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Female Mode of Urban Rambling in Virginia Woolf's "Street Haunting: A London Adventure"

Virginia Woolf'un "Street Haunting: A London Adventure" Denemesinde Şehirde Dolaşmanın Kadın Biçimi

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Abstract

This article explores Virginia Woolf's 1927 essay "Street Haunting: A London Adventure" and its depiction of female *flânerie* in the city. It begins by observing the importance of place in literary studies and the shift towards a "spatial turn" in contemporary scholarship. The text then examines the role of the city in modernist literature, particularly in shaping its settings, narratives, and themes. It also overviews the main ideas of some of the pioneers of that "spatial turn" such as Henri Lefebvre and Yi-Fu Tuan. It is suggested that Woolf's essay offers a unique perspective on *flânerie* as she navigates the city streets with a sense of introspection and emotional resonance. Woolf's observations of urban landscape and encounters with strangers allow her to create a rich texture of potential narratives reflecting the complexities of everyday urban life. The present study also discusses Michel de Certeau's theory of walking as a tactical-rhetorical act of resistance and meaning-making, and it highlights the relevance of de Certeau's ideas to Woolf's essay. The article proposes that, unlike the figure of the male *flâneur*, Woolf's *flânerie* is not only about detached observation of the crowds and her surroundings, but also about authorship as she uses her affects and experiences in the city to inform her writing. Overall, Woolf's portrayal of the *flâneuse* challenges traditional notions of public space and emphasizes the ways in which women's experiences redefine the urban environment and its representations.
Keywords: Virginia Woolf, Michel de Certeau, flânerie, flâneuse, the city, modernist literature, phenomenological place.

Öz

Bu makale, Virginia Woolf'un 1927 tarihli "Street Haunting: A London Adventure" başlıklı denemesini ve buradaki aylak kent gezginliğinin *(flânerie)* kadına özgü tasvirini ele almaktadır. Makalenin başında edebiyat çalışmalarında mekânın önemi ve güncel akademik incelemelerde gözlemlenen ve "mekânsal dönüş" adı verilen değişim kaydedilmektedir. Ardından, şehirlerin modernist edebiyattaki rolüne, özellikle de bu akıma mensup metinlerdeki yer ve zamanları, anlatı özelliklerini ve temaları şekillendirmedeki etkisine değinilmektedir. Ayrıca, Henri Lefebvre ve Yi-Fu Tuan gibi "mekânsal dönüş"ün öncüleri arasında yer alan isimlerin temel fikirlerine genel bir bakış

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sunulmaktadır. Çalışmada Woolf'un denemesinin aylak kent gezginliği üzerine benzersiz bir yaklaşım sergilediği, yazarın şehir sokaklarında bir içe bakış ve duygusal derinlik hissiyle dolaştığı öne sürülmektedir. Woolf'un şehir manzarasına dair gözlemleri ve şehirdeki yabancılarla karşılaşmaları, günlük yaşamın olanca karmaşıklığını yansıtan zengin bir potansiyel anlatı dokusu yaratmasına olanak tanımaktadır. Bu çalışmada ayrıca Michel de Certeau'nun yürümeyi bir tür taktiksel-retorik direniş ve anlam yaratma edimi olarak ortaya koyduğu kuramı tartışılmakta ve de Certeau'nun fikirlerinin Woolf'un denemesiyle ilişkisi öne çıkarılmaktadır. Woolf'un aylak kent gezginliği, erkek "flanör" figüründen farklı olarak yalnızca şehir kalabalığının ve çevrenin mesafeli biçimde gözlemlenmesiyle ilgili değildir, aynı zamanda yazarlığa dair bir yön de barındırmaktadır zira Woolf, şehirde dolanırken yaşadığı duyguları ve deneyimleri yazdıklarına yansıtmaktadır. Bu incelemede esas olarak Woolf'un kadın aylak kent gezgini (flanöz) tasvirinin geleneksel kamusal alan anlayışlarına meydan okuduğu, kadınların deneyimlerinin kentsel çevreyi ve bu çevrenin temsillerini yeniden tanımladığı vurgulanmaktadır.
Anahtar sözcükler: Virginia Woolf, Michel de Certeau, aylak kent gezginliği, flanöz, şehir, modernist edebiyat, fenomenolojik mekân.

Introduction: Space, Place, and the City in Modernist Literature

In all three main literary genres, the notion of place bears great significance as it conditions a wide range of reading practices in understanding characters, narrators or speakers, themes, plots, and figures of speech featured in a text. While place situates a work of literature within a specific geographical and cultural milieu, it may also symbolize or converge in that same text a variety of broader social, political, and historical significances. Analyzing the ways in which place is utilized in literature should yield richer interpretations and better-informed appraisals of literary works.

Acknowledging the centrality of the idea of place in research on literary spatiality, Eric Prieto observes that in the long history of literary studies of place, scholars have either concentrated on particular locations in literature such as the Lake District or Venice, on specific kinds of places such as wilderness or towns, on authors connected with specific places such as Hardy or Muir, or on certain place-based genres or modes of writing such as the pastoral or urban literature (2017, p. 60). Studies that have adopted such approaches often use a phenomenological definition of place that reveals an awareness of the generative interaction between individuals and places, and they examine the latter as they are experienced by the people inhabiting them. Emphasizing the need to build "a strong 'sense of place,' i.e., a sense of that place's uniqueness and value," this phenomenological notion favors the kind of relationships called *topophilia*, suggesting an affective link between a person and a place which gives way to diverse meanings (Prieto, 2017, p. 60).

