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Beyond the Gap between Retaining a Room of One's Own and Sharing the Room and the Streets: Virginia Woolf's Spatial Politics

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I. Introduction

While Virginia Woolf suggests the androgynous mind in *A Room of One's Own*(1929) as the appropriate state of mind for forgetting the matter of sex, a distanced standpoint from the male-dominated order proposed in *Three Guineas*(1938) indicates the necessity of a strong consciousness of the difference between the sexes in order to resist the essence of manhood. To put it simply, the former seems to advocate a stance that is indifferent to the issue of sex; the latter a position indifferent to the male sex. The former appears to believe in the unsexed nature of the human being; the latter the sexed nature of the human being, divided as male and female.

When we consider "Professions for Women"(1931) as a part of *Three Guineas*, a sequel to *A Room of One's Own*, we might hastily judge that Woolf changed her

position from an advocacy of the androgynous ideal to an aggressive claim for women's specificity, as historical and social situations changed. In other words, Woolf's initial claim for cooperation between man and woman might have undergone a transformation into her call for a feminine resistance to a patriarchal society, which indicates her response to the changed socio-political situation in the 1930s, when fascism emerged and war seemed imminent. Furthermore, considering the different acceptance of the two works—*A Room of One's Own* was highly praised, with approving responses to its fictional technique and its androgynous ideal which veiled her feminist resentment at patriarchal culture, while *Three Guineas* was received unfavourably not only by men in general but also by even her Bloomsbury friends—we become sceptical about the compatibility of the seeming contradictions in them. In fact, Desmond MacCarthy acknowledged that *A Room of One's Own*, with its androgynous ideal, made Woolf's "'feminist propaganda'" a "'medicine of cherries'" (requoted from Sally Greene 299; n. 13), which led to him willingly gulp down the thorny subject of feminism. As Quentin Bell has recorded, A Room of *One's Own* "brought the usual crop of appreciative letters" and "sold extremely well"(Vol. II, 150), causing "rhapsodies"(Vol. II, 153) from Ethel Smyth, though "Clive Bell was one of the few who didn't like it"(Vol. II, 150). However, *Three Guineas* was received unfavorably: although "[a] great many women wrote to express their enthusiastic approval" (Quentin Bell; Vol. II, 204), "Vita did not like it, and Maynard Keynes was both angry and contemptuous" (Vol. II, 205).

Then, is *A Room of One's Own* fundamentally different from "Professions for Women" and *Three Guineas*? Can we draw a decisive line between a modernist aesthetic with its loyalty to the impersonal perspective and a pragmatic politics of feminism with its woman-specific, bodily engaged view? Is a formalist/modernist aesthetic of disinterestedness absolutely distinguishable from a feminist aesthetic that calls for recording the somatic experience as a woman? It seems that there were continuing oscillations between the androgynous mind for the depersonalized modernist text and the feminist obligation of inscribing a specifically feminine

experience throughout Woolf's literary career. Then, does this fluctuation indicate an inevitable contradiction between her modernist, formalist aesthetic and her feminist practices? Or, is the appearance of difference between a desire to "[tell] the truth about [her] own experiences as a body"("Professions for Women" 241) and an injunction against "[speaking] consciously as a woman"(*A Room of Own's Own* 99) merely superficial? Do these ambivalent claims of Woolf indicate innate contradictions in her feminism, or do they, despite their external differences, retain any consistency in Woolf's feminism? Does the androgynous ideal, going beyond being merely a product of a modernist aesthetic that prioritizes the depersonalization of the writer, engage us in a more complicated perspective that suggests a new horizon over which we can find a way to disrupt a binary oppositional structure, without necessarily erasing the necessary differences?

II. The Splendour of the Body and the Androgynous Mind

Looked at closer, *A Room of One's Own* seems to embrace a certain incoherence in unfolding Woolf's map of the mind. The female narrator of this book, whom we can identify as Woolf, appears to vacillate between a desire to uncover pure truth of woman and her body that has been distorted and hidden in a patriarchal order and an ideal of the impersonal, androgynous mind that is required to write a valuable literary work. In the beginning of this book, Woolf expresses a suspicion of "the learned and the unprejudiced, who have removed themselves above the strife of tongue and the confusion of the body"(*A Room of One's Own* 26), criticizing the prejudices and omissions revealed in the books that have been written by men and cherished in the British Museum. However, the necessity of unveiling the truth of woman and "the confusion of the body" gives way to another claim of hers, that is, it is harmful for a good writer "to speak consciously as a woman"(A Room of One's Own 99). These contradictory obligations—telling the truth about the body and writing from a mind indifferent

to sex—seem to constitute consistent conflicts, along with invoking ambiguities, in Woolf's feminist agenda. Moreover, along with the ambiguities in Woolf's position as a feminist, there arises the issue of her writing as a modernist that is also inextricably related to the androgynous ideal as well as to telling the truth of woman.

