

Rossana Bonadei

Virginia Woolf.
In the nerves of writing



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Preface

Be by your one ghost pierced, his pointed ferrule,
 Brass and the bodiless image, on a stick of folly...
 (Dylan Thomas, "I, in my intricate image")

C.S. Newinson's "Amongst the Nerves of the World" – a painting that shows the London of 1936 as an intricate tangle of streets – has inspired the title of this book, whose main concern is that very Modernity and whose ambition is to uncover some of its "nerves", choosing literary writing as a privileged observatory.

"Writing" – namely the intricate tangle of Virginia Woolf's writing – is our field of analysis, where we trace the linguistic, epistemic, aesthetic negotiations that bear witness to a turning point, a shift that Virginia Woolf herself, maybe too imperiously, located around 1910. Since then and for decades to come a number of different artists – mainly writers and painters – would be engaged in intellectual challenges and avant-garde announcements, later recognized as the features of Modernism, with the aim to foreground an "awareness" of modernity, somehow felt as a destination.

Virginia Woolf was perfectly in tune with this kind of writing, conceived as a 'manifesto', performed as a laboratory, as a meta-literary act and – in the words that John Hillis Miller applied to certain writings of modernity – as a "constitutive agency".

Critics have widely acknowledged that most of Woolf's essays seem designed to work like wedges: like provocative frag-