Literary modernism, on the other hand, is well-known for its strong attentiveness to the city, that privileged site of modernity and the subjectivizing milieu of modern individuals and collectives. Cities and the urban experience play a pivotal role in shaping the settings, narratives, characters, voices, symbols, and the thematic concerns of modernist world literature. Malcolm Bradbury encapsulates the centrality of metropolises and urban life to modernism in his now classic observation that modernist literature "which emerged in the last years of the nineteenth century (…) was an art of cities, especially of the polyglot cities which, for various historical reasons, had acquired high activity and great reputation as centers of intellectual and cultural exchange" (1976, p. 96). This remark about the cosmopolitanism of the modern city and its impact on modernism is also shared by such prominent critics as Raymond Williams who states that "there are decisive links between the practices and ideas of the avant-garde movements of the twentieth century and the specific conditions and relationships of the twentieth-century metropolis," and Hugh Kenner for whom cosmopolitanism is the sole emblem of modernist literature that composes "a story of capitals" (cited in Tseng, 2006, p. 220).

Next to being a melting pot of diverse cultures, ideas, and languages, the modern city is the locus of industrialization, bureaucratization, money economy, rapid technological developments and social transformations. As such, Alfred Döblin's Berlin, James Joyce's Dublin, Virginia Woolf's London, Italo Svevo's Trieste, Franz Kafka's Prague, Andrei Bely's St. Petersburg, Hope Mirrlees's Paris, and Osamu Dazai's Tokyo, to name just a few cities of modernist literature, become stages of the fragmented self, the alienation and anonymization of the individual, and its restless endeavor to cope with the overwhelming

sensory and affective stimuli and pace of modern life. The urban environment not only serves as a backdrop for investigating the disorienting effects of modernity, but it also takes an active role in the writing process, reflecting the significant changes in perception and experience that characterize the modernist era. Modernist literature explores the intricate relationship between space, place, and the subject through the prism of the city, and the constant flux and complexity of city life induce it to invent new forms of literary expression and narrative strategies adequate to convey the realities of living in this world—hence the stream of consciousness technique, multiple points of view and voices, and nonlinear plots and fragmentary poems.

Fredric Jameson observes that since metropolitan modernity is simultaneously local and conditioned by "internal industrialization and commodification," and globally positioned in "the new imperial world system," it presents "a radically altered situation (new raw materials of a social, psychological or physical type) to which a fresh and unprecedented aesthetic response is demanded, generally by way of formal, structural linguistic invention" (2007, pp. 156-157). Focusing on the local, Andrew Thacker discusses how Virginia Woolf represents in her 1917 short story "The Mark on the Wall" her experience of the metropolis, specifically that of "being blown through the Tube at fifty miles an hour—landing at the other end without a single hairpin in one's hair!", and he argues that "[t]his story, one of Woolf's earliest experiments with the stream of consciousness method, replicates this experience in its narrative flow, with the narrator skipping from subject to subject in a seemingly haphazard fashion" (2019, p. 171). Virginia Woolf was more than aware of the aesthetic and mimetic challenges that the metropolitan experience posed, and she pointed to film as the artform that is potentially able to meet those challenges thanks to its unique techniques and media. As she writes in her essay on cinema, "[w]e get intimations only in the chaos of the streets, perhaps, when some momentary assembly of color, sound, movement, suggests that here is a scene waiting a new art to be transfixed" (1966, p. 272). Woolf's and many a modernist author's formal and narrative inventions aimed at representing this new urban space with all the experiential richness it generated.

Using spatial frameworks at least as often as temporal ones, contemporary literary scholarship exhibits a major shift dubbed the "spatial turn" that was largely initiated by scholars such as Henri Lefebvre and Yi-Fu Tuan. Lefebvre's seminal theorization of space, particularly articulated in his 1974 work *The Production of Space*, redefined its understanding in critical social sciences. Lefebvre contends that space is not a passive, neutral backdrop for human activity but a product of social relations, ideologies, and power structures. He introduces a tripartite framework—spatial practice, representations of space, and representational spaces—to analyze how space is produced and experienced. Spatial practice refers to the everyday interactions and movements within physical space, corresponding to what Lefebvre calls "perceived space" (1991, pp. 33, 38-41). Representations of space denote the conceptual and abstract dimension, including maps, plans, and architectural designs, giving way to "conceived space" (1991, pp. 42-44). Finally, representational spaces, or "lived space," encompass the symbolic, emotional, and subjective experiences that individuals associate with a place (1991, pp. 40-46). This triadic model underscores that space is simultaneously material, conceptual, and lived, with each dimension influencing and shaping the others, thereby making the more differential definitions of space and place possible.

Yi-Fu Tuan's influential 1977 book *Space and Place* parallels Lefebvre's notion of representational spaces, emphasizing how human emotions and perceptions transform abstract spaces into meaningful places. Central to Tuan's work is the idea that space appears to be an abstraction in comparison to place, and that "[w]hat begins as an undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value" (2001, p .6). There is an affective bond between people and places, and this bond, shaped by memory, culture, and sensory experience, reveals the emotional and psychological dimensions of human interactions with their environment. Already in 1974, Tuan had introduced the abovementioned term *topophilia* in his eponymous work to refer to "all of the human being's affective ties with the material environment" and to explain why certain spaces resonate deeply with individuals, becoming sites of attachment, identity, and belonging (1990, p. 93). He suggests in these studies that whereas space denotes mostly material interactions among humans, place comes into being as a result of the cultivation of profound emotional ties with space.

