Urban "Apparitions" in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The London Scene*

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Abstract

London features prominently in Virginia Woolf's works; among them *Mrs. Dalloway* and a collection of essays called *The London Scene*. The location not only serves as a backdrop for Woolf's narratives, but also provides insights into women's lives in relation to urban space in the early twentieth century. While some scholars have applied the figure of the *flaneur/flaneuse* onto Woolf's writings (with reference to Charles Baudelaire and Walter Benjamin), others have challenged this concept in the context of women's experience in the city. I propose that we read women in *Mrs. Dalloway* as "apparitions," and move away from the concepts of the *flaneur/flaneuse*. I also employ "The Docks of London" and "Oxford Street Tide" from *The London Scene* to illustrate the impact of commodity culture on women's movements in the city. I recognize these narratives as Woolf's call to rebuild the city, primarily aimed at the women of the early twentieth century who explore their own vulnerable identities in urban space.

Virginia Woolf's close ties to London can be gleaned from many of her works. For instance, *Mrs. Dalloway* features the city as it chronicles one day in June 1923 with Clarissa Dalloway as its central figure, alongside other individuals who make their way around the metropolis. Woolf's treatment of urban space is also demonstrated in *The London Scene* essays, which show how she "address[ed] spaces of religion, government, and commerce."[1] These essays were originally published as six separate articles in the British edition of *Good Housekeeping* magazine, which had an audience of middle-class women, who were "primarily North American and European bourgeois."[2] The works—titled "The Docks of London," "Oxford Street Tide," "Great Men's Houses," "Abbeys and Cathedrals," "This is the House of Commons," and "Portrait of a Londoner"—were all released from December 1931 to December 1932.

Mrs. Dalloway reveals Woolf's approach to modern life, which deviates from the belief that "women in public . . . particularly women apparently wandering without aim [are] 'non-respectable.'" Thus, the novel compels readers to re-examine the prioritization of the "street and the public arena in the very definition of modernity."[3] In this essay, I will analyze select characters from *Mrs. Dalloway* as I consider female experiences in the modern city, then draw examples of women's interactions with commodity culture from "The Docks of London" and "Oxford Street Tide" from *The London Scene*. While Charles Baudelaire's and Walter Benjamin's conceptualizations of the *flaneur* have become integral to modernist studies, I argue that Woolf's women do not aspire for *flanerie* but instead can be interpreted as "apparitions" who are called to rebuild the city. This leaves us with a view of modernity and modernism which recognizes women's increasing visibility—of women not just being one thing nor in one place, but instead having access to a range of prospects suited for the different spaces they occupy in this modern environment. There should also be consideration for what Janet Wolff describes as "[t]he real situation of women in the second half of the nineteenth century," which becomes much more pronounced in later years up to the early twentieth century: "[The situation of women] was more complex than one of straightforward confinement to the home. It varied from one social class to another, and even from one geographical region to another . . . And, although the solitary and independent life of the *flaneur* was not open to women, women clearly *were* active and visible in other ways in the public arena."[4]

The *flaneur* is seen as an equivalent to modern man, "the lover of universal life" who "enters into the crowd as though it were an immense reservoir of electrical energy."[5] In relation to the male *flaneur*, the woman finds herself among "the dandy, the rag-picker (the *chiffonnier*), and the prostitute as emblematic modern urban types," amid the "rise of commodity culture and the expansion of major metropolitan centers."[6] Woolf's women cannot be read as *flaneur*s simply because they are not men and thus cannot be seen as having the same access to the city. On the other hand, the *flaneuse* cannot completely account for the tensions that exist in women's urban life in the modern era, including their complex role in consumer culture. For instance, the shift to a largely "consumer society" in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries brought with it a corresponding increase in "the proportion and volume of goods sold in stores rather than produced in the home," with the task of purchasing such goods being left to women instead of men. "Even though . . . large numbers of women were themselves beginning to enter the industrial wage-earning force, they also performed the services of housework and shopping for the home."[7] This activity thus brought women "relative emancipation": "Given the assignment of women to the domestic sphere, shopping did take them out of the house to downtown areas formerly out of bounds, and labor-saving equipment could make home work more manageable."[8]

Anna Snaith and Michael Whitworth have observed that "[t]he increasing centrality of Baudelaire and the idea of the *flaneur* to theorizations of modernism posed a challenge to feminist thinkers, and therefore to critics of Woolf."[9] Among those often cited in the so-called "great *flaneur* debate" is Janet Wolff, who once stressed that "[w]hat is missing in [the literature of modernity] is any account of life outside the public realm, of the experience of 'the modern' in its private manifestations, and also of the very different nature of the experience of those women who did appear in the public arena."[10] Meanwhile, Temma Balducci notes how "Baudelaire's portrayal of the *flaneur* has been particularly influential in feminist scholarship since the 1980s . . . Thus, well-to-do women . . . were all but confined to the domestic arena, while well-to-do men, *à la* Baudelaire's *flaneur*, thrived and felt most 'at home' in public spaces."[11] These discussions have led researchers to focus on the marginalization and absence of women, especially in light of "the modern" being defined around activities in the public sphere (and hence, gendered male).

