



THE THEY AND AVERAGE EVERYDAYNESS: A HEIDEGGERIAN APPROACH TO VIRGINIA WOOLF'S *THE WAVES*

HERKES VE ORTALAMA HERGÜNKÜLÜK: VIRGINIA WOOLF'UN
“DALGALAR” ROMANINA HEIDEGGERCİ BİR YAKLAŞIM¹

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Abstract

The work of Virginia Woolf has been deemed exemplary in modernist fiction with its unyielding representations of highly self-conscious individuals. This is especially the case with her perhaps most inaccessible work *The Waves* (1931) in which six characters are presented as having quite self-aware and contrasting personalities. Accordingly, much attention has been paid to their peculiar and differentiating traits that set them apart from each other. Drawing upon the phenomenological insights provided by Martin Heidegger's philosophy, this paper argues that there is a more primordial layer beneath the seemingly clashing natures of these characters in *The Waves* that binds them to each other, and that a close examination of the intersubjective relations between the characters (i.e. the self and others) reveals them to be not that different from each other on the ontological level. Resorting to the conceptual tools such as average everydayness, “the they,” and being-at-home that Heidegger proposes in *Being and Time* (1927), this paper discusses how, ontologically speaking, the characters in *The Waves*, for the most part, are lost (or at times try hard to be lost) among each other.

Öz

Virginia Woolf'un eserleri, öz farkındalığı yüksek ve içe dönük bireylerin istikrarlı temsilleriyle modernist romana örnek teşkil etmeye uygun olarak nitelendirilmiştir. Bu durum özellikle, oldukça öz bilinçli ve zat kişiliklere sahip olan altı karakterin ele alındığı Woolf'un belki de okuması en güç eseri olan *Dalgalar* (1931) için geçerlidir. Bu doğrultuda, bu karakterleri birbirinden ayırt eden onlara özgü ve onları farklı kılan özellikler derinlemesine incelenmiştir. Bu çalışma, Martin Heidegger'in felsefesinin sunduğu fenomenolojik yaklaşımlardan faydalanarak, *Dalgalar* romanındaki karakterlerin görünürde çatışan doğalarının altında onları birbirine bağlayan daha temel bir katman olduğunu ve bu karakterler arasındaki (ben ve başkaları arasındaki) öznelarası ilişkilerin mercek altına alınmasının ontolojik düzlemde onların birbirlerinden çok farklı olmadığını ortaya koyduğunu öne sürmektedir. Heidegger'in *Varlık ve Zaman* (1927) adlı eserinde öne sürdüğü ortalama hergünlük, herkes ve evde-olma gibi kavramsal araçları kullanarak, bu çalışma, *Dalgalar* romanındaki karakterlerin ontolojik açıdan genelde birbirleri arasında ya da Heidegger'in deyişiyle “herkes” arasında nasıl kaybolduklarını (ya da zaman zaman nasıl kaybolmaya çalıştıklarını) tartışmaktadır.

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Virginia Woolf's literary representations of exceedingly self-conscious characters in her fiction have been regarded as exemplary and commendable in terms of their relevance to the general scheme of modernist fiction which includes at its core an exploration of individuals who are not only highly aware of themselves but also of other individuals. Woolf's presentation of such figures can probably be seen *par excellence* in *The Waves* (1931) in which six characters with peculiar and differentiating traits are presented as having quite self-aware and contrasting personalities that set them apart from each other. Drawing on Martin Heidegger's early philosophy, this paper argues that there is a more primordial layer beneath

¹ This article is a revised and abridged version of a part of the first chapter of my unpublished PhD dissertation entitled “The Phenomenology of the Self and Others in Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*, Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim*, and Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier*.”

the seemingly clashing natures of the characters in *The Waves* that binds them to each other, and that a close study of the relations between the self and others reveals them to be not that different from each other on the ontological level. In addition, the characters will be shown to be yearning for catching up with the average ways of existing that do not distinguish them from each other. Resorting to the conceptual tools such as average everydayness, “the they,” and being-at-home that Heidegger proposes in *Being and Time* (1927), this study closely attends to the self-other relations in *The Waves* with a critical eye to disclose to what extent self-conception or self-understanding of the characters is imbued with others. In order to do so, this study first dwells on Heidegger’s conceptualization of “Dasein” along with its structural features and then attempts to unearth the correlations between Woolf’s philosophical outlook on life (as observed in her autobiographical essay “A Sketch of the Past”) and Heidegger’s philosophy. Then, within this philosophical context, it demonstrates how, ontologically speaking, the characters in *The Waves*, for the most part, are lost (or at times try hard to be lost) among each other, or what Heidegger terms, “the they” as seen in their average everyday dealings with the world and with one another.

Human beings are always already tangled up in a world, and in order to denote the being of human beings, Heidegger coined the term “Dasein” – which literally means “being there” in German: *Da* (there) and *sein* (being). As Heidegger puts it in his magnum opus *Being and Time*, “*Dasein is an entity which does not just occur among other entities. Rather it is ontically distinguished by the fact that, in its very Being, that Being is an issue for it*” (12/32). Put differently, Dasein has the ability to raise questions as regards its being and existence, and to make its being an issue for itself. In this sense, Heidegger places the question of being at the heart of his philosophy which he claims has been long forgotten since the investigations of Plato and Aristotle, and revivifies it by putting forward a being, that is, Dasein so as to indicate its being as existing and situated in the world. In effect, Dasein can be roughly considered to be the human embodied self in the world. The idea behind Dasein, therefore, puts a pivotal emphasis on the human being’s worldly existence and on its relations with the world. As Heidegger remarks, “[t]he ‘essence’ [‘Wesen’] of this entity lies in its ‘to be’ [Zu-sein],” that is, in its existence (*Being* 43/67). Given the emphasis laid on existence, a person’s experiences gain meaning only through such involvement (*qua* existing) with the world, and by the same token, human beings make sense of themselves as well as their world only through being a part of such relations.

