



**Virginia Woolf,
Wassily Kandinsky,
the Portrait of a Painter
and her Painting in
*To the Lighthouse*¹**

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It has long been recognised that for her ideas on painting and its relationship to writing Virginia Woolf owed much to her sister Vanessa Bell and still more to her friend and mentor Roger Fry, a debt she acknowledged in an expressed wish that she had dedicated *To the Lighthouse* (1927) to him, for having ‘kept me on the right path, so far as writing goes, more than anyone’ (*L3*, 27 May 1927, 385). Echoing Lily Briscoe’s trope of the ‘odd road ... of painting’ (*TTL* 187), Woolf added a characteristic qualifier, ‘if the right path it is’ which, like the trope itself, highlights how these ideas were continually evolving, for Fry as well as Woolf, who comments in her 1940 biography of Fry that ‘in either case [literature or painting] there was no conclusion, only the perpetual need for fresh effort’, a ‘perpetual revision of aesthetic experiences’ (*RF* 242, 245), which again echoes Lily’s ‘the vision must be perpetually remade’ (*TTL* 197). This perpetual re-vision was done, moreover, in a context of multiple, overlapping and shifting international networks of exchange between diverse cultural actors across Europe, in the collective excitement of the radical turn in the arts known as modernism. One hitherto neglected actor, whose importance to Fry and Woolf (see Heney, de Mille) as well as more widely to British artists (see Glew) is beginning to receive attention, is Wassily Kandinsky, the Russian-born European artist and writer, who was Fry’s exact contemporary (born like him in 1866). Fry’s publicly expressed interest in and admiration for Kandinsky the artist, ‘pushing forward his fascinating experiments into a new world of expressive form’, as he puts it in a review of the Allied Artists’ exhibition of 1913 in the *Nation* (Fry 1996 151), is well known, as is the crucial importance of the Sadler family (in Leeds) to the circulation of Kandinsky’s work in Britain more

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generally, as well as to Fry and the Bloomsbury circle in particular. Michael Sadler (1861–1943) is the first of the ‘private people’ named by Woolf in her biography as among Fry’s allies in the promotion of the new art (*RF* 243), while his son (likewise Michael, 1888–1957) published in 1914 a translation of Kandinsky’s *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* (1911–12) as *The Art of Spiritual Harmony* (later called *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*). Though neither makes explicit mention of it, as far as I have been able to establish, writing by Woolf as well as by Fry is infiltrated by ideas, turns of phrase and images from this seminal work, described by Hilla Rebay, the German-born naturalised-American translator of the follow-up work, *Punkt und Linie zu Fläche* (1926; *Point and Line to Plane* (1947)), as a ‘theoretical treatise, in which [Kandinsky] established the philosophical basis of non-objective painting’ (Kandinsky 1947 8). As Frances Spalding remarks in her biography of Fry, a ‘conceptual base or philosophy’ was precisely what the Bloomsbury artists lacked (Spalding 1980 168). In the case of Woolf, the specificity and range of images and ideas that infiltrated *To the Lighthouse* justify the claim that there was significant input from Kandinsky’s work in her portrait of the painter Lily Briscoe and her painting—‘surely ... rather a good painter’, as Woolf’s sister observed, if ‘before her time perhaps’ (*L3*, 11 May [1927], 573).