Scholars concluded that if the *flaneur* is equivalent to modern man, then the *flaneuse* could be a worthy counterpart, especially if women were to be seen participating in the emerging modern activities of shopping and cinema-going.[12] Wolff would later propose an end to the debate, writing in 2003 that the *flaneuse* is no longer "invisible" (disputing her own claims in 1985) but altogether "impossible," and hence should be "retired." In its place, she urges a move towards looking at "'the city' as itself a discursive construct, and 'the public' (and 'private') as a narrative device." In doing so, she says, "the question of female *flanerie* loses all importance and, at the same time, women become entirely visible in their own particular practices and experiences in the modern city."[13]

While Woolf writes about women who walk on their own as well as with others, their participation in London life relies heavily on their evolving role in society. As Stephanie Loveless notes when she comments on Michel de Certeau's "Walking in the City," who she says "proposes his own methods of walking as a tactic of creative resistance to the systems of repression that, for him, are structurally built into our urban environments": "Whether embodied in the nineteenth-century *flaneur*, the psychogeographer of the 1950s, or the tactical walker of the 1980s—this ability to roam the streets remains constricted by gender, race, class, and ability."[14] Kristine Miranne and Alma Young, meanwhile, have observed how urban studies considers gender in discussions of the city (from its "avoidance" of women's lived experiences in earlier decades): "The starting premise is the recognition in the current literature that: first, women and men's experiences in the city are different and that these differences center largely on relations of inequality; second, that women's use of active space and time often results in changes to the spatial and social structure of the city; and third, that structural changes can alter gender relations within the city."[15]

Woolf's 1927 essay, "Street Haunting: A London Adventure," lends itself well to explore this idea of women as "apparitions." In the essay, Woolf writes, "Am I here, or am I there? Or is the true self neither this nor that, neither here nor there, but something so varied and wandering that it is only when we give the rein to its wishes and let it take its way unimpeded that we are indeed ourselves?"[16] The city's remaking in Woolf's own time and in her writings rests on the lives of women who are not yet clearly defined, hardly given a name or voice, and yet at the same time find themselves existing "everywhere," like far-reaching and infinite "apparitions" in the same manner that Woolf "haunts" in her most treasured walks around London. As Wolff points out, "there is a recurring use of the language of ghosts and haunting in recent literature about the city and urban space," citing studies of scholars in urban and architectural theory. She references the sociologist Avery Gordon who "insisted that haunting is essential to the sociological imagination":

> The ghost is not simply a dead or a missing person, but a social figure, and investigating it can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life. The ghost or the apparition is one form by which something is lost, or barely visible, or seemingly not there to our supposedly well-trained eye, makes itself known or apparent to us, in its own way, of course.[17]

I propose a reading that sees Woolf's women as "apparitions" as they navigate the streets in urban space—women who are specters or shadows who, while generally free to wander the city, are exposed to the threats of commodity culture and overpowering voices of urban life. I endeavor to "read" women in the modern city not as absent or marginalized figures, but instead as palpable beings who are necessary to our understanding of Woolf's modernism.

Modernism and the City

Modernist studies credit the work of French poet Charles Baudelaire, specifically his essay "The Painter of Modern Life," for discussions around the artist and in turn, modern man in relation to the city. Baudelaire models his "modern hero" on the artist named Constantin Guys, from whom he imagines "the *flaneur*, who gives himself over to the crowd . . . and the dandy, who holds himself aloof and unmoved."[18] Baudelaire's take on the modern

which he defined as "the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable"[19] becomes most visible in the transitory encounters of modern life, and the rapidly changing environment that contributed to the shaping of the individual which would then be expressed in the literature of the age.