Heidegger calls the way Dasein exists ordinarily in its daily habitual relations with the world its “everydayness” or “averageness.” In other words, as opposed to a distinctive special way of existing, Dasein, just like others, is entangled in the web of the worldly relations in such a manner that its being is revealed as ordinary and average as reflected in its dealings with the world which are basically similar to those of other Daseins. As Heidegger maintains,

Dasein should be uncovered [aufgedeckt] in the undifferentiated character which it has proximally and for the most part. This undifferentiated character of Dasein’s everydayness is ... a positive phenomenal characteristic ... We call this everyday undifferentiated character of Dasein ‘averageness’ [Durchschnittlichkeit]. (*Being* 44/69)

It should be noted, though, that it is because Dasein’s ordinary mode of being is its average everydayness that Heidegger draws attention to the fact that the inquiry into the question of being should start with this aspect of Dasein. As Charles Guignon duly notes, “[w]e start out from a description of ourselves as we are in the midst of our day-to-day practical affairs, prior to any split between mind and matter. Our inquiry must begin from the ‘existentiell’ (concrete, specific, local) sense we have of ourselves as caught up in the midst of a practical world...” (6). Dasein’s being is marked by a fundamental average everydayness which is manifest in the routine practical affairs that it has in the world. This is inevitable since Dasein is always already situated in the referential totality of the world, and is mostly directed to the world in an ordinary fashion. In this regard, Heidegger’s ontological approach begins from existence in its most primordial manifestation, namely, its average everydayness.

As a part of his inquiry into the existence of Dasein, Heidegger introduces the concept of “being-in-the-world” as one of the fundamental elements or structural features of Dasein. As Heidegger simply states, “[b]eing-in-the-world belongs essentially to Dasein ...” (*Being* 58/84). This feature denotes that Dasein is always already a worldly being instead of an enclosed entity: It is one with the world. It cannot be thought of without a world where it belongs and with which it is familiar. As Heidegger puts it,

[The things] stand in a functionality-totality, which is understandable only if and when something like world is unveiled for us. This led us to the concept of the world. We tried to make clear that world is nothing that occurs within the realm of the extant but

belongs to the 'subject,' is something 'subjective' in the well-understood sense, so that the mode of being of the Dasein is at the same time determined by way of phenomenon of the world. We fixed being-in-the-world as the basic determination of existence. (*Basic Problems* 174)

In effect, the world appears, or rather is disclosed, to Dasein in the particular way of such 'functionality-totality' which designates a web of functions and relations that make the world meaningful for Dasein.

Heidegger brings into discussion Dasein's being-in-the-world as "*being-with*" (*Being* 114/149) so as to elucidate Dasein's primordial relationship with others who prominently play a significant role in the ontological constitution of Dasein's average everydayness. Being-with designates "*the communal dimension of Being-in-the-world*" (Polt 60). A subject without a world is impossible to conceive because Dasein's being-in-the-world already reveals Dasein's intertwinement with the world and entities. Likewise, it is impossible to imagine Dasein without others: "... a bare subject without a world never 'is' proximally, nor is it ever given. And so in the end an isolated 'I' without Others is just as far from being proximally given" (Heidegger, *Being* 117/152). Indeed, for Heidegger, a self without others is as much inconceivable as a self without a world.

Dasein dwells in and circumspectly inhabits the very world which it, as being-with, shares with others who have the same structural characteristics of "being-there" and "being-with" as Dasein. With an emphasis on the existential character of "with" and "there," Heidegger writes that "[b]y reason of this with-like [mithaften] Being-in-the-world, the world is always the one that I share with Others" (*Being* 119/155). In this regard, Heidegger proposes the notion of a world which is primordially intersubjective as characterized by the existential nature of Dasein and others as being-with. Lauren Freeman writes that "*human beings are ontologically inseparable from the complex social interactions in which they engage and Mitsein [being-with] is a structural, constitutive, and therefore, ontological condition for the possibility of being-with-others and existing in the world. Dasein only exists in the world as Mitsein*" (374). In this respect, Heidegger does not introduce any rift at this level between Dasein (self) and others because the world is disclosed to both Dasein and others as the one in which they are together by virtue of their "*circumspectively concerned Being-in-the-world*" (Heidegger, *Being* 119/154).

Dasein's fundamental existence as being-with situates it amidst others without differentiating it from others. Rather, Dasein is inevitably always already lost among others in its everyday existence. Dasein understands itself as one among many (others) like whom it goes about its own business in the world by circumspectly taking care of things. As William Schroeder puts it, for Heidegger, "*one's basic experience of other persons is not that they are present, self-subsistent beings whose minds are hidden, but rather that they are engaged, accessible beings who share the same instruments and gathering places and function much like oneself*" (130). As being-with, Dasein understands others as those who are themselves absorbed in the same world they share together and in the same things they deal with. That is to say, Dasein is "*concernfully*" (Heidegger, *Being* 406/458) in the world the way any other Dasein is, sharing similar concerns, dealings, and so on. For this very reason, there is, for the most part, no distinct self or "I" present in Dasein's everyday being. As Heidegger puts it,

[i]n utilizing public means of transport and in making use of information services such as the newspaper, every Other is like the next. This Being-with-one-another dissolves one's own Dasein completely into the kind of Being of "the Others," in such a way, indeed, that the Others, as distinguishable and explicit, vanish more and more. (*Being* 127/164)