We need to ask first whether the androgynous mind blurs the distinction between the sexes, and thus, if this erasure of such difference absolutely wipes out woman's particular experience and the specificity of the body. There have been various interpretations regarding the androgynous mind, for it is a subject of controversy among Woolf scholars. Yet, the interpreters of Woolf's androgynous vision have been divided roughly into two groups. One group criticizes the androgynous ideal by considering it to be an indication of Woolf's stopping "exploring the physical experience of women," and thus, to be her "escape from the confrontation with the body"(34), as Elaine Showalter's view in *A Literature of One's Own*(1977) represents. Toril Moi, who belongs to the opposing camp, in *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*(1985), regards Woolf's concept of androgyny not as "a flight from fixed gender identities" but as "a recognition of their falsifying metaphysical nature"(13). Chronologically observed, the criticism surrounding Woolf's notion of androgyny before the 1990s shows a tendency to be divided between a critique of Woolf's retreat from feminism because of the disregard of the body and female experience and a positive view of androgyny for Woolf's textual politics that anticipates a postmodern feminism, as the above examples of Showalter and Moi reveal; criticism in the 1990s tends to focus on the textual politics of the androgynous ideal, destabilizing the binary oppositions posited by radical feminism by criticizing the notion of wholeness, unity, or form, as exemplified by the criticism of Michèle Barrett, Kari Weil, and Pamela Caughie.

Among the many feminists whose interpretations show us the diversity of opinions about Woolf's androgynous ideal through their feministic perspectives, there is Camille Paglia, whose approach shows a certain similarity to some Marxists' critique of modernism for its detachment from the actual, socio-political

sphere. She criticizes Woolf's concept of androgyny for its "belong[ing] to the contemplative rather than active life"(21), in Sexual Personae: *Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson*(1990), since she finds the textual aesthetic quite useless in actual life. We become doubtful of her perspective, however, when we read *Imagination in Theory: Culture, Writing, Words, and Things*(1999) written by Michele Barrett, who rightly observes that the androgynous mind indicates "sexual complementarity"(42) rather than sexual difference, blurring "too clear a separation between the biological and the social"(152). We find Barrett's observation more appealing, since Woolf "frustrates this binary between the modern and the postmodern by writing across it"(203), with an "intense ambivalence about feminism"(55). Similar to Barrett, Pamela Caughie also finds that Woolf's androgynous vision affirms "a refusal to choose"(Barrett 82). Woolf's androgynous vision that is necessary to her art rejects totalitarian positions; art is not "the primary or most effective agent of social change"(Caughie 135), nor is it totally useless in a socio-political sphere. Barrett's view that Woolf as a feminist "regards the essence of woman as something that we shall 'discover' rather than an identity that is built"(46) reveals a postmodern feministic approach to the androgynous ideal, showing quite a similarity with Weil, who states that Orlando deals with the identity of the androgyne as a voice of "'differance' for a new understanding of its generative function within identity"(157). Weil's observation is the opposite of Paglia's, since she argues that "undermining of identity does not preclude her[Woolf's] recognition of real, material difference"(158).

The notion of the androgynous ideal, we contend, does not relinquish woman's particular experience, even though it does not posit an absolute difference between the sexes. The affirmation of the androgynous mind in the last section of A Room of *One's Own*, when Woolf as the narrator of this book looks outside "through the uncurtained windows"(91), is symbolized by the image of "a girl in patent leather boots" and "a young man in a maroon overcoat"(92) who get together on a taxicab. Woolf's topographical interest in the junction of a girl, a young man, and a taxicab reflects her concern about a form, shape, or pattern that is composed of

heterogeneous elements in writing. It is more significant that a taxicab, a symbol of the androgynous mind united by a man and a woman is not fixed, because it moves. The questions such as what will happen to them in the taxi and where their destination is remain unexplained, which requires the readers' use of their own imagination to fill what is left unsaid. Putting the spirit of feminism "in the form of fiction"(*A Room of One's Own* 107), Woolf makes the reader imagine a space shared by man and woman together, as symbolized by the taxicab.

This emphasis on movement symbolized by the taxicab seems to affirm the changeability of truth and subjectivity. And this multifarious and unsettled nature of a subject, sexuality, and coupledom is emphasized by a fictional narrator, though we assume it is Woolf herself, whose impersonal attitude observes the couple getting into a taxicab. The couple observed by the disinterested narrator becomes alive only as the couple embodies the narrator's aesthetic and ethical ideal. A truth for Woolf is not determined once and for all, as one's subjectivity undergoes ceaseless and multifarious transformation. Indeed, if a novelist "[has] convinced [the reader] that so it is," then the truth "happens"(*A Room of One's Own* 69). The depersonalized writer creates a truth, since there is no absolutely certain Truth. And this variable truth rejects the dream of the totalitarian reproduction of life in art. Rather than resolving conflicting questions, the narrator affirms ambiguities and vacillations by making us perceive a perpetually deferred quality in a work of art. Therefore, the narrator's oscillation signifies a work of an androgynous mind that is always "altering its focus, and bringing the world into different perspectives"(*A Room of One's Own* 93), as 'but,' the irrepressible word throughout *A Room of One's Own*, signifies. This 'but' that continuously comes up in spite of the narrator's acknowledgement of a necessity for its abandonment, might provide us a clue to Woolf's position in *A Room of One's Own*; 'but' asserts a continuous resistance to a self-same, isomorphic, homogeneous position as well as to the stubbornly masculine fascist ideology based on the laws of exclusion, self-righteousness, and supremacy of the self, his own race, and his own community.