If it is puzzling that neither Fry nor Woolf appears to refer explicitly to Kandinsky’s treatise, it is inconceivable that they did not know of it, or, in the case of Fry, did not read it, given his interest in Kandinsky’s work as an artist, expressed privately on a visit to the Sadlers in March 1913 (Glew 1997 603 n31) as well as publicly in August in the piece in the *Nation* cited above, in which he describes Kandinsky’s ‘improvisations’ as ‘pure visual music’ that have eliminated all vestiges of doubt about ‘the possibility of emotional expression by ... abstract visual signs’ (Fry 1996 153; cf. Sadler: ‘Kandinsky is painting music’ (Kandinsky 1977 xix)). It could not have escaped Woolf’s notice either, since it was reviewed together with *Art* (1914), by her sister’s husband Clive Bell, in the 15 June issue of the *Egoist*, a prominent literary magazine to which Woolf refers several times in her diary. Kandinsky’s is declared ‘the most daring and revolutionary among present day aesthetic theories’, by the reviewer, the critic Huntly Carter, who prefers it to Bell’s, since Kandinsky ‘considers Art as spirit, Mr Bell ... considers it as frame and form’ (236). Kandinsky was prominent too in the first issue of *Blast*, another, more experimental literary magazine edited by Wyndham Lewis, published on 20 June (released on 2 July) 1914, which features a piece on the treatise by the younger artist Edward Wadsworth (1889–1949). His piece is less a review than a judicious selection of passages, not from Sadler’s translation, but as translated by Wadsworth, who inserts linking summaries and so provides a

potted version of this ‘most important contribution to the psychology of modern art’, as he introduces it, highlighting in his title, ‘Inner Necessity’, Kandinsky’s key idea of ‘innere Notwendigkeit’ (119). Kandinsky features again, in a ‘Note’ by Lewis ‘on some German Woodcuts at the Twenty-One Gallery’ (136), and then in a reflection by him on the contemporary ‘Orchestra of Media’, which foregrounds the advances made by Kandinsky in ‘containing all the elements of discord and “ugliness” in his work, which is consequently ‘more original and bitter’ than that of Matisse (142). Indeed, in the Vorticist manifesto by Ezra Pound, which appeared in the same issue, Kandinsky is raised to the status of founder with Picasso, declared ‘father and mother ... of the movement’. Pound’s assertion ‘in painting Kandinsky, Picasso’ is immediately followed by an example in poetry—an imagist poem by H.D. (154).

This (untitled) imagist poem bears comparison with Woolf’s pair of short experimental prose poems ‘Blue & Green’, first published in the collection *Monday or Tuesday* (1921), though it may not be a case of direct inspiration as Nena Skrbic has suggested (51–2). There are also striking likenesses, as Charlotte de Mille has pointed out, between a Kandinsky woodcut illustration to one of the texts in his collection of prose poems and images, *Klänge* (1912–13) and Vanessa Bell’s woodcut illustration to the preceding piece in Woolf’s collection, ‘The String Quartet’, though again it may not be a case of direct inspiration (de Mille 189–98). More broadly, the influence of Kandinsky’s art on other British artists (notably James Wood as well as Wadsworth) has been pointed out by Adrian Glew, who notes how ideas from the treatise, especially concerning colour, found their way into *The Foundations of Aesthetics* (1922), co-authored by Wood with C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards (Glew 2006 42). In the case of Fry and Woolf it would appear to be a case less of influence or inspiration than of infiltration of their writing by ideas and images from the work of this important cultural actor in the Europe-wide modern movement.

When Fry, for instance, writes in 1920 to his friend, the French writer Marie Mauron, that ‘all arts, being one, are parallel ways of reaching the goal of satisfying the needs of the spirit’ (Fry 1972 II.498), he is (perhaps unconsciously) more or less paraphrasing Kandinsky’s reflections on ‘the drawing together’ of ‘the various arts’ in their common ‘striving’ ‘towards the abstract, the non-material’ ‘in this later phase of spiritual development’ (Kandinsky 1977 19). Still more interesting, however, is an example from Fry’s review in the *Athenaeum* (8 August 1919) of an exhibition of ‘Modern French Art at the Mansard Gallery’, which announces the coming together of modern painting and literature, exemplified respectively by Léopold Survage (b. 1879) and Virginia Woolf (b. 1882) (Fry 1996 339–42). Survage is among