Indeed, in using the newspaper or watching the news on TV to find out about the current events, Dasein is just like any other. In this sense, the way Dasein relates to the world does not differentiate Dasein from others; rather, it reveals it to be just like any other. Therefore, the way Dasein deals with and handles its world is normatively structured and guided by the tyranny of (impersonal) others to such a degree that Dasein relates to its world in the very way others do. As Heidegger writes, "*Dasein, as everyday Being-with-one-another, stands in subjection [Botmassigkeit] to Others. It itself is not; its Being has been taken away by the Others*" (*Being* 127/164). The domination of others over Dasein is observed mostly in everyday social contexts where "*we usually act ... following the guidelines of (and keeping within the limits of) formal and informal social norms and conventions*" and where "*we are basically concerned with the conformity or nonconformity of our actions*" (Schmid 177).

Given these premises, being-with or co-existence denotes significantly more intricate and even insidious relations with others by virtue of the referential totality which is fundamentally constituted together with others and into which each and

every single person is thrown. Such common world embodied in the referential complex points in the direction of a more relevant and important issue – that of regulatory and normative influence of others in the make-up of the ordinary everyday existence. Dasein in its everyday being-with-one-other always already surrenders to the tyranny of anonymous others by complying with their ways of being, and thereby loses itself to what Heidegger calls “the they” [*das Man*] (Heidegger, *Being* 125-26/163-64).² “The they” indicates “the anonymous, normative character of everydayness” which instructs Dasein in its everyday dealings with the world (Cerbone 50). Dasein in its heedful absorption in the world is not revealed to be a distinct self; instead, by virtue of its understanding itself via the normative structure of the world, Dasein dissolves into the being of “the they.” As Heidegger contends, “[t]he who [of Dasein] is not this one, not that one, not oneself [man selbst], not some people [einige], and not the sum of them all. The ‘who’ is the neuter, the they [*das Man*]” (*Being* 127/164). “The they,” hence, characterizes Dasein’s everyday mode of being-in-the-world and dictates Dasein’s possible ways of acting, doing, handling, and so forth. The pervasiveness of “the they” inconspicuously lurks behind every move Dasein makes and every act it undertakes. As Reiner Schürmann asserts,

[d]aily existence is composed of running errands, performing tasks, etc. If we are essentially absorbed in our daily existence, rather than reflecting, if we primarily give attention to the way we are involved in what is *not* within us, but outside in the world, then we are perhaps most of the time not ourselves ... If the self is so encountered in everyday-neutrality, then existence is somehow prescribed by the others, and not by myself. (94-95)

In other words, when dealing with and comporting oneself towards the world, one can observe others’ primacy all the more powerfully.

In its everyday relations, the self, for the most part, complies with the ways of being or existing dictated by others. In everyday existence, ontologically, the self is so inextricably absorbed in the world in a circumspensive fashion that one is, as it were, not oneself, but rather “they-self”: “*The Self of everyday Dasein is the they-self ...*” (Heidegger, *Being* 130/167). The self as “the they-self” has always already been

² Various translations have been offered for the term “*das Man*” including “the they,” “the One,” and “the Anyone.” The first translation, “the they,” has been criticized since it implies a rift between Dasein and others. On the contrary, Dasein itself is a part of *das Man* by repeating and promoting the ways “*das Man*” prescribes. As Heidegger puts it, Dasein “*enhances their power*” (*Being* 127/164).

disseminated into the ways of “the they” where it loses its grasp on its own self as well as its own possibilities. As Paul Gerner notes, “[i]n a way that is normally hidden from me the One [the they] exercises a form of dictatorship over my possibilities of being or ways of existing” (107). Such ever-present concern brings one into submission to others in that they frame what one does in accordance with their own average ways and thereby imposing, insidiously and yet soothingly, their ways. In this sense, certain ways of doing, acting, behaving, or existing in general have been bequeathed to Dasein as soon as it is born and thrown into the world. Therefore, “the they” constitutes a fundamental aspect, or as Heidegger would have it “*an existentielle*” (*Being* 129/167) of Dasein’s everyday existence.

Similar to the emphasis Heidegger places on the domination of “the they” in everyday life, Woolf writes in “A Sketch of the Past” that there are “*invisible presences who after all play so important a part in every life*” (80). These invisible presences involve particular individuals such as her mother Julia Stephen (1846 - 1895), siblings and step-siblings. However, there is a more powerful invisible influence beneath such particular concrete influences, that is, a wide range of anonymous societal forces embodied by “the they.” As Woolf writes,

[t]his influence, by which I mean the consciousness of other groups impinging upon ourselves; public opinion; what other people say and think; all those magnets which attract us this way to be like that, or repel us the other and make us different from that; has never been analyzed in any of those Lives which I so much enjoy reading, or very superficially. (“A Sketch” 80)

In a sense, Woolf’s conception comes close to Heidegger’s rendition of “the they” because Woolf, just like Heidegger, believes that such forces ultimately frame and shape the self in its everyday life.

Furthermore, Woolf argues that if one is to get a glimpse of a person, one has no other option than inquiring into these invisible presences that socio-historically influence the person in question. Interestingly enough, Woolf’s formulation of the influence others have on the self is strikingly, yet incidentally the same as that of Heidegger, in terms of diction:

Yet it is by such invisible presences that the ‘subject of this memoir’ is tugged this way and that every day of his life; it is *they* that keep him in position. Consider what immense forces society brings to play upon each of us, how that society changes from decade to decade;

and also from class to class; well, if we cannot analyze these invisible presences, we know very little of the subject of the memoir; and again how futile life-writing becomes. (“A Sketch” 80, emphasis added)

In this respect, since she is looking back on her past from a temporally detached vantage point, Woolf’s characterization of “they” demonstrates that she becomes more and more cognizant of the forces that dictated the lives of the individuals including her own at the turn of the century.