Another prominent figure in discussions around urban space is the German literary critic Walter Benjamin. *The Arcades Project*, Benjamin's unfinished research on nineteenth-century Paris, "provide[s] a theoretical stimulus for cultural theory and philosophical concepts of the modern."[20] Benjamin builds on Baudelaire's concept of the *flaneur* in relation to the city, saying that "[t]he street becomes a dwelling for the *flaneur*; he is as much at home among the facades of houses as a citizen is in his four walls."[21]

Woolf's works have been studied in light of Baudelaire and Benjamin's assertions. But even though we may draw these connections, Woolf is not so easily categorized if seen solely on the basis of her association with the modernism of her time. Bryony Randall recognizes how Woolf exhibits strength "in the margins," as one who "is both a founding figure of modernism, but always already a provoking problem for it." Randall continues by saying that "Woolf's emergence from the margins of modernist studies . . . makes her particularly apt to keep challenging the very definition she continually contributes to constructing."[22] Meanwhile, Melba Cuddy-Keane looks to Woolf's "modernist manifesto," the 1919 essay entitled "Modern Fiction," and says that the author "fits within the general paradigm of modernism's shift from the rational and representational to the alogical and associative; however, her treatment of such binary opposition is neither so simple nor so neat."[23] Woolf's modernism thus rests on an inclination towards "possibilities for further change and development"[24] which is displayed in her treatment of female characters and the city they live in as not fixed, but instead, more visibly manifested through their manifold presences in the urban environment.

In the novel *Mrs. Dalloway*, we get a partial glimpse of Woolf's portrayal of women in the context of modernity through the memories of Clarissa's friend, Peter Walsh, who looks back on their younger country life in Bourton when he describes Clarissa. If in Clarissa's present thoughts she is at one point "Mrs. Richard Dalloway," Peter's statements belong to the past, referring to the Clarissa he once proposed marriage to (but who rejected him) in their youth. His initial memories of Clarissa also connect us to the final lines of the novel, which remain visibly in the past: "[I]t was Clarissa one remembered. Not that she was striking; not beautiful at all; there was nothing picturesque about her; she never said anything specially clever; there she was, however; there she was."[25] Then in the final scenes of the

novel, Peter thinks, "What is it that fills me with extraordinary excitement? It is Clarissa, he said. For there she was."[26] Clarissa as seen through Peter is not fixed to the present, not one who "is" but rather "was." The image of a modern woman based on Clarissa is someone whose links to the past contribute to her present identity. We can attribute this to the character of modernity itself, which is "the epoch most conscious of history precisely because it is so conscious of itself as present soon to become past . . . This experience of the now . . . inevitably creates conditions favourable to anxiety and nostalgia, and generates the need for constant self-definition vis-à-vis the past."[27]

Another contributing factor to Clarissa's identity is women's "expanding mobility" in the late nineteenth century, which saw the emergence of "spaces designed for consumers, from department stores to tea shops . . . female clerks and women shopping for mass-marketed goods in Oxford Street department stores or buying inexpensive meals in modest but genteel restaurants."[28] If we examine Woolf's treatment of social class in the novel, we can look at how Clarissa's journey begins at her home in Westminster, "one of London's most exclusive residential areas," then on to "a Royal Park (St. James's) to its premier shopping street (Bond Street)" where she goes to buy flowers. Against the "'divine vitality' of London's street-life," these locations represent what David Bradshaw calls Clarissa's "gilded confinement." He observes that once she "is in Bond Street she is 'not even Clarissa any more' but more formally and restrictively, 'Mrs. Richard Dalloway.'"[29] While Clarissa is a woman who can walk the city alone without being looked at as an anomaly, she is still inevitably "Mrs. Richard Dalloway" as she proceeds to buy flowers for that evening's party.

The first line of the novel—"Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself"—calls attention to what Rachel Bowlby refers to as the "ambiguity of modern consumption." Whereas Baudelaire and Benjamin's *flaneur* considers women in relation to "'the oldest trade in the world'—[wherein they are] at once commodity, worker and (sometimes) entrepreneur," Woolf's women are clearly responding to "the new commerce [which] made its appeal, urging and inviting them to procure its luxurious benefits and purchase sexually attractive images for themselves." In this way, Bowlby adds, "They were to become in a sense like prostitutes in their active, commodified self-display, and also to take on the one role almost never theirs in actual prostitution: that of consumer." This is ultimately what Bowlby attributes to the reinforcement of "tendencies whereby distinctions between 'masculine' and 'feminine' dispositions were constructed in terms of oppositions between work and leisure, rationality and emotion, practicality and the 'instinct' for beauty."[30]