the 'younger men and women' whose art works 'show how vital and inspiring the modern movement still is' (implicitly, despite the rupture of the war) (339–40), which Fry sees as now tending in two directions, that of the 'Naturalists', as he calls those who may 'distort' but build 'on the appearances of our familiar three-dimensional space', and that of the 'Cubists', who make 'a complete break' with 'ordinary vision' and for whom it is 'the *internal necessities* of design' that 'dictate the relations of the parts' (340–1, emphasis mine). Evoking Kandinsky's key idea of 'inner necessity', Fry underscores the continuity of the upcoming generation of artists with the founding father of the modern movement. This continuity may have been specifically illustrated for him by Survage who was, like Kandinsky, Russian born (if of mixed descent), and whose work had been exhibited with work by Kandinsky in Moscow in 1910, though he had left Russia to settle in France in 1909 (Warnod 22, 30). The 'relation of the parts' dictated by 'the internal necessities of design' has led, Fry affirms, to 'a new kind of literary painting', exemplified by Survage, since 'modern literature is approximating to the same kind of relationship of ideas' (Fry 1996 341).

To illustrate the point, Fry then offers a translation into words of one of the paintings. He does not state which of the six on show by Survage this is—and to date it has not been identified—but from the entry in the exhibition catalogue (*Catalogue* n.pag.), I am reasonably confident it is *Villefranche sur mer*, an oil on canvas done in 1916, which Fry translates as a passage of poetic prose entitled 'The Town' (Fry 1996 341–2). He then declares he has done this with Mrs Woolf in mind, Survage having done in painting what she did in prose. Again he does not specify, but he is surely thinking of 'Kew Gardens' (published in May and reprinted in June, with woodcuts by Vanessa), since the closing lines of 'The Town'—the 'shapes of men ... scarcely leave a mark; their shadows stain the walls for a moment'—echo a painterly passage at the close of Woolf's piece: 'shapes of all these colours, men, women and children ... dissolving ... in the yellow and green atmosphere, staining it faintly with red and blue' (*CSF* 89). Whether consciously or not, Fry thus performs the fusion of the two modern media that he announces. If he self-deprecatingly declares his piece may be a 'clumsy ... parody' (Fry 1996 341), Woolf demurs, declaring it 'most charming' and asking him to do more in the same vein for her and Leonard to print, in a letter which also expresses immense pleasure at seeing her name in his review (*L2*, 17 August [1919], 385). She had reason to be pleased, since the *Athenaeum* article gave her (as well as Survage) some welcome positive publicity when only two short pieces of her experimental 'modern' prose—'The Mark on the Wall' (1917) and 'Kew Gardens'—had been published. Both Survage and Woolf would of course see their careers as avant-garde artists take off in the

1920s, although Survage, like Kandinsky, would be more prominent in the United States and continental Europe than in Britain. Indeed, Kandinsky was given his own exhibition in New York in 1920, while in 1922 he was invited to teach at the Weimar Bauhaus school by its founder Walter Gropius (Sers 236, 229), who, in 1921, had invited Survage to contribute to an exhibition of new work (Abadie 135). During the 1920s, then, as Kandinsky became an internationally recognised authority of the modern movement, Survage and Woolf were establishing their places in it.

A month before the publication of 'Kew Gardens'—and perhaps in preparation for it—Woolf issued her own manifesto for a specifically 'Modern Fiction', as she would later rename 'Modern Novels' (E3 30–7, emphasis mine). The well-known opposition that she sets up here between those she labels 'materialists', who mechanically reproduce 'a design which more and more ceases to resemble the vision in our minds' in their illusory pursuit of 'likeness to life', and those who are beginning to express a different vision of life as an 'incessantly varying spirit' (32–3) resonates with the opening chapters of Kandinsky's treatise, which announce an 'awakening of [o]ur minds' from a 'nightmare of materialism' in which artistic endeavour has been limited to 'mere imitation of nature' (Kandinsky 1977 1–2), whereas now it is striving 'towards the abstract, the non-material' (19), the 'spiritual food of the newly awakened spiritual life' (9). Tellingly, it is, for Woolf, precisely the Russians who have paved the way, thanks to their 'understanding of the soul and heart' and their 'natural reverence for the human spirit' (E3 35).

