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Scott Cohen

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## THE EMPIRE FROM THE STREET: VIRGINIA WOOLF, WEMBLEY, AND IMPERIAL MONUMENTS

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Scott Cohen

The British Empire Exhibition began at 11:45 am on April 23, 1924. And then, approximately eighty seconds later, it really began. The stuttered start to the Empire Exhibition at Wembley was recorded in the newspapers as a "marvel of modern science," but all that the 100,000 visitors packed into the Empire Stadium witnessed was a strange yet perhaps thrilling mingling of ancient pageantry and modern technology ("Flashed").<sup>1</sup> A few minutes after the King declared the exhibition officially open, a telegraph boy strode into the stadium carrying a large white envelope. The band was playing as the King read the seventy-odd letters typed on the enclosed Eastern Telegram form reporting that the sovereign's proclamation had just circled the globe in merely one minute and twenty seconds. This technological stunt was a fitting beginning to an exhibition devoted to monumentalizing images of imperial unity and demonstrating the British Empire's global reach.

The history of the Empire Exhibition is punctuated by similar events that were staged at the 214-acre park in suburban London.<sup>2</sup> During the two seasons that the park was open in 1924 and 1925, more than 27 million people made the pilgrimage to see the empire "reproduced in miniature" (*British Empire*). Yet on Thursday, May 29, 1924, just as Wembley entered its second month of operation, storm clouds on the horizon forecast bad weather for the huge out-

door exhibition. Amid the simulacral display of opulence and luxury, amid the pavilions representing each colony, dominion, and mandated territory, one visitor wandered the grounds of Wembley contemplating its destruction. It was Virginia Woolf who saw the ominous sky above the exhibition and imagined a force more powerful than empire, a force that would cause it all to tumble down. As she would write in the essay "Thunder at Wembley,"

Dust swirls down the avenues, hisses and hurries like erected cobras round the corners. Pagodas are dissolving in dust. Ferro-concrete is fallible. Colonies are perishing and dispersing in a spray of inconceivable beauty and terror which some malignant power illuminates. Ash and violet are the colours of its decay. From every quarter human beings come flying—clergymen, school children, invalids in bath-chairs. They fly with outstretched arms, and a vast sound of wailing rolls before them, but there is neither confusion nor dismay. Humanity is rushing to destruction, but humanity is accepting its doom. . . . The Empire is perishing; the bands are playing; the Exhibition is in ruins. For that is what comes of letting in the sky. (*Essays* 3: 410–11)

In these lines, Woolf articulates her earliest and arguably most vivid critique of empire, finding global significance in the afternoon squall-line that cut across southern England. Woolf's vision of an imperial apocalypse is as serious as it is humorous, as she balances the horrifying image of solid buildings crumbling with the rather ridiculous catalog of exhibition goers seeking shelter. Since the exhibition has teetered on the edge of destruction for some time, Woolf's essay implies, the momentary intrusion of nature merely triggers the inevitable. The final "catastrophe" stems not from imperialism's policies, but rather an unavoidable event outside of human control. Concrete cannot evade returning to its granular beginnings.

In this essay, I examine the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley and Woolf's account of her attendance in order to shed light on the intersection of *Mrs. Dalloway* and imperialist discourses in interwar London. Having only recently settled into No. 52 Tavistock Square, the Woolfs visited the exhibition just over a week after their visit to Cambridge where Virginia lectured on "Modern Fiction" to the Heretics. At the time, Woolf was also in the midst of composing *Mrs. Dalloway* (Bell 103), a novel she famously suggested was intended to "criticise the social system, & to show it at work, at its most intense" (Woolf, *Diary* 2: 248). This constellation of creative and critical energy endows her essay about a soggy afternoon at Wembley

with much significance. To explore Woolf's writings on the city in this context is to illuminate how they work to counter some of the central assumptions and ambitions of imperial representation in postwar London. First, I would like to examine the influence that imperialism's representation of a global empire within the metropolis had on the development of the modernist novel. When placed next to Wembley's phantasmagoric displays and the geography they taught, *Mrs. Dalloway* can be seen as an aesthetic and a political response to the representational dilemmas involved with bringing the empire home and the difficult task of translating global space into local space.<sup>3</sup>