As she proceeds to fulfill the task of buying flowers, Clarissa serves as a prime example of those "middle-

and upper-class ladies [who] were occupied with the frivolous associations of some of the new commodities, and the establishment of convenient stores that were both enticing and respectable, [which] made shopping itself a new feminine leisure activity."[31] Woolf's women thus demonstrate how "women in particular seemed vulnerable" to "Marx's notion of commodity fetishism [which] suggested that commodities reify the labor that produced them while hypnotizing consumers."[32] This puts women in a precarious position if we are to see them as "apparitions," while also performing the task of remaking the city as Woolf envisions them in these works. By looking at their movements in the city, particularly in the context of consumer culture, these women demonstrate how "the making of willing consumers readily fitted into the available ideological paradigm of a seduction of women by men, in which women would be addressed as yielding objects to the powerful male subject forming, and informing them of, their desires."[33] If in the fifteenth century commodities such as food, tools, and household objects were "things that met human needs," by the late nineteenth century it had become "a source of anxiety" and thus "threatened to overwhelm human agency."[34]

Another example from the novel of women's close contact with commodities is seen when Elizabeth and her tutor, the "degradingly poor" Doris Kilman, go to the Army & Navy Stores at Victoria Street in Westminster (a department store which is now known as the House of Fraser):

> What department did [Miss Kilman] want? Elizabeth interrupted her. 'Petticoats,' she said abruptly, and stalked straight on to the lift. Up they went. Elizabeth guided her this way and that; guided her in her abstraction as if she had been a great child, an unwieldy battleship. There were the petticoats, brown, decorous, striped, frivolous, solid, flimsy; and she chose, in her abstraction, portentously, and the girl serving thought her mad. Elizabeth rather wondered, as they did up the parcel, what Miss Kilman was thinking.[35]

On her way out (since Elizabeth "had gone"), Miss Kilman almost forgets her petticoat, then musters all her strength to keep still amid the further onslaught of commodity: "[T]hrough all the commodities of the world . . . she lurched; saw herself thus lurching with her hat askew, very red in the face, full length in a looking-glass; and at last came out into the street."[36] The phrase "and at last" makes it sound as if the street serves as Miss Kilman's escape from the suffocating hold of merchandise. Even for the supposedly strong of conviction such as Miss Kilman (who belongs to a different social class when seen in relation to Clarissa), the imposition of the

shops cannot be so easily dismissed. Her struggle in this resistance is clear, as she is never completely disengaged from her immediate environment despite her best efforts.

Miss Kilman's scenes leave me asking some questions that align with Ruth Hoberman's train of thought: "Does [Woolf] see shopping as offering women an empowering *flaneuse*-like agency? Or is she evoking a modernist marketplace, one shaping both her own consciousness and that of her characters, in ways she seems to accept if not celebrate?"[37] Noticeably, (in the first question) Hoberman relies on the *flaneuse* for her examination of Woolf's work, one which I replace with the "apparition" as a possible agent in the commodity environment. This raises the inevitable question: Can the "apparition" even be empowered in this scenario? If the woman is a specter that comes and goes, is at times easily swayed and never permanent, how can she demonstrate the agency that is clearly required in this modern environment? Perhaps we can find some answers to these questions in Woolf's *The London Scene*, particularly "The Docks of London" and "Oxford Street Tide," where we can focus on this aspect of commodification more closely.

When Woolf describes the docks in "The Docks of London," she provides details of the city's might over the Tower of London and Tower Bridge: "As we come closer to the Tower Bridge the authority of the city begins to assert itself . . . Here growls and grumbles that rough city song that has called the ships from the sea and brought them to lie captive beneath its warehouses."[38] In the midst of the river, the force of commerce is met by the dominance of the city. It is as if these ships holding "timber, iron, grain" can only cower in deference to urban rule. Meanwhile in "Oxford Street Tide," Woolf emphasizes transitory elements which are somehow expected to fit together, and yet clearly do not: "The mind becomes a glutinous slab that takes impressions and Oxford Street rolls off upon it a perpetual ribbon of changing sights, sounds, and movement . . . Buses, vans, cars, barrows stream past like the fragments of a picture puzzle . . . The puzzle never fits itself together, however long we look."[39] There is a resignation in these lines that give in to the disordered world, a kind of acceptance and knowing that no human's (particularly woman's) prolonged effort of "looking" can fully grasp modern life's persistent force. When studied in light of commodities, it then becomes possible for us to see women as having to grapple with the city's incoherence, all the more as they try to understand their identities in this constantly changing environment. Hoberman writes, "Despite Woolf's traditional reputation as an ascetic priestess of art and inwardness, she repeatedly insists on the important role commodities play in her own and her characters' lives."[40] From the example of Miss Kilman in *Mrs. Dalloway* and Woolf's own voice in these two *London Scene*

essays (whether that of her own or her female persona), we are able to gather pieces of the woman as "apparition" and the many interactions that characterize her fraught existence in the urban environment.