Woolf turned from her radical early experiments to take up again the literary conventions of plot and character, albeit in new and original ways, in the novels of the 1920s, including *To the Lighthouse* (1927), just as Roger Fry turned from radical formalism to take up 'figurative conventions' in painting, as Christopher Reed points out (Fry 1996 306). Nevertheless, she continued to aspire to the musical—famously she claimed she wanted the sound of the sea to be heard throughout and she exploits sounds and rhythm to musical effects—and still more evidently to the painterly. Not only are there numerous 'painterly' descriptions, but pictorial language recurs, most frequently in 'The Window', itself a figure of the pictorial frame: Lily Briscoe and William Bankes 'complete the picture' by looking together at the dunes after watching a sailing boat (TTL 25); William Bankes reflects on 'something incongruous' that he needs to 'work ... into the picture' of Mrs Ramsay (34–5); an arrangement of fruit makes Mrs Ramsay think of images 'in some picture' (105), and she feels words as colours, 'one red, one blue, one yellow', 'washing from side to side of her mind rhythmically' (129).

These pictorial/painterly moments furnish a link to 'the greatest modern novelist', as Woolf described Proust to Vanessa in April 1927 (L3 365). For

in her essay 'Pictures', written as she started to think about her novel in the spring of 1925, Proust is singled out for his skill in 'pictorially built up' scenes, which, Woolf comments, are used—as they are by her—to illustrate the subjectivities of his characters (*E4* 244). Equally, if less obviously, pertinent is her opening comment that the 'works of Proust' serve as a repository for the memory of modern painters, who, thanks to him, would survive '[w]ere all modern paintings to be destroyed' (243). *To the Lighthouse* is haunted by the precarious contingency of cultural survival and is itself a repository of names, of authors as well as of painters, though the painters are Renaissance rather than modern: Michelangelo, Rembrandt, Titian, Raphael. No modern painters are named, but an epitome of recent art history is provided through the juxtaposed fictional figures of the impressionist, Mr Paunceforte, with his vision of 'colour ... thinned and faded; the shapes etherealised' and the Post-Impressionist (or expressionist) Lily Briscoe with her vision of 'colour burning on a framework of steel; the light of a butterfly's wing lying upon the arches of a cathedral' (*TTL* 54). (The term 'Post-Impressionist' was hastily invented by Fry for the exhibition of 1910 only after objections had been made to his first proposal of 'expressionist' (Spalding 1980 133).) In its expanded reiteration in part III (*TTL* 186), when Lily makes a second attempt at her painting, this description clearly echoes a diary entry of 8 April 1925, in which Woolf describes Proust's achievement in terms of the 'combination of the utmost sensibility with the utmost tenacity', 'as tough as catgut & as evanescent as a butterfly's bloom' (*D3* 7). This underscores not only Woolf's aspiration to a likeness to Proust but also the shared aesthetic project of modern painters and writers to combine contradictory qualities—toughness and evanescence—in a break with conventional ideas of beauty. 'Du dur et du mou. Les combinaisons de tous les deux—possibilités infinies' (Kandinsky 1935 117; 'Toughness and softness. The combinations of these two—infinite possibilities' (my translation)).

It is in similar terms that Roger Fry describes the achievement of Cézanne, the painter whose work is usually assumed to be the model for Lily's, in a study published by the Hogarth Press in the same year as Woolf's novel. Claiming that Cézanne was the 'first, among moderns', to organise the 'complexity of appearances by referring it to a geometrical scaffolding', Fry adds that this is 'no *a priori* scheme', since Cézanne brings together 'an intellect rigorous, abstract and exacting to a degree, and a sensibility of extreme delicacy' (Fry 1989 67), the combination, that is, of rigour and delicacy to which Lily aspires. Again, he observes of the landscapes of the 1880s: 'It is characteristic of Cézanne's method ... thus to seize on a few clearly related almost geometrical elements, and then on top of this clearly

held *framework*, to give to every part of the contour the utmost *subtlety of variation* which his visual sensibility could discover' (71, emphasis mine). As Frances Spalding remarks, Woolf wrote her novel when 'Bloomsbury's interest in Cézanne was at its height' (Spalding 2014 137).