Here appears a dim light that hints at how to bridge the gap between Woolf's

modernist impersonal aesthetic and her feminist participatory politics. A veil of rhetoric and stylistic masquerade that often accompanies ambivalent, ambiguous, contradictory, and illogical stances in the text might deliver woman's particular experience without necessarily uncovering woman's resentful self in her literary work. There is definitely a tension between Woolf's modernist aesthetic and her feminist political position, along with the ethical dimension that seems to relate a modernist formalist aesthetic with feminist politics. First, there is Woolf's acknowledgement of the importance of questioning the relationship between "novel-writing" and "the effect of sex upon the novelist"(68). Second, she admits the necessity of a mask for a woman novelist, since she needs to hide her experience as a woman for the sake of an art that calls for disinterestedness. Third, as a result, art might be a proper way for a woman to reconstruct her bodily experience while escaping from a male scrutinizing eye. Fourth, rhetorical adroitness and stylistic dexterity are required in order to repeat woman's experience as grasped by her imagination in a literary text. Hence, her consistent oscillation between her feminist position that is based on her emotional engagement in the bodily experience of a woman and her modern, formalist position that affirms a disinterested, impersonal aesthetic might be merely a surface fluctuation. The androgynous mind that appears as a third from these two positions, therefore, opens up to a heterogeneous dimension of the Other. Instead of indicating an absolute forgetting of the female experience as a body, or a sheer assertion of a conceptual dimension of art, the ideal of androgyny with its dissimulation uncovers a third dimension beyond a homogeneous self-same, fascist structure. The "splendour of the body"("Modern Fiction" 154) and a truth of the body relies on the androgynous mind. When the narrator's, and thus, the writer's, multiple subjectivity, since we can call her "Mary Beton, Mary Seton, Mary Carmichael or any name [we] please"(*A Room of One's Own* 6), suggests the androgynous mind, then, diverse rooms embrace the beauty of the body.

III. A Room of Woman's Own and Outsider's Society

Similar to *A Room of One's Own*, in "Professions for Women," Woolf's feminist agenda that asserts the uncovering of the truth of woman is interlocked with her aesthetic project of writing about woman's experience as a body. The discarding of the characteristics of "[t]he Angel in the House"("Professions for Women" 236), the traditional female characteristics, such as sympathy, tenderness, unselfishness, purity, and spirit of sacrifice, does not necessarily designate Woolf's giving up on finding the truth of a woman, or her search for recording this truth. In fact, the truth of a woman depends on "express[ing] herself in all the arts and professions open to human skill"("Professions for Women" 239). "[W]hat a woman is"("Professions for Women" 239), hence, still in process and on trial, needs to be imagined and fictionalized, after giving up the reproduction of the traditional image of a woman. The claim—"a novelist's chief desire is to be as unconscious as possible"("Professions for Women"239)—does not entirely lead to an exclusive affirmation of indifference to sex, since the experience of a woman that waits to be uncovered by a female novelist is already inscribed in the woman's unconscious. Similar to the androgynous mind, the unconscious state of the mind, with its capability of the free play of imagination by uncovering a truth of woman's experience discovers what is concealed in the existing patriarchal culture. If *A Room of One's Own* directs a woman to own a room of her own as well as enough money to live independently, this essay asks a woman to think about how to furnish and decorate the empty room that she acquires. Furthermore, Woolf, instead of providing a definite answer, asks woman this question: "With whom are you going to share it, and upon what terms"("Professions for Women" 242)?

To those questions, the woman in *Three Guineas* seems to answer that she does not want to share her room with a man. Rather, more correctly, she seems to give up having a room and choose the life of an alien by refusing any kind of participation in a male-dominated, warmongering society. The concern about the experience of a woman is changed into an interest in women's collective experience,

emphasizing women's united resistance to men. As "the daughters of educated men"(*Three Guineas* 4), "we" need to stand against "the great majority of your[male] sex [that] are . . . in favour of war"(*Three Guineas* 8). Being "a step-daughter of England"(*Three Guineas* 14), a woman does not have any obligation to British jingoism. Women "need not acquiesce"(*Three Guineas* 17) to men's criticism. Hence, if feminine artifice, instead of a straightforward challenge to the male-oriented system, is preferred in *A Room of One's Own* as its affirmation of the androgynous ideal represents, then, Woolf's claim for woman's remaining the outsider of a bellicose patriarchal society in *Three Guineas* seems to indicate a certain change in Woolf's feminism.

Woolf uses a similar metaphor of 'disinterestedness' in *Three Guineas*. However, although a woman is, "[a]t last," "in possession of an influence that is disinterested"(17) by absolutely separating herself from man's society, this "disinterestedness" seems to work, in this book, differently from the impersonal, androgynous mind in *A Room of One's Own*. If in *A Room of One's Own* the disinterested mind brings forth a depersonalized work of art, being distanced from the resentment against a patriarchal order while affirming the complementarity of the different sexes, this impartial mind in *Three Guineas* severely accuses a patriarchal society, by dividing men and women whereas siding with the collective subjectivity of women.

