his life." "It was with Roger Fry. They had been discussing the theory of art for hours . . . So Roger appeared" (*MB*, 197). Woolf must have been that "stranger meeting him then for the first time (1910)" which *Roger Fry: A Biography* invokes (149).

It is Fry, elected an Apostle in 1887, one year after McTaggart and two after Whitehead, five years before Russell and seven before Moore, who provides the link between Cambridge philosophy and visual art and aesthetics. Quentin Bell no doubt reflects Bloomsbury's general opinion that "Cambridge at the turn of the century was aesthetically blind" (*VW*, I, 103). Mr. Ramsay's "narrowness, his blindness" (*TL*, 72) is only a special case of "the extraordinary indifference of the English to the visual arts" (*RF*, 52), "the stone-blind eye with which" in general nineteenth-century English writers and thinkers, according to Whitehead, "regarded the importance of aesthetics in a nation's life" (*SMW*, 182). "When abroad," Spalding writes of Leslie Stephen, "he studiously avoided galleries and museums" (*Vanessa Bell*, 18). Woolf sees "the disparity" between her father's "critical and creative powers" in terms of the inability to paint:

> Give him a thought to analyse, the thought of Mill, Bentham, Hobbes; and his is (so Maynard has told me) acute, clear, concise: an admirable model of the Cambridge analy[tical spirit]. But give him a life, a character, and he is so crude, so elementary, so conventional, that a child with a box of coloured chalks is as subtle a portrait painter as he is. (*MB*, 126)

That deficiency of analysis was bound up with the Apostles' "doctrine":

> It is difficult to suppose that Baron Pollock, Lord Derby, Sir James Stephen, Clerk-Maxwell and the Sidgwicks ever discussed . . . the painting of Titian and Velasquez. There is no evidence, apart from MacTaggart's early reference to Rossetti and from one visit in his company to the Royal Academy, that the young men who read so many books and discussed so many problems ever looked at pictures and debated the theory of aesthetics. Politics and philosophy were their chief interests. Art was for them the art of literature; and literature was half prophecy . . . Perhaps then, when Mr Benson talks of the pallor of the Apostles, he hints at something eyeless, abstract and austere in their doctrines. (*RF*, 51–2)

The change Fry introduces opposes itself to the strange word "eyeless," to which we return. Here we only note it as a synonym for Cambridge philosophy's blindness to art. For the shift was more than the replacement of one aesthetic by another; it signalled a new predominance of the visual arts, especially painting. The young Apostles of Woolf's generation were exceptional, in her account, because some among them had a passion for art – Lytton Strachey, for instance, "had French pictures in his rooms" (*MB*, 188).[12] The change in intellectual orientation Strachey represented could not come to fruition in the academic atmosphere of Cambridge, however, but required something cosmopolitan London offered. The fact that the subject of the first Bloomsbury conversation Woolf records was initiated when her sister Vanessa, "having said perhaps that she had been to some picture show, incautiously used the word 'beauty'" (*MB*, 167), thus follows from the hypothesis that Bloomsbury answered a need to supplement the philosophical with the aesthetic. The sequence of key words she then gives – the subject "might be 'beauty,' might be 'good,' might be 'reality'" (*MB*, 167) – places the aesthetic question within the context of philosophy, first ethics and finally theory of knowledge.

The visual in Bloomsbury is synedochic for the sensible, for "those senses which are stimulated so briskly by the moderns; the senses of sight, of sound, of touch" (*CE* II, 158). Fry had supplied the Apostles with the eyes for the philosopher-logicians to discern a sensible reality and complete their picture of the world: "even while they argued his eye was always active" (*RF*, 52). "Art and literature have not merely an indirect effect on the main energies of life," writes Whitehead. "Directly, they give vision" (*Ed*, 58). Like "[t]he gera-

nium in the urn'' that ''became startlingly visible'' to Mr. Ramsay (*TL*, 54), the sensible world suddenly came into focus; the canvases Fry put on display in 1910 presented the look of things at the moment the completion of the logicist project turned the philosopher to the physical world.