Bloomsbury was, however, doing no more than catching up with modern artists across continental Europe, for whom Cézanne had long been a point of reference and a model, including the two I have discussed. While Surriage's admiration for and indebtedness to Cézanne found early expression in a reprise of *Les Baigneuses* (1898) in *Baigneurs et Baigneuses* (1912), exhibited in Paris in 1913 (Warnod 25–30), Kandinsky, in his treatise, celebrates Cézanne as 'the great seeker after a new sense of form' 'endowed with the gift of divining the inner life in everything' (Kandinsky 1977 17), and cites *Les Baigneuses* (which is reproduced) to illustrate the modern painter's subordination of the human figure to form, here 'the form of a triangle', an 'old principle' to which, he comments, Cézanne has given 'new life' by using it 'for purely artistic purposes' (31 n11). Fry, on the other hand (perhaps in reaction to Kandinsky's appreciation), finds the 'elementary schema' of 'the pyramid' as he calls the structuring form of this painting, too 'deliberate a formula' (Fry 1989 77–8), although earlier, in language suggestive of Kandinsky, he points out 'the *necessity* which Cézanne felt so strongly of discovering always in the appearances of nature an underlying principle of *geometric harmony*' (61, emphasis mine). As Wadsworth (more lyrically expansive than Sadler) translates Kandinsky: 'Form alone, even if it is quite abstract and geometrical, has its inner timbre, and is a spiritual entity with qualities that are identical with this form: a triangle ... is an entity of this sort with a spiritual perfume proper to itself alone' (Wadsworth 121). For Kandinsky the triangle has philosophical significance as a trope for 'the life of the [collective] spirit', which he expounds in his second chapter 'The movement of the triangle' (as Sadler translates 'Die Bewegung' (Kandinsky 1977 6–9)). The triangle is also privileged in his art work, even when, in the Bauhaus years, he turns rather to the circle. And it remains the privileged exemplary form in his writing, as in a piece for *Cahiers d'Art* (1935) in which he writes: 'Un triangle provoque une émotion vivante, parce que lui-même est un être vivant' (Kandinsky 1935 54; 'A triangle stirs a living emotion because it is itself a living being' (my translation)). For Cézanne, on the other hand, as Fry observes, the privileged geometrical 'forms' were 'the sphere, the cone, and the cylinder' (Fry 1989 50).

It is a 'triangular purple shape' that William Bankes first notices when he looks at Lily's painting, and to his question as to what she wished to indicate by it Lily replies Mrs Ramsay and James, although she 'had made no attempt at likeness', and Mr Bankes accepts that 'Mother and child ... objects of

universal veneration ... might be reduced' in this way (*TTL* 58–9). The exchange is slightly, but tellingly modified when it is remembered by Lily ten years later (in part III): their reflection on 'mother and son' is here remembered as 'a subject which, they agreed, Raphael had treated divinely' (*TTL* 191). Raphael's *Holy Family*, specifically the *Canigiani Holy Family* (1508), is reproduced by Kandinsky, alongside Cézanne's *Les Baigneuses*, as another 'example of triangular composition', although, according to Kandinsky, 'used only for the harmonizing of the group' (Kandinsky 1977 31). As Lily works on her painting again, she is granted the return of 'an odd-shaped triangular shadow over the step' (*TTL* 218), thanks to a presence in the house which she then identifies with Mrs Ramsay, the maternal figure, who 'cast[s] her shadow on the step' (*TTL* 219). The triangular form is then a sign of continuity between Lily's past and present (life/painting) and, more generally, between past and present painters, as it is for Kandinsky, for whom this 'old principle' of artistic construction illustrated by Raphael's *Holy Family* and Cézanne's *Les Baigneuses* has an enduring 'spiritual perfume'. Indeed, this continuity is underscored in art by Kandinsky, who in 1917 produced a 'Madonna and Child' in the 'primitive' style of the Byzantine icon, using a triangular composition highlighted by purple drapery, which enfolds both figures. Though it is unlikely Woolf knew of it, this painting confirms a shared 'concern' not simply 'with form' (Heney 19) but with the particular form of the triangle—combined with the colour purple—as a form expressive of the collective 'reverence' towards the 'objects of universal veneration', 'mother and child' (*TTL* 59).