The path opened by the pioneering works of Lefebvre and Tuan has been trodden, among others, by Michel de Certeau, Edward Casey, and Jeff Malpas. In *Getting Back into Place*, Casey delves deeper into

the experiential and embodied aspects of place, resonating strongly with Lefebvre's lived space and Tuan's topophilic space. Casey argues that place is central to human existence and identity, emphasizing its role as the ground of memory, experience, and meaning. He expands on the phenomenology of place by examining how places serve as anchors for human life, providing stability and continuity amidst the flux of time and movement. As he maintains, "[m]y body continually *takes me into place.* It is at once agent and vehicle, articulator and witness of being-in-place" (1993, p. 48). It is our living and moving bodies that structure and configure all possible articulations of place, which is to say that place-generating human interactions with space are defined by emotional and embodied experiences. Jeff Malpas further develops these themes in *Place and Experience*, where he reconsiders these frameworks and integrates them with Heideggerian philosophy. Malpas highlights the relational and ontological dimensions of place, viewing it not merely as a container for human activity but as a fundamental component of being, knowing, and understanding. The symbolic and existential aspects of place contribute to human identity and meaning-making, whereby it becomes an indispensable constituent of the human condition (1999, pp. 2-7, 31-33).

Taking these interconnected definitions of space and place as its basis, this article concentrates on Michel de Certeau's 1984 study *The Practice of Everyday Life* to analyze Virginia Woolf's 1927 essay "Street Haunting: A London Adventure." It aims to discuss the ways in which Woolf depicts her own relationship to the metropolis through the act of rambling in the urban setting, and how walking in the city or *flânerie*, a celebrated motif of modernist literature, is characterized in this subjective experience of a woman writer. The study argues that while Woolf's unique perception of London colors her literary aesthetic, her particular way of attending to her environment during her wanderings also functions as an embodied, affective, and topophilic engagement that carves places out of the otherwise undifferentiated space. This kind of rambling will be discussed comparatively in connection with the figure of the *flâneur* and some of the recent studies made on the figure of the *flâneuse.*

Two critical concepts—strategies and tactics—proposed by de Certeau are of special interest to this study as they both refer to and are anticipated by Woolf's female mode of *flânerie* which transforms the abstract space of London through an affective engagement with it. De Certeau uses these concepts to explain the dynamic and contested nature of space by focusing on how individuals navigate and appropriate spatial structures in their daily lives. Accordingly, strategies evoke Lefebvre's representations of space as they are the tools and structures imposed by dominant powers such as governments, corporations, and urban planners to organize and control space. Tactics, on the other hand, pertain to lived space, as they represent the ways individuals subvert and reappropriate these structures through everyday practices, such as walking, storytelling, and informal use of space (1988, pp. 29-43). This study tries to demonstrate how de Certeau's focus on the tactical, micro-level, and embodied practices of people recalls Woolf's own deployment of female *flânerie* as a distinct style of rambling that conjures up topophilic places within the city.

Textuality of the City: Walking as Resistance and Rhetoric

Michel de Certeau's work on *flânerie* and urban space rests on a critique of cartographic strategies (1988, pp. 91-93), bringing it closer to the studies that emphasize the experiential and embodied relationship to space which transforms it to place or a series of singular places. De Certeau qualifies this phenomenological relationship as an operation that enables individuals to make unpredictable, spontaneous uses of the city by navigating and appropriating urban spaces. While strategies strive for "rationalized, expansionist, and at the same time centralized, clamorous, and spectacular production" of urban space, tactics refer to various practices of repurposing and using that space, resulting in its consumption. "The latter is devious," de Certeau suggests, "it is dispersed but it insinuates itself everywhere, silently, almost invisibly, because it does not manifest itself through its own products, but rather through its *ways of using* the products imposed by a dominant economic order" (1988, xii-xiii). Tactics used by individuals are opportunistic and pragmatic, and they both evade and manipulate the space dictated by various institutions so as to form places for resistance and self-expression.

De Certeau defines strategies as institutionalized, controlled, and organized ways of operating, typically employed by entities with power and authority such as governments, corporations, and other

institutions that function on the basis of a "calculus of force-relationships" (1998, xix). These strategies are characterized by their planned and structured nature, aiming to control and organize urban space by establishing grids, boundaries, and rules. Strategies are associated with institutional power, as they are executed by agents that define and impose their own spaces through mechanisms such as urban planning, architecture, and regulations. The essence of strategies is to create and delimit "proper" places, striving for stability and order in the urban environment to make it "the means of a generalized 'discipline'" (de Certeau, 1988, xiv). Strategies are used by apparatuses of power to produce a cartographic or geometrical space which "seems to have the status of the 'proper meaning' constructed by grammarians and linguists in order to have a normal and normative level to which they can compare the drifting of 'figurative' language" (de Certeau, 1988, p. 100). This very analogy elucidates the textual nature of the city and the rhetorical quality and anti-disciplinary potentials of *flânerie.*

On the other side, tactics are the methods used by the citizens of a city to navigate and utilize spaces in creative and often subversive ways while operating within the constraints imposed by strategies. Tactics are opportunistic and adaptive; they make use of the materials and spatial elements encountered within the boundaries set by strategic entities, and they "constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into 'opportunities'" (de Certeau, 1988, xix). Unlike strategies, tactics are employed by those who lack institutional power and must maneuver within the existing frameworks. They involve temporary and inventive uses of spaces that may subvert or bypass the intended uses imposed by strategic and disciplinary planning. Consequently, the "walking of passers-by offers a series of turns (*tours*) and detours that can be compared to 'turns of phrase' or 'stylistic figures'" (de Certeau, 1988, p. 100). This is the rhetorical operation of walking as an everyday practice creating alternative meanings, and it can thus well resist and disrupt the dominant forms of proper language imposed in the deployment of power. To cite a few examples, by taking detours, shortcuts, and unexpected routes, individuals can challenge the prescribed paths and spatial hierarchies imposed by urban planning. This can be seen as a form of "tactical" maneuvering, enabling individuals to carve out their own paths and assert their presence within the city. Likewise, de Certeau emphasizes the importance of spaces that are overlooked or marginalized by urban planners. These spaces, such as alleyways, stairwells, and vacant lots, can be creatively appropriated by individuals for their own purposes, offering opportunities for social interaction, leisure, or even resistance (1988, pp. 111-115).