But our argument is also that for Woolf Fry showed the importance of the ''eyeless'' dimension learned from the Apostles' ''doctrines'' for a ''modern'' art. At Cambridge, ''Fry's mind had opened there; his eyes had opened there'' (*RF*, 60) to other objects than those of sense, to universals and logical form. The ''perceptual metaphor'' Peter Hylton (*Russell*, 232) stresses in Moore and Russell is not simply a metaphor. Russell's first chapter of *The ABC of Relativity*, ''Touch and Sight: the Earth and the Heavens,'' insists that ''astronomy differs from terrestrial physics because of its exclusive dependence upon sight'' (17). Sight is a safer guide: ''As physics has advanced, it has appeared more and more that sight is less misleading than touch as a source of fundamental notions about matter'' (12). ''Cold grey eyes George Plummer had'' in *Jacob's Room*, who might become ''Professor of Physics,'' ''but in them was an abstract light'' (35). Mr. Ramsay was one of those ''thinkers standing with hands to the eyes on some crag above the multitude'' (*JR*, 162) gazing at distant things but ''blind'' to the close, with that ''attentiveness, analogous to visual alertness, accompanied by concentrated effort'' Elizabeth Ramsden Eames sees in Russell (58). Ultimately, such sight reveals more in the universe than meets the eye.

Cambridge's ''abstract light'' is roughly defined by Fry's description of Apostles' meetings, which Woolf repeats: ''discussing 'things in general' '' (*RF*, 51 and 55). Its limitation lay in the fact that it ''excluded some things in particular'' (*RF*, 51), notably sensible, visible particulars. If the art Fry unveils answers some philosophic need expressed by theory of knowledge, logic provided something Fry required: the invisible aesthetic principles needed to go beyond ''the last phase of Impressionism'' and complete its vision. The resultant theory is dualistic, relating what Fry labels ''vision'' and ''design,'' Impressionism and Post-Impressionism. It is the product of a thinking which also gave rise to Moore's, Russell's and Whitehead's persisting dualism, in which ''the world of universals'' coexists with ''the world of existence.'' There are two realities, one sensible and the other inaccessible to the senses; nonetheless, ''both are real, and both are important to the metaphysician'' (*PP*, 100). Fry's

"vision" complements Moore's and Russell's theory of sense-data which Peter Geach calls "the current Cambridge doctrine" in the period before the war (*Truth, Love and Immortality*, 75) and Russell's theory of sensibilia, central to his full-blown 1914 theory. The knowledge it yields is sensible knowledge, a special case of Russell's "acquaintance." But it is not knowledge in the full sense, nor is Fry's "vision" equivalent to art. His "design," like Russell's logical form, rests upon an "eyeless" knowledge of something unperceivable, in Russell, "knowledge by description."

The "centre," "a nucleus" of "the wider circumference of the moment" (*CE*, II, 294), is December 1910. It represents the encounter between philosophy and art which was Bloomsbury and confirms Allan Janik's and Stephen Toulmin's claim of "a closer connection than books on the history of philosophy sometimes suggest between the intellectual views of Moore and Russell . . . and the radical transformations in practical ethics and aesthetics . . . represented, for example, by Roger Fry's Post-Impressionist Exhibition, the immense success of Diaghilev's Russian Ballet, and the novels of Leonard Woolf's wife, Virginia" (*Wittgenstein's Vienna*, 210–11).

THE OUTSIDE WORLD AND THE OUTSIDERS' SOCIETY

> The excursion to Manchester [to visit an art gallery] was made with friends, but they were not Apostles, a sign that when Roger Fry wished to gratify certain growing curiosities he had to seek company . . . outside the circle of that very select and very famous society (Spalding, *Roger Fry*, 53)