Continuity was important to Fry too, as Woolf emphasises: 'he would explain that it was quite easy to make the transition from Watts to Picasso; there was no break, only a continuation' (*RF* 152); the Post-Impressionist French painters including Cézanne 'were masters of their art; he could see "how closely they followed tradition"' (160). Woolf too, in her reflections on modern fiction, seeks continuity as well as a break with immediate predecessors, commenting, for instance, in a 1919 review of the modernist writing of Dorothy Richardson, that '[w]e want to be rid of realism', but 'further require' that the modern writer 'shall fashion this new material into something which has the shapeliness of the old accepted forms' ('The Tunnel', *E3* 12). (Cf. Kandinsky's description of the triangle as an 'old principle'.) As I discuss elsewhere and take up below, Woolf's own writing forges such continuities, notably in the tripartite structure of *To the Lighthouse*, which itself echoes the figure of the triangle (see below and Tudeau-Clayton 306–7).

In explaining her reduction of the 'objects of universal veneration' to a 'triangular purple shape', Lily appeals to 'the need of darkness', given that,

‘in that corner, it was bright’, which is reformulated by Mr Bankes and recalled by Lily: a ‘light there required a shadow there’ (*TTL* 59, 191). As she paints again, she is ‘moved ... by some instinctive need of distance and blue’ (197), a motivation by an inner imperative that is earlier expressed through the use of passive verb forms: she paints, ‘as if she were urged’ (172), ‘some rhythm ... was dictated to her’ (173). For Kandinsky, it is the ‘duty’ of ‘the artist’ ‘to use only those forms which fulfil his own need’, an inner need or necessity which frees the artist from any obligation to likeness to nature (Kandinsky 1977 53). The ‘effect of Inner Necessity’, translates Wadsworth, ‘is a progressive expression of the eternally objective [in forms such as the triangle] within the temporarily subjective’ (Wadsworth 120), since form, as he paraphrases it, always has ‘a psychic import’. This is the case for ‘the whole composition’ as well as ‘its component parts and their relationship to one another’ (121). For Lily, the painting she works on in part I carries ‘the residue of her thirty-three years’ (*TTL* 58), just as, Kandinsky comments, ‘in each picture is a whole lifetime imprisoned, a whole lifetime of fears, doubts, hopes, and joys’ (Kandinsky 1977 3). As Wadsworth summarises: ‘This insistence on the value of one’s feelings as the only aesthetic impulse means logically that the artist is not only entitled to treat form and colour according to his inner dictates, but that it is his duty to do so and consequently his life (his thought and deeds) becomes the raw material out of which he must carve his creations’ (125). When Lily works on her painting for a second time in part III, her struggle with form is explicitly tied to the struggle with her feelings towards others, notably the Ramsays: ‘For whatever reason she could not achieve the razor edge of balance between two opposite forces; Mr. Ramsay and the picture; which was *necessary*. There was something perhaps wrong with the design? Was it, she wondered, that the line of the wall wanted breaking, was it that the mass of the trees was too heavy?’ (*TTL* 209, emphasis mine). It is, of course, above all a consuming inner need to find expression for her conflicted feelings towards the maternal figure—and her loss—that drives Lily’s pursuit of forms and design in her painting.