In de Certeau's work, the practice of walking in the city signifies a fluid and improvisational approach to urban life, where individuals "make" their own narratives and meanings (1988, xii) by using "tricks" and "maneuvers" (1988, xix). Through walking, people engage with the city in a manner that is deeply rooted in their personal experiences and interactions, thus challenging the gaze of "the space planner urbanist, city planner or cartographer," (de Certeau, 1988, p. 93) which often causes the destruction of the city as a lived and habitable space. Quite in tune with the literary scholars who give primacy to the phenomenological notion of place, de Certeau argues that a true understanding of urban life and subjectivity cannot be derived from such totalizing views, instead it must acknowledge the myriad everyday practices of those who live within it. Often resistant and oppositional, these practices evade the order, surveillance, and control dictated by technical-rational approaches, thanks to which "a *migrational*, or metaphorical, city thus slips into the clear text of the planned and readable city" (de Certeau, 1988, p. 93). The urban meandering that Woolf records in "Street Haunting" reflects certain acts of evasion and textualization that register "a second, poetic geography on top of the geography of the literal, forbidden or permitted meaning" (de Certeau, 1988, p. 105). Moreover, as it will be demonstrated below, Woolf achieves this through a *flânerie* that is experienced in the feminine style.

The *Flâneur*: Hero of Modernity

The *flâneuse* is distinguished from the figure of the *flâneur*, and it is possible to argue that the ur-*flâneur* was first promoted by Charles Baudelaire in his 1863 essay "The Painter of Modern Life" written about Constantin Guys, a contemporary Parisian artist. However, Baudelaire had begun to articulate the fundamental aspects of the *flâneur*, without yet using that term, in his 1861 prose poem "Crowds," which deals with the distinct experience and joy that comes with blending into a bustling crowd. Baudelaire

maintains that "not all men have the gift of enjoying a crowd-bath," as it is an artform akin to poetry reserved for individuals with a passion for disguises, a disdain for mundane household life, and a love of exploration or "*wanderlust*" (1989, p. 59). As he further suggests, the male poet-wanderer "enjoys the unique privilege of being both himself and other people, at will," and he can take on the personality of others whenever he wants, similar to how lost souls seek a body to occupy. Consequently, "he who can readily identify with the crowd enjoys ecstatic delights which are forever denied to the egoist who is locked inside himself as in a coffer, or to the lazy-minded fellow trapped in his own shell like an oyster" (Baudelaire, 1989, p. 59). Clearly enough, Baudelaire celebrates the rambler's capacity to lose himself in the crowd, finding freedom and joy in anonymity and the momentary loss of subjective identity.

In his piece on Guys, Baudelaire reiterates the views he advanced in "Crowds" and presents the figure of the *flâneur* as their practitioner, this time embodied not by a hypothetical poet but a real-life painter. In this essay, Baudelaire famously defines modernity as "the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable" (1995, p. 13). And the *flâneur*, that new urban personality who strives to make the most of the modern condition, is cast as follows:

> The crowd is his element, as the air is that of birds and water of fishes. His passion and his profession are to become one flesh with the crowd. For the perfect *flâneur*, for the passionate spectator, it is an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement, in the midst of the fugitive and the infinite. To be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the centre of the world, and yet to remain hidden from the world (…). (Baudelaire, 1995, p. 9)

Lauren Elkin remarks that the *flâneur* in Baudelaire wishes to find refuge in the crowd (2016, p. 3), yet she also detects a kind of enjoyment in this new mode of urban existence which is at once gendered and classed. As a symbol of male leisure and privilege, the *flâneur* has memorized the city by walking around it so often that he knows it better than anyone else. With more time and money on his hands, and without any pressing obligations that demand his attention, he may easily fall into "*réverie*" at any turn, in any alleyway or stairway: "What happened here? Who passed by here? What does this place mean? The *flâneur*, attuned to the chords that vibrate throughout his city, knows without knowing" (Elkin, 2016, p. 3). In this regard, he is a new kind of animal that has the skills to navigate the urban jungle incognito, in an entranced yet also curiously knowing mood.

Elkin invokes certain critical works that posit the necessary functional invisibility of the *flâneur* and thus rule out the possibility of the *flâneuse* in connection with questions of visibility. Accordingly, women cannot (or could not) engage in *flânerie* precisely because the public-private dichotomy makes a solitary woman wandering amidst the metropolitan masses cause a kind of provocation. "We're not the ones who make ourselves visible (…) in terms of the stir a woman alone in public can create," Elkin writes, "it's the gaze of the *flâneur* that makes the woman who would join his ranks too visible to slip by unnoticed" (2016, p. 13). All in all, it is usually maintained that just free-floating unattended in the streets of a city is enough for a woman to attract attention, thereby undermining all her attempts at invisibility and anonymity, major requisites for *flânerie*.

In her much-discussed essay "The Invisible *Flâneuse*," Janet Wolff claims squarely that a female *flâneur* is unconceivable and that there has been no *flâneuse* in the history of modernity. She alludes to George Sand's remarkable experiment in 1831 where she dressed as a male to finally ramble alone in Paris thanks to the fact that no one knew her, no one stared at her, and no one criticized her. As Sand puts it, "[she] was an atom lost in that immense crowd" (cited in Wolff, 1985, p. 41). However, for Wolff, the problem is not only the public-private binarism, but also the literature of modernity which has been damaged due to its disregard for women's lives.