When Woolf says that “*I see myself as a fish in a stream; deflected; held in place; but cannot describe the stream*” (“A Sketch” 80), she emphasizes the pervasive domination of others in and over the “stream” which signifies the referential context of significances articulated and ordered by “the they.” As Madelyn Detloff further argues, “[t]he consciousness of other groups,’ ‘public opinion,’ and what contemporary scholars call discourse (*‘what other people say and think’*) are thus part of the system (the stream) surrounding the fish of the self. The stream might also be likened to the background noise of conscious living” (51). The self is necessarily thrown into this stream where “*it is not ‘I’, in the sense of my own Self, that ‘am’, but rather the Others, whose way is that of the ‘they’. In terms of the ‘they’, and as the ‘they’, I am ‘given’ proximally to ‘myself’ [mir ‘selbst’]*” (Heidegger, *Being* 129/167). Hence, one is, for the most part, bound to be a fish in the stream with others where, as Heidegger intriguingly says, “*[e]veryone is the other, and no one is himself*” (*Being* 128/165).

Woolf’s awareness of everydayness in which one, for the most part, is lost demonstrates her understanding of average everyday existence as that which fundamentally belongs to the everyday self. In “A Sketch of the Past,” Woolf distinguishes between “moments of non-being” and “moments of being” both of which are inseparable parts of everyday life. Woolf characterizes the former as those moments that are mostly unattended and unheeded. As Lorraine Sim puts it, moments of non-being “*refer to a form of perception and a mode of being; the phases of life that are lived automatically and inattentively*” (14-15). However, for Woolf, these moments are as important as those of being, that is, the “*exceptional moments*” (which are the ones mostly remembered) (“A Sketch” 71). There is, Woolf says, no reason why one remembers some moments while not others. Similarly, there is no reason, either, for why some moments are exceptional enough to be etched in one’s mind and to be remembered even years later while others are not. In

a sense, Woolf unintentionally illustrates phenomenology especially when she says, in a tone very close to Heidegger, that “[a] great part of every day is not lived consciously” and consequently “[e]very day includes much more non-being than being” (“A Sketch” 70). Considering the rendition of “moments of non-being” as such over against those of “being,” one might clearly spot the correlation between Woolf’s moments of non-being and Heidegger’s conception of everydayness for both of whom such everyday experiences or moments constitute the core of existence.

Moreover, Woolf herself concedes that the exceptional moments of being are “*embedded in many more moments of non-being*” (“A Sketch” 70). In this respect, Woolf sees moments of non-being/everydayness as fundamental as those of being even if at times she seems to favor moments of being as “reality” behind appearances. Makiko Minow-Pinkney argues that Woolf finds such aspects of everyday life superfluous: “*On the level of fictional form, this mundane sequence is the narrativity of the realist novel which Woolf had been denouncing since ‘Modern Fiction;’ it is a materiality (‘cotton wool’) which blots out the light*” (162). Likewise, Jeanne Schulkind’s characterization of “*the individual in his daily life*” as “*cut off from ‘reality’*” (17) has the same mistaken assumption as that of Minow-Pinkney in that, contrary to what Schulkind and Minow-Pinkney posit, moments of non-being – which are the pervasive mode of existing in everydayness – are the realest aspects of everyday being. In addition, moments of being – which denote, in Woolf’s sense, “reality” behind appearances – necessarily presuppose moments of non-being in order to be revealed as moments of being. As Lorraine Sim points out, “*for Woolf, the quotidian is not devalued in moments of being, nor is the cotton wool of everyday life separate from, or separable from, the numinous ‘pattern’ she finds behind it. Rather, these two forms of experience and modes of being are intimately related for her*” (163). In this respect, Woolf’s extensive use of everyday moments of non-being in her fiction evinces that moments of being arise and come to the surface out of them, and the nexus of both sorts of being in Woolf’s rendition is apparently the self as they-self who experiences, for the most part, moments of non-being and at the same time is capable of having those of being. This can be observed in much of her fiction, including even *The Waves* which is *seemingly* removed from everyday life.

Considered the most obtuse and inaccessible work of hers because of its highly formal experiments and stylistic concerns and generally cast as exploring the inner workings of consciousness, or what many critics simply call, the inner life³, *The Waves* nevertheless manages to convey the humdrum lives of the characters as they are inevitably entangled within everyday involvements with others. For Woolf, the self always exists in relation to others along with whom s/he is situated in the world as being-in-the-world-with-others. In this respect, Woolf's notion of the self under 'invisible forces,' though not sketched out as rigorously as a philosopher would have it, comes very close to Heidegger's analysis of "the they" and they-self, and finds expression in *The Waves*. In Heidegger's conception, Dasein is insidiously manipulated by "the they" and comes to interpret the world as "the they" sees it fit – just like Woolf's understanding of herself as "tugged this way or that" under "invisible presences" ("A Sketch" 80). Therefore, the wave metaphor which Woolf employs throughout *The Waves* and which gives the novel its title is exceptionally fitting for her conception of the self. As Madelyn Detloff writes, Woolf's exploration of the self in *The Waves* demonstrates that

the self is a singularity caught up in a system, like the ocean waves which break on the shore in the interludes that separate the chapters or strophes of the novel. Each wave is part of the sea and yet recognizable as an individual entity with a particular wavelength, crest height, and trough depth ... (53)

The characters in the novel come under the normative influence of "the they" in varying degrees. Almost unconsciously, or rather semi-consciously, they are pushed to and fro like the uncontainable waves that permeate the novel. Moreover, the novel's title is not simply "Wave" but rather "The Waves" in the plural which suggests the fluidity of waves blending into each other creating a sort of medley that both implies a *mélange* and yet allows for differentiation with each wave rising on its own and falling and then rising again, among others. In a sense, waves are just like Heideggerian indefinite others: not this one nor that one. Anyone, everyone and yet no one is a wave among other waves.