Woolf's Women as "Apparitions"

As Wolff notes in "The Invisible Flaneuse," "[i]n Baudelaire's essays and poems, women appear very often. Modernity breeds, or makes visible, a number of categories of female city-dwellers." The same essay also comments on how "[t]he dandy, the *flaneur*, the hero, the stranger—all figures invoked to epitomize the experience of modern life—are invariably male figures." But what we are able to gather from Woolf's women is that they are no longer the recipients of the *flaneur's* gaze, admiration, or pity (i.e., "the prostitute, the widow, the old lady, the lesbian, the murder victim, and the passing unknown woman"[41]); instead, the female is someone who demonstrates visible interactions with the city, which regards her as a perceptible "apparition" who reflects the fleeting character of the urban environment. We see Clarissa expressing that "[she] love[s] walking in London,"[42] which at first could be taken as a resemblance to Baudelaire's *flaneur*, a "passionate spectator" who finds "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."[43] What is problematic with seeing Clarissa as *flaneur* is that in Baudelaire and Benjamin's definitions, she can never completely belong to the city streets because she is a woman. What we can recognize instead is how by leaving her home in Westminster to buy flowers at Bond Street, Clarissa's movement indicates an active, but otherwise temporary engagement with the city. She pursues this activity and explores a portion of the city because it aligns with her role as the "perfect hostess," one that requires her to go back home to host her party. As Shannon Forbes notes, "Clarissa loves London because the city environment provides . . . a sense of the order, vitality, and stability she lacks within herself. In addition, London validates and celebrates Clarissa's choice of performing the role of the perfect hostess."[44]

Clarissa's daughter Elizabeth demonstrates the faint possibilities that are available for women in the city. One notable scene is Elizabeth's journey which begins at Victoria Street, initially with her tutor Doris Kilman, at the earlier described Army & Navy Stores. This trip becomes an opportunity for reflection as Elizabeth goes on a spontaneous omnibus ride alone through the city. "Buses swooped, settled, were off . . . But which one would she get on to? She had no preferences . . . She inclined to be passive."[45] Elizabeth eventually finds herself on the Strand, passing Somerset House and thinking that "she liked the feeling of people working

. . . It was quite different here from Westminster, she thought, getting off Chancery Lane. It was so serious; it was so busy. In short, she would like to have a profession." And even though her thoughts "made her quite determined, whatever her mother might say, to become either a farmer or a doctor," she acknowledges that she is "rather lazy." Elizabeth is unable to navigate this unknown territory because she has no female model from whom she can determine her next move. When she makes an effort to avoid "dark alleys" it is made clear that "no Dalloways came down the Strand daily; she was a pioneer, a stray, venturing, trusting."[46] Elizabeth only had her own instincts as company on this pioneering journey, which puts her in a position of relying on the city itself as guide for where she goes next. But then she quickly realizes that "it was later than she thought. Her mother would not like her to be wandering off alone like this. She turned back down the Strand [then] mounted the Westminster omnibus."[47] It is as if she is woken from a trance, and the city calls her back to reality.

Elizabeth's short trip does not allow her to reach a conclusion as to a definite career choice, but instead makes her realize that "she must go home. She must dress for dinner," and head back to a life that echoes that of her mother. Instead of what she momentarily considers (a "profession"), this is what she was supposed to follow: "[T]here was in the Dalloway family the tradition of public service. Abbesses, principals, head mistresses, dignitaries, in the republic of women."[48] If at first Elizabeth may have encouraged thoughts of becoming a "farmer or a doctor," it becomes clear that none of those earlier options fit into those previously performed by "the republic of women" in her own family. If she does eventually decide to pursue a career, then it would most likely be in the vein of "public service" as other women in the family had done before her. Even Elizabeth's consciousness of and reference to time—"But what was the time?—where was a clock?"[49] —is reminiscent of the rigid structure that Clarissa herself requires as she goes about her day, leading up to that much-awaited dinner party.

While it is possible for Elizabeth to explore the city on her own and even start to think about other professions, urban life for women seems to always draw them back to the home, or alternatively have them fulfill the roles that other women before them have pursued. Only Elizabeth seems to get closest to forging a new path, but she finds herself rudderless in an entirely new city that has provided a clear roadmap for men and left no fixed directions as of yet for women. And while it may seem that Clarissa and Elizabeth are "free" to go about their day, they are not career women, nor do they escape society's expectations. For one, Clarissa is portrayed as "the perfect hostess" which Peter accurately predicts her to become upon marrying Richard Dalloway: "[S]he had the makings of a perfect hostess, [Peter] said,"[50] and so Clarissa is portrayed at the

end of the novel as a dutiful party host. Elizabeth's thoughts of a career lead her back home to Westminster, and by the end is seen by her father and other party guests as a thing of beauty.

