Fall 2012

The Politics of Writing, Writing Politics: Virginia Woolf's A [Virtual] Room of One's Own

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Abstract: This article revisits *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf's foundational 1929 text on women's writing. I examine from a feminist materialist perspective the relevance of Woolf's notion of a "room" in our globalized and technological twenty-first century. I first review Woolf's position on the material conditions necessary for women writers in her own time and then the applicability of her thinking for contemporary women writers on a global scale. I emphasize that the politics of writing, and in particular writing by women, that Woolf puts forth gives feminists the necessary tools to reevaluate and rethink women's writing both online and offline. I therefore argue that Woolf's traditional work on materiality can be updated and developed to further inform what is now, in the twenty-first century, an urgent need for women writers, a feminist philosophy of sexual difference in relation to technology, and an e-feminism of online spaces and women's online writing.

Keywords: Woolf (Virginia), *A Room of One's Own*, cyberspace, e-feminism, materialist feminism, women's writing, virtual room, sexual difference

> ...an already-written text, and at the same time an empty page.
> — Przemysław Czapliński, "The 'Mythic Homeland' in Contemporary Polish Prose"

> ...no woman is a blank page: every woman is author of the page and author of the page's author.
> — Susan Gubar, "'The Blank Page' and the Issues of Female Creativity"

The *Oxford English Dictionary* provides several definitions for a "room," including a sufficient space, to clear a space for oneself, to make "room" by removing other things, a certain portion or area separated by walls or partitions, or a form of accommodation. All of these meanings of keeping in and keeping out can be found in Virginia Woolf's foundational essay *A Room of One's Own*, published in 1929. In this text, originally given as two lectures on women's writing to the female students of Newnham and Girton colleges, Woolf claims that if women want to be great writers they will need an income of five hundred pounds a year and a space all of their own in which to write. Woolf argues that if these requirements are met, Shakespeare's imaginary brilliant sister Judith will reemerge in the future: "Drawing her life from the lives of the unknown who were her forerunners ... she will be born.... I maintain that she would come if we worked for her, and that so to work, even in poverty and obscurity, is worth while" (2000, 112). In an age of technology and globalization eighty-three years after Woolf's lecture, feminists must ask if a room of one's own is still meaningful for women's writing today.

In this article, I adopt a materialist feminist perspective to argue that the lack of material conditions, such as a room, which make writing possible according to Woolf, is still a reality for many would-be women writers around the globe (differing in their geographic, cultural, economic, political, racial, and social positions); and, furthermore, that feminists now must confront the specific materiality of virtual, that is

online, rooms.[1] In rethinking offline and online rooms, the first section of this article briefly reviews Woolf's position on the material conditions necessary for women writers in her own time and considers how her thinking continues to relate to women writers on a global scale. In the next section, the main focus of this essay, I argue that Woolf's traditional work on materiality can be updated and developed to further inform what is now, in the twenty-first century, a pressing need for women writers: a feminist philosophy of sexual difference in relation to technology, online spaces, and women's online writing.

The Material Conditions for Women's Writing: 1929 and the Twenty-First Century

In 1929 Woolf argued that two necessary and interdependent conditions for women writers were an income of five hundred pounds a year and a space of their own in which to write. The act of writing for publication is "liberatory" for Woolf in the sense that it can provide women with an opportunity to earn money and enter into the public realm. Thus Woolf claims that of greater historical importance than the Crusades or the War of the Roses is that at the end of the eighteenth century middle-class women began to write (66). Woolf's demand for a new space for women writers plays with traditional notions of personal and political boundaries by transforming the historical experience of a woman invisibly locked away in her home—as women "have sat indoors all these millions of years" (87), ironically without any privacy—to one of freedom from intrusion. Jane Goldman, citing Peggy Kamuf (1982, 17), writes that

> Woolf's room metaphor not only signifies the declaration of political and cultural space for women, private and public, but the intrusion of women into spaces previously considered the spheres of men. *A Room of One's Own* is not so much about retreating into a private feminine sphere as about interruptions, trespassing, and the breaching of boundaries. (Goldman 2007, 71)

Woolf refers to the private or familial sphere as one of confinement, potential violence, and bereft of actual life or public experiences when it is imposed on women. When women cease "to be the protected sex," she argues, when we "remove that protection, expose them to the same exertions and activities" (41) as men, new opportunities for women to be women will arise; and Woolf's essay, as she notes in her metanarrative, is "opening the door" for this to occur (42). She insists that money will open most doors and transform most lives and is the means for securing a future writing tradition for women, making a room of one's own and the poet Judith Shakespeare both physically and psychically possible.

For Woolf a room of one's own, a room in which a woman can write, is impossible to realize without access to other material goods, such as food, clothing, and shelter. She writes: "A good dinner is of great importance to good talk. One cannot think well, love well, sleep well, if one has not dined well" (20). She also questions "what effect poverty has on the mind; and what effect wealth has on the mind" (25). The materiality of spaces is thus clearly tied to imagination, perhaps seen best when Woolf is refused entry to Cambridge's gravel path, library, and chapel, which are reserved for men only. She laments:

> I thought of the organ booming in the chapel and of the shut doors of the library; and I thought how unpleasant it is to be locked out; and I thought how it is worse perhaps to be locked in; and, thinking of the safety and prosperity of the one sex and of the poverty and insecurity of the other and the effect of tradition and of the lack of tradition upon the mind of a writer.... (25–26)

Woolf makes the case that sexual segregation, both public and private, puts women, particularly those who write, at a social, political, and monetary disadvantage.

While the essay is very much an exercise in establishing the necessity of material conditions for women to have a room in which to write, and in contributing to a literary tradition women can turn to for inspiration,

build upon, and improve, Woolf's discussion of the materiality of rooms is nevertheless imperfect for some critics. Michèle Barrett, in particular, notes that Woolf "retains the notion that in the correct conditions art may be totally divorced from economic, political, or ideological constraints" (1979, 17) and observes that the text's early emphasis on materiality as the necessary precondition for writing evaporates as it progresses (23). I disagree with the claim that Woolf does, or even could, disassociate materiality from art, as she herself argues that "fiction is like a spider's web, attached ever so lightly perhaps, but still attached to life at all four corners. Often the attachment is scarcely perceptible" (43). The necessary connection between women's creativity and the materiality of a space is further evident when considering Woolf's claim for five hundred pounds a year.

The assertion that women writers need an income of five hundred pounds a year deserves much more attention than I can give it here, but I will emphasize its most relevant aspects in relation to the question of space, not only in the context of the colonization and imperialism of Woolf's time but also within today's technology-driven capitalism, the result of which is cheap gendered labor. Historicizing the English room during the nineteenth century, which I argue is still meaningful today, Margaret Higonnet observes:

> While the poorest women lived in quarters so cramped that segregation by sex was scarcely possible and privacy a dream, the architecture of wealthy women's "private" domains subdivided into private and public arenas, such as dressing rooms and salons. The home had a very different configuration of private and public for a mistress or a maid, for an aristocrat or a peasant, "upstairs" and "downstairs," in a city or on the land. (1994, 4)

A room of one's own, a physical space, a separate area with its own walls or partitions is not easily attained by poor women, as Woolf is well aware.