Wembley was a complex space situated somewhere between what Michel Foucault would designate as the two dominant heterotopias of modernity: the modern museum or library, on the one hand, where "the will to enclose in one place all times, all epochs, all forms, all tastes, the idea of constituting a place of all times that is itself outside of time and inaccessible to its ravages," and the fairgrounds, on the other, where "once or twice a year . . . stands, displays, heteroclit objects, wrestlers, snakewomen, fortune-tellers, and so forth" are experienced and embraced. Juggling the competing drives of modernity—the "perpetual accumulation of time in an immobile place" and the "flowing, transitory, precariousness" of the funfair (26)—Wembley stood for two years, stately yet pedestrian, modern yet anachronistic, immensely popular yet also popularly derided. Speaking directly to the exhibition's complex fusion of the ephemeral and the monumental, Woolf confronts the spectacle of empire, revealing specific problems of representation that become of increasing concern to metropolitan modernist authors. Accordingly, I also want to pursue the more controversial claim that Woolf's experience of Wembley set the groundwork for the formal innovations of *Mrs. Dalloway*, which delineates a London at once dominated by and utterly dependent upon imperial landmarks. To Wembley's insistence on unification, the novel embraces disunity; to Wembley's attentive wandering, *Mrs. Dalloway* poses leisurely distraction in the face of empire's call; to Wembley's attempt to recenter the empire in the suburbs, the novel clearly locates the empire in the city. By exploring this dialectic, I shall endeavor to demonstrate the complexity of Woolf's response to imperialism in her work—a response that is at once critical and complicit—and, ultimately, I hope to show that Woolf's "London novel" is as much a novel about the empire as the city (Daiches 82).<sup>4</sup>

Consequently, I am also interested in uncovering the force of empire on the streets of London and the role that the Wembley exhibition had in structuring the imaginary relations between the metropole and periphery between the wars. Part of this analysis involves tracing out a dialectic between this massive cultural event



and the modernist novel's vision of the city in order to show what had to happen to representational prose in the face of empire's appropriation of certain strategies of representation; while yet another, no less important direction involves looking at how London and Wembley's architecture informed the contemporary global imagination. No doubt the character of Britain's relationship with its vast territories around the globe can be studied through a variety of urban artifacts and discourses, from imperial offices around Trafalgar Square to advertising campaigns for the London Underground Group, from consumer products to guidebooks for London tourism. All of these are present in *Mrs. Dalloway* in one form or another; Wembley, however, cannot actually make an appearance in a novel that is set one year before the gates of the exhibition opened. Nevertheless, the ideologically saturated grounds of Wembley reveal how empire worked at home, how imperialism created consensus, and how colonial power manifests itself in the metropolis through representational systems.<sup>5</sup>

### **An Empire out of Time**

Among the myriad little-known facts about the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley is the small but important detail that it was unceremoniously built on the ruins of one of Victorian England's failed national monuments, the Metropolitan Tower. More familiarly known as Watkin's Folly—for Edward Watkin, owner of the Metropolitan Railway Company and MP—the failed rival of the Eiffel Tower never was able to provide the promised vista of metropolitan London, only rising a disappointing two hundred feet from its conception in 1889 to its dynamiting in 1907. In its wake, the Empire Stadium was built in 1922, and in 1924 the doors opened to what most historians regard as the century's most popular imperialist event.

Wembley set its sights well beyond London and claimed to offer an imperial vista for surveying the globe. Great pains went into constructing an intricate monument to the empire, a map of the world that could be strolled in a well-planned afternoon or over several days, as the official guide recommended. Every territory of the empire that could afford to build a pavilion had one at the exhibition. Along with the Palaces of Industry, Engineering, and Science, the largest structures were reserved for pavilions representing India, Canada, and Australia, each occupying about five acres. Wembley allowed visitors to inspect their empire, either while strolling the fifteen miles of roads named by Rudyard Kipling or riding in one of eighty-eight carriages circling the park on the Never-Stop Railway. This updated version of the Imperial Exhibition of 1911's "All-Red

Tour" traveled a one and a half mile circuit by the Amusements Park and the Indian Pavilion, by the working Coal Mine and the famous Empire Stadium, only slowing at each stop and reaching a maximum speed of 24 miles per hour. As the official brochure boasted, the exhibition aimed to provide visitors with the global experience. What was once a "prize of the fortunate few," Wembley claimed to democratize: "To-day the Grand Tour is within the reach of us all, and the actual cost of it is just eighteenpence! . . . To visit the Exhibition is to visit every Continent of the earth" (Lawrence 13, 15).