Clarissa, Doris Kilman, and Elizabeth engage in activities associated with *flanerie*, like shopping or wandering aimlessly, but they do so only temporarily. This may be partly attributed to what some scholars have tagged as "Woolf's personal discomfort with shopping" and "ambivalent relation to the marketplace."[51] On the other hand, Woolf could be seen as exploring the role of women in the city as "apparitions," as she contends with the inescapable limitations that exist around women in urban space. These examples capture the paradoxical nature of women's lives in modern life: "And insofar as the experience of 'the modern' occurred mainly in the public sphere, it was primarily men's experience."[52]

Elizabeth's omnibus scene is a reminder of the persistent "omission of women" which exists amid the changing landscape in Woolf's time. Bradshaw writes that "[a]lthough Woolf's London holds the promise of extramural freedom and increasing employment opportunities . . . it also abounds with reminders of the omission of women, the dispossessed, and everyone but the governing elite from the infrastructures of patriarchal power."[53] But instead of simply acknowledging this as a representation of women's absence in urban life, Woolf finds these supposedly "absent" women a place within her writings, if only to explore the still largely uncharted possibilities for women in the city.

A poetic example of this is when Woolf introduces a "battered woman" in the novel, whose singing is first heard by Peter: "A sound interrupted him; a frail quivering sound, a voice bubbling up without direction, vigour, beginning or end, running weakly and shrilly and with an absence of all human meaning . . . the voice of no age or sex, the voice of an ancient spring sprouting from the earth." [54] The passage goes on to describe "the battered woman—for she wore a skirt—with her right hand exposed, her left clutching at her side, stood singing of love—love which has lasted a million years." The scene may be interpreted as Woolf's dedication to the literary tradition that she belongs to, one that would be initially unheard of and at times misunderstood. The city is vividly incorporated into this moment, as if the woman's presence by way of song travels, finding its roots in the midst of the modern environment: "As the ancient song bubbled up opposite Regent's Park Tube Station, still the earth seemed green and flowery . . . and skeletons and treasure, streamed away in rivulets over the pavement and all along the Marylebone Road, and down towards Euston, fertilizing, leaving a damp stain."[55]

Woolf gives voice to women in these examples—whether they are fully understood or not by the people around them—but she also portrays the forces that persist and are constantly provoked by the rapidly changing city. Oxford Street is such a place where those "voices" exist, as Woolf writes in "Oxford Street Tide." In order to hear them, she instructs "the moralist" to "tune his strain so that it receives into it some queer, incongruous voices. Above the racket of van and omnibus we can hear them crying."[56] Clarissa has to compete with the city's own voices when she urges Peter to "'Remember my party to-night! . . . having to raise her voice against the roar of the open air, and, overwhelmed by the traffic and the sound of all the clocks striking." Her efforts then seem blighted when it's mentioned how she "sounded frail and thin and very far away as Peter Walsh shut the door."[57] It seems as though Woolf intends for Clarissa's voice to be drowned out in the city's noise as an affront to her superfluous gathering. Nonetheless, it is another indication of the threat to women (in addition to commodity culture) as they become predisposed to disappear from city life altogether. And yet, their presence still visibly haunts and patiently lurks in the shadows, reappearing and lingering throughout the city.

In "Oxford Street Tide," the people who own such voices include a man who sells tortoises, a great merchant, a middle-class woman, and a thief ("woman of that persuasion"). Woolf writes, "A thousand such voices are always crying aloud in Oxford Street. All are tense, all are real, all are urged out of their speakers by the pressure of making a living, finding a bed, somehow keeping afloat on the bounding, careless, remorseless tide of the street . . . even a moralist must allow that this gaudy, bustling, vulgar street reminds us that life is a struggle."[58] Woolf highlights these working men and women who make possible the continued movement of the city. Alongside the men of Oxford Street are the women who also "cry aloud" for their voices to be heard amid the struggle of life in the modern city. These voices, at times disembodied and other times more tangible, could therefore be labelled "apparitions," being now so far removed from Baudelaire and Benjamin's corporeal city-walkers.