Describing the inspiration a renowned male artist might take from seeing a woman in a domestic setting, Woolf asserts that for a woman to verbalize her experiences when entering a room is too difficult: "The rooms differ so completely; they are calm or thunderous; open to the sea, or, on the contrary, give on to a prison yard; are hung with washing; or alive with opals and silks; are hard as horsehair or soft as feathers— one has only to go into any room in any street for the whole of that extremely complex force of femininity to fly in one's face" (87). Given that women have historically spent so much time inside rooms, according to Woolf, their "creative power differs greatly from the creative power of men. And one must conclude that it would be a thousand pities if it were hindered or wasted…. It would be a thousand pities if women wrote like men, or lived like men, or looked like men…." (87). These affirmations of sexual difference suggest that while men and women are different, neither sex is superior to the other, and thus woman's position as inferior and subordinate to man in a patriarchal society needs to be radically challenged: thus "a self-defined woman … would not be satisfied with sameness [to man], but otherness and difference would be given social and symbolic representation" (Whitford 1991a, 24–25). Sexual difference is linked directly to Woolf's thoughts on a women's writing tradition, which begins with Judith, William Shakespeare's working-class sister (a rebellious woman who experiences rape, abuse, obscurity, and suicide). The British women's writing tradition Woolf traces in 1929, which follows Judith Shakespeare, includes Aphra Behn, Lady Winchilsea, Charlotte Brontë, Emily Brontë, Jane Austen, George Eliot, and Dorothy Osborne (79, 91), and ends with another one of Woolf's fictitious narrators, Mary Carmichael, thinking "back through her mothers" (96), because this maternal tradition is deemed essential by Woolf for women writers.

Regarding a matrilinear genealogy of women writers, Woolf argues that "one must read it [Carmichael's novel] as if it were the last volume in a fairly long series, continuing all those other books…. For books continue each other, in spite of our habit of judging them separately" (79). One could say Woolf is only speaking of a British women's tradition and that there exist now, in the twenty-first century, various Western

women's writing traditions or canons following Woolf's genealogy. For example, in Canada there is Margaret Atwood, Marie Campbell, Anne Carson, Anne Hébert, Alice Munro, Carol Shields, Annie Proulx, and Jane Zwicky. However, is there a women's writing tradition in the developing world, or does the tradition Woolf espouses merely cater to a Western and patriarchal ideology of the written text that requires subscribing to Western feminist notions of ownership, capitalism, and freedom, and arguably also to the idea of a room of one's own?[2]

What does a non-Western room of one's own look like? And does the Western writing tradition inspired by Woolf come at the expense of other, non-Western women? Jane Marcus argues so, and I would agree: "We have rooms of our own because they don't—our sisters in the former colonies on whose labor the 'first' world largely functions" (2004, 42). Are we in the Western world repeating the oppressions based on race, nationhood, and gender that Marcus (1994, 176) identifies in Woolf's text? One of the most telling examples of these oppressions is provided by Woolf's aunt in Bombay who "falls" from her horse (a Biblical reference to the fallen Eve is clearly suggested, and perhaps also symbolizes the inevitable future decline of the British Empire) (Woolf 38). The woman is Woolf's relative and by extension implicates Woolf herself in colonialism; the narrator's money, which allows her to write in her room, has come from this aunt. Marcus argues that the white woman writer's economic freedom, lauded by Woolf, comes "at the expense of colonial expansion" (1994, 174), which entails the exploitation of women in India and Africa. She concludes that "the precious room of her own ... so symbolic of feminist struggles in the twentieth century has been bought with [women's] blood money" (175). In Woolf's essay, the narrators are white Englishwomen of privilege who are not subject to racial discrimination nor to the restraints imposed on the working class; for them, separate gendered spheres, such as a room of one's own, are possible, though hierarchies based on gender and gendered divisions of labor remain intact.

As Marcus perceptively notes, however, "the salient subtext in every Woolf novel [and essay] is the voice of the working-class women" (1987, 138), while *A Room of One's Own* "is a class narrative that allows Virginia Woolf to imagine the creative writer in her cook, who is home washing the dishes while she is speaking" (2004, 8). But, as Marcus asks, "What about race?" (2004, 8). If we, and Woolf, can imagine Judith Shakespeare as a working-class woman, can we also imagine her as black? Woolf's controversial statement, "It is one of the great advantages of being a woman that one can pass even a very fine negress without wanting to make an Englishwoman of her" (51), has provoked several interpretations and readings in terms of race, nationhood, gender, and economics. Though perhaps it stands as Woolf's attempt to absolve herself, and all English women (though we remember her wealthy colonizing aunt in Bombay), from the acts of patriarchal imperialism, a literal claiming and taking of another's space that aims to make the whole world an English room of one's own, the quotation remains problematic.

A sense of shared gender, a communal space, between women of different races is missing in Woolf. Her definition of "Englishwoman" does not include black women (Marcus 2004, 44). Excluded from the category of woman by virtue of her color, the "negress" is implicitly, by virtue of being black, also excluded from being English. The notion that the woman may in fact be English or at least British never enters Woolf's consideration; as Marcus asserts, "what is necessary for an 'Englishwoman's' identity, the subversive text says, is white skin and aristocratic blood" (2004, 35–36). If the room is Woolf's escape from a patriarchal empire of space-taking, judgment, and gaze, where Englishmen want to make Englishwomen out of fine negresses, then the passage likewise suggests that the woman of color needs her own private domain not only for the same reasons but also to escape being racialized, victimized, and objectified by the gaze of white women such as Woolf. Though Woolf might have believed she was avoiding making a "fine negress" into an

object of patriarchal desire, her act is questionable because it singles out the negress as a stranger, not as a sister. Woolf's statement implies that Judith Shakespeare is not and cannot be black (Marcus 2004, 32), nor can Woolf imagine her own sister as being black. How the negress views a white woman like Woolf is never asked, though potentially she could, like Woolf, also be imparting her own racialized, gendered, and nationalized gaze.

My reservations about race, in terms of who can achieve the traditional materiality Woolf's room stood for in 1929, continue in our globalized twenty-first century and are further linked with the ownership of space. In 1929, Woolf conceived of reflective writing as monopolized by men's ownership of both public and private space—essentially all spaces. This is evident when one night, looking out the window at the anonymous famous university, she visualizes writing in terms of exteriors and interiors: the old stone, the domes, towers, and books,

> pictures of old prelates and worthies hanging in paneled rooms; ... the quiet rooms looking across the quiet quadrangles. And (pardon me the thought) I thought, too, of the admirable smoke and drink and the deep armchairs and the pleasant carpets: of the urbanity, the geniality, the dignity which are the offspring of luxury and privacy and space. Certainly our mothers had not provided us with anything comparable to all this.... (25)

Men's luxury and space give birth to dignity, geniality, and philosophical and theoretical reflection, including reflection on women. In male-authored texts, Woolf notes, "Some of the most inspired words, some of the most profound thoughts in literature fall from her [woman's] lips; in real life she could hardly read, could scarcely spell, and was the property of her husband" (45). Women such as Mrs. Seton, her mother, and her mother's mother are not writing, Woolf notes, but giving birth to children (22–23, 111), as they engage in upholding the material basis of society through domestic work.

The reality of women's poverty and consequent unequal distribution of "rooms of one's own" in the twenty-first century are remarkably similar to the conditions of Woolf's time, though most middle-class women are no longer indoors at home; instead, they are employed in the public realm. Thus, while some women of privilege may have rooms of their own, such as an office or studio, either inside or outside of the home (or both), another common economic reality amongst working women artists, such as China's Lin Tianmiao, is making the room serve double duty as one's workspace and living space. It is a room of one's own, but it is also one's only room. In addition to the difficulty in mapping out and imagining a physical and creative space, either outside of or within the home, women are still expected to perform most domestic tasks, which creates a "double burden" and often entails the sacrifice of any inventive private space or time.[3] When women are "surviving," Woolf suggests, they are not penning their thoughts.

