

Haunting History

Virginia Woolf, Vivian Maier, and the Twentieth-Century *Flâneuse*

by
Abbie Reeves

A Thesis Submitted to the Department of English Language & Literature
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the B.A. Degree

The University of Chicago
April 29, 2019

The growth of the modern city at the turn of the twentieth century impacted every facet of daily life, but it especially changed the ways in which pedestrians accessed and interpreted the built environment around them. As cities like Paris and London grew into massive metropolises full of winding arcades and busy boulevards, the city became not just a place to live and work, but a place to shop, sightsee, and show off. In this shifting urban landscape, a key figure emerged: the *flâneur*. This detached, wandering observer came to represent the artistic possibilities afforded by modern urban spaces. However, not everyone could experience the city as a *flâneur*. Women walking the city streets were automatically labeled as commodities or consumers, or confined to the domestic sphere and denied access to public spaces altogether. The conditions of modernity made it exceedingly difficult for women to wander freely, let alone partake in the kind of imaginative drifting that was characteristic of the *flâneur*. While the female version of the *flâneur*—the *flâneuse*—is largely absent from historical discourse, this essay will show that there is in fact evidence of her wanderings in the twentieth century, *after* the male *flâneur* had faded into oblivion. It is possible to follow the *flâneuse*'s footsteps through the history of urban experience, if only one looks closely enough.

This paper will examine the work of two female artists who attest to the historical presence of the *flâneuse* and exemplify the practice of *flânerie* at various points during the twentieth century: Virginia Woolf and Vivian Maier. In her 1930 essay “Street Haunting,” Woolf challenges the convention that *flânerie* is a male practice. Taking on the persona of the *flâneuse*, she engages in the same type of imaginative ambulation usually reserved for the male *flâneur*, forging a sense of identity through her wanderings and channeling the nineteenth-century *flâneur*'s curiosity about city life. In turn, Maier uses the medium of photography to capture both the spectacular and the quotidian aspects of the mid-twentieth century American city. Her

photographs of Chicago and New York evoke the inquisitive spirit of the *flâneuse* in their portrayal of everyday scenes. While these artists practice a form of *flânerie* that is similar to male *flânerie* in its basic premise and its creative output, it is fundamentally different in its more empathetic relationship with the city crowds as well as its fraught relationship with domesticity and consumerism. Drawing on the work of twentieth and twenty-first century literary critics and social thinkers, I argue that Woolf and Maier reclaim and revise the outdated practice of *flânerie* in a way that is informed by the gendered history of urban space and urban mobility.

Understanding these artists as *flâneuses* allows us to trace the evolution of *flânerie* into the twentieth century, to acknowledge the lived reality of the female *flâneur*, and to turn a more critical eye to the social structures and economic institutions that shape the goings-on of city life.

In order to investigate the *flâneuse*, it is first necessary to understand the conditions of modernity that led to the birth of the *flâneur* in the nineteenth century. In the era of industrialization, village-dwellers flocked to European cities and metropolitan populations exploded in Europe. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the population of London ballooned from 1 million to over 6.5 million people (Clout). As nineteenth-century cities became more crowded and dirtier, public health concerns shaped urban planning by way of new housing standards and zoning ordinances. In 1850s Paris, architect Baron Von Haussmann refashioned the claustrophobic medieval streets into vast, well-lit boulevards that encouraged a new culture of people-watching and facilitated the transport of commercial goods (Encyclopædia Britannica, “Baron Haussmann”). In addition to these new pedestrian spaces, Haussmann designed glass-lined arcades where shoppers could browse sparkling arrays of never-before-seen merchandise. The new arcades and boulevards were not just social spaces—they were immensely practical and economic in nature. The increased ease of passage through the modern city was directly

beneficial to the capitalist project of industrialization, as it facilitated the transport of workers and materials to and from factories. Haussmann's plan for a walkable Paris represented a new wave of modernization efforts and economic growth that spread throughout Europe during the nineteenth century, and it proved essential for the development of *flânerie* as an urban artistic practice.

As European cities adapted to crowding and industrialization, the changes in urban planning were reflected in the psychology of urban spaces and the interactions that occurred within them. In *The Metropolis and Mental Life* (1903), Georg Simmel refers to the experience of walking through the city as a “swift and continuous shift of external and internal stimuli” (11) caused by the shock of perceiving new faces, noises, and smells as one passed through a city street. Simmel suggests that people who grew accustomed to the city's onslaught of sensory stimuli tended to develop a more rational and calculating, even robotic attitude toward life in order to cope with the rapidly shifting landscape around them, causing “the predominance of what one can call the objective spirit over the subjective” (Simmel 18). It was not just the saturation of stimuli that Simmel believed was responsible for the metropolis's intellectual climate—it was also the triumph of capitalistic values like “punctuality, calculability, and exactness” (Simmel 13) that he believed were causing the metropolitan crowds to act in such a mechanical way. For Simmel, the culture of metropolitan life at the end of the nineteenth century was brainwashing crowds of pedestrians into acting like machines and turning public spaces into emotional voids.

While the ultra-stimulating urban spaces of the nineteenth century demanded the kind of rapid and rational attitude that Simmel describes, they also provided the perfect opportunity for exactly the opposite behavior: aimless drifting. With its busy streets and endless stream of

distractions, the modern city made it possible for an individual to wander without drawing attention, to become immersed in the city crowds and observe the comings-and-goings of city life while maintaining total anonymity. In 1863, Baudelaire identified this peculiar figure as the *flâneur*—the man of the crowd. The massive, unaffected crowds of pedestrians in the nineteenth-century city enabled the *flâneur* to pass unnoticed and to take pleasure in the swirling flow of people and goods. In “The Painter of Modern Life,” Baudelaire introduces the *flâneur* as a crowd-dwelling individual:

For the perfect *flâneur*, ... it is an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow.... To be away from home, yet to feel oneself everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the center of the world, yet to remain hidden from the world...The lover of universal life enters into the crowd as though it were an immense reservoir of electric energy. (Baudelaire 9)

Unlike Simmel’s hardened metropolitan man, Baudelaire’s *flâneur* derives joy from the city’s constant flow of stimuli. Importantly, the Baudelairean *flâneur* is not just a passive observer: he is also able to synthesize his perceptions into something artistic and beautiful. Baudelaire says of the *flâneur*, “We might also liken him to a mirror as vast as the crowd itself; or to a kaleidoscope endowed with consciousness, which, with each one of its movements, represents the multiplicity of life and the flickering grace of all the elements of life” (9). In these passages, Baudelaire suggests that the *flâneur* derives his existence from his urban milieu, and that he is able to reflect his ever-changing surroundings. The constant hubbub of the nineteenth-century city and the impersonal climate of its public spaces allowed the *flâneur* to place himself at the heart of it all and draw inspiration from metropolitan life.

While the conditions of modernity enabled a select subset of European city-dwellers to adopt the lifestyle of the *flâneur*, the license to wander freely and enjoy the crowds was not available to everyone. To be a *flâneur* required a certain degree of idleness—a unique

detachment from the capitalistic values that motivated other pedestrians to head dutifully to their respective workplaces in the morning or run errands in the afternoon. This meant that the *flâneur* was, by necessity, a bourgeois or upper-class figure with sufficient economic means to spend his time loafing around the city rather than making ends meet. As I shall show, these qualifications meant that in reality, the *flâneur* was almost exclusively male. Baudelaire describes him as both “passionate” and “impartial”—fascinated by the city but drifting through it without becoming too attached to any one person or object (9). Despite his being a member of the upper classes, the *flâneur*’s aimlessness, for Benjamin, represented his resistance to structures of capitalism. In *The Arcades Project*, Benjamin describes the way in which the *flâneur* opposes the mechanistic crowds:

These [the city crowds] are less the movements of people going about their business than the movements of the machines they operate... The *flâneur*, at any rate, has no part in such behavior. Instead, he forms an obstacle in its path. His nonchalance would therefore be nothing other than an unconscious protest against the tempo of the production process. (337)

This passage from Benjamin illustrates the ironic position of the *flâneur* in the context of modernity: his status as a bourgeois idler signified his complicity in capitalist society, yet his resistance to the movements of the crowd set him against this very same framework of capitalism. Importantly, the physical act of *wandering* was the practice that signified the *flâneur*’s social status, defined his identity, and symbolized his resistance toward the capitalist project.