Drawing on the more successful strategies of industrial exhibitions of the previous century, from the Great Exhibition of 1851 onward, Wembley seamlessly incorporated the business and pleasure of empire. At every turn administrative elements of empire were straddled by its commercial ventures. Kiosks for Caudon, Lipton, Moorcroft, Wedgewood, and Pears sold limited exhibition editions of their wares. Products made throughout the empire, whether imported from far-flung colonial zones or manufactured in Stoke-on-Trent, began life anew as imperial memorabilia, stamped with the iconic Wembley lions. Interestingly, a startling number of these objects still circulate today as collectors around the world sell and trade napkin rings, tea caddies, pin dishes, pottery, postcards, stamps, and pamphlets on eBay.

Born in the rooms of the British Empire League, the idea of an exhibition dedicated to showcasing the empire took shape as early as 1902. As the imperial historian John MacKenzie suggests, the Empire Exhibition at Wembley figured as "a consolidator of all the ideas [about empire exhibitions] prevalent before the war" (110). This contributed to the exhibition's strange existence, at once representative of the current changes and anxieties about empire as well as a product of an empire that had existed before the war: the product of an empire running out of time, yet also a replica of an empire plucked out of time. What could not be reproduced was imported and placed on display, from tropical trees to thirty full-grown ostriches, from a Burmese shrine to a mountain of New Zealand wool, from a house built with South African tiles and bricks to the rebroadcasting of Big Ben's hourly tones throughout the park. Hundreds of "local inhabitants" took up residence at the site, conscripted to represent the native other as responsible colonial subject. These members of the "races in residence" were employed to simulate a colonial contact zone (Lawrence 126). It was this population that performed in the exhibition's live displays, making pottery, cooking local dishes in village scenes, as well as participating in a number of different pageants during the life of the exhibition.<sup>6</sup> A similar sort of immobility characterized one of the most strange but very popular human

displays at Wembley. In the Palace of Beauty visitors could "see living presentments of ten of the most beautiful women known to history," including Cleopatra, Dante's Beatrice, Helen of Troy, Scheherazade, Mary Queen of Scots, Sarah Siddons, and "our present day beauty" Miss 1924 (Lawrence 97, 99). According to the official guide, the women "who take the part of each of these characters have been chosen for the natural resemblance they bear to the women they are intended to represent" (99). In fidelity with the dynamic of a peepshow, the women in the Palace of Beauty were behind glass and silenced: "On each side of its richly decorated hall, glass-fronted, sound-proof rooms have been constructed to contain the 'beauty,' each furnished in accordance with the historical period it is designed to represent" (97, 99). The vocabulary of contamination and authenticity combine to give the sense of an autonomous aesthetic object in order to extract display-value.

All of this was in the service of Wembley's attempt to narrate imperial geography and history in suburban London. If the empire itself was a sloppy amalgamation of conquered, partitioned, and mandated territories demanding ideological acrobatics to cleanse their violent origins from a map drawn in blood, then the Wembley Exhibition was a prime opportunity for the pink-red areas of the globe to come alive in a parade of imperial pride. Wembley offered the crystal clarity of the planned city and the rigorous planning of an idealized globe. This planning permitted the unprecedented reproduction of the model empire:

There the visitor will be able to inspect the Empire from end to end. From Canada it is but a stone's throw to Australia, from Australia a short step to India and the Far East, from Hong Kong a few minutes' walk to New Zealand or Malay. In a single day he will be able to learn more geography than a year of hard study would teach him. And he will be able to see in each case the conditions of life in the country he is visiting. That is the importance of the British Empire Exhibition. It is a stock-taking of the whole of the resources of the Empire. (*British Empire*)