> The dandy, the *flâneur*, the hero, the stranger—all figures invoked to epitomize the experience of modern life—are invariably male figures. In 1831, when George Sand wanted to experience Paris life and to learn about the ideas and arts of her time, she dressed as a boy, to give herself

> the freedom she knew women could not share (…). The disguise made the life of the *flâneur* available to her; as she knew very well, she could not adopt the non-existent role of a *flâneuse*. (1985, p. 41)

The modern has been associated with "the public realm of work, politics, and city life" also in the writings of such influential twentieth-century scholars as Georg Simmel, Walter Benjamin, Richard Sennet, and Berman, whereby women's experiences of modernity have remained obscure. Along the same vein, because "[m]odernist literature describes men's experiences" and produces works chiefly "about changes in the public sphere and its accompanying consciousness," only man can feature as that hero of modernity called the *flâneur* (Wolff, 1985, p. 37). This figure, especially after Benjamin's readings of Baudelaire's abovementioned texts, becomes "a conceptual metaphor for urban observation and walking that extends even to the present day and the *flâneur* of de Certeau's postmodern city" (Tseng, 2006, p. 237).

Woolf's *Flâneuse*: Pleasures of Rambling and Authorship in the Metropolis

Contrary to Wolff, in her influential study titled *Flâneuse*, Elkin argues that despite historical and cultural narratives that have largely ignored or erased her presence, "there always was a *flâneuse* passing Baudelaire in the street" (2016, p. 11). As she suggests, women have always navigated cities, observed the cityscape, and engaged with public life, albeit in ways that might differ from their male counterparts. The *flâneuse* does exist as a historical and contemporary figure who explores, experiences, and interprets the city from a female perspective. To substantiate this point, Elkin foregrounds various women writers, artists, and thinkers, including filmmaker Agnes Varda, journalist Martha Gellhorn, and Virgina Woolf, who have walked and written about Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice, and London. By demonstrating that the *flâneuse* is a reality of urban modernity that has been grossly overlooked, Elkin broadens the concept of *flânerie* to accommodate the diverse experiences of women. Seeking to reclaim the idea of the *flâneuse*, she proves to follow in the footsteps of Woolf, who in "Street Haunting" not only presents us with an example of this figure but she also demonstrates some of the distinguishing aspects of the *flâneuse.*

Woolf's essay explores the deep satisfactions and insights derived from the simple act of wandering through city streets; yet she presents street rambling as more than a casual stroll. Through this activity, individuals can temporarily step out of their own lives and identities, engaging in a unique observational experience at once stimulating and liberating. Woolf starts her essay with an everyday object that is capable of triggering the "London adventure" evoked in the title:

> No one perhaps has ever felt passionately towards a lead pencil. But there are circumstances in which it can become supremely desirable to possess one; moments when we are set upon having an object, an excuse for walking half across London between tea and dinner. (…) [W]hen the desire comes upon us to go street rambling the pencil does for a pretext, and getting up we say: "Really I must buy a pencil," as if under cover of this excuse we could indulge safely in the greatest pleasure of town life in winter—rambling the streets of London. (2015, p. 7)

Woolf seems to be hinting at the condition that most women's appearance in the public arena of the city ordinarily required an excuse, and shopping or consumerism provided one such legitimation specifically after the establishment of department stores in the second half of the nineteenth century (Wolff, 1985, p. 44). But she also adds to her statement a tinge of irony by choosing an ordinary pencil as her object of desire. Besides, she sets out to pursue this object not during the day, the usual time for shopping, but on a winter evening which offers her "the champagne brightness of the air and the sociability of the streets" and "the irresponsibility which darkness and lamplight bestow" (Woolf, 2015, p. 7). Mundane objects, especially those that surround us within the household, the space that was detested by Baudelaire's *flâneur*, "perpetually express the oddity of our own temperaments and enforce the memories of our own experience" (Woolf, 2015, p. 7). In this regard, they fix us within the confines of identity and character, but once we

cross the threshold of our house, "[w]e are no longer quite ourselves (…) we shed the self our friends know us by and become part of that vast republican army of anonymous trampers, whose society is so agreeable after the solitude of one's own room" (Woolf, 2015, p. 7). While the *flâneur* enjoys his solitary and unengaged freedom amidst the anonymous crowd, the *flâneuse*, having divested herself of the identity she is believed to bear, discovers a sense of commonality and companionship as she walks through the same crowd.

Woolf is one of the literary pioneers of the "female mode of rhetoric," through which she "pursues arguments indirectly, usually not stating her thesis until the end of a piece and even then, presenting it tentatively and leaving the discussion open-ended; her structure is generally associative, appearing to imitate the way ideas occur to the mind" (Farrell, 1979, pp. 909-21). This rhetorical mode centered on the vacillations of lived experience reflects the way Woolf uses walking as an everyday rhetorical practice. In this connection, Agnieszka Pantuchowicz offers a compelling contrast between the traditionally masculine concept of *flâneuring* and the more complex notion of "female haunting" (2017). As it is epitomized by the male street rambler, *flâneuring* is characterized by a detached, leisurely observation of the urban landscape. The *flâneur* navigates the city with a sense of objectivity and distance, content with a relatively passive exposure to the world around him. In contrast, Pantuchowicz, inspired by the title of Woolf's essay, introduces the concept of "female haunting," which implies a closer interaction with the city (Pantuchowicz, 2017, p. 196).