While no longer adequate for a woman writing in any Western society, five hundred pounds a year is sufficient for women writers living in certain "developing" countries.[4] The website MeasuringWorth (2012) indicates that Woolf's £500 correlates today to a middle-class income of roughly £23,700 or 40,000 US dollars, which suggests a modest income for a working woman in the Western world, given that the gross national income (GNI) per capita in UK equals $37,780 (approximately £23,787) (World Bank 2012). For a woman living in 2011 in Zimbabwe or Tanzania, where the GNI per capita is $640 and $540 respectively, 500 pounds, equaling roughly 800 US dollars, would still allow a standard of living well above the average income level. Further, the romanticized writer's room that both Goldman and Barrett identify in *A Room of One's Own* becomes not only suspect but put into yet sharper perspective when looking directly not just at women's global poverty and employment alone but also examining them specifically in combination with the issue of literacy. Though the *OED* defines literacy as "a knowledge of letters, especially reading and writing," this definition, like the one for "room," is outdated and must be extended to include the digital realm.

Gunther Kress, amongst others (Tyner 2010; Burniske 2008; Coiro et al. 2008; Jenkins 2002), argues that effective communication increasingly requires the ability to use computers and gather information by means of communication technologies; thus any understanding of literacy should now encompass the use of sets of skills needed for digital technologies (Kress 2003, 35, 56). Therefore, rethinking women's writing in relation to Woolf's essay must now also take technology into account. In addition to considering Woolfian "offline" rooms, the effects of space, class, race, culture, geography, and sexuality on women's writing must be analyzed also in terms of the online room, and this analysis must consider the direct correlations between women's poverty and both traditional and digital illiteracy.[5]

In sum, the 1929 room Woolf speaks of is still, in many respects, the same today; it is very much a Western concept of the material room that most women cannot achieve, and it reinforces the now well-established term "feminization of poverty."[6] Though Woolf is addressing privileged women from Newnham and Girton Colleges, she does ask why women compared to men are poor (27), a question that the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (2012) and Vital Voices Global Partnership (2012) both take up. The UN Women: National Committee Australia (2012) finds that women's wages are still much lower than men's, and that women "bear a disproportionate burden of the world's poverty." According to Vital Voices, women make up 66% of the world's workers and produce 50% of the world's food, but only earn 10% of the income and own 1% of the property. These global statistics suggest women in poverty rarely have the means to learn or purchase new technologies, which are fueled by Western ideologies of consumption.[7] The above-cited evidence of women's poverty is meant to establish the continued relevance of Woolf's traditional room of 1929 in terms of twenty-first century women's work and writing. This is necessary in order to support my overall argument and primary focus, which is that Woolf's philosophy of women's writing is dependent on materiality (meant as money and a physical and psychical room to write) and can, by being updated and extended to include online writing and virtual rooms, offer useful tools for rethinking women's writing and the materiality of technology in the present time. Though difficult questions remain as to what paths to empowerment women can create and achieve, and how both Western and non-Western women can resist and transform gender inequalities in striving towards a material ethics encompassing both a traditional room and virtual "room" of one's own, Woolf's essay, including the women's writing represented in her text, suggests that writing for women is an immediate and necessary political action.

"Chloe Liked Olivia": The Virtual Laboratory and Women's Writing

The issue of whether Woolf subscribes to a notion of equality between the sexes that is premised on sexual difference (men and women are ontologically different beings and thus have different needs and desires) or that relies on gender as construction (men and women are not ontologically different, but socially constructed as such—which is closely connected to Woolf's concept of androgyny) still stands at an impasse in current feminist theory (Jacobus 1986; Marcus 2010; Moi 1985; Showalter 2009; Solomon 1989) and is relevant to my discussion of online rooms and women's writing. Laura Marcus suggests that Woolf's "accounts of the difference of women's values, in literature and in life, are central to her writings but they are also open-ended, and more relativist than absolute" (2000, 212). Referencing Mary Jacobus, Marcus posits that for Woolf "women's writing, like sexual difference itself, becomes a question rather than an answer" (212). Woolf's position on sexual difference and the construction of gender, while ambiguous, inspires the following questions: Is cyberspace dependent upon sexual difference or is it an androgynous "room" where the writer freely lives? Are websites and chatrooms no longer sexually discriminating, having made realizable Woolf's sense of a space beyond gender? While online, one is typically not meeting another/

the other face to face. Does embodiment matter when one searches a website? Does cyberspace render discriminations premised on gender, race, and class that Woolf discusses obsolete or invisible?

Though online rooms, for example chatrooms, might intuitively appear as *tabulae rasae* for users (reminding us of Susan Gubar's description of how "woman has been defined symbolically in the patriarchy as a tabula rasa, a lack, a negation, an absence" [1985, 305–6]), a space for a Butlerian gender performativity or self-invention because there is no "physical" interaction, Lori Kendall insists that a body behind anonymity is still expected in online relationships, and that discriminations based on visibility (of race, class, disability, and gender) thus continue to persist (2002, 215). Rethinking the division between disembodied and embodied presence is further complicated by users taking up webcams or Skype video, for example; would Woolf, keeping her anger in check, use an androgynous pseudonym on Twitter and avoid using video conferencing or FaceTime?

Elaine Showalter argues that Woolf's recourse to the myth of androgyny "helped her to evade confrontation with her own painful femaleness and enabled her to choke and repress her anger and ambition" (2009, 216). Woolf, for example, accuses Lady Winchilsea of being forced to "anger and bitterness" (61) and Charlotte Brontë of an abrupt disturbance in *Jane Eyre* when she lets her anger seep in (73). At the same time, she herself lets the "black snake" (33) of anger in when she sketches a picture of the author of *The Mental, Moral, and Physical Inferiority of the Female Sex*. She writes that upon reading this ridiculous title, "Anger had snatched my pencil while I dreamt.… My heart had leapt. My cheek had burnt. I had flushed with anger" (33). Ellen Bayuk Rosenman reads Woolf as implying that "Brontë's anger disfigures her writing and that anger is a legitimate, essential source of female self-expression" (1995, 109). The same might also be said of Woolf's sketch of the professor, whose own anger, provoked by his attempting to protect his proclaimed superiority, makes her (as she is ashamed to admit?) angry as well (Woolf 36). Showalter, however, contends that "abstracted from its physicality and anger, denied any action, Woolf's vision of womanhood is as deadly as it is disembodied. The ultimate room of one's own is the grave" (2009, 243). That Woolf's room of one's own, dependent on an androgyny that avoids feminist political activism and confrontation, can be likened to woman's coffin by Showalter leads credence to Julie Solomon, who also holds Woolf in contempt for not angrily challenging the Beadle who waves her off the gravel path in Cambridge (1989, 335). There is, however, I argue, a salient anger that runs throughout, and even underneath, the essay and that drives it forward. Woolf's anger, I believe, does seep in—and is tied to the material realities of women's poverty and unequal status in all forms of life within patriarchy and made manifest in her act of writing the essay, which becomes the medium for her anger.