What remains to be explained are the wider forces that brought philosophy and art, Cambridge and Bloomsbury, to their historic rendez-vous in late 1910. This is supplied by the social dimension Woolf explicitly gives to the 1910 change in "human character." It is an alteration in the relation between the classes, sexes and generations: "All human relations have shifted – those between masters and servants, husbands and wives, parents and children" (*CE*, I, 321). The terms of Woolf's "homely illustration" of the "Georgian cook" who no longer inhabits the Victorian cook's "lower depths," but "is a creature of sunshine and fresh air" (*CE*, I, 320) is translatable into the new and old aesthetic oppositions of Fry's exhibition. It resembles the change from "the gloom of a room naturally dark" whose Victorian decor was "much under the influence of Titian" at 22

Hyde Park Gate (*MB*, 164) – what Woolf called "the cage" (*MB*, 116) – to Vanessa Bell's Post-Impressionist inspired Bloomsbury interiors. In Woolf's account of Fry's Exhibition, the link between the social and the aesthetic is made with the same examples: "Everyone argued. Anyone's sensation – his [Fry's] cook's, his housemaid's – was worth having. Learning did not matter; it was the reality that was all-important" (*RF*, 153). Echoing Woolf's description of Fry's ability to bring together Post-Impressionist canvases and "the untutored taste of negresses" (*RF*, 152), both of which, for Fry, gave a better analysis of "the totality of appearances" (Fry, "The Last Phase of Impressionism," 46) than did a blind learning, we can say that "[u]nder his influence," the philosophical, the social and the aesthetic" "all were connected" (*RF*, 152–3). The connector was supplied by the word "reality." What Fry took from the Apostles was a philosophical questioning as to its nature: "Whatever else his new friends had taught him, they had taught him to distinguish between the sham and the reality, 'whatever that reality might be' " (*RF*, 58). Uncovering reality in art itself required a philosophical vision and brought enlightenment. If "[t]he light and the air [of Bloomsbury] after the rich red gloom of Hyde Park Gate were a revelation" (*MB*, 162), "Moore and his book," visual housecleaning of sorts, Leonard Woolf thought, "suddenly removed from our eyes an obscuring accumulation of scales, cobwebs, and curtains, revealing for the first time to us, so it seemed, the nature of truth and reality" via "the fresh air and pure light of plain common sense" (*An Autobiography*, 93). Air and light were at once sensible, aesthetic, intellectual and social.

The social and aesthetic intersect literally as well in Bloomsbury. As a locale on the London map, it provided the neutral meeting ground between two places exclusive of a wider public: Apostolic Cambridge and the society extending from the drawing room of 22 Hyde Park Gate to Mayfair that the Duckworth brothers wanted their half-sisters to inhabit. Sunshine and fresh air are also a new ethos, one which substitutes free exchange for the "prison" – "the cage" – of the old social relations.[13] "Prisons" was the title of a book Russell planned with Ottoline Morrell. One such prison was for Woolf "patriarchy" (*Room*, 33), governed by "the fear that forbids freedom in the private house" (*TG*, 142). Bloomsbury's nucleus was a society of orphans setting up house free of parental authority – the 1910 shift in relations included, for Woolf, those between "parents

and children.'' What better way to inaugurate it than with the death of the father? The society of brothers had already thrown off the yoke of authority in its self-conception. Enlarged to include the sisters in Bloomsbury's ''small concentrated world dwelling inside the much larger and looser world of dances and dinners'' the Stephen sisters frequented (*MB*, 192), ''the free intellectual intercourse, the Athenian liberty of speech and speculation, that was offered by 'the Society' – the Apostles'' (Q. Bell, *Bloomsbury*, 24), was extended, as the suffrage would be, here to the unelected. Like the Apostles, it was ''the society of equals . . . questioning everything with complete freedom'' (*RF*, 51).