The *flâneur* was not only a historical phenomenon with a tangible presence, but also a symbolic figure of modernity that appeared prominently in *fin-de-siècle* literature. Alongside Baudelaire’s essay “The Painter of Modern Life,” in which he introduces the *flâneur* as part of his description of the artist “Monsieur G.,” other nineteenth-century writers were also captivated

by the idea of the wandering, incognito observer. One prime example of the *flâneur* in literature is Edgar Allan Poe's 1840 short story "The Man of the Crowd," a cat-and-mouse chase in which a mysterious man leads the narrator on a winding trail through the London streets. Benjamin describes Poe's story as a detective story without any crime, referring to its general atmosphere of paranoia (Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire* 48). What is interesting about Poe's story, however, is the way in which the narrator engages the same kind of wandering, street-haunting activity as the unknown man that he is pursuing. In this regard, both the narrator and the subject of the story can be seen as versions of the *flâneur*. The practice of *flânerie* thus becomes tied to the site of literary production (the author, the narrator) as well as the site of literary inspiration.

The conflation of the narrator and the man of the crowd in Poe's story alludes to the way in which the *flâneur* was not just a stock character in literature, but also became conflated with the figure of the journalist. Benjamin associates the *flâneur* with the nineteenth-century writer of *feuilletons*—inserts in French newspapers devoted to non-political news and gossip, literature, and art criticism (Chisholm). The *feuilleton*-writer resembled the *flâneur* in the type of quotidian details that he collected as well as his ultra-detached standpoint: Benjamin describes one of the most famous *feuilleton* writers, Alfred Delvau, "claim[ing] that he could divide the Parisian public according to its various strata as easily as a geologist distinguishes the layers in rocks" (Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire* 39). This attitude of impartial, taxonomic observation turned the city crowds into a kind of cipher that only the privileged *flâneur* was able to decode. In addition to the *feuilleton*, *flânerie* became associated with the *faits divers* (literally "various facts"), a genre of newspaper writing during the latter nineteenth century that magnified the shocking and spectacular events of everyday life. It seemed that the *flâneur* and the journalist were becoming increasingly alike in their activities, such that the French journalist came to be known as "the

man of the street” (qtd. in Schwartz 42). These associations of the *flâneur* with literary and journalistic production imbued the *flâneur*’s activities with commercial undertones, further complicating his ambivalent relationship to capitalism.

One reason why the conditions of modernity were so propitious for the *flâneur*’s journalistic drifting was the separation of public and private spaces in cities—a distinction intimately linked to questions of gender. Not only was the *flâneur* an upper-class figure with the privilege of leisure time and unrestricted mobility, he was nearly always a man. In her essay “The Invisible Flâneuse,” Janet Wolff categorizes modern life into two spheres: public and private. She describes the public sphere as that of the workplace and the marketplace, while the private sphere encompasses the home and domestic life. Although women did cross over into the public sphere—for work, for leisure, for utility—Wolff argues that their presence went largely unacknowledged by writers and sociologists in the literary and historical canon of the nineteenth century. Indeed, the very concept of “modernity” was chiefly concerned with city life and did not include the private sphere; as Wolff puts it, “the particular experience of ‘modernity’ was, for the most part, equated with experience *in* the public arena” (12). The idea of two spheres also appears in Simmel’s *The Metropolis and Modern Life*, but in a different sense. For him, a division exists between “the essentially intellectualistic character of the mental life of the metropolis” and “the small town which rests more on feelings and emotional relationships” (12). Like the private sphere that Wolff identifies, the non-urban—and therefore non-male—sphere in Simmel’s binary is characterized by domesticity and ruled by emotions. Since women were associated with this second sphere, they were seen as not sophisticated or rational enough for city life. Within this gendered modern landscape, the *flâneur*—who was able to enter the public sphere and enjoy the experience of modernity whenever he pleased—was necessarily male. This

gendered historical antecedent would have major ramifications for Woolf's and Maier's later subversions of *flânerie*.

As a key figure of modernity, the *flâneur* was able to occupy the hallmark spaces of modernity as if he lived there, thereby claiming a certain type of privileged ownership over the public realm and simultaneously devaluing the traditional spaces of domesticity (traditionally female spaces). Of these public spaces, the *flâneur*'s wanderings most often occurred in the Parisian arcades—those bustling, glassy passageways associated with Haussmann's modernization of the city. For the *flâneur*, “the arcades were a cross between a street and an *intérieur*... The street becomes a dwelling for the *flâneur*; he is as much at home among the facades of houses as a citizen is in his four walls” (Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire* 37). As Benjamin identifies, the arcades offered all the comforts of home for the *flâneur* while still providing the exciting opportunities of the city streets. Importantly, although the *flâneur*'s experience mirrored the experience of domesticity, the arcades were not gendered as a female space. At the same time as the male *flâneur* claimed ownership over public spaces like the arcades, other parts of nineteenth-century Paris also experienced a blurring of the boundary between public and private, particularly the main boulevards that had been made into wide-open, well-lit spaces during Haussmann's redesign. Businesses began popping up along these new boulevards, including a wealth of sidewalk cafes where pedestrians could sit and watch whatever was happening on the street as they sipped their coffee. According to Susanna Barrows, sidewalk cafés became “the primary theaters of everyday life in nineteenth-century France” (17). Yet while Schwartz argues that nineteenth-century café culture made the practice of people-watching available to everyone—not just the bourgeois male (25)—sidewalk cafés offered an immobilized site of observation that was much more limited than the roving practice of *flânerie*.

When women did pass from the private sphere into the public sphere, their presence was carefully policed. According to Wolff, women in public spaces were classified based on their relationship to men: they often appeared as “whore, widow, or murder-victim” (13) in nineteenth-century literature. These undesirable roles reduced women to sexual objects and symbolized men’s power over women in the public sphere, discouraging female transgression. A similarly reductive classification of women occurs in Benjamin’s depictions of nineteenth-century Paris—the same urban milieu that gave rise to the *flâneur*. When Benjamin refers to women in the *flâneur*’s surroundings he adopts a distanced, taxonomic tone, reminiscent of the way Delvau taxonomizes the crowd in the *feuilleton*: “Feminine fauna of the arcades: prostitutes, grisettes, old-hag shopkeepers, female street vendors, glovers, *demoiselles*” (Benjamin 494). Here, women are not people, but “fauna;” creatures with no real interiority or value other than their use-value. Women existed in the Parisian arcades only as commodities (prostitutes), consumers (grisettes, *demoiselles*), or vendors, inseparable from male structures of consumption. Female pedestrians in the modern city were limited to a set number of types or caricatures, all of which compromised their agency and associated them with the structures of consumer culture to which the *flâneur* was strictly opposed.

The alienation of women in urban spaces through the separation between the public and private spheres and through the objectification of women in public meant that it was practically impossible for them to engage in the same kind of imaginative wandering that men were able to enjoy freely. Women’s entry into urban spaces—even spaces such as sidewalk cafés—was defined by their relationship to men and their relationship to capitalism, which prohibited them from taking on the *flâneur*’s detached attitude. Their wanderings were subject to the male gaze, preventing them from drifting anonymously. In terms of artistic production, this meant that

women were unable to experience the city as a site of inspiration in the same way that men, as *flâneurs*, could and did. In “The Invisible Flâneuse” Wolff argues that the separation of public and private spheres excluded women from the literature of modernity altogether, since women in public were seen as either subservient or transgressive figures (13). Wolff comes to the pessimistic conclusion that the female *flâneur* (the *flâneuse*) never existed in the literature of modernity: “There is no question of inventing the *flâneuse*: the essential point is that such a character was rendered impossible by the sexual divisions of the nineteenth century” (Wolff 14). Women’s absence from the discourse of *flânerie* meant that they were excluded from an entire mode of subjective experience and artistic production.