The debate between sexual difference and androgyny plays itself out in a very real way in terms of offline and online space, particularly given that Woolf, for some critics, upholds the status of male writers; in speaking of a generic writer she refers to "his experience" and "his mind" (103). Shakespeare is the ideal, and though Woolf's Shakespeare has an androgynous mind (97, 102), for Showalter this represents another instance of a flight from engaging with feminist anger (2009, 282). Solomon interprets Woolf's idealization of the male or androgynous writer in regards to Judith Shakespeare, claiming that for Woolf "Shakespeare's sister longs to follow in the footsteps of her brother" (1989, 335). Perhaps Woolf too wants to follow in these footsteps when she attempts to enter the library in order to read Charles Lamb (Woolf 9)? This act is strange given that Woolf claims, using imagery of spatial measurement, that for women writers "it is useless to go to the great men writers for help, however much one may go to them for pleasure. Lamb, Browne, Thackeray, Newman, Sterne, Dickens, De Quincey—whoever it may be—never helped a woman yet.… The weight, the pace, the stride of a man's mind are too unlike her own for her to lift anything substantial from

him successfully" (76). It is, however, possible to affirm that Woolf deconstructs sexual identity as defined in terms of a masculine/feminine dichotomy.

Woolf's concept of androgyny can be viewed as breaking down rigid barriers that work to keep women from "male" spaces (the university, wealth, science, literature of genius, and so on), and within spaces assigned to women (i.e., the home). She envisions a new space for gender; it is not "a flight from fixed gender identities, but a recognition of their falsifying metaphysical nature.... [Woolf] has understood that the goal of the feminist struggle must precisely be to deconstruct the death-dealing binary oppositions of masculinity and femininity" (Moi 1985, 13). For Mary Jacobus, as for Toril Moi, Woolf's androgyny engages with and negotiates difference (Jacobus 1986, 39; Moi 1985, 3, 9–10); it does not entail, as Laura Marcus points out, "a sublation into a unified, sex-transcendent holism" (2010, 164). Woolf, eager to reject rigid and falsifying definitions of femininity and masculinity as assigned to a specific sex, female or male, nevertheless clearly adheres to an ontological sexual difference that is instrumental in her writing and now can be redeployed in rethinking virtual spaces. While virtual space has the potential to challenge patriarchal sexual difference, like the unity of mind Woolf describes (87–88), presently the individual creators of this space, its users, and the predominantly Western culture that produces online spaces are determined by patriarchal practices to such an extent that it is difficult to conceive of virtual reality outside of, or beyond, these parameters. Thus no space, traditional or virtual, is gender-neutral. Online versions of women's magazines, for example *Cosmopolitan*, which disturbingly describes itself as "The Online Women's Magazine for Fashion, Sex Advice, Dating Tips and Celebrity News," suggest cyberspace is not androgynous, but an extension of sexual difference as defined by patriarchy. The masquerade it stages for women relies on a femininity as defined by masculine desire; its female participants "'envelop' themselves in the 'needs/desires/fantasies of men'" (Whitford 1991b, 77), which keep women in a subordinate and inferior position in relation and opposition to man and masculinity.

My reading of the online room as a virtual gendered space, dependent upon sexual difference, is supported by online publications and subject matter such as *Cosmopolitan*'s website. The existence of such strongly gendered content on the Internet motivates me to ask if the underlying online space, the virtual blank page, can itself be gendered? More specifically, are online spaces conceived as feminine because a patriarchal espisteme informs the Internet? Joan Acker, quoting from Sally Hacker's book *Pleasure, Power, and Technology* (1989), argues that "the pleasures of technology often become 'harnessed to domination, and passion becomes directed toward power over nature, the machine, and other people, particularly women, in the work hierarchy'" (Acker 1990, 153). Characterizing online space in general as feminine is justifiable if one correlates it to Western cultural symbolizations of nature as a mother and vice-versa and recalls feminist responses, both negative (conceptualists Denise Riley or Simone de Beauvoir, for example) and positive (ecofeminists such as Karen Warren or Noel Sturgeon), to this equation.[8] Do the "infinite" areas of the Internet map onto Western interpretations of nature and woman as inferior to cultural, rational *oikonomos* man? Is Woolf's blank sheet of paper "on which was written in large letters WOMEN AND FICTION" (27) the same as the Internet in its infinite white space, a feminine sphere, an artificial, man-made, passive "blank page," to use Gubar's term? Or are these blank spaces "products of the male imagination, objects created for the use of men" (Gubar 1985, 293), destined by masculine offline and online neo-imperialism and global capitalism to be conquered and manipulated? Is cyberspace the new frontier of space to be mastered under the rule of e-imperialism? Are we to think of online rooms as feminine spaces in terms of virtual reproduction, an artificial womb or *mater*iality, an electronic mother to "reproduction and sexuality and the biotechnical appropriation of procreation" (Braidotti 2011, 187) by

techno-savvy men? Gubar writes of the connections between the pen as a penis and the hymen as the page, explaining that "when the metaphors of literary creativity are filtered through a sexual lens, female sexuality is often identified with textuality" (1985, 294). What might be the new pen/penis of the digital age if the blank page is still the hymen?

Criticizing the Western tradition by means of spatial metaphors for its fear of woman's embodiment, Margaret Whitford, articulating Luce Irigaray's viewpoint, writes that "man needs to represent [woman] as a *closed* volume, a container, his desire is to immobilize her, keep her under his control, in his possession, even in his house. He needs to believe that the container belongs to him. The fear is of the 'open container'" (1991a, 28). Rosi Braidotti echoes this assessment when she writes, "Woman/mother is monstrous by excess: she transcends established norms and transgresses boundaries. She is monstrous by lack: woman/mother does not possess the substantive unity of the masculine subject … the indefinite, the ambiguous, the mixed, woman/mother is subjected to a constant process of metamorphization as 'other-than'" (228). Statistics on women's "lack" of both creative and practical involvement with computer technology and on their "lack" of power over the means of textual production would suggest this might be the case. As Acker asserts,

> claims to non-responsibility [by multinational companies] reinforce the underlying gender divisions between production and reproduction and the gendered understructure of capitalist production, as they continually relegate reproduction to the unpaid work of women or to the low-paid work of women in the for-profit economy. These gendered elements in fundamental capitalist processes are exacerbated in present globalizing changes. (2004, 30)

The first section of this paper suggested that in a global context women play little part in developing technology or even using it. However, women are clearly forming and reproducing the material basis for its development, which includes erratic and irregular work schedules, required overtime and enforced part-time labor, sexual exploitation and the threat of one's job being taken away and filled by cheaper labor at any moment, creating potentially political silence for fear of losing one's position, along with rivalry between women over limited resources.

In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf describes in encouraging terms a new potential space for women: the scientific or technological room. She depicts herself reading Mary Carmichael's fictitious novel, *Life's Adventure*, about two women scientists, Chloe and Olivia, who share a laboratory. Woolf writes that "these two young women were engaged in mincing liver, which is, it seems, a cure for pernicious anaemia" (83). Though Woolf laments that Carmichael does not go further in describing how Chloe liked Olivia within her novel, she commends her for showing the reader a glimpse into the lives of women not in the company of men. Woolf therefore encourages her female audience to take up where Carmichael has left off and to write as many books as possible on as many subjects as possible, including that of science. By doing so, women will "certainly profit the art of fiction. For books have a way of influencing each other" (107). The link Woolf makes between science and fiction is evident today in women's organizations such as the UN's Division for the Advancement of Women and other initiatives that work towards the goal of equality and empowerment of women through literacy. However, it remains clear that traditional literacy, let alone digital literacy, remains a challenge for many women, the Chloes and Olivias around the globe.