Nevertheless, while criticizing men's possessiveness and their desire for power that cause war, Woolf in this book does not assert a total disconnection between the sexes. The aim of donating one guinea to a new college for women lies not in perpetuating the division between the sexes but in "explor[ing] the ways in which mind and body can be made to co-operate"(*Three Guineas* 34). Woolf, identified with the feminist speaker in this book, asserts that her ultimate goal is "not to segregate and specialize, but to combine"(Three Guineas 34). In spite of her rejection of participating in "the patriarchal system" and "the public world, the professional system" 74), Woolf agrees to donate her money for women's education, women's professions, and a society "'to protect culture and intellectual

liberty'"(*Three Guineas* 85). In short, Woolf's solution for preventing war by cultivating "the disinterested influence that they[women] possess through earning their livings"(*Three Guineas* 36) reveals that remaining an outsider might only be a temporary process on the way to achieving the disinterested condition that will uncover a hidden truth of women in a warmongering society. By repudiating the unreal loyalty to public laws that call for masculine belligerent vigor, Woolf asserts "the real loyalties"(81) to invisible, "unwritten," and "private laws" that "regulate certain instincts, passions, mental and physical desires"(*Three Guineas* 184; n. 42). Here, the independence and disinterestedness that are found in the feminine space of resistance against the masculine one are called for, in order to "help [men] to prevent war"(84).

In other words, Woolf settles a dilemmatic situation between the necessity for a woman to acquire a space in the public sphere and the obligation to be loyal to her nature as the female, by discovering a justification of the feminine private law that remains outside the masculine public law. If the public sphere incubates a warmongering society, the only way to resist it is by remaining outside of men's bellicose masculinity. To answer her own question—"How can we[women] enter the professions and yet remain civilized human beings, human beings, that is, who wish to prevent war"(*Three Guineas* 75)—Woolf relies on the ethical capability of a disinterested, free mind that lies in a feminine private sphere and disrupts a masculinized public sphere. Accordingly, woman's private space is not absolutely separated from man's public space, since the private and the public sphere are permeable, rather than absolutely divided. Because of the very porosity that destabilizes the total split between the private and the public, between the feminine and the masculine, women need to endeavor to remain outsiders on the border of a totalitarian public structure. This position is difficult to maintain, since being an outsider signifies putting herself ceaselessly on her guard against the penetration of the masculine public power into her private sphere.

Woolf's calling for an Antigonian ethic uncovers the other law repressed under patriarchal law, and opens up to an extremely difficult but crucial feminine ethic.

Antigone's rejection of observing patriarchal law while following "the unwritten laws"(*Three Guineas* 184; n. 42) reveals Woolf's awareness of the necessity of discarding the deceptive notion of a patriarchal family. To be an outsider for a woman is a requirement for being independent, since a totalitarian patriarchal society "tend[s] to abolish the boundary between the public and the private"(110), by its desire "to be seen as 'one big family'"(110), as Milan Kundera points out in his criticism of fascism. A patriarchal society where a woman is merely a stepdaughter and a secondary citizen tries to ensnare a woman to serve its law by infusing its ideal of the family into a mind of woman's own. Therefore, the Antigonian ethic is called for, not to "improve the written law" but to assert the other, more fundamental law. Instead of the fascist law of jingoism, racial purity, bellicosity, and masculinity, the Antigonian law affirms cosmopolitanism, universalism, pacifism, and femininity. The freedom of the mind that is again claimed is to resist an untruthful solidarity instilled by a totalitarian law.

The "Society of Outsiders"(113) is needed, therefore, in order "to tell the truth about politics and the truth about art"(*Three Guineas* 97). Here again it is revealed that Woolf's deep involvement in a political arena is closely connected to her position about art. This feminine ethic can be paralleled with Woolf's feminine modernist aesthetic that differs from fascist modernists. In this context, Woolf's formalist, modernist aesthetic that privileges the artist's absolute disengagement from a socio-political sphere seems to undergo a revision. Woolf's feminist engagement separates her from other male modernists, including her Bloomsbury friends, which might be the reason why they did not like *Three Guineas*.

Woolf's call for women to remain the outsiders of a masculine bellicose society in this book provides an interesting comparison with Wyndham Lewis's self-professed position of living "the life of the outlaw"(171) in his belligerent book, Men Without *Art*, published in 1934. Lewis's position as an outlaw indicates his rejection of Woolf's effeminate "pretty salon pieces"(166) of art, while advocating the "robust talents"(Lewis 167) of male modernists, such as the works of D. H. Lawrence and James Joyce. His masculine warlike criticism, as symbolized by his