For Kandinsky, the freedom of the artist to seek out the forms needed to express his subjective life is paramount. For Fry too, ‘[f]reedom was the word that summed up what he most desired’ (*RF* 243). In this respect, Picasso was admired by both Fry and Kandinsky, who comments how Picasso ‘shrinks from no innovation’, driven ‘by the need for self-expression’ (Kandinsky 1977 18; cf. *RF* 243). Lily too does not shrink from innovation, and finds freedom—from the socio-political constraints of gender relations as well as the cultural constraints of likeness to nature—in pursuing her need for self-expression. This freedom is exemplified not only by her choice of a ‘triangular purple shape’ over a ‘human shape’ (*TTL* 59) to express her vision

of mother and child, but also by her refusal 'to tamper with the bright violet [of the jacmanna] and the staring white [of the wall], since she saw them like that, fashionable though it was, since Mr Paunceforte's visit, to see everything pale, elegant, semi-transparent' (*TTL* 23). For Kandinsky, an anecdote about Van Gogh and 'a white wall' 'marks a transition from Impressionism to an art of spiritual harmony', since the question raised by Van Gogh in one of his letters as to whether he 'may not paint a white wall dead white' would pose no problem to the 'non-representative artist', but would seem to the impressionist-realist 'a bold liberty to take with nature' (Kandinsky 1977 39 n22; an English translation of the letters of Van Gogh had been published in 1912). For Lily, the non-representative 'honest' artist, the problem of the wall transmutes from a problem of colour (in part I) to a problem of line in part III (*TTL* 209–10), although whiteness is suggested by the 'glare' that her eye gets from 'the line of the wall, or from thinking—she wore a grey hat' (210), an explicit (con)fusion of her thinking about the forms in her painting with her (intense) memories of Mrs Ramsay.

Kandinsky observes: 'A single line can alter the whole composition of a picture' (Kandinsky 1977 48 n2). It is a line, not horizontal (like the line of the wall) but vertical, which, '[w]ith a sudden intensity, as if she saw it clear for a second', Lily draws 'there, in the centre', allowing her to feel 'it was finished' (*TTL* 226). 'Every artist knows, who works with feeling', writes Kandinsky, 'how suddenly the right form flashes upon him ... a true work of art must be like an inspiration' (Kandinsky 1977 54 n5). Lily's inspired sudden choice of a vertical line in the centre may reprise the decision taken '[i]n a flash', during the dinner scene in part I, to 'put the tree further in the middle' (*TTL* 92), a decision which she recalls throughout the scene (94, 101, 111) and which at once enables and illustrates her emancipation from the constraints of gender relations, especially the imperative to marry (111), since it represents 'her work' (92). This tree might recall landscapes by Cézanne reproduced in Fry's study, notably *Maisons au bord de la Marne* (fig. 26) in which 'a tree divides the composition in half' (Fry 1989 59; similarly, *Winter Landscape* (fig. 27)). The reprise of the tree as a line in part III would then underscore how, in the ten years between her first and second attempts at the painting (between, say, 1910 and 1920), Lily has become more avant-garde, has turned, we might say, from Cézanne towards Kandinsky.

The closing image of the line is of course taken up by Woolf in her letter to Fry when she responds to his question concerning the meaning of the lighthouse: 'I meant *nothing* by The Lighthouse. One has to have a central line down the middle of the book to hold the design together' (*L3* 385). Confirming the implied parallel between Lily's painting and the novel, Woolf appeals in painterly idiom to the inner need of the design. Observing too that