Woolf's concern about women's inequality to men, particularly in terms of physical spaces, technology, education, earnings, and writing, is thus pertinent to the virtual room of the twenty-first century. The 2009 factsheet published by the Women's Learning Partnership (WLP) confirms that there is both a gender divide and a digital divide simultaneously and globally working against women's interests. While the challenge,

undertaken by Woolf, of encouraging women to pursue technological and scientific jobs in North America and Europe was difficult in her time, it remains considerable now (as reports like Heidi Seybert's on the European Union [2007] articulate), and more so in non-Western countries.[9] In addition to the problem of women not entering computer-related fields, the percentage of women using the Internet and computers for either personal or professional use remains low globally. While it is quite high for Western countries— for example, in the EU27 65% of women use the Internet at least once a week (Seybert 2011, 3)—the WLP factsheet claims, with regard to Muslim-majority countries, that only 4% of Arab women use the Internet and that Moroccan women represent almost a third of this figure.[10] Also necessary today in this discussion of the woman writer and her access to a writing room, as espoused by Woolf, is the consideration of that room containing a computer connected to the Internet. In most African nations, for example, such connection is not a widely available commodity: the average cost of a local dial-up Internet account for 20 hours a month in Africa is about $60, compared to $22 a month in the US, where the average monthly salary is $3,945, while the average African monthly salary is less than $60 (WLP 2009).

As mentioned previously, and intimated by Woolf in her descriptions of patriarchal sexual difference (which privileges man as superior in relation and in opposition to woman), there are some strong indicators as to why women on a global scale are not partaking equally in using or producing technology. Acker argues that "in today's organizing for globalization, we can see the emergence of a hegemonic hyper-masculinity that is aggressive, ruthless, competitive, and adversarial" (2004, 30) and that "the new dominant growth sectors, information technology, biotech innovation, and global finance, are all heavily male-dominated, although women fill some of the jobs in the middle and at the bottom, as is usual in many old economy sectors" (32). Woolf anticipates this argument when she discusses picking up an English newspaper. She claims that anyone reading this paper could "not fail to be aware, even from this scattered testimony, that England is under the rule of a patriarchy.... His was the power and the money and the influence. He was the proprietor of the paper and its editor and sub-editor" (35). It is not a coincidence that Acker names Rupert Murdoch, Phil Knight, and Bill Gates as leaders in these growth sectors; with the exception of Knight, a direct link of these men to computer technology and the circulation of offline and online texts is manifest.

Research by US Aid (2012) also supports the contention that technology is often seen as "male" and invented or designed by men for male pleasure and for the furthering of men's interests. One illustration of this is the online sex industry, which reaps $57 billion in revenue worldwide. Twelve billion dollars of this revenue generates from the US and equals "more than all combined revenues of all professional football, baseball, and basketball franchises or the combined revenues of ABC, CBS, and NBC (6.2 billion)" (Bissette 2004).[11] Certainly women do visit sex-oriented websites as well, but the majority of these statistics comprise male Internet users (given the association of the word "user" with exploitation, the term itself is troubling). Though Woolf herself did not foresee this continuation of the sexual divide in technology (one might consider women's romance novels as a counterpart to male pornography), her thinking supports the position that the Internet (often conceived as a masculine or disembodied social trend) is embedded in gendered materiality. Pornography on the Internet, invading the virtual room through the visually explicit subjugation of women, operates along heterosexual male-oriented parameters and psychological barriers, further deterring women from an authentic Woolfian space, let alone body, of their own. By successfully obscuring women's oppression, the virtual room feels "bodiless" when, of course, it is really all body; there is a materiality to digital texts, a real embodied presence—a version of Woolf's Judith—behind every image. Thus, the currently prevalent form of Woolf's virtual room of one's own challenges epistemological assumptions about the disembodied nature of the digital text.

In addition to the challenge of creating online spaces for women writers and the perception of technology as male, women involved with technology often perceive themselves or are perceived as less sexually desirable (Kendall 2002, 88). Lori Kendall notes that in developing countries further determents include expensive training materials and inconvenient times and locations that work against women's schedules, particularly for women with children. Internet public-access points, such as telecenters and cybercafés, are sometimes considered inappropriate spaces for women and girls, thus additionally reinforcing the divide between the private and the public, women and men, physical (body) and virtual (mind) that Woolf resisted. The US Aid report (2012) argues, in reference to developing countries, that

> Entrepreneurial success is positively correlated with business tools such as Microsoft Excel, accounting software, and access to banking and capital. Women's relative unfamiliarity with these tools means they are at a disadvantage when managing their businesses. Women's physical access to training and encouragement to learn how to use computers, especially for business usage, is much lower than that of men.

The issue of women's access to public spaces, as discussed by Woolf in terms of the library and chapel, remains a reality for women's writing today. Moreover, as the report notes, women often do not have their own personal computer and thus rely on male family or community members to use the technology on their behalf.

Another hindrance to the number of women writing and publishing, online and offline, is that much of the text on Internet sites is in one of four of the major world languages: English, Chinese, Arabic, and Spanish (US Aid 2012). While the Internet might be considered by some as an open-plan space, without boundaries, both in the online realm and when it comes to publishing books, national and linguistic divisions, as Woolf also reminds us, function like walls and clearly discriminate. According to Louis Gereaux (2010), "the top seven countries which publish books in order are Great Britain, the United States, China, the Russian Federation, Germany, Spain, and Iran. After Iran, the number of titles per country is less than 50,000 per year." Gereaux notes that "most of the books published in each country are written in their own language for their native speakers." Thus women writers looking for publication, in hard copy and more likely now online, with a global readership, will need to be translated if they do not write in one of the world's major languages.[12] In relation to publication, and given the immense number of texts freely available online (for example through Google Books), perhaps the most urgent and pressing issues, not only for women's writing but for writers in general, are those of copyright protection, competitive pricing for online books, and fair payment to writers who choose not to publish their work in open-access forums but do so commercially.

Statistics on adult literacy, digital access, and computer usage by women in developing nations can be changed by supporting women's organizations that are committed to creating spaces and the means for women to write. Focusing on an economy of sexual difference outside of and beyond patriarchal discourses is imperative, because patriarchal societies like Woolf's and our own technology-driven one "have vested interests in distorting the terms of the differences" (Marcus 2010, 153). Thus Woolf does not reject sexual difference so much as she does the exploitation of difference that works in favor of patriarchal practices and imprisons women in subordinate and inferior positions to men. One strategy adopted by agencies and indigenous feminisms, which Woolf anticipates with her invention of Chloe and Olivia's laboratory, is to better acquaint women with technology. For example, the Women's Networking Support Programme of the Association for Progressive Communications (2012), Africawoman, and US Aid (2012) encourage young women to overcome, as Woolf suggests we must, the sexual and digital division of labor. Such organizations aim to claim a space for women online in order to raise awareness related to women's issues and concerns, such as politics, education, government programs, health, and AIDS (Alden 2004). Africawoman, for

instance, operates online and through community radio, bringing together women journalists from ten different African countries (Alden 2004).