One model for Apostolic discussions was Plato's Symposium. That model Woolf explicitly connects to homosexuality – ''I had known since I was sixteen or so, all about sodomy, through reading Plato'' (*MB*, 104), ''I knew there were buggers in Plato's Greece'' (*MB*, 172) – but one that makes room for rather than excludes the sisters, allowing us to see Bloomsbury as not only the suspension of parental authority but the neutralization of the sexuality Woolf's Duckworth half-brothers represented, not only in their incestuous attraction to their sisters but also in their goal of marrying them for which their ''society'' existed. The symposium reinforces the idea of philosophy as the male's exclusive purview, while simultanously opening up the possibility of women joining. In the ''society of buggers,'' Woolf writes, ''if you are a woman,'' ''[o]ne fizzes up into some absurd delightful effervescence of soda water or champagne'' (*MB*, 172). The neutralization of sexuality as heterosexual courtship rituals was the freedom for nothing but intellectual exchange, desexualizing ''male'' knowledge. Its phallic character is transformed from tyrannical power to the ''support'' for imaginative speculation when the father is turned into the brothers. But the brothers must keep a brother's distance, for Woolf's half-brother George Duckworth used the threat of succumbing to unnamed ''vices'' to force himself sexually on his half-sisters: ''I could only conjure up in my virgin consciousness, dimly irradiated by having read the 'Symposium' with Miss Case, horrible visions of the vices to which young men were driven whose sisters did not make them happy at home'' (*MB*, 177). It is as if the homosexual observes the incest taboo, not only sexually, as George Duckworth did not, but also politically, by allowing fraternal equality, as the father did not. Bloomsbury permitted the cohabitation of fatherless brothers and sisters and then

extended it to the cohabitation of Virginia (Vanessa was by then married) and her brother Adrian with Duncan Grant, Maynard Keynes and Leonard Woolf, an arrangement shocking to George Duckworth (see *VW*, I, 175). Leonard Woolf thus began his relation with Virginia Stephen in the structural position of a good brother, an apostle, while the only proposal of marriage Virginia accepted before Leonard's a little over a year after they became "housemates" was Lytton Strachey's.

The implicit *raison d'être* of Bloomsbury discussions was the extension of knowledge beyond the confines of the university elite.[14] Their wider circumference began with "co-education," itself preceded by various projects for the extension of knowledge. Moore had in 1899 lectured on Kant to the Passmore Edwards Settlement in London (Levy, *G. E. Moore*, 200). Paul Levy recounts the abortive project of Russell and others for publishing "a sort of radical manifesto, with Moore as their acknowledged inspiration" (253). Russell in a 1904 letter to Moore insists that "the scope and purpose of the book is popular, and it is rather important that the first chapter should not be too difficult" and again that "it is quite essential that everything should be intelligible to ordinary educated people, and not only to those who have philosophic capacity" (255). Despite having co-authored one of the most notoriously difficult, specialized books, Russell was concerned with bringing philosophy to the layperson. At Cambridge, Fry had given university extension lectures on art in 1900 (Rosenbaum, *The Bloomsbury Group*, xvii). Woolf herself had felt this educative impulse, alongside the impulse to learn from this milieu: later reading her 1904–5 diary, she records that "I went on to the Waterloo Road and lectured (a class of working men and women) on the Greek Myths." (*MB*, 186). The year 1910 brought together in London many such projects simultaneous with the First Post-Impressionist Exhibition. Whitehead's move to London, for instance, led to a series of addresses on education, starting in 1911 with "The Place of Mathematics in a Liberal Education." (When in *Three Guineas* Woolf says that "[t]he poor college must teach only the arts that can be taught cheaply and practised by poor people," she includes mathematics in her list (34).) Like Woolf's on the Greek myths, Moore's 1910 lectures were given at Morley College, "an evening institute for working men and women . . . set up as an adjunct to the Old Vic" (*VW*, I, 105) like the "poor men's college" where Katherine Hilbery's second cousin "lectures" (*ND*, 120). They

were thus destined for a working-class audience. Woolf recalls that "once at least Morgan [Forster] flitted through Bloomsbury lodging for a moment in Fitzroy Square (hence between 1907 and 1911)," talking "of Italy and the Working Men's College" (198). The extension of knowledge was in the air.