Wolff’s assertion that the *flâneuse* never existed is based on the absence of female *flâneur* figures in the literary and artistic canon. However, some theorists have argued that the nineteenth-century *flâneuse* *did* exist, even though her activities might not have led to any tangible artistic output. Anne Friedberg asserts that the nineteenth-century *flâneuse* was a product of the modern department store and the possibility of window-shopping, which simultaneously allowed women the ability to wander safely while trapping them within a net of consumerism:

The *flâneuse* was empowered in a paradoxical sense: new freedoms of lifestyle and “choice” were available, but, as feminist theorists have amply illustrated, women were addressed as consumers in ways that played on deeply rooted cultural constructions of gender. (36)

In Friedberg’s analysis, the *flâneuse*’s particular environment prevented her from engaging in the same types of observational practices and enjoying the same freedoms as her male counterpart. And while women may have been able to partake in a limited version of *flânerie* in the nineteenth century, it was still greatly restricted by class, race, and other social factors; not every woman had the time, means, or ability to engage in shopping as a pastime, much less wander the

boulevards without a specific destination. Because of these lived realities, there is little to suggest that a true female counterpart existed alongside the male *flâneur* during the nineteenth century. However, there is clear evidence of women practicing *flânerie* in the decades that followed the male *flâneur*'s decline at the turn of the century.

In the remainder of this paper, I address the question of the *flâneuse*'s presence in the twentieth century and identify the differences between the historically established version of nineteenth-century *flânerie* and the unacknowledged *flânerie* of twentieth-century women artists. Although the *flâneur* was the harbinger of modernity in the nineteenth century, his glory days were short-lived. The twentieth century brought a wave of modernization that resulted in the replacement of much of the previous century's urban infrastructure and the disappearance of the wandering artist figure. No longer was it possible to remain concealed under the faint glow of Haussmann's gas lamps—instead, the pedestrian of the twentieth century was constantly exposed to “the brutal shock caused by the spectacle of entire cities suddenly being illuminated by electric light” (*Charles Baudelaire* 51). Public spaces were evolving, too: the tunnel-like arcades of Haussmann's Paris gave way to the department store and, eventually, the shopping mall. This, too, signaled the *flâneur*'s downfall: “If the arcade is the classical form of the *interieur*... the department store is the form of the *interieur*'s decay” (Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire* 54). The proliferation of technological advances such as automobiles and public transit in twentieth-century cities rendered the *flâneur* obsolete: roaming the city on foot was no longer the symbol of bourgeois artistic freedom, and the precision of new documentary technologies like photography made the *flâneur*'s photo-realistic observations unnecessary.

Virginia Woolf's 1930 essay “Street Haunting” brings peripatetic wandering into the interwar period of the twentieth century. While Woolf's nighttime wanderings in “Street

Haunting” bear a number of similarities to the typically male practice of *flânerie*, her text also suggests the flourishing of a *flâneuse* in a time period when the male practice of *flânerie* had already faded into obscurity. Just as Baudelaire’s *flâneur* drifts through the crowd in order to revel in the goings-on of metropolitan life, Woolf immerses herself in the London masses in “Street Haunting.” Before she can engage in wandering and observation, Woolf first becomes a woman of the crowd, the entity that both conceals and constructs the *flâneur*’s identity. She describes the experience figuratively: “The shell-like covering which our souls have excreted to house themselves, to make for themselves a shape distinct from others, is broken, and there is left of all these wrinkles and roughnesses a central oyster of perceptiveness, an enormous eye” (20). Here, Woolf consciously casts off the outermost protective shell that separates her from others in order to access her most perceptive self. Like the *flâneur*, Woolf finds solace and inspiration in the crowd and, as the *flâneur* does, she draws energy from it. Just as Baudelaire’s man of the crowd seeks to reflect the vivacity of his surroundings through some form of artistic or intellectual production, Woolf uses richly imaginative language in the form of an essay to describe her London environs. In terms of her relationship to the London masses, Woolf’s experience of haunting the London streets mirrors the experience of the nineteenth-century male *flâneur*.

Not only through her immersion and dissolution in the crowd, but also through the shared theme of wandering does Woolf echo the *flânerie* of the nineteenth century and adapt it for her own purposes. In “Street Haunting,” Woolf’s wandering comprises the main action of the story, as the text depicts her rambling journey to buy a pencil in London on a winter evening. Woolf makes it quite clear that she cannot simply wander whenever or wherever she pleases: “One must, one always must, do something or other; it is not allowed one simply to enjoy oneself”

(27). For the nineteenth-century *flâneur*, wandering was a sign of social status as well as a symbol of his characteristic opposition to the production process. But in Woolf's case, wandering does not seem to serve either of these main purposes of *flânerie*: she does not have the *flâneur*'s privilege of unlimited leisure time, and her quest to buy a pencil works in tandem with capitalism rather than opposing it. In spite of these restrictions it is still possible to consider Woolf's wanderings as *flânerie*, and Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* provides a theoretical framework with which to do so. De Certeau refers to the "rhetoric of walking" (100), describing how pedestrian movements through the city constitute a kind of language and how the city's physical structures form a rhetorical logic that governs the way walkers are able to express themselves. Woolf's essay is ironically structured around the quest to buy a pencil—an instrument of literary production—but by the time she actually buys it she has already crafted a creative work of literature documenting her journey through London. The line of her walk parallels the line of the page. Indeed, Woolf inscribes what de Certeau would call a "poetic geography" (105) on top of her literal route. Her path through London is so rambling that she has forgotten the pencil entirely by the time she reaches her destination: "But what was it? Ah, we remember, it was a pencil" (27). The pencil, as she freely admits, was simply an excuse to go out. Since Woolf's rambling deviates from the expected path, her walking represents a form of creative expression in itself. Woolf's wandering works within the constraints of time and space just as her writing, with its meandering third-person narration and its elaborate metaphors, presses against the constraints of language and style. While Woolf may not conform to the exact pattern of the nineteenth-century *flâneur* in either gender or aimlessness, her London wandering constitutes a kind of creative *flânerie* when viewed through a twentieth-century theoretical lens.

This idea of physical wandering as creative composition is especially evident in the roving eye of the *flâneur*, the detached observer of the city. Like Baudelaire's Painter of Modern Life, Woolf documents and observes her surroundings as she wanders, scanning her eye casually over objects. Separating her eye's activity from her conscious thoughts, she 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" (Woolf 20). However, although this practice of surface-level observation appears to be similar to the impartial gaze of the nineteenth-century *flâneur*, Woolf is not content with gazing at exteriors alone. While she admits that her eye is drawn to beautiful surfaces, she finds beauty to be insubstantial: "after a prolonged diet of this simple, sugary fare, of beauty pure and uncomposed, we become conscious of satiety" (21). In Woolf's rejection of superficial beauty, a difference emerges between the male *flâneur* and Woolf's *flâneuse* in the way they process the visual stimuli of the city. This difference can be best described as the difference between generalization and specificity: while the *flâneur* revels in the project of categorizing what he sees, of knowing the people and objects around him, Woolf revels in the imaginative possibility of entering other lives if only for a moment, tantalized by the possibility of grasping the ugly or the unknown. Benjamin describes how the *flâneur* "went botanizing on the asphalt" (372), suggesting that nineteenth-century *flânerie* was similar in nature to the Victorian project of botany—an attempt to group the world into abstract categories based on what one (in this case, the *flâneur*) could physically observe. Woolf, on the other hand, is fascinated by what she *cannot* see: "Into each of these lives one could penetrate a little way, far enough to give oneself the illusion that one is not tethered to a single mind, but can put on briefly for a few minutes the bodies and minds of others. One could become a washerwoman, a publican, a street singer"

(Woolf 28). Instead of attempting to classify people, Woolf is inspired to imagine what their lives might be like. This illustrates a key difference in Woolf's experience of London: When Woolf dissolves herself in the crowd she is seeking a sense of intimacy or empathy with the people around her. In contrast, the nineteenth-century *flâneur* enters the crowd in order to observe from a distance.