It is often difficult for feminists to discern when and which traditions are oppressive. Nonetheless, important feminist initiatives in terms of rethinking spaces and rooms have been undertaken toward implementing change for women, for example granting greater access to non-traditionally gendered labor roles, including those that involve working with technology. I believe it is imperative that women work collaboratively across the boundaries of race, class, and nationhood in order to create meaningful material rooms for themselves offline, but perhaps even more importantly online. While differing in approaches, feminists tend to agree that women's exclusion from cultural spaces has been the result of the objectification and domination of nature and women under patriarchal scientism and that such past and continuing practices cannot be ignored. How feminists enter into these cultural spaces is also a concern, and as Woolf's words about the library, gravel path, and chapel invoke, women must confront the politics of the network of web pages as a new room, a new border, even a new frontier for women's writing. To repeat, Woolf argues that "fiction is like a spider's web, attached ever so lightly perhaps, but still attached to life at all four corners. Often the attachment is scarcely perceptible" (43). That one can sit on a beach in Brazil and write a novel, or be sitting directly across from you (wherever you are) writing the same novel is irrelevant. Both acts no longer require the typewriter, or the even more obsolete pen and paper, but merely a device with access to the Internet. Who needs to stroll the Cambridge grounds to the library when with a simple "www" one can be there, or in any library, instantaneously? The visibility of the physical world becomes further and further removed the deeper we go into cyberspace, making it easy to forget, not care, or be ignorant of the women who make such privileged delving possible.

Woolf's retort to Cambridge, "Lock up your libraries if you like; but there is no gate, no lock, no bolt that you can set upon the freedom of my mind" (76), might seem irrelevant today because the physical barriers she speaks of are simply no longer there. But if we rethink the "library" in conjunction with the statistics provided earlier, as the realm of the virtual and, more specifically, as a feminine virtual space controlled and operated by men, which we daily explore for access to information, dictionaries, and sources of reference, we know that neither women at large nor women writers in particular have achieved global equality. A quick look at winners of the Nobel Prize for Literature between 1945 and 1966 reveals no female recipients, and between 1966 and 2010 there were only six female winners, intimating that Judith's success is still far in the distance.[13] These six women add up to a mere thirteen percent of all winners. Likewise, according to the Barnes and Noble's list of "Year's Best Reading: Editors' Picks" in fiction for 2011, seven of the top ten books were written by men, while nine of the top ten books on "Amazon's 100 Best Books of 2011" are by male authors. With regard to other forms of publishing, in a recent online article Meghan O'Rourke (2011) argues that there is a surprising scarcity of women writers publishing in literary magazines such as *The Atlantic* or *The New Yorker*. O'Rourke, citing the informative website *VIDA: Women in the Literary Arts*, suggests that its "study raises questions about how *seriously* women writers are taken and how viable it is for them to make a living at writing. As we all know, small rewards and affirmations have a concrete but unquantifiable effect on one's writing life. So does silence." Woolf, a writer who should have won the Nobel Prize, like her successors such as Alice Walker or Margaret Atwood, is not permitted to follow in the steps of successful male authors.

Seeking an economy of sexual difference that overcomes patriarchal male authorship, calculation, and ownership in favor of reciprocity and by acknowledging a maternal genealogy based on spatial metaphors, such as Woolf encourages, is well supplemented by Luce Irigaray's insightful essay, "Women-Amongst-

Themselves: Creating a Woman-to-Woman Sociality." Envisioning a space, perhaps an online one, where women can collectively join together—where, in Woolf's terms, Chloe and Olivia in their shared laboratory subvert male relationships—Irigaray takes up Woolf's thinking in her discussion of *affidamento*. *Affidamento* entails women joining together in shared values but without reducing their individuality to a universal concept of "woman." Irigaray further warns against current technology or technocracy, suggesting *affidamento* would operate despite and against "the current reign of technocracy and its often abstract, cold ... and weak rationality" (1991, 193). Irigaray also argues that she as a woman, like Woolf before her, is "physically and mentally somewhat alien to the technocratic 'paradise' and its almost fatal hold over its workers ... [but] that is not to say that women are incapable of entering technocratic society. On the contrary! They can enter it more easily than an economy which demands, for example, more muscular strength, more warlike courage" (195). The problem is not in women entering into technology but in how women relate to this new environment and what transformations, if any, they can make within the patriarchal structure that attempts to both neutralize sexual difference and employ for its own benefit (for example, by reducing women to sex, paying women workers less, or offering them more "flexible" working hours).

To reiterate, I take from Woolf's essay not only the requirement for a room in the traditional sense, a physical space with four walls, but the ever-increasing inclusion today of virtual spaces (websites contained within four virtual walls) created by women for women. Claiming a virtual room of women's own will involve combating techno-patriarchy through e-feminism. This e-feminism, imbued with an ethos of care, would reevaluate the link between textuality and sexuality, and women's access to and use of technology and online space, leading toward fair-trade technology. Ecofeminist Karen Warren suggests that a transformative feminism "would promote values and social processes (such as care, friendship, reciprocity in relationships, appropriate trust, diversity) underplayed or lost in traditional ... ethics; and it would challenge masculinist versions of science and technology" (1987, 18–20). An example of such e-feminist projects, indebted to an updating and expansion of Woolf's position to include a virtual space of one's own, is the recent e-book *Women's Work* (2012), edited by Clare Strahan. *Women's Work* is an innovative collection of short stories written by emerging Australian women writers; its purpose is to recognize women's writing as making invaluable contributions to fiction, and thus warranting a wider reading audience, more critical reviews, and better promotional marketing, both offline and online. E-feminist e-books have the potential to provide women writers with a much needed online platform or space of their own.

Related to the publishing of feminist e-books is the major obstacle that Woolf's essay names: the practical and thus economical aspect of writing. One project designed to combat elitist writing, and which works to include women from the developing world in a meaningful way, is sponsored by the International Information Centre and Archives for the Women's Movement and described as a "Knowledge-Sharing Product" in the organization's "Annual Report: Effective E-Feminism Project 2005" (IIAV 2006). The report states that in 2005 IIAV ran two simultaneous projects: 1) a training program to improve women's experiences and involvement with technology in Serbia and Montenegro, Bulgaria, Macedonia, and the Czech Republic; and 2) an information dissemination program entitled Digitall Future (2). Believing that in order to hold a job and be competitive in the job market one must be computer-literate (9), this feminist organization identified lack of funding as one of the major obstacles to women's technology. Attempting to raise funds for the women who need them most, the website presents the first of the above two projects in the following terms:

> WITT [Women in Trades and Technology] aims to strengthen civil society, the women's movement, women's organizations and those that work towards gender equality and democratic development through the use of

appropriate ICTs. WITT follows similar principles as how we envision the Internet: free, open, transparent, inclusive, and active. (13)

WITT's contributions to the "E-Feminism Project 2005," especially in terms of free software, not-for-profit legal advice, technical support, creation of local and transnational networks, and "providing accessible information and documentation on issues related to specific questions concerning women and the organisations in which they work" (70), exemplify the kind of materialist feminism that Woolf believed was needed for the women writers of Newnham and Girton colleges and that is now necessary for online spaces.

E-feminist projects thus approach technology differently and might continue to do so in the following ways in regards to women's writing: 1) reconceptualizing the subject or observer (moving away from terminology such as "user" and focusing more specifically on the politics and economics of embodiment in terms of race, nationality, culture, class, religion, and sexuality); 2) designating gendered spaces (for example, for women to be educated by women only); and 3) encouraging subject-object interaction, including the aim to create a visible identity for women writers in the face of discrimination and sexism. Questions about materiality and how for-profit and non-profit organizations can rethink non-capitalistic links and provide safe spaces for women offline and online are both a challenge and a necessary precondition to the success of any e-feminist project. How can knowledge be exchanged, how can women's and men's attitudes about women and technology change to one of serious political and social engagement, and not simply reproduction and/ or consumption?