One especially indicative educative project was the Home University Library of Modern Knowledge, which began publishing a series of small, inexpensive books written by prominent philosophers, mathematicians, scholars and public figures. Its first titles included Whitehead's 1911 *An Introduction to Mathematics*, Moore's *Ethics*, Lytton Strachey's *Landmarks in French Literature* and, to indicate its scope, J. Ramsay Macdonald's *The Socialist Movement*. The series was from the start bound up with the problem of knowledge: one of its earliest titles was Russell's 1912 *The Problems of Philosophy*, commissioned in the autumn of 1910. Written, Russell says later, as an "escape from the rigours of symbolic deductive reasoning," this book "setting out in popular terms a general outline of my philosophy" (*MyPhD*, 77), his "shilling shocker" detested by Wittgenstein,[15] was just the kind of popular introduction that Mrs. Ambrose, Sara Pargiter, Ottoline Morrell or Virginia Woolf might be supposed to have read, perhaps among the "shilling shockers" Woolf imagined the young men at Cambridge reading in *Jacob's Room* (43). Hylton has hypothesized that the very project of producing what one of the series' editors Gilbert Murray called "a message to the shop-assistants about philosophy"[16] is itself one of the factors explaining "Russell's concern, from 1910 onwards, with the issue of knowledge," so "new in his work" (*Russell*, 361):

> His concern with this question thus represents a shift not in doctrine but in interests; an issue which he had previously neglected came to seem important to him, and came for a time to be a major focus of his work. Why did this occur? The completion of *PM*, in the autumn of 1909, no doubt left Russell looking for a philosophical task of a somewhat different kind. (362)

A factor in Russell's turn, as he states in *The Problems of Philosophy*'s Preface, is the "valuable assistance from unpublished writing of G. E. Moore and J. M. Keynes." Hylton points out that in the Preface to *Some Main Problems of Philosophy*, Moore indicates that "those writings are the first ten of Moore's twenty lectures, which are largely concerned with issues having to do with perception and with knowledge of physical objects" (362). Even if, as Hylton adds,

there remains "a question here about the origin of Moore's interest in these issues" which "dates back" to "The Refutation of Idealism" (362), Moore's expansion of the 1903 essay's arguments in the 1910 lectures came at a critical moment of intellectual ferment which had overflowed the boundaries of the university. The problem of knowledge was the philosophical problem through which philosophy was brought to a wider public.

The turn from logic to theory of knowledge was thus bound up with a kind of university extension.[17] But if the audience for the Home University Library was identified as "shop assistants" or "working men," there is evidence it importantly consisted of the women largely excluded from Cambridge.[18] (Woolf does place "a woman" together with "a working-man, a negro" as members of classes who have reason to resent their exclusion (*CE*, II, 144).) The claim has been made that Russell's own turn from the work of *Principia* to epistemology was an attempt to address himself to the woman as lay philosopher, even to plan a collaboration. The woman in question was Ottoline Morrell, but that does not undercut the argument that Russell's epistemology was elaborated in a deliberately widened philosophical arena, in contrast to his logic. This is the point Eames makes in her introduction to the 1914 *Theory of Knowledge* manuscript, explaining that "Russell expressed in letters to Ottoline Morrell a revulsion" against "technical philosophy," the result, he wrote later, of "the long years of concentrated logical work on 'the big book,' *Principia Mathematica*." Instead, he was "rereading philosophers of the past" preparatory "for his next major work at the kind of philosophy which was of interest to Ottoline Morrell":

> Russell attributed to her a broadening of his tastes, interests, and sympathies, and he longed to share his intellectual life with her; at their lovers' meetings they read Plato and Spinoza, and from their discussions a book emerged which they referred to as "Prisons," dealing with the ability of philosophy to free the mind and spirit from the trammels of the here and now. (Eames, intro., Russell, *Theory of Knowledge*, xix)[19]

The book, whose text is lost, "reached the stage of typescript"; its interests, Eames says, "can be seen in the final chapter of *The Problems of Philosophy*" (xix). The "next major work" Russell refers to could also be one of the works contributing to the 1914 theory of knowledge – either *Our Knowledge of the External World*, which, as the Lowell Lectures, Russell called, in a letter to her, his "popular