As demonstrated in the discussion of the title of the novel, insofar as human beings are not *worldless* and average everydayness constitutes a fundamental part of being in the world *with* others, one might argue that "the they" as an embodiment of averageness is, indeed, crucial in the way one comes to see him/herself among

³ An example would be Julia Briggs' detailed analysis of consciousness in *Virginia Woolf: An Inner Life*.

others. The self loses itself in an attempt to catch up with others and thereby be ultimately concerned with where it stands in relation to others. It is troubled by a “constant care as to the way one differs from them [others]” (Heidegger, *Being* 127/163). The constant care the self existentially has as part of its being-with might involve eliminating the differences between oneself and others, trying to catch up with them in the light of these differences or simply suppressing them. Heidegger calls such uneasiness on Dasein’s part regarding its care or concern about the distance between itself and others “distantiality” [*Abständigkeit*] (*Being* 127/164). Moreover, the self “in its Being, essentially makes an issue of this [concern]” (*Being* 127/165). From very early on, the characters in *The Waves* find themselves in such concern of “distantiality,” that is, to what extent they lag behind or at times surpass others. For instance, in the mathematics class at the boarding school, all the children hand in their answers to the question written on the board while Rhoda fails to find any answer:

Now taking her lump of chalk she [the teacher] draws figures, six, seven, eight, and then a cross and then a line on the blackboard. What is the answer? The others look; they look with understanding. Louis writes; Susan writes; Neville writes; Jinny writes; even Bernard has now begun to write. But I cannot write... . But I have no answer. (*The Waves* 15)

Even though Rhoda does not seem to understand the mathematical puzzle *per se*, she sees that others look at the problem ‘with understanding.’ It is such understanding that Rhoda tries to catch up with.

The whole class is revealed to Rhoda as consisting of a group of students, in fact, her friends, who are responding *understandingly* to an ordinary question. As a matter of fact, there is nothing unusual in the circumstances: it is typical of a mathematics teacher to ask such questions in the class and of students to do their best at answering them. The worry Rhoda has emanates less from her inability to find an answer to the question than her failure to catch up with others in an average manner. By turning in the answers one by one, others imply a level of averageness against which Rhoda measures herself. As Heidegger notes, “[b]eing-with-one-another concerns itself as such with averageness, which is an existential characteristic of the ‘they’” (*Being* 127/164). In this regard, the very reason why Rhoda is terrified in not being able to find an answer seems to be that she is afraid of being left outside “the loop:” “I begin to draw a figure and the world is looped in it, and I myself am outside the loop; which I now join - so - and seal up, and make

entire. The world is entire, and I am outside of it, crying, ‘Oh save me, from being blown for ever outside the loop of time!’” (*The Waves* 15).

The loop as enclosing the world, therefore, signifies the totality of significances and referential involvements through which one can understandingly comport oneself towards and deal with the world. In Rhoda’s case, she fails to do so in relation to the figures and numbers on the board – which are also a part of the referential complex. Emily Dalgarno argues that Rhoda can represent her subjectivity to herself through the diagram (the loop) which “*draws her subject position in the code of the visible, suggesting that she herself inscribes the loop that isolates her from the world*” (107). In a sense, Dalgarno suggests that Rhoda is cognizant of her own situation as someone isolated from the world, that is, basically a misfit, and that she reconciles herself to this situation by making it explicit with the diagram. However, Rhoda is utterly dejected and desperately wants to be spared being blown outside the loop. If to recall Heidegger’s argument, the tendency of being-with others has at its core the ultimate concern with the distance one has between oneself and others. In this respect, Rhoda cannot be, and is not, content with being outside the loop even if she, as Dalgarno maintains, ‘inscribes the loop.’ On the very contrary, she yearns to be included in the loop along with others.

In effect, to what extent one manages to comply with the averageness dictated by “the they” is beside the point; on the contrary, what matters is Dasein’s tendency towards and yearning for it – which is an ontological component of existence. In this sense, Rhoda longs to be ordinary and hence *average*, that is, be just *like* others. As a case in point, soon after the mathematics class incident when they are back from school, Rhoda says: “‘*As I fold up my frock and my chemise ... so I put off my hopeless desire to be Susan, to be Jinny*’” (*The Waves* 20). As can be clearly seen, Jinny and Susan set the example of averageness: Rhoda does not desire to be only Susan or only Jinny, that is, a particular other; on the contrary, quite casually, either of them will do. They represent the average being-in-the-world which might be said to be manifest in, what Hubert Dreyfus calls, “‘*mindless*’ *everyday coping*” with one’s surroundings and environment in an average way (*Being-in-the-World* 3). Nevertheless, Rhoda seems to be too self-conscious and self-introspective to deal with the world averagely as the others do.