Much of the variety and indeed the velocity of the displays at Wembley is represented in Edward Bawden and Thomas Derrick's poster for the London Underground, which visually reproduces Wembley's fascination with forms of movement and the optics best suited for perceiving it all (Figure 1). From the dizzying, nearly illegible fireworks display spelling "by London Underground" and the jumble of sharply drawn lightning bolts spelling "To Wembley" to the orderly phalanx marching southward from the main entrance into the stadium and

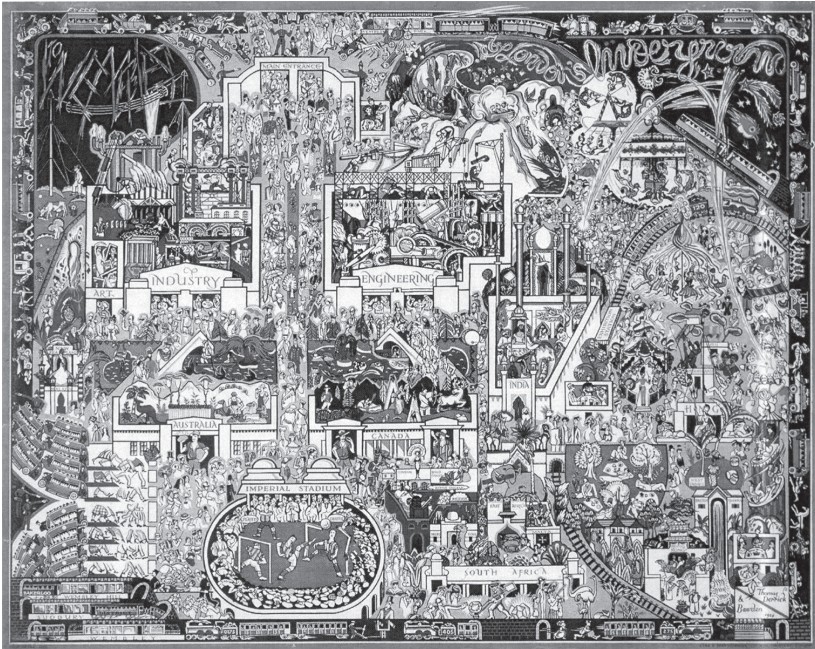


Figure 1.

*Wembley by Underground Tube poster. Reproduced with the permission of London's Transport Museum.*

the modes of transport sketched around the outer edges of the poster, Bawden and Derrick offer a veritable snapshot of the exhibition's global gloss. Along with the obvious celebration of colonial unity, the exhilarating display of movement was featured and modeled for its participants; the orderly uninhabited streets of the pre-exhibition poster are overflowing with a crowd that seems to dance through the streets of the empire (Figure 2). The poster encapsulates the scopic fantasy of the imperialists behind the exhibition's layout, a vision that has clear associations with the nineteenth-century realist novel: a map intricately populated and involved in the choreographed pageant of crowds circulating the empire, all witnessed from the inherent safety of a great height and distance.<sup>7</sup> In the intricate layering of bodies and objects that seem to spiral downward and through the channels of the park, there also exists an illusion of multidimensionality. The variety of figures involved in a wide range of activities almost suggests that there are hidden corners to the park. Indeed, looking for figures that might occupy hidden corners on the margins

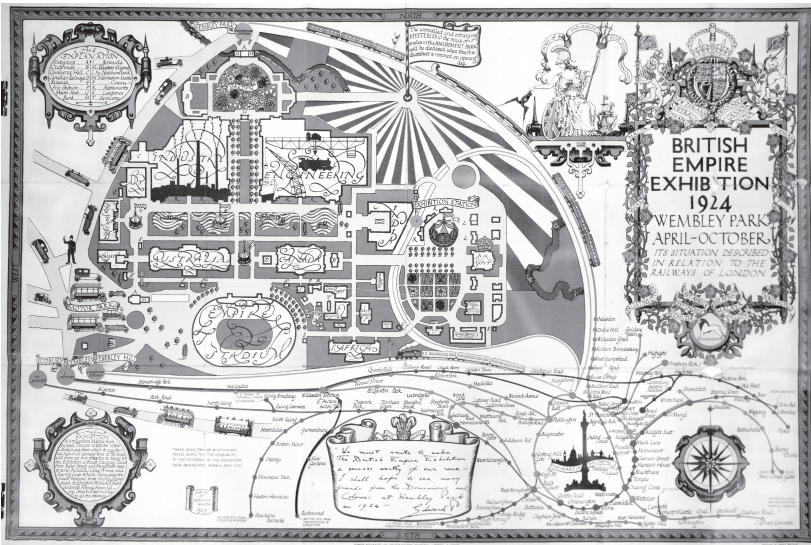


Figure 2.