Rebuilding the City

"Oxford Street Tide" includes a compelling address to the women who would have likely read this piece in *Good Housekeeping*: "We do not build for our descendants, who may live up in the clouds or down in the earth, but for ourselves and our own needs. We knock down and rebuild as we expect to be knocked down and rebuilt. It is an impulse that makes for creation and fertility."[59] While Woolf here writes about a particular section of London that

is tied to commodities, she might as well be urging her female readers to "build" the city on their own terms, that is, despite the challenge of having to rebuild again later on. There is a similar instance in "The Docks of London" where Woolf seeks to "empower her female"[60]:

> The only thing, one comes to feel, that can change the routine of the docks is a change in ourselves . . . It is we—our tastes, our fashions, our needs—that make the cranes dip and swing, that call the ships from the sea. Our body is their master. We demand shoes, furs, bags, stoves, oil, rice pudding, candles; and they are brought us. Trade watches us anxiously to see what new desires are beginning to grow in us, what new dislikes.[61]

Woolf speaks directly to generations of women, maybe other Clarissas who seem resigned to old age (even death) and conventions. It is perhaps someone like Elizabeth who is Woolf's ideal audience, one who explores the city on her own to consider other careers—that is, if only it were possible in reality for Elizabeth to escape her "class-bound and gendered destiny" and thereafter "build" a life that is different from the ones lived by her mother and all women before her. But we know that it would take more Elizabeths to strengthen the community of women who will later find themselves wandering and exploring a city that they can emphatically call home. Just as she would ask in "Street Haunting" in 1927, "Am I here, or am I there?" what appears to be Woolf's vision of rebuilding the city in *Mrs. Dalloway* is hinged on its title character's positioning as a rather ambivalent figure. For example, "[Clarissa] would not say of Peter, she would not say of herself, I am this, I am that"[62]; while Peter remembers Clarissa saying once as they were "sitting on the bus going up Shaftesbury Avenue, she felt herself everywhere; not 'here, here, here'; and she tapped the back of her seat; but everywhere. She waved her hand, going up Shaftesbury Avenue. She was all that. So that to know her, or any one, one must seek out the people who completed them; even the places."[63]

While Woolf recognized a shrouded power in this practice of "haunting" by women in the city, I must reiterate that using the figure of the "apparition," thus relying on a singular persona to challenge Baudelaire's *flaneur* and the scholar's favorite *flaneuse*, poses its own limitations for viewing women's condition in the modern city. Interestingly, recent scholarship on gender and urban studies advocate for new methodologies which are able to achieve a more comprehensive analysis of women's lives: "The complexity of the gendered usage of urban space is a feature that has not only become increasingly prominent but that also contests many of the longstanding assumptions about the gendering of city streets."[64] Instead of choosing a side in the "great *flaneur* debate," perhaps

it would be more productive to admit that ultimately, there is more than one way to "read" Woolf's women, and in turn this would allow us to recognize British modernism and modernity in light of its many contradictions as we continue to challenge its definitions in the same manner that Woolf did in her own time.

Notes

[1] Anna Snaith and Michael Whitworth, "Introduction: Approaches to Space and Place in Woolf," in *Locating Woolf: The Politics of Space and Place,* ed. Snaith and Whitworth (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 24.

[2] Sonita Sarker, "Locating a Native Englishness in Virginia Woolf's 'The London Scene'," *NWSA Journal* 13, no. 2 (2001): 6, https://www.jstor.org/stable/4316806.

[3] Janet Wolff, "Gender and the Haunting of Cities: Or, the Retirement of the *Flaneur*," in *The Invisible Flaneuse? Gender, Public Space,* and *Visual Culture in Nineteenth-Century Paris*, ed. Aruna D'Souza and Tom McDonough (2003; repr. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 19-20.

[4] Janet Wolff, "The Invisible Flaneuse: Women and the Literature of Modernity," in *Feminine Sentences: Essays on Women and Culture* (1985; repr. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), 45.

[5] Charles Baudelaire, "The Painter of Modern Life," trans. Jonathan Mayne in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism,* ed. Vincent B. Leitch (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001), 795.

[6] Wolff, "Gender," 19.

[7] Rachel Bowlby, "Commerce and Femininity," in *Just Looking: Consumer Culture in Dreiser, Gissing, and Zola* (1985; repr. Oxon: Routledge, 2010), 12.

[8] Bowlby, "Commerce," 12.

[9] Snaith and Whitworth, "Introduction," 7.

[10] Wolff, "Invisible *Flaneuse*," 47.

[11] Temma Balducci, Introduction to *Gender, Space, and the Gaze in Post-Haussmann Visual Culture: Beyond the Flâneur* (Oxon: Routledge, 2017), 1.

[12] Wolff, "Gender," 20.