The contrast between these two types of observational practices also manifests itself in the way Woolf's *flâneuse* and Benjamin's *flâneur* perceive women in urban spaces. While Benjamin reduces women to 'fauna' based on their relationship to consumer culture, Woolf portrays them as more complex individuals. She peers into the lit window of a house and sees "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?" (20). Here, Woolf imbues the unknown woman with thoughts and a voice rather than simply assigning her to a category. Woolf is clearly interested in the woman's project of measuring teaspoons— she begins to imagine what the spoons are for, but this question remains unanswered when the doorbell rings. The doorbell snaps Woolf out of her reverie, but it also illustrates the important fact that her musings never quite penetrate beneath the surface of a person—that is, Woolf retains the basic detached attitude of the *flâneur* while managing to be more empathetic toward the people around her. This moment in "Street Haunting" is also important because it illustrates another unique quality of Woolf's haunting: her wandering and observation is not confined to the public space of the city streets, but includes the private sphere as well. While the *flâneur* confines his activity to the public sphere and finds a home for himself there, Woolf's wanderings acknowledge the existence of the private (and female) sphere of existence and break down the boundaries between this sphere and the public, modern city. In a way, Woolf's title "Street

Haunting” also reflects her oscillation between empathy and detachment—the title could suggest Woolf “haunting” the streets *or* the streets “haunting” her. In both cases, Woolf collapses divisions between self and other, interior and exterior, just as the boundaries between public and private became blurred in the nineteenth century.

Woolf shows the blurring of the supposedly separate spaces of public and private life not only by observing other women in the city, but also by describing her own activity of window-shopping. As she passes down Oxford Street, Woolf decides which beautiful furniture she would buy for her dream home: “having built and furnished the house, one is happily under no obligation to possess it; one can dismantle it in the twinkling of an eye, and build and furnish another house with other chairs and other glasses” (23). Through these imaginings, Woolf is both inside the domestic “space” of her dream home and at the same time outside in the heart of the modern metropolis. Woolf has no intention of buying the things she sees: she appreciates them solely for their aesthetic appeal. This act of furnishing a home solely as a playful exercise of make-believe embodies the *flâneur*’s ambivalent attitude toward capitalism and consumer culture. In this regard, Woolf is like the nineteenth-century *flâneur*, consciously resisting the pull of capitalism as she wanders without buying, but fascinated by the visually stunning array of merchandise. The practice of window-shopping in the twentieth century was more than just a pastime for female pedestrians. In her book *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern*, Friedberg suggests that the twentieth-century department store was the environment that gave birth to the *flâneuse* because it sparked female wandering and imagination (36). Friedberg explains how shopping—which previously signified women’s subservience to men in the public sphere—became a way to safely indulge in the pleasures of drifting and observing in the twentieth century. In this historical context, Woolf’s text is a perfect example of the way in

which window-shopping could serve as a form of female *flânerie*—an activity that breaks down the separate spheres of public and private and encourages both observation and reverie. Woolf's imagined shopping spree allows her to engage with certain aspects of traditional femininity without actually assuming a traditionally feminine persona or occupying the domestic sphere.

In addition to challenging the limits of female domesticity by way of window-shopping, Woolf also interrogates the connection between femininity and the spectacle of consumer culture. As she wanders through London, Woolf spies on a dwarf woman entering a shoe store: “She was shabbily dressed, but she was ready to lavish any money upon her shoes. And as this was the only occasion upon which she was not afraid of being looked at but positively craved attention, she was ready to use any device to prolong the choosing and fitting” (22). It appears that the shoes have the power to transform this woman from a social outcast into a beautiful, feminine figure; however, the instant the woman re-enters the street with her new shoes, “she had become a dwarf only” (Woolf 22). Because the woman is a dwarf, she is already a spectacle of sorts—the subject of public scrutiny and fascination. For her, the shoes represent the possibility of reclaiming control over her public image, transforming her from a self-conscious individual into a woman eager to show off in front of everyone: a different kind of spectacle, but spectacular nonetheless. This troubling episode emphasizes the false promise of the commodity and its powerful influence over ideas of beauty and femininity. Woolf's vision of the dwarf woman could be considered part of what Guy Debord calls “the society of the spectacle, where the commodity contemplates itself in a world it has created” (53)—in this case, the commodity comes to life at the instant the dwarf tries on the expensive shoes. For a moment, the dwarf woman's dream of attaining beauty and normalcy is made into reality, but Woolf witnesses the falsity of this spectacle when the woman exits the shop and returns to her previous state. Woolf's

uncomfortable fascination with this woman demonstrates her troubled relationship to consumer culture. Here, Woolf can be likened to the nineteenth-century *flâneur* who is at once captivated and repelled by the spectacle of consumption under capitalism. Unlike the *flâneur*, however, she is attuned to the ways in which the society of the spectacle is linked to the construction of gender and the ways in which women continue to be commodified in public spaces into the twentieth century.

Woolf's heightened experiences in the city, such as her vision of the dwarf woman, are depicted through the lens of phantasmagoria—a surreal or bizarre effect provoked by reflections, illusions, or shifting lights. As the cognate terms “fantasy” and “fantastic” suggest, “phantasmagoria” names the fantasy image of the city that emerges out of its architecture, crowds, and atmosphere. In *The Arcades Project*, Benjamin makes frequent references to the phantasmagoria of the city: for him, phantasmagoria was a unique feature of modernity, “rendered in stone” by Haussmann’s design of Paris, which made the circulation of crowds and the viewing of spectacle paramount (24). Haussmann’s glassy, mirrored arcades and gas-lit boulevards produced surreal, dreamlike effects that allowed the *flâneur* to experience the city as a fantasy space. For Benjamin, this impression of phantasmagoria had much to do with the Marxist notion that commodities became imbued with a magical sense of value under capitalism. Through their capacity for circulation and exchange, the shiny objects in shop windows were endowed with an almost magical allure. In the Parisian arcades, objects in window displays gained a reflective brilliance that underscored and enhanced their value as commodities, providing a surreal backdrop for *flânerie*. This capitalist phantasmagoria drew Benjamin’s *flâneur* to arcades and other retail spaces, where he “abandon[ed] himself to the phantasmagoria of the marketplace” (14).

In contrast to the nineteenth-century *flâneur*, Woolf is able to see through the capitalist phantasmagoria of the commodity; yet as her window-shopping for her dream home suggests, she is not immune to the magnetism of the commodity spectacle. Despite the fact that Woolf occupies an environment that differs greatly from nineteenth-century Paris, she is able to capture a similar feeling of surrealism in her wanderings. But while Benjamin's phantasmagoria is specifically tied to the architecture of nineteenth-century Paris, Woolf's wanderings in twentieth-century London manage to capture glimpses of the *flâneur*'s Paris. She begins her essay by describing the conditions that allow for street haunting: it must be a winter evening in London, when "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" (Woolf 20). For Woolf, the city's "unreality"—its phantasmagoria of darkness and lamplight—is only able to be experienced at a certain time of day and year, when London appears in a certain fantastic half-light. Unlike the general quality of unreality that pervaded the nineteenth-century Parisian metropolis, this unreal atmosphere in London is only a fleeting apparition. Under this dreamlike light, Woolf is drawn, like Benjamin's *flâneur*, to the phantasmagoria of the marketplace as she passes by lit-up storefronts: "Passing, glimpsing, everything seems accidentally but miraculously sprinkled with beauty, as if the tide of trade which deposits its burden so punctually and prosaically upon the shores of Oxford Street had this night cast up nothing but treasure" (Woolf 23). There are no mirrored arcades to exalt the commodity in this vision of phantasmagoria: instead, electric streetlamps and the cold winter air—elements of the London cityscape—are what create the effect of fantasy for Woolf. As a twentieth-century *flâneuse*, Woolf experiences the city as a phantasmagoric space much like that of Benjamin's Paris, although the conditions that produce the phantasmagoria are specific to London. As Woolf

wanders through an atmosphere of “unreality” illuminated by the glow of crowds and commodity spectacle, traces of the *flâneur*’s nineteenth-century historical context come to haunt her own practice of street-haunting.

These layers of past and present in Woolf’s twentieth-century London appear in the skewed temporality of “Street Haunting” and its acknowledgment of history. Woolf has trouble situating herself temporally as she wanders in a dreamlike state in “Street Haunting”: one moment it is six in the evening, the next “it becomes instantly between two and three in the morning” (Woolf 23). Within this ambiguous temporality, the past intrudes on the present as Woolf contemplates what her past self might have been feeling: “It is only when we look at the past and take from it the element of uncertainty that we can enjoy perfect peace” (27). Her sense of temporality contrasts with that of the nineteenth-century *flâneur*, who was the first of his kind to wander the streets of a modernized Paris that looked nothing like the Paris of centuries past. The *flâneur*’s activity represented the experience of modernity and was concentrated in the immediate present. In comparison to nineteenth-century *flânerie*, Woolf’s wanderings operate within a more complex, layered temporality that allows her to access the historical milieu of the nineteenth-century *flâneur* while remaining present in her London surroundings. It is through this temporal drifting that she is able to re-imagine the activity of *flânerie* in a twentieth-century context.