In addition, how might women collectively and transnationally voice the need to work for individuals and companies that organize technological skills training and provide equal access to computer labs and information-technology resources, including the right to both traditional and digital literacy programs? Irigaray posits this kind of thinking by asking, in the same terms in which Woolf envisioned "room" as a separate space for oneself, how women will be able to constitute a "shelter or territory of one's own. How are we to construct this female shelter, this territory in difference?" (Woolf 196). Irigaray's quest is suggested by Woolf when she writes about novelists Jane Austen and Emily Brontë as the only writers who possessed genius and integrity against external authority because, "in the face of all that criticism, in the midst of that purely patriarchal society … they wrote as women write, not as men write" (75). Thus Woolf lauds sexual difference that encourages different economies and takes patriarchy and, I suggest, capitalist patriarchy as the dominant force which must be overcome by women collectively and communally in rethinking a room of one's own, both in terms of traditional materiality and, as e-feminists, with regard to the materiality of virtual spaces.

Tracy Seeley argues that Woolf perceives patriarchy in terms of spatial power and desires. When women define their own subjectivity, she claims, "such incandescence does not mean that women will stop thinking as women, though they will no longer think of themselves as patriarchy does" (2007, 39). Seeley's suggestion for reading Woolf allows one to see sexual difference, once again, as a mode for overcoming the rigid constraints of femininity and masculinity as defined by patriarchy. The US Aid (2012, section "How to Address Gender in ICT Projects") and Natasha Primo in *Gender Issues in the Information Society* (2003, 40, 62, 67–75) recognize such feminist theories and provide some examples of a collective praxis to match, which entails understanding that women in developing nations might embrace and benefit from technology more when it comes from another woman, for instance through renting Internet or telephone time. Training programs aimed at women that offer advice on spreadsheets, e-mail, and management tools, and encompass distance-learning training by other women, are invaluable. Access to safe spaces for free computer time, libraries, and reading rooms, as well as free computer programs, such as those offered by

community centers set up by the Réseau Femmes en Action (Women in Action) network in Burkina Faso, are likewise necessary (Cayré 2011).

Though Woolf testified to patriarchal divisions between materiality and immateriality, man and woman, and body and mind when she strolled the grounds of Cambridge gathering ideas for her lecture, the woman *flâneur* of today can be read in terms of an online engagement with writing as she surfs the web. Maria Bakardjieva argues that an online setting can serve as a social space, particularly for those with an illness, those who are retired, unemployed, suffering from marriage problems, dissatisfaction with work, relocation, those who have globally spread family and friends, or perhaps those who are simply seeking advice or information and want a sense of belonging to an online community, for instance Facebook or Twitter, that is not realized in their everyday lives (2005, 118). In a sense, online spaces can potentially alleviate the loneliness and isolation private rooms create. Free blogs and sites such as YouTube also allow women to access a world audience in a way never before possible. In an ironic way, technology, which does much to discourage women from engaging with it, can also be used as a tool for widespread criticism of multinational corporations and the effects of capitalism, including technological advances that have direct effects on the lived experiences of women. It can be a means for critiquing capitalism's so-called freeing of women from the home only to enslave them in public work that operates, and must do so necessarily, on the principle of gender and racial inequality. Thus it is a way for women to gain visibility and a voice they might not otherwise be able to raise against cultural and political injustices, not to mention abuses by their own governments; one might think here of the much-publicized case of Sakineh Mohammadi Ashtiani, who was condemned to be stoned to death by the Iranian government. Ashtiani's case, like so many others, would not have received the media attention it did had not the Internet been used as the primary communication medium to spread the story.

Perhaps through engaging in employment-related and social programs, women worldwide will be able to access education, the Internet, and wordprocessing software, and proceed to write. To express this hope is not to discredit or diminish the merit of already acclaimed women writers from "developing" countries, such as Claribel Alegría, Djenar Maesa Ayu, Amma Darko, Mahasweta Devi, Laura Esquivel, Célestine Hitiura, Vaite, Yvonne Vera, and many others. But what would it be like to write a short story, a poem, or a novel in a computer lab, or on a shared computer in the community? What would a woman's room in a non-capitalist patriarchy look like? Such questions connect back with Woolf when she imagines Jane Austen writing her celebrated tales and creating what Drucilla Cornell names as "the imaginary domain" and "the space of the as if" (1998, 8): "the imaginary domain demands that we lift the prohibitions that prevent us from freeing ourselves" (190). The power of the imagination is expressed by Woolf many times and poses a real threat to a masculine economy; thus we must ask how a woman can reimagine herself as a writer and her relationship with technology after "having been colonized by the male imaginary" (Braidotti 2011, 101)?[14] Woolf's view claims that if imperialist patriarchal culture and its obsession with space does not change, women's writing will remain paradoxically both uncontainable and boxed in (as happens, for example, with the proliferation of chick-lit in today's bookstores). She further mentions Austen writing in her common sitting room, which can be compared with women plagued by interruptions in the communal computer room. Woolf's feminist philosophy nonetheless signals hope for would-be women writers of today. All that is needed is digital literacy and a computer of one's own.

On the one hand, the room is physical, a space between four solid walls, but it is also a free psychic and utopian space of the imagination, a virtual room, which I believe Woolf conceives of in materialist terms. Though I have pointed to the material limits of women in developing nations in terms of physical

and practical access to the Internet, it is also important to see the political value of online tools. Writing online can be a catalyst or way for women to write their lived experiences and gain an identity and visibility outside of their everyday lives. The diverse stories of women, historical references, and statistics provided by Margaret Higonnet (1994) and the UN Women website, to name just two sources, confirm that rooms, both virtual and physical, cannot, nor ever do, exist in isolation. A room, any room, is anchored to the stuff of life and can be a prison as well as means to an escape, the complexity of which is brought to the forefront when Woolf imagines Austen sitting in a common room, Brontë looking solemnly out over the empty fields, and her own self gazing out her London window at the streets below.[15] A containing and confining, limiting and at the same time freeing, a freedom from trespassers while trespassing on patriarchal territory, are all suggested by the meaning of a room. Woolf suggests it is possible to shut one's self off and away, to temporarily experience a privacy that Austen or women in poverty arguably rarely experience, but that it cannot last.[16]

This brings me back to the original discussion of a contemporary online "room" and of how Woolf's modernist approach is still relevant to the twenty-first century in terms of both traditional rooms and online spaces. While the physical limits Woolf discussed in 1929 remain a reality for many women in the world, feminists can no longer ignore the material effects of virtual rooms. When a room is wired to the outside world and provides instant access to our families and strangers simultaneously, it is time to rethink Woolf's feminist notion of a room to encompass the virtual; it is time for e-feminism(s). One could even imagine Woolf, now, not sitting and writing letters but typing e-mails on her laptop, and of course in my imaginary domain Woolf would be Facebook friends with Claribel Alegría, Djenar Maesa Ayu, and Amma Darko. Woolf's encouraging words, thus, should not be forgotten: "I maintain that she [Judith Shakespeare] would come if we worked for her, and that so to work, even in poverty and obscurity is worth while" (112). Is this the new motto for the how and why of women's writing in twenty-first-century globalized world? I believe it is, and that a displacing or disruption of patriarchal hierarchies between private and public, mind and body, feminine and masculine, offline and online, physical and virtual, as I have argued throughout this article, is necessary from a materialist feminist perspective. Woolf's lectures show the tenuous and fragile nature of patriarchal capitalism's limits, constructed prejudices, and oppressions, but also their inherent susceptibility to resistance and trespassing. For this reason, Woolf continues to this day, in the era of virtual rooms and e-feminism, to engage and encourage women to wander, muse, and most importantly, to write.