*British Empire Exhibition, 1924, promotional poster.*

and even in the middle of the exhibition space seems to be the primary source of aesthetic pleasure in viewing this poster that one would have gazed at while waiting at an Underground Station. Yet ultimately, one can look forever only to learn that the entire landscape is mapped and that in its elaborate design no corner is outside the gaze of the privileged spectator.

### The Empire in a Handful of Dust

Woolf imagines all this in ruins. Yet significantly at the end of her essay one monument remains standing. It is notably not the imposing southern façade of the Palace of the Arts, nor the steel and glass roof of the Palace of Industry, nor the West African Walled City. Rather, Woolf's essay concludes with the crowds rushing into the Canada Pavilion's "frail tent of shelter" under which they "group themselves round" a life-size statue of the Prince of Wales made entirely of butter (*Essays* 3: 413). As Wembley's planners boasted, the Canadian dairy display drew crowds of visitors who gazed upon the Prince of Wales and his horse with a Canadian homestead in the background that, in its butter incarnation, was "shown in a manner both instructive and pleasing to the eye" (Lawrence 65). It is from



this vantage point that Woolf describes lightning trail across the sky: "The bagpipes neigh. . . . The Empire is perishing; the bands are playing; the Exhibition is in ruins" (*Essays* 3: 413). The captivating final image of butter sculpted in the shape of the Prince of Wales enhances Woolf's brilliant play on the terms "ruin" and "perish" to counter the organic tropes of imperial health and vitality. Moreover, a butter statue of a dignitary of the empire (and the chairman of the exhibition planning committee, no less) is an excellent example of the type of monumental thinking that was at work at Wembley and emblematic of the exhibition's arrogance and prodigality, not to mention its historical blindness.

Despite the tone of apocalyptic spoofery that colors its conclusion, Woolf's account demonstrates a keen awareness of the staying power of empire and recounts an ordinary day at the exhibition. Unlike other responses from P. G. Wodehouse, Noel Coward, the editors at *Punch*, and the Won't Go To Wembley Society, Woolf's examination of the exhibition reveals a complicated sense of disappointment and disidentification. Though the sprawling complex of pavilions and palaces nearly covered the entire park, walkways and paths were vulnerable to the sky, which, as Woolf indicates, could not but be the sky of suburban London. These few patches permit the entrance of the thrush, which Woolf endows with the voice of critique. Even the fortified empire city "cannot keep [nature] out," Woolf insists: "They might have eradicated the grass and felled the chestnut trees; even so the thrushes would have gotten in, and there would always have been the sky" (*Essays* 3: 410–11).

Although "Thunder at Wembley" suggests that at Wembley the terms and destinations of imaginary voyages were as prescribed as the well-trodden paths throughout the exhibition, Woolf searches for moments of revelation within the planned space. Remarking on the crowds at Wembley, Woolf offers a portrait of the spectators moving about the grounds:

They pass quietly, silently, in coveys, in groups, sometimes alone. They mount the enormous staircases; they stand in queues to have their spectacles rectified gratis; to have their fountain-pens filled gratis; they gaze respectfully into sacks of grain; glance reverently at mowing machines from Canada; now and again stoop to remove some paper bag or banana skin and place it in the receptacles provided for that purpose at frequent intervals along the avenues. But what has happened to our contemporaries? Each is beautiful; each is stately. Can it be that one is seeing human being for the first time? In streets they hurry; in houses they talk; they are bankers in banks, sell shoes in shops.