In a much later scene, when the characters are in their early twenties and get together for a dinner party to say goodbye to their friend Percival who will leave for India, Rhoda’s worry about ‘distantiality’ is reiterated to a great extent. Although

“Rhoda’s hold on ordinary reality is far more tenuous than that of the other speakers” (Dick 70), Rhoda tries hard to comport herself in an average way: “I pretend, as I go upstairs lagging behind Jinny and Susan, to have an end in view. I pull on my stockings as I see them pull on theirs. I wait for you to speak and then speak like you” (*The Waves* 107). In addition, she reveals that the only reason she goes to meet her friends is that she desires to be included in “the general blaze of you who live wholly, indivisibly and without caring” (*The Waves* 107). The choice of her words to describe others is, indeed, telling in that Susan and Jinny in their average everydayness (such as in pulling their stockings, or everyday speech) comport themselves understandingly⁴ towards the world in which they are absorbed and smoothly move about. In other words, they perform everyday activities without explicit attention, that is, with a sort of ‘mindless coping’ – towards which Rhoda ultimately yearns.

Similar to Rhoda, Louis, in the Latin class, is concerned with the way he speaks which differs from the way others speak due to his distinct Australian accent: “I will not conjugate the verb,’ said Louis, ‘until Bernard has said it. My father is a banker in Brisbane and I speak with an Australian accent. I will wait and copy Bernard. He is English. They are all English” (*The Waves* 14). Like Rhoda, Louis is very much worried about to what extent he can enunciate in a manner as much average as possible. Heidegger points out that the concern with distanciality might take the form of, what he calls, “levelling down” (*Being* 127/165) – which means that, instead of merely catching up with the average with a movement upwards, one might as well suppress oneself and refuse to stand out among “the they,” and thereby reducing oneself down to the average once again. As Heidegger writes, “[i]n this averageness with which it prescribes what can and may be ventured, it keeps watch over everything exceptional that thrusts itself to the fore. Every kind of priority gets noiselessly suppressed” (*Being* 127/165). Put differently, the tendency to be average works both ways, namely, either upwards or downwards to average being-in-the-world. Louis does not refrain from conjugating simply because he does not know the answer; on the very contrary, as Louis reveals, “I know the lesson by heart. I know more than they will ever know. I know my cases and my genders ... But I do not wish to come to the top and say my lesson” (*The Waves* 14). As Michael Watts notes, “[i]n the world of the They, there is a levelling off of distinctions and a levelling down of possibilities ... at school, children who are ‘different’ are rejected

⁴ See Heidegger, *Being* 53/78, 148/188.

until they learn to conform to the *They-world of their peers*" (54). Indeed, necessarily thrown into the world of "the they," Louis does his best to avoid deviating from the averageness set by "the they." It should be noted, though, that Louis's imitation is to achieve an acceptable level of averageness, not simply to emulate this or that particular person's accent – which is clearly seen in his emphatic mention of the others as all being English in the lines quoted earlier: '[Bernard] is English. They are all English.' In effect, this line is quite apposite to demonstrate that there is an average way of being 'English' which Louis not only protests but at the same time yearns for.

Just as Rhoda's concern with distantiality, starting from early childhood, lasts throughout her life, so does Louis's. When Louis becomes a successful clerk with his "cane" and "waistcoat" (*The Waves* 183), he cannot help but feel uncomfortable at a restaurant where there are other clerks like him. Louis says: "*I prop my book against a bottle of Worcester sauce and try to look like the rest. Yet I cannot... I repeat, 'I am an average Englishman; I am an average clerk,' yet I look at the little men at the next table to be sure that I do what they do*" (*The Waves* 75, emphasis added). The dictatorship of "the they" prescribes the way one bears oneself towards the world in everyday activities as seen in Louis's case. Moreover, it is not enough to regard oneself as being average; instead, one's constant concern with the way one differs from others outweighs one's conviction of oneself as average. Hence, one is always anxious to not only fit in the framework of "the they" but also be positive about it. Louis is apparently envious of others for their mundane abilities and smooth everyday coping with the world, and just like Rhoda, he has to watch others do it first. Therefore, any stance that Louis adopts towards his behavior is fundamentally affected by and measured against the demands of "the they."

This is the reason why Louis's actions much later in the novel are still regulated by "the they": "*Yet when six o'clock comes and I touch my hat to the commissionaire, being always too effusive in ceremony since I desire so much to be accepted ...*" (*The Waves* 141). Louis's strict attention to the proper enactment of certain actions and hence his desire for order(liness) make him "*presume it will empower him to fit in, to be 'ordinary'*" (Boon 68). Louis touches his hat the way *they* do; in other words, this is simply what *one* does. Therefore, instead of characterizing both Rhoda's and Louis's attempts to fit in as failures, it is more fitting to regard them as always already thrown into the world of "the they" where

they conduct themselves (or at least try to do) as “the they” sees fit. James Naremore’s rendition of Louis as having a “*characteristic desire not to be seen as painfully individual or foreign*” (156) and Julia Briggs’ characterization of Louis and Rhoda as “*tormented by a sense of social inadequacy and of alienation*” (“The Novels” 77) and hence as “*social misfits*” (Virginia 249) testify to the never-ending worry one has about one’s distance from others. Such worry is a fundamental component of everyday being-in-the-world and might be manifest in various circumstances and situations, such as in Rhoda’s behaviors and Louis’s actions and speech. All in all, the self measures and defines itself against “the they” who might simply consist of one’s friends as well as of people one does not know in person (like those sitting next to Louis in the restaurant). Thus, “the they” is never simply this or that particular person; it is rather revealed in everyday averageness through anyone and no one at the same time.

The normative operation of “the they” is so subtle that one is most of the time unaware of the ways of “the they” when s/he is living in everyday manner as Woolf’s example of fish which is not conscious of the stream has already demonstrated. Such ‘invisible forces’ of “the they” are so strong and gripping that they, in Heidegger’s words, “*tranquilizes*” (*Being* 177/222) Dasein. Everydayness presents everything to be already dealt with in this or that particular fashion which Dasein immediately takes on and contributes to its perpetuation. Furthermore, the tranquilizing and numbing effect of “the they” further “*drives one into uninhibited ‘hustle’ instead of ‘stagnation and inactivity’*” (Heidegger, *Being* 177/222). One manifestation of such absorption in the world along with others seems to point in the direction of an extreme monotonous everydayness in which Dasein has lost him/herself in the hustle and bustle of everyday routine life.