Urban rambling allows Woolf to leave her identity behind, which is one of the main joys of *flânerie*. Walking around London, she delights in observing the immense number of details pertaining to urban life and the people she encounters. Although at first glance it seems to be retaining the voyeuristic structure of seeing-without-being-seen, this act of observation is not passive, but it actively stimulates the imagination. Besides, this gaze is not reifying unlike, for instance, the erotic male gaze that objectifies the female body as described by Laura Mulvey (1975, p. 12). Acknowledging this unobjectifying voyeuristic pleasure, Woolf uses the metaphors of "a central oyster of perceptiveness" and "an enormous eye" (2015, p. 8). Transforming into a gigantic and mobile eye with intensified sensitivity and receptiveness, Woolf descends beneath the line of visibility and readability that for de Certeau panoptic structures impose on the city, thereby making the "down below" her own dwelling and the street level her own line of sight:

> How beautiful a London street is then, with its islands of light, and its long groves of darkness, and on one side of it perhaps some tree-sprinkled, grass-grown space where night is folding herself to sleep naturally and, as one passes the iron railing, one hears those little cracklings and stirrings of leaf and twig which seem to suppose the silence of fields all round them, an owl hooting, and far away the rattle of a train in the valley. But this is London, we are reminded; high among the bare trees are hung oblong frames of reddish yellow light—windows; there are points of brilliance burning steadily like low stars—lamps; this empty ground, which holds the country in it and its peace, is only a London square, set about by offices and houses where at this hour fierce lights burn over maps, over documents, over desks where clerks sit turning with wetted forefinger the files of endless correspondences; or more suffusedly the firelight wavers and the lamplight falls upon the privacy of some drawing-room, its easy chairs, its papers, its china, its inlaid table, and the figure of a woman, accurately measuring out the precise number of spoons of tea which—She looks at the door as if she heard a ring downstairs and somebody asking, is she in? (2015, pp. 8-9)

This passage vividly illustrates Woolf's emotional and imaginative engagement with the city, where the interplay of light and darkness creates a rich and layered urban milieu other than the one reflected in maps and documents. The "islands of light" and "groves of darkness" suggest a cityscape that is both mysterious and inviting, dissolving the rigid boundaries between public and private spaces, and connecting the collective rhythm of the city with individual moments of domestic intimacy. Through the entangled imagery of natural and urban elements—the hooting owl, the train's rattle, and the lamplight making its way into drawing rooms—Woolf crafts an integrated vision of London that harmonizes the pastoral, as it were, with

the metropolitan. Her affective investment in the city emerges through her generous attention to its details, transforming London into a living, breathing entity that resonates with her perceptive, imaginative eye. This city is not merely observed but emotionally inhabited, revealing Woolf's deep commitment to its sights, sounds, and rhythms. This type of meaning-making which echoes individuals' actions by which space turns into place is a tactical operation in the sense de Certeau uses the term as Woolf's practice demonstrates a personal and ephemeral way of engaging with the city that reclaims its spaces for lived experience and creativity.

Woolf also invents stories about the strangers she sees, piecing together fragments of their lives to create a rich tapestry of potential narratives. The city becomes a living canvas filled with individuals from all walks of life, with hidden personal trajectories and untold stories waiting to be discovered or imagined. The two stone-blind bearded men, "brothers, apparently," strutting down the street with a boy between them; "the stout lady tightly swathed in shiny sealskin; the feeble-minded boy sucking the silver knob of his stick; the old man squatted on a doorstep," and many other characters including "a bearded Jew, wild, hunger-bitten, glaring out of his misery, [and] an old woman flung abandoned on the step of a public building with a cloak over her" (Woolf, 2015, pp. 10-12) enable Woolf to uncover or imagine the everyday practices, lived experiences, and singular stories of her fellow urban dwellers. Her train of thoughts about the dwarf woman in a boot shop enjoying the unharmful attention of the shop girls is a case in point:

> "What, then, is it like to be a dwarf?" (…) Look at that! Look at that! she seemed to demand of us all, as she thrust her foot out, for behold it was the shapely, perfectly proportioned foot of a well-grown woman. It was arched; it was aristocratic. Her whole manner changed as she looked at it resting on the stand. She looked soothed and satisfied. Her manner became full of self-confidence. She sent for shoe after shoe; she tried on pair after pair. She got up and pirouetted before a glass which reflected the foot only in yellow shoes, in fawn shoes, in shoes of lizard skin. She raised her little skirts and displayed her little legs. She was thinking that, after all, feet are the most important part of the whole person; women, she said to herself, have been loved for their feet alone. Seeing nothing but her feet, she imagined perhaps that the rest of her body was of a piece with those beautiful feet. (2015, p. 10)

One among others, this episode shows that Woolf's eyes and mind do not slide over the spectacle of the city but attach themselves to its elements, establishing stronger attachments through imagination and storytelling. Woolf's ability to invent stories about the strangers she encounters allows her to create places with meaning out of the impersonal, rational city structured by those rigid social and political forces identified by de Certeau. This act of imagination and narrativization resides in zones that are not represented within the premade urban grid, revealing the city as a site of possibility and individual agency. By tactically using or consuming these unchartered sites as she rambles, Woolf's *flânerie* resists the dominant gaze and discourses of the city's official administrators.

De Certeau juxtaposes what he calls the "panorama-city" and its related totalizing view (1988, p. 93) with the lived experiences of individuals navigating the city. He first scrutinizes the experience of viewing the city from a high vantage point, such as the top of a skyscraper. This elevated perspective, which he terms the "solar Eye," offers a panoramic view that yields an illusion of comprehending and mastering the city's totality (de Certeau, 1988, p. 92). The view of the "voyeur-God" created by this fiction represents a form of power and control where the city is reduced to a mere spectacle, stripped of its complexity as well as dynamic and unpredictable nature. Such a perspective abstracts the experiential particularities of its inhabitants, thereby presenting the city as a static, organized entity rather than a vibrant, dynamic space. Reduced to a simulacrum or a picture, the panorama-city rests on the erasure of practices carried out by "the ordinary practitioners of the city" who live "down below," below the limit at which the city's visibility or readability begins (de Certeau, 1988, p. 93).