Here against the enormous background of ferro-concrete Britain, of rosy Burma, at large, unoccupied, they reveal themselves simply as human beings, creatures of leisure, civilization, and dignity; a little languid perhaps, a little attenuated, but a product to be proud of. Indeed they are the ruin of the Exhibition. (*Essays* 3: 411–12)

In this dense passage, Woolf portrays her fellow visitors as "beautiful" and "stately," and she marvels at humanity unfettered and crowds unoccupied. The ironic suggestion that humanity is the ruin of the exhibition strikes to the core of the organizers' rapture with attendance figures. It becomes clear that it is Woolf who is transformed and surprised by the potential of humanity at the exhibition. Reversing the optics of the imperial gaze, the essay turns to the strange presence of the daily visitors who are somehow out of place, despite every effort of the exhibition to situate them. Mark Wollaeger has recently suggested that "Woolf is protected from dizzy revelers by her class position, for both ends of the class spectrum seem insulated from the ideological hailing of the state" (51). While it must be acknowledged that there is some ambiguity in Woolf's assessment of her fellow exhibition-goers, it is not altogether clear that Woolf does not identify with any of them as she watches "them trailing and flowing, dreaming and speculating, admiring this coffee-grinder, that milk and cream separator" (*Essays* 3: 412). Instead, Woolf is much more intent on exploring and testing the flexibility of the subject position of the writer as observer—a powerful position yet one also threatened by merely attending this party of the empire.

Woolf reads Wembley—both in its narrative promiscuity and mimetic fidelity—negatively as an imaginative discourse, if not a literary artifact. Unsurprisingly, then, embedded in her critique are judgments that might better fall under the category of literary value, and Wembley's "empire in miniature" ten miles outside London is seen as just as nostalgic and anachronistic as she would cast that "appalling narrative business of the realist" (Woolf, *Diary* 2: 209). The city of the empire at Wembley was all the worse for its mediocre reconstruction, but it was its counterfeit claims to reality and the public's willingness to occupy these patently fraudulent spaces that Woolf's essay seems most intent on describing. Wembley's geography manipulated its participants' senses by suggesting an equality between its ferro-concrete construction and the originals crafted in ancient masonry. But more significantly, the exhibition forced an outmoded and antiquated fiction upon those circulating through its avenues, arcades, and pavilions. Much of this stems from the exhibition's attempts to create a narrative of empire, one which positions its crowds as both characters and readers. In contrast to ear-

lier displays that Woolf admits had a seductive quality to them where "everything was intoxicated and transformed," at Wembley the vision of imperial totality on such a massive scale fails. Wembley's model empire is baggy, unwieldy, and predictable (*Essays* 3: 411). Accordingly, Woolf draws out a much more disturbing representational dilemma involving the question of global space. If in Woolf's analysis the attempt to translate global space into local space at Wembley was a failure largely because of its inability to account for the experience of empire, then it is easy to see her experimental fiction, which is so intent on exploring the possibilities and impossibilities of bridging universal and particular experiences, as part of a response.<sup>8</sup>

As early as 1919 Woolf was writing suggestively about the problems with connecting events that take place on the global stage with local experiences and vice versa. Her review essay "The War from the Street" recounts the subjective and narrative violence of the war as it was experienced on the home front. While her critique turns on the pronominal inadequacy of the title under review, *Our Own History of the War*, she also introduces much larger questions concerning metropolitan perception and narrative. Showing a clear distrust of historical narratives that claim to represent everyday life, Woolf suggests that "no one who has taken stock of his own impressions since 4 August 1914, can possibly believe that history as it is written closely resembles history as it is lived" (*Essays* 3: 3). Such written histories might record events, Woolf admits, but in their narrative progression they fail to resemble the perplexing sense of impotence and simultaneous complicity that mass mobilization involves. Woolf playfully mirrors this through the sort of subjective slickness that would be echoed in *Mrs. Dalloway's* iconic phrase that serves to frustrate the stability of identity, "I am this I am that" (9).<sup>9</sup> In the war the only subject positions of any consequence are held by "the individuals, the generals, the statesmen, the people with names" who are the motor force of the contemporary historical moment:

They . . . proclaim war. . . . The individuals do the thing, and you in a muddled way reflect what they do in blurred pictures half obliterating each other; little particles of you get somehow broken off and turned into soldiers and sent to France, to reflect rather different things out there, while you, in your vast quivering bulk, remain at home. Soon your mind, if one may distinguish one part of the jelly from another, has had certain inscriptions scored upon it so repeatedly that it believes that it has originated them; and you begin to have violent opinions of your own, which are reinforced by those varieties of you. (*Essay* 3: 3-4)



In a description of the fracturing of the subject under the coercive power of war-mongering patriotism that is as powerful as it is personal, Woolf illustrates how complicity is so easily constructed.