The characters’ everyday routines in *The Waves* confirm how they are lost in everydayness and go about their business in an average way. Many of the characters take refuge or find comfort in their everyday routine and even the idea of stepping out of their routine strikes them as disorienting and upsetting. For instance, Bernard, for several times, refers to the flow of everydayness (in which he is entangled) variously as “*the machine,*” “*the sequence*” and “*the usual order*” (*The Waves* 126-29). Casting Bernard’s attitude to such everyday sequence as “*profoundly ambivalent,*” Makiko Minow-Pinkney remarks that “[t]his general sequence is more often resented as something that, impeding ‘the moment,’ is viewed as dead matter, stifling truth and light (‘cotton wool’). Even when Bernard welcomes

it, he does so with an undertone of scorn or condescension ...” (162-63). However, on the contrary, like Heidegger and Woolf who see such everydayness as constituting a positive aspect of existence that helps maintain one’s daily engagement, Bernard clearly sees the significance of it in the way it enables him to comport himself understandingly toward the world. ‘The sequence’ or ‘the machine,’ as Bernard calls it, is what provides the basis of a comfortable and smooth interaction with the world in the first place. This is the reason why Bernard finds it exhausting to be left “*outside the machine*” (*The Waves* 129) and similarly why Louis, unable to go to university like Bernard and Neville, resents and even “*env[ies] them their continuance down the safe traditional ways ...*” (*The Waves* 52).

Moreover, the tranquility “the they” offers is more than enough to cover one with “*the nondescript cotton wool*” (Woolf, “A Sketch” 70). As Bernard says, “[a]s I let myself in with the latch-key I would go through that familiar ritual and wrap myself in those warm coverings” (*The Waves* 155). Interestingly enough, Bernard uses the very same example of “the latch” Heidegger deploys to illustrate one’s “concernful dealings” with entities encountered in the world and thereby revealed as ready-to-hand in the totality of involvements where one smoothly goes about his/her daily routine. Heidegger notes that such concernful dealing “*is the way in which everyday Dasein always is: when I open the door, for instance, I use the latch*” (*Being* 67/96). Therefore, on the whole, circumspective dealings with objects, or the world in general, constitute the familiar absorption in the world where one already pre-reflectively knows how to proceed, and as an extension thereof, is tranquilized with, in Bernard’s words, ‘warm coverings.’

Furthermore, everyday Dasein as being-in-the-world, that is, being familiar with its world in a pre-cognitive fashion, is characterized, in Heidegger’s terms, as “*being-at-home*.” “*This character of Being-in was then brought to view more concretely through the everyday publicness of the “they,” which brings tranquilized self-assurance – “Being-at-home,” with all its obviousness – into the average everydayness of Dasein*” (*Being* 188-89/233). Indeed, one feels most “at-home” when one is fully entangled in everydayness simply because everything is laid out in advance to be easily taken up and put to use. As Bernard notes in a manner similar to Woolf’s remarks in “A Sketch of the Past” (70), “[w]e are not always aware by any means; we breath, eat, sleep automatically” (*The Waves* 205). Such automaticity brings an extreme sense of familiarity which in turn prepares the ground for feeling at-home. In this respect, when he experiences exceptional moments, that is,

moments of being such as the vision of the fin and the drop falling, he hastily tries to resume his previous comfortable position: “*Bernard’s strange detachment from the ordinary flow of life comes unsought; he wishes it would end; he cannot understand at the time what his vision of the fin means; and he disposes of it as quickly as he can, filing it away in his mind for future reference*” (Graham 203).

As thrown into the world, one is simultaneously cast into the web of referential totality with which one grows familiar. This occurs on such a pervasive level that one does not even realize or recognize, for the most part, the stretch of such absorption. As Bernard remarks, “[*w*]e are all swept on by the torrent of things grown so familiar that they cast no shade ...” (*The Waves* 180, 215). As a case in point, Bernard gives the example of shaving with which he is engaged and of which he is not yet distinctly aware particularly because it becomes so familiar that he can handle it automatically:

Last week, as I stood shaving, the drop fell. I, standing with my razor in my hand, became suddenly aware of the merely habitual nature of my action (this is the drop forming) and congratulated my hands, ironically, for keeping at it. Shave, shave, shave, I said. Go on shaving. The drop fell. (*The Waves* 153).

As Merleau-Ponty puts it, “*my body and my senses are precisely that familiarity with the world born of habit, that implicit or sedimentary body of knowledge*” (277). In this respect, it is these habitual and familiar dealings subtended by the body that in the first place open up the possibility of easily engaging with one’s environment and consequently of feeling at home. The body is what enables one to “*‘be at home’ in that world, ‘understand’ it and find significance in it*” (Merleau-Ponty 275). This is precisely the very reason why Bernard ‘congratulates [his] hands’ which form the basis of his active involvement with the world.

In addition, pertinent to everydayness, Bernard’s metaphor of “the drop” forming – which recurs several times in the latter half of the novel – signifies “*habitual behavior within a quotidian routine ... Experience generates mere habit, veiling truth; its practical comforts efface the latter’s harsh necessity*” (Minow-Pinkney 165). Considering his inability to endure to be long outside the machine, it is the ‘quotidian routine’ that allows Bernard to be “*wedged into [his] place in the puzzle*” (*The Waves* 180) where he moves “*like a log slipping smoothly over some waterfall*” (196), thereby making his life “*pleasant*” and “*tolerable*” (215). Merleau-Ponty writes that “[*h*]abit expresses our power of dilating our being-in-the-world ...”