[13] Wolff, 28.

[14] Stephanie Loveless, "Tactical Soundwalking in the City: A Feminist Turn from Eye to Ear," *Leonardo Music Journal* 30 (2020): 99-100, https://muse.jhu.edu/article/775530.

[15] Kristine B. Miranne and Alma H. Young, Introduction to *Gendering the City: Women, Boundaries, and Visions of Urban Life*, ed. Miranne and Young (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000), 1.

[16] Virginia Woolf, "Street Haunting: A London Adventure," in *Virginia Woolf: Selected Essays,* ed. David Bradshaw (1927; repr. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 182.

[17] A. F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 7-8, quoted in Janet Wolff, "Gender," 27.

[18] Vincent B. Leitch, "Charles Baudelaire 1821-1867," in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism,* ed. Jeffrey Williams et al. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001), 791.

[19] Baudelaire, "Painter of Modern Life," 796.

[20] Peter Osborne and Matthew Charles, "Walter Benjamin," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2020 Edition),* ed. Edward N. Zalta, last modified October 14, 2020, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2020/entries/benjamin/.

[21] Walter Benjamin, "The *Flaneur*," in *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism,* trans. Harry Zohn (1973; repr. London: Verso, 1983), 37.

[22] Bryony Randall, "Woolf and Modernist Studies," in *Virginia Woolf in Context,* ed. Bryony Randall and Jane Goldman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 36-37.

[23] Melba Cuddy-Keane, "Woolf and the Theory and Pedagogy of Reading," in *Virginia Woolf, the Intellectual, and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 190.

[24] Cuddy-Keane, "Pedagogy of Reading," 192.

[25] Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925; repr. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 64-65.

[26] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway,* 165.

[27] Angeliki Spiropoulou, "Modernity, Modernisms, and the Past," in *Virginia Woolf, Modernity, and History: Constellations with Walter Benjamin* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 19.

[28] Tamar Katz, "Woolf's Urban Rhythms," in *A Companion to Virginia Woolf,* ed. Jessica Berman (West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2019), 398.

[29] David Bradshaw, "Woolf's London, London's Woolf," in *Virginia Woolf in Context,* ed. Bryony Randall and Jane Goldman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 236.

[30] Bowlby, Introduction to *Just Looking,* 6-7.

[31] Bowlby, "Commerce," *Just Looking,* 11.

[32] Ruth Hoberman, "Woolf and Commodities," in *Virginia Woolf in Context,* ed. Bryony Randall and Jane Goldman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 449.

[33] Bowlby, "Commerce," *Just Looking*, 12.

[34] Hoberman, "Woolf and Commodities," 449.

[35] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 110.

[36] Woolf, 113.

[37] Hoberman, "Woolf and Commodities," 451.

[38] Virginia Woolf, "The Docks of London," in *The London Scene: Six Essays on London* (1931, repr. e-artnow, 2003), 52, Kindle.

[39] Woolf, "Oxford Street Tide," in *The London Scene: Six Essays on London* (1932, repr. e-artnow, 2003), 133-134, Kindle.

[40] Hoberman, "Woolf and Commodities," 449.

[41] Wolff, "Invisible Flaneuse," 41.

[42] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 451.

[43] Baudelaire, "Painter of Modern Life," 795.

[44] Shannon Forbes, "Equating Performance with Identity: The Failure of Clarissa Dalloway's Victorian 'Self' in Virginia Woolf's 'Mrs. Dalloway,'" *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 38, no. 1 (2005): 40, https://www.jstor.org/stable/30039298.

[45] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 114.

[46] Woolf, 116-117.

[47] Woolf, 117-118.

[48] Woolf, 117.

[49] Woolf, 116.

[50] Woolf, 6.

[51] Hoberman, "Woolf and Commodities," 451.

[52] Wolff, "Invisible Flaneuse," 35.

[53] Bradshaw, "Woolf's London," 232.

[54] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 68-69.

[55] Woolf, 69.

[56] Woolf, "Oxford Street Tide," 171.

[57] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 41.

[58] Woolf, "Oxford Street Tide," 180-183.

[59] Woolf, 161-162.

[60] Alice Wood, "Made To Measure," *Prose Studies* 32, no. 1 (2010): 19, https://doi.org/10.1080/01440351003747634.

[61] Woolf, "The Docks of London," 99-103.

[62] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 7.

[63] Woolf, 129.

[64] Danielle van den Heuvel, "Gender in the Streets of the Premodern City," *Journal of Urban History* 45, no. 4 (2019): 693-710, https://doi.org/10.1177/0096144218768493.

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