Yet if war and its mobilization of consciousness cannot be narrated from the streets of London, then what about the empire? In many ways "The War from the Street" answers the questions that Woolf would later pose after visiting Wembley: "And what . . . is the spell it lays upon them? How, with all this dignity of their own, can they bring themselves to believe in that?" (*Essays* 3: 412). They believe because empire was presented in a manner that allowed them to see aspects of themselves in the global reduction around them, and in finding resemblances they participate in the enterprise of empire.

Perhaps this explains why imperialists saw lessons in Wembley that might be applied to London's monuments and urban planning. In fact, the editors at *Architectural Review* included Wembley's monuments and pavilions alongside the colonial architecture of India, Burma, and Canada in their 1924 volume dedicated to the "Architecture of Empire." The editors insist that Wembley supplied much-needed links between distant imperial zones and a familiar England:

As we walk about the great fair grounds at Wembley and see displayed in a thousand ways the material resources of all these lands . . . it is exciting to think that those who tend the herds and the corn, the forest and the mine, or make the jungle their dwelling-place and teach self-government to childish races, these far-dwellers under alien stars, have all some link with this our own familiar land, a farmstead it may be on the Pentland Hills, where grandfather minded the sheep, or a doorstep in Bermondsey, where mother played as a girl, or some old parsonage in the west country, where the oar won in the Eights still hangs on the panelled wall. (*Empire* 203)

What we now identify as the manifestation of a nostalgic fantasy, the editors saw as the height of exhibition architecture, a triumph of modernity, and a blueprint for metropolitan landscapes.<sup>10</sup> However, upon returning to London after a recent visit to Wembley, the editors of *Architectural Review* are less sanguine about the future linkages of the imperial family and regretfully report that "our own art at the moment is too fumbling and uncertain for it to send a clear trumpet call over the seven seas. . . . It is ill preaching to readers who may have been walking down Regent Street this very afternoon, looking for a sense of spiritual values and finding nothing but our stony sepulchre of Nash's gracefulness" (*Empire* 203). To the mind of the im-

perialist architect, the government should build on the success of Wembley and redesign the city's monumental spaces to produce a permanent pageant celebrating the empire. This perspective sheds some light on one architect's rather strange suggestion that a huge wall should be built around the exhibition so that it would "endure" as "a world club, a cosmopolis where we may rendezvous with our fellow citizens of every colour, creed, and race." He continues, asking "Why shouldn't it be; there is only one place in the world where it is possible, and that is London, only one Empire in the world of which it is possible, and that is ours" (Barnes 212).

### London's Marble Stare

Such a fusion of imperialist and cosmopolitan ideals comes into interrogation in *Mrs. Dalloway* where the traces of empire are around every corner. Conversion, Woolf's term for the quintessential discursive and material work of empire, is shown to be operating in the "purlieu of London" as well as "in the heat and sands of India, the mud and swamp of Africa . . . wherever in short the climate or the devil tempts men to fall from the true belief which is her own" (100). In addition to the haunting intrusions of empire in the form of trunks prepacked for voyages to India or in the sounds of Big Ben's tones echoing Greenwich's authority, the geography of empire is represented through the novel's various characters—the ideal English hostesses Clarissa, the statesman Richard Dalloway, and the quintessential Englishman Hugh Whitbread walk the same streets as Maisie Johnson, the Scottish girl recently arrived from Edinburgh, Molly Pratt, the Irishwoman moved by the Prince of Wales, the unnamed Colonial, launching invectives from a back street pub, Rezia Smith, the young Italian emigrant, and Septimus Smith, the unoriginal but not undistinguished English clerk. Such a masterful if at times uneasy mingling of characters sets the stage for a battle of the politics of mobility. Setting these figures adrift in London, the novel inverts Lady Bruton's ambition of sending people out into the empire by bringing them in. In fact, the positioning of Millicent Bruton's imperialist luncheon at the center of the novel foregrounds its pivotal role in shaping the thoughts and fates of the novel's populations. And the irony is not to be missed in that the empire migration enthusiast who prescribes travel for others and dreams of "commanding battalions marching to Canada" also dreads circulating in the heart of the empire: "Parties terrified Lady Bruton" (112, 111). Here, as elsewhere in the novel, global and local mappings and movements are at odds: those who are particularly well suited, or so they think, for the global, find themselves circumscribed or paralyzed in their local movements.