"shoes" that trample "upon a carpet of eggs," as well as his "[taking] the cow by the horns"(Lewis 170), seems to be the opposite of Woolf's pacifist claim for remaining outside of the masculine, bloodthirsty standpoint. Woolf's outsider, which risks a transgression of the patriarchal law, nullifies Lewis's metaphor of her as a timid old maid for whom "[o]utside it is terribly *dangerous*"(169). Similarly, Lewis's laying the blame on Woolf for her privilege given to the narrow private world along with her fear of the outside public sphere is untenable. In sum, Woolf's outsider seems to reveal Woolf's resistance to Lewis's fascistic desire for power with which he stealthily attacks Woolf's modernist/feminst aesthetic and ethical position. As Merry M. Pawlowski observes, in his attack on Woolf, "Lewis's fascist unconscious explodes most overtly in print"(244). While Lewis's vigorous masculine standpoint easily sympathizes with a fascist politics, Woolf's adherence to a feminine principle that is not necessarily identified with the 'effeminate' position, as Lewis accuses, provides a force for struggling against the fascist devouring power.

Woolf's fight against fascist dictatorship is not, therefore, to confront it with alternative politics, but to take up the winding, ambiguous ethic that art intimates. Poignantly enough, women "should not believe in war" but "in art"(*Three Guineas* 97). Remaining outsiders means, hence, cultivating "an attitude of complete indifference"(*Three Guineas* 107; emphasis mine), a feminine artifice, guile, and pretension. Here again, Woolf seems to validate the private sphere over the public, since art, in spite of its inevitable engagement in the political, public arena, still values the effectiveness of the private practices of women. In other words, women's practices of art might supply another public sphere that would exist without being totally absorbed into a dominant masculine culture. In order to be politically effective, the private sphere needs to be changed into a public sphere which it never enforces a totalizing, dictatorial power upon its citizens.

This society of outsiders, therefore, appears similar to the society of liberal ironists that is supported by Richard Rorty in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, embracing an ironical position. Strictly speaking, this alternative society does not

refer to another politics, but an ethic that is closely connected with an aesthetic stance. A community of outsiders appears to be characterized by a combination of seemingly incompatible desires—desires between the "desire for self-creation, for private autonomy"(xiii), which rejects solidarity in the public space, and the "desire for a more just and free human community"(Rorty xiv), which warns against a dangerous narcissism in the aesthete's position. Thus, Rorty's affirmation of the complicated position of a liberal ironist seems to share a common ground with Woolf.

Furthermore, Rorty's repudiation of "the sense of national purpose which the Nazis briefly offered the Germans, or the sense of conformity to the will of God which inspired the Wars of Religion"(Rorty 50) shares Woolf's rejection of the fascist desire of imperialism as well as her suspicion about Christian religion. However, while the common ground of Rorty's ironist society has no space for communion or friendship, Woolf admits the necessity of solidarity, though the solidarity called for is only that between women. If sharing common ethics is acknowledged by Rorty as dangerous, since all human disasters, such as human suffering, pain, and murder, are committed in the name of loyalty to a community, Woolf would have found Rorty's privatization of ethics too weak to confront a fascist power. Accordingly, art that might privilege self-creation and autonomy over the commitment to a community does not absolutely remain independent and satisfied with private practices.

Therefore, Woolf's call for engagement in a public sphere by way of art not only for female artists but also for women in general seems to provide a critique of the myopic view of Raymond Williams. Williams' condemnation of Bloomsbury's formalist aesthetic for its detachment of art from life by fashioning "the effective forms of the contemporary ideological dissociation between 'public' and 'private' life"(168) is not an appropriate view in interpreting *Three Guineas*. While a total separation between the public and the private, prioritizing the private practices of art, is dangerous for its aestheticization of life, art's absolute participation in the public sphere risks a nullification of art by merely privileging

a politicization of art. How to avoid this dilemma remains a difficult but crucial task, which always already seems to embrace indeterminacy, except for provisional decisions on present particular problems. Here again we find a similarity between Woolf's somewhat deconstructive stance and the standpoint of Rorty's ironist in their rejection of dwelling in final language. Furthermore, Rorty's ironist, who continuously doubts but restlessly searches for enlarging acquaintances, looks similar to Woolf's aesthetic outsider who does not settle down with a homogeneous, decisive perspective. The ironist's endeavor "to get acquainted with strange people . . . , strange families, . . . and strange communities"(Rorty 80) is not very different from Woolf's calling for an affiliation with strange people or with the unknown world. In fact, Rorty's assertion of the ironist who "desperately needs to *talk* to other people, needs this with the same urgency as people need to make love"(Rorty 186) disrupts his initial position that supports the total separation between the private and the public, making Rorty's intermediate position that tries to balance between the deconstructionists and the pragmatists vulnerable.