However, her tactical mode of *flânerie* enables Woolf to move much beyond this picturesque panorama-city and to inscribe back onto that surface the streets, alleyways, and neighborhoods that take on a life of their own, thus becoming phenomenological places and characters in their own right. Be they

sidewalks near public buildings where all kinds of deposed objects and commodities create heaps of obsolescence, or the streets of Mayfair which exude an air of extravagance, Woolf describes these places with vivid, almost poetic detail and sensory plenitude, emphasizing their dynamism and topophilic quality. Once again,

> How beautiful a street is in winter! It is at once revealed and obscured. Here vaguely one can trace symmetrical straight avenues of doors and windows; here under the lamps are floating islands of pale light through which pass quickly bright men and women, who, for all their poverty and shabbiness, wear a certain look of unreality, an air of triumph, as if they had given life the slip, so that life, deceived of her prey, blunders on without them. (2015, p. 8)

This narrative style reflects the author's appreciation of the lure of everyday life in the city where "everything seems accidentally and miraculously sprinkled with beauty" (Woolf, 2015, p. 12). It accompanies a certain mode of *flânerie* and contributes greatly to Woolf's experience of street haunting, which generates de Certeau's metaphorical, poetic city or a "psychogeographical" map of "the emotive force field of the city" (Elkin, 2016, p. 18). It is evident, then, that Woolf counters the solar Eye of urbanists and architects with her ever-perceptive gigantic eye that discloses and registers the lived experiences and places of ordinary people. Through a ground-level voyeurism attentive to the stories of individuals, she disrupts the panoptic surveillance mechanisms that strive to homogenize the city with its inhabitants. Furthermore, she deploys an encyclopedic form of writing—yet another staple of literary modernism—that tends to include as many individual stories and phenomenological places as possible in opposition to the totalitarianism of techno-rational power determined to efface them.

It should be noted at this point that Woolf's keen attentiveness to her surroundings in the city may not derive only from her literary goals, but it may also be conditioned by her gendered experience of space and place. Linda McDowell asserts that "women and men are positioned differently in the world and that their relationship to the places in which they live is thus different too." These differences, she adds, result from a host of structural inequalities that give way to "women's inferiority to, and oppression by men in different places at different times" (1999, p. 228). Underscoring the fact that practices of space and place are also contingent on gender or sexuality, Lynda Johnston and Robyn Longhurst write that,

> Whether it is a bar, casino, or home sexual politics permeate the space. There are no spaces that sit outside of sexual politics. Sex and space cannot be "decoupled." (…) Place and sexuality are mutually constituted. Sexuality has a profound effect on the way people live in, and interact with, space and place. In turn, space and place affect people's sexuality. (2010, p. 3)

These studies suggest that Woolf's intense alertness and awareness during her *flânerie* can be understood as deeply rooted in the constitutive aspect of sexuality in one's experience of urban space. As the spatial practices of women are shaped by androcentric sexual politics that permeate all environments, Woolf's navigation of the city seems to reflect not only an aesthetic sensibility but also an acute consciousness of the limitations, threats, and possibilities imposed by her gender, transforming her rambling into a critical engagement with the spatial politics of her time.

The pencil that Woolf wants to buy is not that mundane an object, nor is her *flânerie* a mere act of walking or an exercise in movement. In other words, Woolf does not walk just to enjoy mobility and the cityscape despite that she seems to claim the contrary. While wandering in the streets, Woolf writes, "we are only gliding smoothly on the surface. The eye is not a miner, not a diver, not a seeker after buried treasure. It floats us smoothly down a stream; resting, pausing, the brain sleeps perhaps as it looks" (2015, p. 8). We are led to think that the kind of flowing or gliding carried out through voyeurism is what Woolf is content to reclaim for herself; but in fact, this is only the beginning. While the *flâneur* as the male rambler may be fascinated with walking amidst the urban crowd mainly as an experience testifying to his monadic existence, for Woolf the *flâneuse* street rambling always implies the inclination to "penetrate a little way"

into the lives of others so that "[o]ne could become a washerwoman, a publican, a street singer" (2015, p. 19). Woolf's urban meanderings are never unattended by the will to write with an eye to appropriate the city and to turn it into a series of places abounding in subjective stories and significance, whether they belong to Woolf herself or to her fellow Londoners.

The rambler's eye rejoices in beautifying the urban surface, but this is an incomplete enjoyment for Woolf as she also claims creativity and authorship for herself. In that sense, the pencil is really a pretext for navigating the city precisely because it symbolizes authorship and the autonomy that it suggests. We get that same symbolism in an essay titled "Professions for Women" that was originally delivered by Woolf as a speech in 1931 at the National Society for Women's Service. Here, she professes to killing a phantom, the Victorian figure of "the Angel in the House," as part of her endeavor to become a writer as a young woman. She had no other option than destroying that Angelic phantom epitomizing the self-sacrificing and submissive role imposed on women by patriarchy. "Had I not killed her she would have killed me," Woolf says, and asks her audience to imagine her as a girl sitting with a pen in her hand, waiting for hours on end to be able to put it on paper to create something:

> The image that comes to my mind when I think of this girl is the image of a fisherman lying sunk in dreams on the verge of a deep lake with a rod held out over the water. She was letting her imagination sweep unchecked round every rock and cranny of the world that lies submerged in the depths of our unconscious being. (1966, pp. 286-287)

Woolf uses this fishing metaphor to describe the act of creative writing, where the female author casts her line into the depths of her subjectivity to retrieve ideas and emotions. The fishing rod features as the tool—the pencil or the pen—by means of which the writer connects with her subconscious, drawing out the material needed to create literary works. The process of fishing, accordingly, implies that writing is not an act of skimming surfaces, it rather requires the writer to delve deep into her inner world, pursuing the not-yet-known and bringing forth novel insights.