‘she did not consciously think’ of her sister when ‘doing Mrs Ramsay’, she adds that ‘the whole process of writing remains to me a complete mystery’ (L3 386; cf. ‘this extremely mysterious process’ (D3 131, 14 March 1927)). Similarly, for Kandinsky: ‘The work of art is born of the artist in a mysterious and secret way’ (Kandinsky 1977 53). As I have discussed, the vital importance to Kandinsky of the freedom of the artist to obey the (mysterious) inner need for self-expression finds echoes with Fry as well as with Woolf. They also share a sense of the provisionality of theoretical statements and an attendant openness. When Kandinsky, for instance, observes that a single line may completely change a composition (see above), he does so to illustrate that ‘[r]ules cannot be laid down, the variations are so endless’ (Kandinsky 1977 48 n2). He states this specifically to counter the systematicity implied by his examples of the meanings of colours, as he underscores when he comments: ‘all I have said of these simple colours is very provisional and general’ (41). Similarly, he draws attention to the provisionality of the (crucial) terms ‘material’ and ‘non-material’, which in Sadler’s translation (though not in the original German) appear in distancing quotation marks, as the label ‘materialists’ is in distancing quotation marks in Woolf’s essay ‘Modern Novels’, a sign in both cases of the provisionality of the terms. For Woolf, as for Kandinsky, that is, ‘the boundaries drawn should not be too definite’ (Kandinsky 1977 9 n3). Similarly, it is ‘the tentative and provisional’ that characterises Fry’s writing of the 1920s and 1930s, as Christopher Reed has pointed out (Fry 1996 306) and as the quotations from Woolf’s biography of Fry in my introduction underscore. Kandinsky was, finally, like Fry and Woolf, radically open-minded in the pursuit of a modern art expressive of human spiritual aspirations, although as a Russian Orthodox Christian his understanding of the spiritual was perhaps more conventionally religious. If, however, neither Woolf nor Fry were conventionally religious, both were open to a spiritual dimension, Fry from a Quaker family and Woolf with an ‘irrational Xtian’ in her that Leonard disliked (D3 81, 9 May 1926) and a liking in particular for the ‘Roman Catholic religion’ which, on a visit to Italy in April 1927, she suggested to an ‘outraged’ Leonard was ‘an attempt at art’ (L3 360).

I return in conclusion to the ‘triangular purple shadow’ to which mother and child are ‘reduced’ in Lily’s painting. For Kandinsky, as I have indicated, the triangle had philosophical as well as spiritual meanings, while Protestant cultures from the early seventeenth century onwards saw the emergence of a ‘widespread iconographical convention of portraying the Holy Trinity as a triangle’ (Skinner 293–5). If such meanings may have been more or less unconsciously present for Woolf as for Lily, the triangular shape is, at the least, a sign and an example of continuity, an enduring form that traverses

time and place, linking present to past and future, as it is for Kandinsky. Within the novel of course it finds echo in the ‘wedge shaped core’ that Mrs Ramsay discovers in herself (*TTL* 69) as well as the ‘trident’ to which the ‘French novel’ carried by Mr Carmichael is compared (225). It recalls too the tripartite structure of the novel itself, which, as I have argued, echoes the tripartite structures of the works of two authors named in the novel: Virgil and Shakespeare (Tudeau-Clayton 306–7). Finally, the triangular shape underscores Woolf’s attraction to the number three, which Anne Toner has observed in *Three Guineas*, where there is ‘an elaborate structural and thematic organization based around the number three’ (Toner 163–4), while Frank Kermode has pointed to a recurrence of a ‘triadic pattern’ in *Mrs. Dalloway*, *Between the Acts* and *The Waves* (Kermode xxi–xxiii).² In *To the Lighthouse*, the attraction to—or perhaps we might say the inner need for—three finds expression in the set of three colours that words become in Mrs Ramsay’s mind, ‘like little shaded lights, one red, one blue, one yellow’ (*TTL* 129). More strikingly still, it overrides not only convention, but also biology and horology when Mrs Ramsay is described as ‘giving herself the little shake that one gives a watch that has stopped, the old familiar pulse began beating, as the watch begins ticking—one, two, three, one, two, three’ (91). ‘Three’, writes Jacques Derrida, ‘is the first figure of repetition’ and ‘[t]he last too, for the abyss of representation always remains dominated by its rhythm, infinitely’, and ‘[t]he infinite is of a ternary essence’ (Derrida 299). It was perhaps some more or less conscious sense of this that drew Woolf to the number three, and Kandinsky as well as Woolf, to the figure of the triangle, ‘l’être vivant’ (‘the living being’). Indeed, as Neil Cooper has pointed out, the triangle recurs in *The Waves* (1931), again as a figure of the ineffable infinite, ‘a triangle ... beyond our reach’ (*TW* 151).

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²I am grateful to Neil Cooper for this reference to Kermode’s introduction to his Oxford World’s Classics edition of *Between the Acts*.

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