If Woolf, in the first part of *Three Guineas*, focuses on women's solidarity and their sense of community against the fascist public sphere, the latter part of this book, which relies on the power of art, seems to return to the affirmation of the disinterested mind, which would allow women's experiments "not with public means in public but with private means in private"(113). This acknowledgement of the necessity of remaining in the private does not demarcate Woolf's prioritization of her art; rather, this obligation of situating women's aesthetic practices in the private seems to emerge as a strategy for avoiding the male inspecting eye while working towards disrupting the masculine public sphere. Moreover, her claim that "[t]hose experiments will not be merely critical but creative"(*Three Guineas* 113) indicates a particular aesthetic of a female writer that resists the merely critical and belligerent criticism of a male writer, presumably like Lewis's criticism. In sum, the total distinction between Woolf's androgynous mind claimed in *A Room of One's Own* and her "Society of Outsiders" in *Three Guineas* does not seem to be maintained. Although the emphasis lies in a different place—in A Room of One's

Own the issue of woman's writing and in *Three Guineas* the matter of pacifism—Woolf advocates a creative and at the same time a critical perspective innate in art. As stated before, I do not agree on the pervading opinion that *Three Guineas* is a work of Woolf's feminist politics, widely different from the modernist impersonal aesthetic that she advocated in *A Room of One's Own.*

Although a doubt lingers, Woolf's advocacy of creative criticism makes us return to *Three Guineas* where the narrator's call for "a passive experiment"(*Three Guineas* 118) seems to be similar to the narrator of *A Room of One's Own's* claim for the qualities of the androgynous mind. This "experiment of absenting oneself"(*Three Guineas* 118), similar to John Keats' famous 'negative capability,' affirms the passive power in a work of art. By veiling the self, writers can "[make] their absence felt" and make "their presence [become] desirable"(*Three Guineas* 119), showing a striking similarity to women outsiders. The androgynous mind might be a strategic term for an experiment in passivity. After following Woolf's typical winding way, we arrive at a place where continuous transgressions of the very boundaries are affirmed. Despite the seeming discrepancy between a room and the outside, the walls of a room fall apart; the room and the outside signify the very places where woman affirms the independency that allows her a freedom to share, which indicates a certain parallel between her feminist ethics and modernist aesthetics.

IV. Sharing the Room and the Streets

Woolf's call for a room of a woman's own in order not to be interrupted by other people or influenced by external situations is closely related to her acknowledgement of the adverse conditions for a female writer in the past when woman "was always interrupted"(*A Room of One's Own* 64) because of the absence of her own room. The room as a space of mental and spiritual freedom is, accordingly, connected to the androgynous mind that indicates the ideal state of the

mind of a writer. Within this room where "[t]he curtains must be close drawn," the "nuptials in darkness" (*A Room of One's Own* 99) happen. How can the celebration of a room of one's own be compatible with engagement in the sphere of social and historical realities? How does a mysterious marriage between the private and the public happen? These issues surrounding the androgynous vision and the call for remaining an outsider problematize the traditional subjection of women merely to the private sphere, where women are forced to repress their emotions and preferences in order to serve the patriarchal household. Both—the claim for a room of woman's own and the call for the outside space where a woman stands—challenge an age-old domestication of women, in spite of the appearance of incompatibilities between them. Therefore, the room of the outsider redefines woman's place, while positioning woman in an ambiguous and ambivalent place, together with blurring the spatial distinctions between the inside and the outside.

When Woolf accuses "[t]he division of . . . lives" within her Victorian home located in Hyde Park Gate—"[d]ownstairs there was pure convention; upstairs pure intellect"("A Sketch of the Past" 157)— Woolf inverts a patriarchal division of positionality and thus disrupts a sexist distinction of space. While man's space is based on vanity, a false sense of properties, and snobbism, merely following a Victorian value system, woman's place—her room upstairs— is detached from the egotism and convention downstairs, being an intellectual space. Through this inversion, Woolf shows a truth of woman that is not represented in the stereotypical images of women. She asserts that woman is neither a pretty ornament inside the house nor a witch outside the socio-political law, but an intellectual, rational human being who is capable of being a writer.

Orlando's experience, which does not seem to be limited to a domestic space even after he is transformed into a female, can be a symbol of the necessity of woman's being an outsider into a male-dominated society. Her stay with gypsies just after the sex change provides a severe critique of the imperialistic, egocentric, and materially oriented Western culture. The gypsies' responses to Orlando's pride in English civilization and her aristocratic class—"there was no more vulgar

ambition than to possess bedrooms by the hundred . . . when the whole earth is ours" and "a Duke . . . was nothing but a profiteer or robber who snatched land and money from people who rated these things of little worth, and could think of nothing better to do than to build three hundred and sixty-five bedrooms when one was enough"(*Orlando* 148)— provide a severe critique of British imperialism and upper-class snobbism. Woolf, by paralleling Orlando with a gypsy, uncovers woman as "a stepdaughter of England"(*Three Guineas* 14), just as a gypsy is an orphan in the Victorian culture, both without material abundance or a distinctive social identity.

Like the gypsies who are "unstable in eighteenth-century texts," being "foreign nomadic and exotic peoples"(Maaja A Stewart 166), Orlando as well as Shelmerdine remains a vagrant, despite their entering the conventional system of marriage. Orlando, despite being a female, idly roams the streets of London. Although the gypsies who Orlando met are different from "the poor who were uprooted by agrarian capitalism or with the more threatening 'lumpen proletariat'" of Austen's time, since they are situated in a remote country far distanced from England, Stewart's study of the gypsies whose "apparent idleness could be equated with potential rebellion"(166) might be applied to Orlando. As the gypsies "threaten the ideal of containment and stasis"(Stewart 166), so does Orlando.