(166). In other words, one is attuned to the world *qua* the habitual nature of embodied existence whose ways of being, behaving, acting, and so on are further prescriptively shaped by “the they” that endorses certain forms, while rejecting others. In a sense, this explains why Bernard, feeling like “*an insect on top of the earth*” and feeling “[*the earth’s*] *hardness, its turning movement,*” “[*has*] *no desire to go to the opposite way from the earth*” (*The Waves* 154). On the very contrary, he hankers after being “*harnessed to a cart, a vegetable-cart that rattles over the cobbles*” (*The Waves* 154), which ultimately stands for embracing what “the they” dictates and for setting out on the familiar or beaten path presented by “the they.”

Just as Bernard feels at-home letting himself into the familiar world with the latch-key, so does Susan with the ‘usual order’ of her life in Lincolnshire. Rita Felski states in “The Invention of Everyday Life” that “[*e*]veryday life ... recognizes that every life contains an element of the ordinary. We are all ultimately anchored in the mundane” (16). In like manner, Susan is, in effect, very contented and at ease with her mundane life with her husband and children in Lincolnshire: “*I have had peaceful, productive years... . I have grown trees from the seed... . I have seen my sons and daughters ... break the meshes and walk with me ...*” (*The Waves* 158). Susan also reveals herself to be “*early acquainted with the farmyard*” (*The Waves* 159). Apparently, Susan was born and bred in the everyday life of farms and domesticity where she has “*natural happiness*” (*The Waves* 108, 143). As Susan remarks, all of her life revolves around the usual sequence of everyday activities peculiar to domestic life: “*I pad about the house all day long in apron and slippers, like my mother who died of cancer*” (*The Waves* 142). Moreover, she is “*all spun to a fine thread round the cradle, wrapping in a cocoon made of my own blood the delicate limbs of my baby*” (*The Waves* 142). Her everyday routine is all the more strengthened and emphasized through the metaphors of sewing:

At night I sit in the armchair and stretch my arm for my sewing; and hear my husband snore; and look up ... and see others’ lives eddying like straws round the piers of a bridge while I push my needle in and out and draw my thread through the calico. (*The Waves* 160)

In this respect, she is fully integrated and absorbed in her natural life on the farm, from which she derives ‘natural happiness.’ Therefore, Susan succumbs to the grip of the domestic routine and loses herself in the ‘hustle’ of everyday life; however, most importantly, this is where she feels “*at home in the large world of nature*” (Hussey 9) and thus where she feels she belongs. In this respect, her everyday self

is fundamentally characterized by the ways of farm and domestic life which are shaped by the standards set by others.

Likewise, Louis also recounts his routine life in which he is trapped and yet seems to be extremely comfortable. Louis associates life in general with his extreme monotony and everyday actions which can be embodied by “the they.” Notwithstanding its numbing and tranquilizing effect, “the they” constantly pushes one to activity. Indeed, in the current of everydayness, Louis hurls himself as a clerk into the abyss of the business world where he seems to find himself by actually losing himself. As Louis says in relation to his everyday routine activities, “[b]ut now I have not a moment to spare ... The weight of the world is on our shoulders ...” (*The Waves* 140). There is always something for Louis to go at and engage oneself with in the world in which he is fully absorbed: “I do this, do that, and again do this and then that” (*The Waves* 140). Recounting his everyday routine in detail, Louis brands it “life:” “This is life; Mr Prentice at four; Mr Eyres at four-thirty ... The weight of the world is on our shoulders. This is life” (*The Waves* 140). Such everyday “life” is where Louis just like Susan and Bernard feels most at home, and the possibility of being precluded from it disturbs him to a great extent. Like Rhoda who is terrified from being left outside the “loop,” Louis as a child feels excluded from “the circle” (*The Waves* 76). As a clerk who feels the weight of the world on his shoulders, he still senses that “if [he] deviate[s], glancing this way and that way, [he] shall fall like snow and be wasted” (*The Waves* 138).

In this respect, as Susan Dick points out, “[t]hrough ordinary activity [Louis] is seeking to fix his place in the world and thus stabilize his fluid sense of self” (70). Indeed, Louis’s work as a clerk enables him to indulge himself in the required activities of the business and thereby to lose himself in what he does: “‘I have signed my name,’ said Louis, ‘already twenty times. I, and again I, and again I. Clear, firm, unequivocal, there it stands, my name. Clear-cut and unequivocal am I too’” (*The Waves* 138). Thus, similar to Susan’s absorption in the domestic everydayness which enables her to make sense of herself as a maternal domestic figure, it is such losing oneself in the everyday world which is dictated by the ways of “the they” that brings about a sense of being “at-home” and consequently, what Louis calls, akin to Bernard’s ‘warm coverings,’ “the protective ways of the ordinary” (*The Waves* 76).

Unearthing and emphasizing the characters' tendency towards a certain level of averageness and being-at-home as such, this study has argued that Woolf in *The Waves* situates the self within a complex of insidious relations with others as embodied in the way the self conducts itself in average everydayness. Making use of Heidegger's philosophical concepts, it has further demonstrated not only that the referential totality, which "the they" prescribes and into which each and every self is thrown, is what ultimately enables the self to comfortably comport itself in the world and to feel at-home, but also that everyday average existence of the self as presented in Woolf's *The Waves* forms a significant part of being a self which is 'tugged this way or that every day of his life.'

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