In many ways, the fact that Woolf engages in *flânerie* as a woman seems to point to the idea that the *flâneur* is “a site for the contestation of male authority rather than the epitome of it” (Parsons 6). However, although it is possible to argue that Woolf’s activity constitutes a specifically feminine form of *flânerie*, we can also view her wanderings as a challenge to the

idea that the *flâneur* is a gendered being in the first place: queering the practice of *flânerie*. One possible instance of queering appears in Woolf's description of *flânerie* as a search for identity:

Is the true self this which stands on the pavement in January, or that which bends over the balcony in June? 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? (24)

This passage emphasizes the way in which Woolf's street haunting constitutes a loss of self—a loss that she frames as liberating and expansive. Once she sets out on her London adventure, Woolf loses her sense of personal identity, of individuality. Perhaps she is not a gendered being at all when she haunts, simply roaming the streets as an “enormous eye.” Woolf's choice to write “Street Haunting” in the third-person plural further reflects the possibility of queering *flânerie*, as it seems to open up the prospect that anyone can indulge in street-haunting if they choose—that anyone can be part of the “we” narrating the story. This narratorial choice suggests that the practice of street haunting transcends gender. In this way, Woolf's *flâneuse* poses a challenge to the gender binary and actively resists the masculinity of the nineteenth-century *flâneur*.

While there is much to say about the ways in which “Street Haunting” does and does not conform to the blueprint of *flânerie* set out by Baudelaire and Benjamin, there is no doubt that it is a text about wandering and observation at heart. As an urban wanderer, Woolf opposes the mechanistic crowds of the city and takes her urban surroundings as a source of vitality and inspiration just as the archetypal male *flâneur* does. However, Woolf's style of haunting is nineteenth-century *flânerie* with a twist: while the essence of her activity remains the same, she resists the male *flâneur*'s tendency to ‘botanize’ the metropolis and turns a more discerning eye toward the capitalist fantasy that lies at the heart of urban life. Because of these differences, “Street Haunting” can be viewed as a literary artifact that demonstrates how *flânerie* was able to evolve and adapt beyond the specific urban milieu of nineteenth-century Paris. Woolf's more

inclusive and modern version of *flânerie* represents the evolution of the *flâneur* into the twentieth century, in a historical era when the male *flâneur* was in decline.

As Woolf published “Street Haunting” in 1930, the latter half of the twentieth century brought cultural and technological shifts that removed Western society even further from the *flâneur*’s experience of modernity. One of the technologies that blossomed in the twentieth century was the camera, which became increasingly affordable and sparked a whole new generation of amateur and professional photographers. Despite the fact that photography was unavailable to the general public in the nineteenth century, the practice of *flânerie* and the practice of photography are linked in ways that might not be immediately apparent. In its documentary capabilities, the practice of *flânerie* itself mimics a kind of proto-photography, before photographic technology was widely available. The idea that a photograph could capture the essence of a particular scene of public life was very similar to the idea behind the nineteenth-century *faits divers*, which Georges Montorgeuil described as “photography drawn from life” (Schwartz 37) because of the crude, realistic brutality of its content. In addition to the idea of *flânerie*’s documentary potential, the urban milieu of the *flâneur* was described as having a photographic quality about it: the *Guide Conty* described the spectacle of the nineteenth-century crowd as “a camera obscura where all the characters, differently but always picturesquely colored, change with every step and in every moment” (qtd. in Schwartz 25). Here, the *flâneur*’s gaze can be likened to the camera’s ability to capture the flickering outlines of city life. Even though photography became ubiquitous after *flânerie* had already faded out of fashion, it is important to recognize the way in which these two practices were associated with one another.

Within this history of photography and *flânerie*, Woolf’s street-haunting finds an unlikely parallel in the work of Vivian Maier, a European immigrant to the United States who took

photographs in New York City and Chicago during the mid-twentieth century. Many of the themes that Woolf touches on in “Street Haunting” are also visible in Maier’s photographic oeuvre—a massive collection of prints and negatives that was discovered unexpectedly after her death, violently catapulting Maier out of obscurity and into the public eye. Since most of the prints that we now attribute to Maier were printed posthumously by several different collectors and archivists, it is impossible to know which narrative Maier might have ascribed to her own photographs: which negatives she would have ultimately developed, how she might have cropped or processed them, and whether she would have displayed them as artwork if she had the opportunity to do so. With these limitations in mind, it is still possible to examine the formal elements of Maier’s photos in order to explore the ways in which Maier uses street photography as a form of *flânerie*.

Although Maier had access to a camera and was able to wander the streets in an era when women were no longer relegated to the home or the department store, she did not have the same privileged position that the nineteenth-century *flâneur* enjoyed, or even that Virginia Woolf enjoyed as a higher-class member of the Bloomsbury group. Throughout her life, Maier was a low-income working woman, often serving as a nanny for well-to-do families who would provide her with a private room and most importantly, her own bathroom—the place where she could develop her photographs. Maier’s creative output was dependent upon the financial and social resources that she had to work to obtain: according to Bannos, “traveling with a wealthy family provide[d] license and operating a camera [gave] activity a sense of purpose. Privileged access was extended to Maier’s employers’ children, the real point of her contact with other worlds” (93). In addition to her socioeconomic status, Maier’s cultural background also influenced her position in American society: as a European immigrant to the United States as a

teenager, “seventeen-year-old Vivian, who had shuttled between countries and families, was never quite part of any dominant culture” (Bannos 50). Furthermore, Maier’s somewhat androgynous gender presentation may have caused others to view her as a social outsider: Some described her clothing choices as “tall and masculine, with clunky shoes and long purposeful strides,” (Bannos 266) yet others who knew her remarked upon her imposing femininity (266). This androgynous persona may have reflected Maier’s obstinate desire to cross over into typically male environments—rough alleyways, political demonstrations, crime scenes, and more: she “assumed command in a world in which few women would have felt safe or comfortable” (Bannos 183) Due to her gender, class, and nationality, Maier lacked the sense of leisure and detached entitlement that was a key characteristic of the *flâneur*. However, these characteristics allowed her to cross boundaries and see beneath surfaces that the original male *flâneur* could not access.

One possible effect of Maier’s lack of socioeconomic privilege was her lack of public artistic output. While she took thousands of photos in her lifetime, she left hundreds of rolls of film undeveloped, hidden away in storage lockers (Bannos 99). Unlike the ‘man on the street’ *flâneur* seeking material to publish in a *feuilleton* or *faits divers*, Maier did not use her photography as a means for profit; and unlike Virginia Woolf, Maier had to take up other jobs to make ends meet. In fact, it is possible that she never had the financial means to develop her film: a part of the photographic process that Maier increasingly neglected as the years passed (Bannos 233). However, this tendency to leave film undeveloped might have been a conscious choice not to do so: photography critic Allan Sekula suggested that “[Maier] must have hated the darkroom, and simply let her unprocessed film accumulate: it’s a weird short-circuit in a typical photographer’s working process” (qtd. in Bannos 99). Perhaps—like Woolf’s ironic amnesia at

the end of “Street Haunting” regarding the pencil she had originally set out to purchase—Maier’s reluctance to develop her negatives indicates the importance of the *process* of wandering and photo-taking relative to the practice of printing and displaying her photos as artwork after the fact. Although Maier’s was not able to distance herself from the capitalist structures that made it impossible for her to be a full-time artist, her focus on the process of capturing photos rather than her photos’ commercial value shows that she was detached from capitalism in a different sense.