Notes

1. Though feminists have written extensively on Woolf's traditional concept of a room, the notion of a virtual room remains unexplored. Curiously, neither Kerstin W. Shands's thorough *Embracing Space: Spatial Metaphors in Feminist Discourse* (1999), which argues that "the spatial boundaries affecting, defining, or determining women's lives are thus both material and metaphorical, involving both the literal, concrete confinement of women in actual domestic space and conditions that are measurable in society at large, that is, legal and economic forms of discrimination that keep woman in certain spaces" (63), mentions virtual space, nor does *Reconfigured Spheres: Feminist Explorations of Literary Space* (1994), edited by Margaret R. Higonnet and Joan Templeton. Brenda R. Silver connects *A Room of One's Own* to hypertexts in "Virginia Woolf://hypertext" (2001), but does not link the idea of a room with a virtual space.

2. African-American writer Alice Walker traces Woolf's notions of a female tradition in "In Search of Our Mother's

Gardens" (1983). Walker, however, revises Woolf by considering race. As Ellen Bayuk Rosenman claims, "there will be both common ground and divergence in the experiences of black and white women writers.... Walker says that the standards of white women have masqueraded as universal ones for women, absorbing or marginalizing the works of African-Americans just as British [Western capitalist] patriarchy silences women" (1995, 115). Walker's claim can also be updated and developed to include not only African-American writers but all non-white women writers.

3. For an excellent discussion of women's lives within globalization that supports many of the claims I make here, see Joan Acker's article, "Gender, Capitalism and Globalization" (2004). On women's work from a global perspective, see Kim England and Victoria Lawson's chapter, "Feminist Analyses of Work: Rethinking the Boundaries, Gendering, and Spaciality of Work," in *A Companion to Feminist Geography* (2005).

4. "Developing," it must be noted, is not necessarily the right word because it prompts questions such as "Developing towards what?" The term implies that the Western capitalist world is the standard all nations should strive to emulate. Nonetheless, this essay will refer to "developing" countries, albeit cautiously, since feminism itself is often defined as developing social change by opening up for women opportunities that are reserved for men under the regime of patriarchal exclusion. This paper also resists aligning with the notion of gender equality whereby "men" signify, in parallel with the "first world," the ideal standard that women should strive to imitate.

5. Woolf, however, never considers the direct correlation between women's illiteracy and poverty, because she speaks to the privileged women of Newnham and Girton College who do not even themselves have equal funds, opportunities, or support when compared to men. Though, presumably, when Woolf speaks of the privilege to write she likewise implies the freedom to read, the "we" being privileged readers.

6. A recent collection of essays on this subject is *Poor Women in Rich Countries*: *The Feminization of Poverty over the Life Course* (2010), edited by Gertrude Schaffner Goldberg.

7. The idea that women workers in developing countries are strongly affected by this ideology of consumption is suggested by the World Bank (2009), which reports that women constitute around 60-80% of the export manufacturing workforce in the developing world.

8. As early as Plato's *Timaeus* and Aristotle's *On the Generation of Animals*, women and nature were associated as objects of both passivity and formless matter in contrast to man's activity and form. This traditional view, or logos, later furthered by Descartes's rationalism in *Meditations* and Bacon's "domination over creation," solidified a shared history between nature and woman and justified woman's so-called natural inferiority and man's natural and cultural superiority.

9. In "Gender Differences in the Use of Computers and the Internet," a recent (2007) report completed for the European Union, Heidi Seybert demonstrates that more men than women use a computer and the Internet in all age groups. While the difference in the number of users between men and women is not great, particularly between the ages of 16 and 24, the number of "Chloes and Olivias" employed in computer-related jobs in the European Union is low, at just 0.7% compared with men at 2.6% (Seybert 2007, 6).

10. Internet World Stats (Miniwatts Marketing Group 2012) supports the WLP's (2009) findings and indicates that Africa accounts for 6.2% of the world's Internet use, though it has roughly the same population as Europe, which accounts for 22.1% of Internet use.

11. David C. Bissette claims that in 2004 pornography on the web accounted for 25% of all searches, 12% of all websites were pornographic, and child pornography generated $3 billion annually, seemingly proving Gunther Kress's assertion that we have moved from a society dominated by writing to a society dominated by image (2004, 1). Bissette also claims that 90% of eight- to sixteen-year-olds have viewed porn online (most while doing homework), the average age of first Internet exposure to pornography is eleven, and the largest consumer population of Internet pornography is

between twelve and seventeen years of age.

12. Susan Sniader Lanser discusses this problem of translation and excluding, for example, African and Polynesian literatures from comparative literature syllabi, anthologies, and canons in her article "Compared to What?" Lanser, drawing on Woolf, advocates instead a global feminist comparative literature (2004, 298) and questions why comparative literature has resisted both feminism and the global (287).

13. Woolf suggests it will be another century before the likes of Judith Shakespeare appear on the literary scene (112), but she does not clarify which literary scene it will be. One can only assume she means English or English-speaking and writing women.

14. Maureen McNeil argues in *Feminist Cultural Studies of Science and Technology* that by the 1990s there were two separate feminist camps in technoscience: "successor science" associated with Sandra Harding and cyberfeminism strategized by Donna Haraway, which, according to Judith Squires, forgets "both the exploitative and alienating potential of technology and retreats into the celebration of essential, though disembodied woman" (McNeil 2007, 143). How technoscience influences or relates to women's writing, however, is not explored, though it could make for a fruitful dialogue. For further discussion of the threat of a maternal imagination to patriarchy, see Rosi Braidotti's Chapter 8, "Mothers, Monsters, and Machines," in *Nomadic Subjects*.

15. Woolf claims that Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* was written in a single sitting room and rationalizes that it would be easier to write a novel under these circumstances than poetry or a play, because less concentration is required for novel writing (67). She also notes that for Austen, who would have presumably been plagued by interruptions, these interruptions actually served her art. Austen felt "at home" in writing about feelings and observing character (68). While she felt at home writing in her bustling common sitting room, there was also "the narrowness of life that was imposed upon her. It was impossible for a woman to go about alone. She never travelled; she never drove through London in any omnibus or had luncheon in a shop by herself" (68–69). Brontë, in contrast, is believed by Woolf to long for a public life, a longing that becomes evident to her when she takes *Jane Eyre* from a library shelf and reads: "And I read how Jane Eyre used to go up on to the roof when Mrs. Fairfax was making jellies and looked over the fields at the distant view. And then she longed—and it was for this that they blamed her—that 'then I longed for a power of vision which might overpass that limit; which might reach the busy world, towns, regions full of life I had heard of but never seen: that then I desired more of practical experience than I possessed; more of intercourse with my kind, of acquaintance with variety of character than was here within my reach'" (69).

16. Women with "mental illnesses" were typically shut off and relegated to the home in Woolf's time, as Elaine Showalter (2009) claims. Thus Woolf, who underwent treatment by Dr. Mitchell, the same doctor who "treated" Charlotte Perkins Gilman, was confined to her home with no exercise or intellectual stimulation. See also Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's discussion of women's illnesses, the anxiety of authorship, and a female writing tradition (though criticized for referring to woman and patriarchy as a universal and for not including any non-white writers) in *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*.

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