Orlando, as an inheritor of the gypsy spirit, is one of the "[w]omen in motion [who] provide a particular threat to the cultural vision of a domesticity that posits timeless women inhabiting in unchanging space, where they sustain permanent values, as an alternative to the anxieties produced by a rapidly changing market society" (Stewart 168). Instead of remaining in her "private room alone"(*Orlando* 112), as she does as a young man in order to write poetry, Orlando as a transvestite disrupts not only sexual determinacy but also refuses to stay at a woman's fixed place in a house. If remaining in his private room does not help Orlando as a young man, ironically it is Orlando's ceaseless search for various kinds of life as a woman that contributes to the completion of her poem. In other words, rather than a private room, the adventure of Orlando in the streets of London as well as her exploration

of life with gypsies seems to help the process of finishing her poem. As in *A Room of One's Own*, the androgynous mind is again called for. Not remaining in a private room, but being a vagrant might assist a female writer; forgetting the matter of sex, a female writer paradoxically retains a feminine disruptive artifice, which Orlando's breaking all the rules that are imposed on women seems to accomplish.

However, there is another room affirmed in Orlando. Woman's own room where women's community can be constituted and woman's masquerade is ironically effective is asserted. The prostitute Nell's room is where friendship among and solidarity of women flourish, regardless of their class origin. Though it sounds rather naively idealistic, by eliminating the class distinction among the courtesan, the harlot, and the lady, women's space resists to any collusion with the hierarchical masculine sphere.

In her essay "Street Haunting: A London Adventure"(1930), Woolf describes her experience of sauntering through the London streets and experiments with the possibilities of an idle woman's disruptive force. Woolf, who "become[s] part of that vast republican army of anonymous trampers"(20), is similar to Orlando who is free while living in the early twentieth century to go out alone and shop in the London streets. If Orlando after the sex change into a female surprisingly realizes that "ladies are not supposed to walk in public places alone"(*Orlando* 191) in the 18th century, Orlando in the 20th century is a Mrs. Dalloway who roams the London streets observing diverse people who are different in class, disposition, and social situation, even including the madman, Septimus.

These female figures—Woolf in "Street Haunting" and *Orlando* in Orlando—seem to realize the dream of the female narrator of *A Room of One's Own*, since this freedom implies the possession of the money and independence that are necessary to be a good writer; their money and independence allow them "to travel and to idle, to contemplate the future or the past of the world, to dream over books and *loiter at street corners* and let the line of thought dip deep into the stream"("Street Haunting" 103; emphasis mine). While a female writer needs a room of one's own, she also has to acquire a chance to step out of a room and

enter an open space such as the streets where knowledge, adventure, and art wait for her.

Woolf's street haunting is also identified with a withdrawing from the role of "[t]he good citizen"("Street Haunting" 29); instead of being "banker, golfer, husband, father," one dreams, at those moments of the dissolution of the representative self, of being "*a nomad wandering the desert*, a mystic staring at the sky, a debauchee in the slums of San Franscisco, a soldier heading a revolution, a pariah howling with skepticism and solitude"("Street Haunting" 29; emphasis mine). It demarcates an emergence of "another self" that "disputes the right of the tyrant"("Street Haunting" 33). Reminding us of a gypsy whose nomadic life resists the dominant society, this appearance of another self is a sort of liberated feminine self that defies "the accustomed tyrant"("Street Haunting" 32). Liberating oneself from the duty and obligation to the family, this self can "enjoy oneself"("Street Haunting" 32). The pleasure and beauty that Woolf tastes through loitering the streets is equivalent to glancing at various kinds of books; "at the street corner, another page of the volume of life is laid open"("Street Haunting" 31-32). One makes in the streets "such sudden capricious friendships with the unknown and the vanished"("Street Haunting" 30), and there is a moment of "a flash of understanding" when "one catches a word in passing and from a chance phrase fabricates a lifetime"("Street Haunting" 31).

However, Woolf ultimately returns home after tasting "the happiness of death" and "the insecurity of life"("Street Haunting" 33); her house provides a temporary haven where she forgets the confusion of the identities that give her terror as well as beauty. Yet, returning home does not necessarily designate a negation of the multitudinous identities and the momentary empathy with other people. Rather, the security and peace inside home ironically harbor "uncertainty"("Street Haunting" 33) of life, as the ambiguous ties with strangers on the streets do not absolutely disappear. Furthermore, the "delight and wonder" that visit one's mind when one can "leave the straight lines of personality and deviate into those footpaths that lead beneath brambles and thick tree trunks into the heart of the forest where live those

wild beasts, our fellow men"("Street Haunting" 35) are not totally erased, even when one returns home. She is haunted by the streets.