While little is known about Maier’s exact strategies and practices as a street photographer, Bannos attempts to situate Maier’s work within the history of photography and the ways in which photography entered the public consciousness during Maier’s lifetime. In particular, the rise of street photography during the 1930s and 1940s likely contributed to Maier’s photographic process as well as her ability to access cameras and film. One 1947 article in the *New York Times* camera column (at the time when Maier was living in New York City) gave advice to budding street photographers, suggesting, “The best approach is the leisurely one, with no set program to reach anywhere at a particular time... It is more important to get the flavor of a street than to record its details” (qtd. in Bannos 48). These instructions evoke *flânerie* in more ways than one: street photography is implicitly tied to the upper-class *flâneur*-photographer with unlimited leisure time (and no pressing engagements that could distract from the artistic process), and the article’s advice to “get the flavor of a street” recalls the *flâneur*’s tendency to generalize and taxonomize people around him—like Delvau’s analogy of the geologist examining the layers of a rock. In contrast to this view of the photographer, however, Maier is bound to a schedule: she cannot simply wander forever—she has a job to do and a living wage to earn. Maier’s photos also reflect her more detail-oriented eye: her images suggest she was not interested in the general flavor of a scene, but rather the individual faces and details that

caught her attention. While Maier might not have seen herself as a *flâneuse*, this historical framework gives us a starting point with which to understand the relationship between her work and the practice of *flânerie*.

In order to understand the way in which Maier's photographic practices reflect certain elements of *flânerie*, it is necessary to examine specific prints. Figure 1 is an undated, untitled photograph captured in Chicago during the 1950s or 1960s that evokes Maier's relationship to the crowd as a *flâneur* as well as other ways in which Maier deviates from nineteenth-century *flânerie*. The most immediately noticeable formal element of the photo is the presence of the three women in the foreground. These figures form a discrete group because of their proximity to one another, and also because all three women are wearing very similar outfits—blackish dress or coat, black heeled shoes, bare or nude-stockinged legs, and a short, wavy hairstyle. The lack of color as well as the women's vintage clothing style lend an sense of nostalgia to the photo and situate it within the context of the mid-twentieth century. Since the photo is in black and white, the three dark shapes created by the women's dresses stand in sharp contrast to the lighter sidewalk and the sky in the background of the photo. The women's shadows extend vertically behind them, suggesting that the sun is shining from in front of the figures. The darkly clad bodies of the women and their dark shadows at the bottom of the image form three bold vertical lines that trisect the photo into thirds.

The setting of the photo appears to be a sidewalk on an urban street. The presence of the trash can reading "Help keep our city clean," the number of pedestrians in the background, the American flag, and the presence of tall buildings extending to the horizon confirm that we are in an American city—a fact that we can infer even without knowing that the photo was taken in Chicago. While we cannot be sure what the central three women are doing in the city, the fact

that they are so similarly dressed suggests that perhaps they are employed in a similar profession and are on their way to or from work, rather than out on a leisurely stroll. The coat and purses that the three women are carrying further support this interpretation, since they would be common objects to bring to an office. The presence of other pedestrians traveling in the same direction suggests that it is early morning or late afternoon—a time of day when many people would be commuting at once. The composition of this photo is strikingly symmetrical, with the center woman occupying a place closest to the camera and the outer two women walking equidistant from the central figure on each side, both gazing off to the left. These lines of sight can help us decode the relationship between the subjects of the photo. The woman at the center of the photograph is looking straight ahead, not seeming to acknowledge the women to either side of her. Meanwhile, the gaze of the woman on the left is, away from the group, while the woman on the right is also directing her gaze slightly off to the left and downward. These divergent gazes and the slight distance between the figures suggest that the three women have not acknowledged each other's presence and likely are total strangers to one another. By photographing these similarly clad women in such a symmetrical formation, Maier creates an artificial association between the figures and allows the viewer to view these three disparate people as one coherent unit.

In this setting, the photographer (Maier) is clearly situated on the sidewalk behind the three primary subjects. Maier's presence is virtually undetectable in the photograph: the angle of sunlight would cause her shadow to fall behind the camera and out of the frame of the photo. Not only is her presence invisible to the viewer, but Maier seems to go unnoticed by the three women as well: Because the women are moving forward and looking ahead, they seem to be unaware that their picture is being taken. Since there is no clear acknowledgment of the photographer by

the photographed subjects, we can infer that this photo is meant to capture a scene of visual interest rather than conjuring a sense of intimacy between subject and viewer. This slightly distanced, incognito position of the photographer also helps us to understand Maier's work as a form of *flânerie*. According to Baudelaire, to be a *flâneur* is "to be at the center of the world, and yet to remain hidden from the world" (*The Painter of Modern Life* 9). It is exactly by adopting this kind of centralized, yet invisible position and by wandering through the crowd as a street photographer that Maier is able to achieve the shot of the three women. Because Maier is in motion, she is able to spectate freely and take advantage of the street's shifting landscape: "[the *flâneur*] catches things in flight; this enables him to dream that he is like an artist" (Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire* 41). In this way, Maier's photography reflects the basic elements of *flânerie*.

While the nineteenth-century *flâneur* is drawn to the shiny spectacle of consumer culture, Maier's photograph draws the eye without sensationalizing, analogous to how Woolf finds wonder in the most quotidian aspects of a nighttime street. Nothing out of the ordinary is happening in the street scene, and yet Maier manages to capture visual elements of symmetry and geometry that intrigue the viewer. Unlike the nineteenth-century *flâneur* in his attempt to find material to embellish in the *faits divers* section of a newspaper, Maier shows how a simple street scene can become spectacular and unusual when viewed from a certain perspective—without the need for exaggeration. As a street photographer and a *flâneuse*, Maier is able to reveal moments of spectacularity in the most quotidian settings while still preserving their ordinariness. Importantly, Maier's depiction of these three women shows them both outside the home and—temporarily at least—outside the circuits of capitalism.

Indeed, unlike the nineteenth-century *flâneur*, who sees women as the "feminine fauna of the arcades" (Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* 494), Maier's photograph allows for a more open

interpretation of female activity in public spaces—in fact, male figures seem to be absent altogether from the background of the photo. In this photo, women’s activity in the streets is not presented in relation to men, but only in relation to other female pedestrians. Additionally, Maier does not treat women as “fauna” to be ogled and labeled. While the typical *flâneur* “went botanizing on the asphalt” (Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* 372) in order to categorize the types of people on the street, Maier operates differently: rather than labeling people by force, she is able to draw attention to similarities between the three women in the photograph without passing any sort of judgment or placing a label on them. This observational practice recalls the impartial empathy of Woolf’s “enormous eye” in “Street Haunting.” In part, this more liberal attitude toward categorization is made possible by the medium of photography. Benjamin suggests that inscription (the caption) is the most important part of the photograph and the only way to imbue a photograph with concrete meaning (*Little History of Photography* 527). By *not* adding a caption, Maier is able to avoid adding an authoritative or politicized meaning to her photo—thereby taking advantage of what Benjamin sees as the “approximate” nature of photography in order to open up a wider range of possibilities for female activity in the streets.

In addition to providing a portrait of unrestricted women in transit, Maier’s photography also breaks down the division between public and private space, or between the modern and the domestic, erasing the lines between interior and exterior that defined public life in the nineteenth century and that prevented women from wandering into the world of the *flâneur*. Her 1954 photo of a woman cleaning the window of an apartment in Manhattan (Figure 2) is a specific example of the way Maier brings domestic life into the street. Like the moment in “Street Haunting” when Woolf peers into a window and sees a woman setting the table, this glimpse inside a domestic space acknowledges and foregrounds the domestic activities of women. In this photo, the

photographer's presence becomes apparent as the woman looking out of the window seems to be making direct eye contact with Maier. This woman's expression is inscrutable—perhaps she is scowling at the sudden realization she is being photographed. The upward angle of the photo as well as the presence of a staircase railing in the lower right corner indicate that the window is situated at a higher level than the street where Maier is presumably standing, creating a sense of separation between the interior of the apartment and the exterior space of the street. Yet the woman's angular pose and her white dress seem to unite her with the geometry of the building's façade and the white fabric of the window curtains, making her part of this exterior space. Maier's photo seems to be fascinated with the intrusion of domestic life into the outside world—here, the literal intrusion of the woman's hand into the air as she cleans the windowpane. In contrast to the nineteenth-century *flâneur*, who uses his privileged position to make the street into an *interieur*, but one largely closed to women, Maier frames the activities of women in the private sphere as inextricable from urban architecture and thereby blurs the line between public and private spaces.