According to Ching-fang Tseng, the ubiquitous emphasis put on metropolitan cosmopolitanism has given way to the "androcentric Eurocentric canonization" of modernist literature (2006, p. 220). This is so because almost all the metropolises mentioned in this canonical narrative are European or occidental. Moreover, the highly favored cosmopolitan aspect of the metropolitan city generally includes "a derogation of the feminine or feminized attributes such as conventionality, sentimentality, and domesticity" (Tseng, 2006, p. 221). This devaluation, Tseng maintains, constitutes one of the central traits of modernist literature. The figure of the *flâneur* is a product of such androcentrism which detests the domestic and the feminine on grounds of an explicit desire for mobility and invisibility through crowd-bathing. Sure enough, this very disdain, which was initially expressed by Baudelaire, stems from one of the deep-seated divisions in modern society, that is the one between the public and the private spheres, whose forcible separation from one another characterizes the gender politics of modernity.

The abovementioned girl's creative exploration of her depths is undercut by internalized gender roles and judgements that are interlinked with the gender ideology described by Tseng. "Now came the experience," writes Woolf, "the experience that I believe to be far commoner with women writers than with men." The woman writer's imagination eventually hits into something hard, something that wakes her up from her trance-like mood. She now finds herself in a debilitating distress: "To speak without figure she had thought of something, something about the body, about the passions which it was unfitting for her as a woman to say" (Woolf, 1966, pp. 287-88). Women become authors by constantly struggling with all kinds of inhibitions stopping them from writing about their bodies, sexualities, and desires. Similarly, a woman willing to enjoy the delights of *flânerie* in her own way should surpass the ways of the *flâneur* that have been denied to her and reject limiting herself to urban surfaces, human façades, and sheer mobility. This rejection should even include the divide between the public and the domestic—a binary that the *flâneur* is predicated upon—as Woolf suggests in the closing paragraph of her essay:

> That is true: to escape is the greatest of pleasures; street haunting in winter the greatest of adventures. Still as we approach our own doorstep again, it is comforting to feel the old possessions, the old prejudices, fold us round; and the self, which has been blown about at so many street corners, which has battered like a moth at the flame of so many inaccessible lanterns, sheltered and enclosed. (2015, p. 19)

With the kind of *flânerie* experienced (and perhaps even designed) by Woolf, the absolute chasm between the street and the home turns into a continuum, provided that the latter is not inhabited by a patriarch and the Angel in the House, and that it rather functions as the topophilic place of one's own in which the woman author, after a tactical flight into the city, writes and addresses the world, suturing the inside and the outside.

Conclusion: Feminine Walking and Rhetoric

For Woolf, walking the streets allows individuals to momentarily escape the confines of their personal responsibilities and identities. The act of wandering transforms the male walker into a *flâneur*, a detached observer who is liberated from his own concerns, only enjoying the startling, momentary charge of "the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent." This attitude is perhaps best expressed by Baudelaire in his poem "To a Passer-By":

> The street about me roared with a deafening sound.
> Tall, slender, in heavy mourning, majestic grief,
> A woman passed, with a glittering hand
> Raising, swinging the hem and flounces of her skirt;
> (…)
> A lightning flash... then night! Fleeting beauty
> By whose glance I was suddenly reborn,
> Will I see you no more before eternity? (2015, p. 95)

Baudelaire's *flâneur* is beholden to flashing images instantly appearing from among the crowds; he cherishes the fleeting revelations of urban modernity. However, by observing and imagining intently, Woolf develops a deep connection to the city and its inhabitants even in the briefest encounters. In this regard, she exploits yet supersedes the scopophilia associated with the male gaze by having the seemingly paradoxical feeling of both disconnection and connection. Woolf feels a sense of kinship with the anonymous crowd, yet she also enjoys the anonymity and the ability to remain an uninvolved observer. This dual experience unpursued by the *flâneur* enhances the pleasure of street haunting, as it allows her to engage with the world on her own terms.

The cartographic operations of power transform the concrete activities of urban wanderers "into points that draw a totalizing and reversible line on the map" (de Certeau, 1988, p. 97). As a result, they doom to oblivion individual ways of being in the world and the topophilic places intricately related to them. But, as Elkin states with regard to her own experiences of urban rambling,

> Walking is mapping with your feet. It helps you piece a city together, connecting up neighbourhoods that might otherwise have remained discrete entities, different planets bound to each other, sustained yet remote. I like seeing how in fact they blend into one another, I like noticing the boundaries between them. (2016, p. 21)

At stake in walking is another mode of mapping, one that saves places from the totalitarian anonymity that they are constantly subjected to by institutions of power. While restoring the singularities and intensities of places, it also connects them in ways as diverse and creative as the everyday practices and rhetorical operations of city dwellers. "I keep thinking of different ways to manage my scenes;" writes Woolf in a journal entry, "conceiving endless possibilities; seeing life, as I walk about the streets, an immense opaque

block of material to be conveyed by me into its equivalent of language" (1979, p. 214). By engaging in a female mode of *flânerie* and by inserting subjective stories into the urban space that is otherwise kept as an immense monolith under the gaze of "voyeur-God," Woolf creates a colorful palette out of city dwellers and places, and she breathes diverse lives into the metropolis.

Wandering through the city reflects a subjective engagement with the urban landscape, where each encounter and observation motivates intimacy and creativity. Woolf is known to have "call[ed] on women writers to select from the language of men what they can use and recombine its elements to create a discourse more congenial and useful to women" (Bizzell and Herzberg, 2001, p. 1249). By the same token, she retains certain elements of male *flânerie* such as invisibility, voyeurism, and mobility, but Woolf's *flâneuse* does not refrain from interacting with her surroundings, finding a sense of connection and participation in the city's texture. The sociability that Woolf discovers in her walks through London contrasts sharply with the solitary nature of the *flâneur*. Woolf's experience is characterized by a form of engagement that is both personal and relational, as she connects with the city and its inhabitants in veritably affective ways. Ultimately, this sociability highlights the *flâneuse*'s ability to integrate her personal experiences with the broader urban and social environment, revealing a form of urban exploration that is as emotionally intense as it is socially connected.

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