Although "to escape is the greatest of pleasures" and "street haunting in winter the greatest of adventures"("Street Haunting" 35), this adventure to a foreign sphere distanced from "the old possessions, the old prejudices" (35) does not lead to an imperialistic engulfing of the other in the self-same system. This brief exile from the familiarity of home that allows a chance to meet unknown people and unfamiliar worlds in the strange streets destabilizes her identity, which might remain as fixed and unchangeable in a room of her own. Her observation of strangers does not lead to a colonization of them by the imperialistic desire, but lets them feely live their own lives, retaining their individualistic idiosyncrasies. There is no enforcement of her desire or will upon them. The vision of the idler allows of criticizing a masculine, imperialistic desire; it insinuates into us a doubt about the imperial, capitalist, bourgeois public sphere. In this context, Susan Squier's complaints—"[t]he stroll through London leaves [the narrator of "Street Haunting"] neither morally, spiritually, nor politically changed, but merely entertained"(47)—seems to fail to notice the ethic of the idler. The optic of an idler might be a passive resistance to a dominating order because of her lack of action. However, as the outsider in *Three Guineas* provides a more effective solution to the present matter through her distance from the insiders' limited perspective, an idle stroller can overcome his narcissism by respecting others and their differences.

Furthermore, as Greene implies, Woolf's "use of irony"(296) in *A Room of One's Own*, in order "to subvert them[the conventions of oratory] at every turn"(295), is not merely limited to the matter of style or to *A Room of One's Own* ; it seems that, under "a 'veil of pleasure'"(295) in the narrative of an idle walker, "the seriousness of its message"(Greene 295) is hidden. A serious message in the form of an essay might be a critique of a totalitarian public sphere where fascist modernism and patriarchal sexist culture coexist. Furthermore, the idlers, including Orlando, the street dandy, gypsies, and prostitutes, by being marginalized in the commercially advanced capitalist society, question the class division and material

progress in a capitalist economic system. Women, being the secondary sex, seem to find it easier to remain merely observers in a commercially advanced society. Women's living on the boundary allows a distance necessary to detach them from the dominant culture, permitting them to criticize it. Being distanced from social and political situations as an outsider, and being impartial in a room of one's own, one sees things as they are and approaches the other, not one's other, but the Other.

If a room of woman's own is necessary for a woman to write without being interrupted, to explore outside without exploiting others is essential for Woolf to experience the world and to communicate with the unknown. Since "it is worse perhaps to be locked in"(*A Room of One's Own* 24) than to be locked out, it is crucial for a female not only to free herself from a locked room for the sake of art, but to venture into the streets to share life with others. While a room of woman's own is a necessity for having uninterrupted time and space in order to incubate an impersonal attitude towards the things in the world, leaving a safe and familiar house does not necessarily signify being contaminated by the bourgeois public sphere. Hence, "windows should be open, and doors shut"(*To the Lighthouse* 27), as Mrs. Ramsay makes a rules for her home. Though it is important to have one's privacy within a room behind a closed door, one needs to open one's self to communicate with the other through the open windows. Woolf's investigations of the party consciousness in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* and street haunting in *Mrs. Dalloway, Orlando*, and "Street Haunting" show us her endeavor to search for odd affinities and connections with strangers; one should escape one's solipsistic space, while retaining the value of one's independent space at home. The boundary between a room of one's own and the streets is blurred in Woolf's spatial politics, in that the room and the streets can both be a place where one's freedom is guaranteed while a certain sharing occurs, acknowledging the necessity of continuous oscillations of the borderline. Crossing a risky ground, Woolf's aesthetic/ethical convergence calls for her and our vigilant endeavor to maintain that difficult position.

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Abstract

Beyond the Gap between Retaining a Room of One's Own and Sharing the Room and the Streets: Virginia Woolf's Spatial Politics

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The (non)relation between the private aesthetic space and the public politico-ethical sphere, together with the ambiguous connection between writing and experience, has produced continued discussions throughout Western thought, which is still evident in the ongoing controversies surrounding British modernism. Virginia Woolf's androgynous ideal, which calls for an impersonal writer, best represented in *A Room of One's Own* and *Orlando*, engages us in her complicated aesthetic, especially compared with the seemingly contradictory request for a feminine writing that uncovers the hitherto unknown experience of woman. Furthermore, her assertion of woman's remaining an outsider in a warmongering patriarchal society, as revealed in *Three Guineas* and "Professions for Women," seems to be incompatible with her aesthetic of disinterestedness for which retaining a room of one's own is a prerequisite.

We explore Woolf's politics of space, focusing on spatial images disclosed in her works, surrounding *A Room of One's Own,* "Professions for Women," *Three Guineas*, *Orlando*, and "Street Haunting." Despite the appearance of contradictions, a parallel between retaining a room of one's own and woman's remaining an outsider signifies an inevitable liaison between the aesthetic space and a socio-political sphere, without the aestheticization of politics or the politicization of art. The boundary between a room of one's own and the streets is blurred; the room and the streets can be places where one's freedom is guaranteed while a certain sharing occurs, acknowledging the necessity of continuous oscillations of the borderline. Implying the permeability between the inside and the outside, by

disrupting the binary oppositional structure, Woolf opens up a third, ethical place of writing (as) woman.

■ Key words : androgynous mind, room, streets, outsider, writing (as) woman, spatial politics (양성성, 방, 거리, 국외자, 여성(으로서)의 글쓰기, 공간의 정치학)