In Figure 3, a self-portrait from the 1950s, Maier uses the activity of window-shopping to explore the activity of women in the public realm. Maier uses the mirrored entrance to a shop to capture two female shoppers peering intently at a window display of lingerie, as well as her own reflection as she takes the photo. This photo tricks the eye: the display appears strangely above Maier's head, as if the shoppers are looking at *her*, while the women appear doubled in the mirror such that it is unclear whether they are standing in front of Maier or behind her. Maier's photo subtly juxtaposes the allure of the commodity (the women transfixed by the window display) with the illusory nature of consumer culture, as evoked by the mind-bending play of mirrors in the photo, which create a series of reflections extending into infinity. In this photo,

Maier seems to be associating herself with the two reflected women as the mirror brings them closer together, while simultaneously occupying a more distanced position—the vertical edge of the shop window almost makes it seem like Maier and the two women exist in two different worlds or two different photographic panels. Like Friedberg’s window-shopping nineteenth-century *flâneuse*, Maier takes advantage of the architecture of consumerism. Unlike the nineteenth-century *flâneuse*, however, Maier is able to turn a more critical eye to the commodity spectacle rather than succumbing to its attraction. This photo’s voyeuristic glimpse at the two shoppers echoes Woolf’s spying on the dwarf woman purchasing shoes; like Woolf, Maier hovers at the edge of the commodity spectacle. In this photo as well as in Figure 4, Maier’s love of reflective surfaces is apparent. In fact, her oeuvre is full of mirror self-portraits and other reflections. Maier’s use of mirrors can be tied to Baudelaire’s notion of *flâneur* as a mirror of the crowd, as well as the idea that the mirror is like a photograph: “just as photographs do, mirrors flatten space” (Bannos 121). In a way, both Maier *and* her camera are performing the work of *flânerie*, since they are both acting as mirrors that reflect their surroundings.

Maier’s *flânerie* not only captures the illusion of consumerism, but it also allows her to tap into what Benjamin calls “the optical unconscious.” In the picture, we see that she is using waist-level periscope camera—a device that allows her capture an image *beyond* what the human eye could perceive in the instant the photo was taken, because of its lower perspective. Because of its angle and its use of mirrors to achieve a surreal juxtaposition and repetition of subjects, Maier’s photo can be seen as accessing what Benjamin describes as “a space informed by human consciousness [that] gives way to a space informed by the unconscious” (Benjamin, *The Work of Art* 266). We might relate the technology of the camera to Woolf’s suggestive metaphor of the “enormous eye” left by the dissolution of the self in the crowd, enabling vision beyond the

conscious mind (20). In Maier's case, the technology of the camera transforms the flickering impressions received by the *flâneuse* into a legible artifact for visual consumption and allows the viewer to see a version of reality that was invisible at the time the photo was taken. The nineteenth-century undertones of Maier's photo offer another kind of optical unconscious beyond the instant of its capture, however. Maier's portrayal of the mirrored storefronts and the magical quality of the commodity recalls the mirrored, glassy storefronts of the Parisian arcades, revealing a hidden visual connection to history, a sort of temporally roving optical unconscious similar to Woolf's muddled temporality in "Street Haunting." Despite these historical echoes, however, Maier's work reflects a creative consciousness that is undeniably modern. Maier is not confined to the interior of the department store like the nineteenth-century *flâneuse*, nor is she trapped within a consumerist construction of gender. Like Woolf, Maier uses window-shopping as a vehicle for *flânerie* while approaching capitalism with a critical eye.

Like Woolf's evocation of nineteenth-century phantasmagoria in the "floating islands of pale light" in 1930s London (20), Maier also manages to hint at the presence of phantasmagoria in 1960s Chicago. Her 1963 photograph of illuminated signs reflected in puddles on a nighttime sidewalk (Figure 4) captures the eerie glow of the city at night and produces an effect that can be compared to the glow of the nineteenth-century city after dark. For Benjamin, the *flâneur's* activity was inextricable from the phantasmagoria produced by Haussmann's gas lamps: "The appearance of the street as an *intérieur* in which the phantasmagoria of the *flâneur* is concentrated is hard to separate from the gaslight" (*Charles Baudelaire* 50). Conversely, Benjamin identifies the "brutal shock caused by the spectacle of entire cities suddenly being illuminated by electric light" (*Charles Baudelaire* 51) as part of the changing urban environment that became hostile to the *flâneur* in the twentieth century. Under electric lights, the *flâneur* was

no longer able to conceal himself in public, and was instead brutally exposed at every instant. Electric lights, too, did not produce the same ghostly effect that attracted the *flâneur* to the nineteenth-century arcades and their array of glittering merchandise. Yet in this photograph, Maier is able to use these very same hostile conditions of electric lighting to capture a glimpse of the nineteenth century. The wet sidewalk covered with a glowing sheen and the reflected text on the various signs warped and distorted in the central puddles create an atmosphere that can only be described as phantasmagoric. This photo also evokes what Benjamin called “*noctambulisme*” (*Charles Baudelaire* 50), or night-walking—the *flânerie*-like practice of wandering after dark, which was considered fashionable during the late nineteenth century. The total lack of people and signs of human activity in Maier’s photo suggests that she was engaging in the same kind of late-night street-haunting when she captured the shot—roaming the streets long after businesses had closed. Although this photo contains traces of the nineteenth century in its formal and atmospheric qualities, the text of the signs reveals that this particular sidewalk was part of Chicago’s Rush Street, known for its glitzy nightclubs like the Scotch Mist and the Tender Trap (both of which appear in the photo). This stretch of famous nightclubs symbolized a specific era in Chicago’s cultural history, thereby juxtaposing Maier’s evocation of the past with a concrete representation of the present day.

While the nineteenth-century *flâneur* carried a strong association with literary production and the practice of journalism, an association continued in Woolf’s “Street Haunting,” Maier manages to hint at these associations through the medium of photography. In Figure 5, Maier adopts a journalistic angle, capturing a street scene in which pedestrians gape at a man on crutches who is being led into a doorway by two other men—presumably police officers. The presence of the police officers suggests the possibility of a crime scene, which evokes

Benjamin's idea of the *flâneur* as a detective—an idea affirmed by other writers, such as Poe in his story “The Man of the Crowd.” For Benjamin, the *flâneur*'s journalistic tendency to sniff out interesting happenings allowed him to act as an investigator: “No matter what trail the *flâneur* may follow, every one of them will lead him to a crime” (Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire* 41). The *flâneur*'s mercenary intentions as a crime-seeking journalist and his detached, rational attitude as a detective serve as a parallel for the commercial activities of a photo-journalist as well as the supposedly objective, truthful quality of photography as a medium. In fact, Benjamin draws a connection between the emergence of the detective story and photography's ability to “preserve permanent and unmistakable traces of a human being” (*Charles Baudelaire* 48). The *flâneur*'s roving eye here moves out of the dreamlike phantasmagoria to bear forensic witness to reality.

Unlike the “man on the street” journalist seeking shocking material to fill a *feuilleton* or the detective trailing his suspect to solve a crime, though, Maier's street scene presents a more zoomed-out perspective that avoids adopting either a sensational or a falsely objective interpretation of the action. Each one of the subjects in the photo possesses a distinct personality and sense of purpose, lending a variety of different attitudes to the photo: the woman in the hat looks concerned or even disgusted, the man at the far left of the photo seems largely unaffected, and the boy near the back of the image peers at the scene with fascination. Unlike photojournalism or forensic photography, Maier's photo does not serve to accuse or explain, but instead leaves many questions unanswered. There is the obvious question of the man on crutches: who is he, and why is he being arrested? The other figures in the scene pose their own questions, such as the indistinct outline of a woman's profile near the left side of the photograph that remains inscrutable through the smog emanating from a mysterious source. Perhaps most

peculiar is the half-visible man at the right edge of the photograph, whose shadowy eyes peer out of a wrinkled face, straight at Maier. This man's gaze almost seems to accuse Maier of voyeurism, thereby implicating her as a part of the crime scene. These scattered points of interest make it difficult to say whether or not the man on crutches is really the focal point of the image at all: Bannos argues that Maier could have been following the woman in the hat when she captured this shot: "It's hard to tell if Maier's intention with [this image] was to juxtapose the gaping spectators with the heartrending crutches scene, or if she had backed away to capture a portrait of the woman in the fancy hat. Women in hats often excited her interest" (120). This photograph serves as an example of Maier's ability to particularize the general and complicate the sensational, working as a detective yet declining to reveal the answer to the mystery that she has captured on film. As a *flâneur*, Maier produces observations without passing judgment.

Although Maier walked the streets of different cities and lived decades after Virginia Woolf, her photography echoes many of the themes that Woolf touches upon in "Street Haunting." The fact that their work is similarly informed by the act of wandering characterizes them as twentieth-century *flâneuses* whose artistic production is a form of *flânerie*. This recognition is not only limited to Woolf and Maier, but it also suggests the continued viability of the *flâneur*'s creative, reciprocal relationship to the city. The nineteenth-century *flâneur* was more than just a key figure of modernity—he also represented a unique way of accessing and aestheticizing the city. Within the urban landscape, the practice of *flânerie* afforded the *flâneur* the freedom to wander and observe from outside the framework of capitalism that undergirded city life as well as the ability to draw energy and inspiration from his urban surroundings. As Maier and Woolf demonstrate, this idiosyncratic way in which the *flâneur* accessed and interpreted his environment was not lost at the turn of the twentieth century, but instead remained

a creative avenue through which women were able to interact with the city long after the *flâneur* had ceased to roam the passages of the metropolis.

These female artists occupy a complex position in relation to the nineteenth-century *flâneur*. On one hand, their work is inextricably tied to twentieth-century technologies, experiences, and environments that would have been completely alien to the Baudelairean *flâneur* and illustrate the obsolescence of such a figure. Woolf and Maier go beyond nineteenth-century conceptions of class, gender, and urban space, leaving behind the Parisian boulevards and arcades where the *flâneur* was born. At the same time, however, the work of Maier and Woolf is peppered with traces of the nineteenth-century urban landscape such as the phantasmagoria of the gas lamps and the sparkle of Hausmann's arcades. Like the nineteenth-century *flâneur*, these *flâneuses* display a degree of fascination with the capitalist commodity spectacle. But while the nineteenth-century *flâneur*'s privileged position as a bourgeois male allowed him to manipulate the city into his own narrow frame of reference, Woolf and Maier show how the twentieth-century *flâneuse* operated from outside structures of privilege and was thereby able to critique and connect with the city on a deeper level. Both artists adopt an attitude that is at once critical of the capitalist framework of the city and also empathetic toward the people around them, maintaining a position of interested detachment toward the city masses *without* adopting the pseudo-scientific, taxonomic gaze of the nineteenth-century *flâneur*. This detached empathy is what allows Woolf and Maier to erase the boundaries between public and private spaces and take comfort in the modern city while simultaneously highlighting the activities of women in the domestic sphere. Maier's and Woolf's work helps to de-gender the gendered public/private binary that gave rise to the *flâneur*'s existence in the first place.

This paper exists in dialogue with scholars such as Wolff, Parsons, and Friedberg, whose work argues for or against the existence of the female *flâneur* (the *flâneuse*). I have shown that it is not enough simply to ask this question of existence, for it reduces the *flâneuse* to a fixed *type* rather than allowing for the possibility that *flânerie* constitutes a practice that can take many forms: the *flânerie* of the twentieth century can be spontaneous and sporadic like Woolf's street-haunting or habitual like Maier's street photography. Woolf and Maier demonstrate that being a *flâneuse* is not a static identity, but rather an imaginative practice limited by the demands of everyday life, thereby illuminating the shortcomings of the term *flâneuse* in a twentieth-century context. In the nineteenth century, *flâneur* delimited a social type just as it referred to a specific way of interacting with the city, and it was this social dimension that excluded all but the bourgeois male from experiencing the city as a *flâneur*. The lived reality of Woolf and Maier reveals the obsolescence of thinking about the *flâneur* as a specific type of person and the usefulness of thinking of the term *flâneuse* as denoting a state of being that can be transitory, permanent, or anywhere in between.

While this paper has explored one way in which we can trace *flânerie* into the twentieth century, but there are surely wanderers of all kinds who might offer alternative perspectives on this same topic. Future examinations of modern *flânerie* might incorporate aspects of race, sexuality, and cultural background into discussions of wandering in urban spaces, for urban mobility is constrained by a diverse array of factors beyond class and gender. It is also important to consider *flânerie* in a non-Western context, and to investigate its evolution in the twenty-first century. Through their shared practice of street-haunting, Woolf and Maier grant us an access point that allows us to imagine these possibilities and many others. These *flâneuses* show how traces of the nineteenth century—the arcades, the spectacular, the phantasmagoric—haunt

twentieth-century landscapes and illustrate the continued relevancy and adaptability of a creative practice that was reserved for the elite few.

Works Cited

- Bannos, Pamela. *Vivian Maier: A Photographer's Life and Afterlife*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017.
- Baudelaire, Charles, and Jonathan Mayne. *The Painter of Modern Life: And Other Essays*. London: Phaidon, 1964. Print.
- Benjamin, Walter. *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*. London; New York: Verso, 1983.
- Benjamin, Walter, and Rolf Tiedemann. *The Arcades Project*. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 1999. Print.
- Chisholm, Hugh. *The Encyclopaedia Britannica: A Dictionary of Arts, Sciences, Literature and General Information*. New York: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1910. Internet resource.
- Clout, Hugh D., et al. "London." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 22 Nov. 2017, www.britannica.com/place/London.
- Debord, Guy. "Society of the Spectacle." Translated by Black & Red, *Marxists Internet Archive*, 1967, www.marxists.org/reference/archive/debord/society.htm.
- De Certeau, Michel. "Walking in the City." *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988. 91-110. Print.
- Fainstein, Susan S. "Urban Planning." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 12 May 2016, www.britannica.com/topic/urban-planning/The-era-of-industrialization.
- Friedberg, Anne. *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern*. University of California Press, 1993. *EBSCOhost*, proxy.uchicago.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xna&AN=42297&site=ehost-live&scope=site.
- Kogan, Rick. "Memories of Rush Street Bar Scene: Chicago's 'Street of Dreams'." *Chicago Tribune*, 28 Aug. 2015, www.chicagotribune.com/entertainment/ct-rush-street-reunion-bars-clubs-chicago-20150826-story.html.
- Livingstone, Rodney, translator. "Little History of Photography." *Die Literarische Welt*, edited by Michael W Jennings et al. by Walter Benjamin, II, 1931, pp. 368–385. *Gesammelte Schriften*.
- Maier, Vivian. "Figure 1: Three Women Walking in Chicago." *Vivian Maier*, Maloof Collection, www.vivianmaier.com/gallery/street-4/#slide-23.

- Maier, Vivian. "Figure 2: Woman Cleaning a Window." *Vivian Maier*, Maloof Collection, www.vivianmaier.com/gallery/street-2/#slide-43.
- Maier, Vivian. "Figure 3: Self-Portrait with Window-Shoppers." *Vivian Maier*, Maloof Collection, www.vivianmaier.com/gallery/self-portraits/#slide-14.
- Maier, Vivian. "Figure 4: Street Signs Reflected at Night." *Vivian Maier*, Maloof Collection, www.vivianmaier.com/gallery/street-3/#slide-19.
- Maier, Vivian. "Figure 5: Pedestrians Watching an Arrest." *Vivian Maier*, Maloof Collection, www.vivianmaier.com/gallery/street-1/#slide-2.
- Parsons, Deborah L. *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City, and Modernity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. Print.
- Schwartz, Vanessa R. *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-siècle Paris*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.
- Simmel, Georg. "The Metropolis and Mental Life." *Stimuli*. (1903). Print.
- The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica. "Georges-Eugène, Baron Haussmann." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 20 Mar. 2018, www.britannica.com/biography/Georges-Eugene-Baron-Haussmann.
- Wolff, Janet. "The Invisible Flâneuse. Women and the Literature of Modernity." *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 2, no. 3, Nov. 1985, pp. 37–46, doi:[10.1177/0263276485002003005](https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276485002003005).
- Woolf, Virginia, and Leonard Woolf. "Street Haunting: A London Adventure." *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays*, Harcourt, Brace & Co, 1942, pp. 19–29.



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5