If "the charm of modern London is that it is not built to last; it is built to pass" as Woolf would insist in *The London Scene*, then *Mrs. Dalloway* vividly maps a supremely charming and thoroughly mobile modern London (19). In contrast to the monumentalized imperial London that certain architects would dream of, *Mrs. Dalloway* is particularly interested in mobility. In many respects, then, we can see *Mrs. Dalloway*'s interest in monuments in the context of Wembley's attempts at global resemblance and its dedicated attempt at realist representation. I am not saying that Woolf wrote her novel with Wembley in mind, though as I indicate above the links between the different writings during the period provide for productive speculation about Wembley as an influential presence. Rather, what I want to suggest is that this novel of graceful bumblng and uncertainty has something to say about the production of space that the British Empire brought about and Wembley rigidly monumentalized at home. As Woolf noticed at Wembley, populations endow monumental spaces with meaning. Indeed, recent scholarship on the metropolitan spaces of empire has suggested that such spectacles as Empire Day celebrations and Imperial Exhibitions were successful because they were "spaces in movement, shaped at least in part by the crowds who passed through them" (Driver and Gilbert 8). What I want to attend to here is how monuments and landmarks figure in Woolf's attempt to demonstrate the processes of how spaces are produced and experiences are orchestrated at the empire's core. Woolf's novel, I want to suggest, is particularly interested in illuminating the power of monuments and in many cases suspending their power.

Amid *Mrs. Dalloway*'s pageant of life and variety, monuments dominate and in many ways determine the novel's depiction of London. The repeated appearances of monuments such as Nelson's Column in Trafalgar Square, Gordon Statue, and the statue of the Duke of Cambridge play both narrative and descriptive roles in the novel. They delineate scenes and thicken atmospheres, and in an instant they introduce history, the state, and empire. Despite the use of monuments to hold the various strains of the novel together, the active geographical imagination of the novel is strikingly antimonumental, found more in the "ebb and flow of things" and often actively conspiring against the ordering tendency of monuments (9).<sup>11</sup> For instance, Peter Walsh, the failed colonial administrator, is distracted from the bounds of imperial London by a young woman walking across Trafalgar Square. Walsh pursues. On his journey, he imagines the traffic narrating this seduction, actually hailing him: "he started after her to follow this woman, this excitement, which seemed even with its back turned to shed on him a light which connected them, which singled him out, as if the random uproar of

the traffic had whispered through hollowed hands his name, not Peter, but his private name which he called himself in his own thoughts" (53). Peter's northward voyage out of Trafalgar Square in pursuit of the mysterious woman wearing a red carnation is clearly framed as a mockery of the imperial picaresque. His breathless chase continues through Piccadilly Circus and up Regent Street. As he follows her, the city presents itself as an obstacle course, and Peter does battle with the streets and crowds:

But other people got between them in the street, obstructing him, blotting her out. He pursued; she changed . . . he was an adventurer, reckless, he thought, swift, daring, indeed (landed as he was last night from India) a romantic buccaneer, careless of all these damned proprieties, yellow dressing-gowns, pipes, fishing rods, in the shop windows; and respectability and evening parties and spruce old men wearing white slips beneath their waistcoats. He was a buccaneer. (53)

Such movement in the "wonderful maze of London," to borrow a phrase from *Night and Day*, is of course not unusual in Woolf's writings about the city (44). From the jostled beginning of the *Voyage Out* to Nicholas's timing of the German guns with chronometric accuracy from Hampstead to the Embankment in *The Years*, movement is united with Woolf's mapping of the city. Yet *Mrs. Dalloway* finesses global and local mappings, both real and imagined, in ways that we can read as allegorical and political strategies. In Peter's case, his movement figures as a deferral if not outright renunciation of the zone of imperial administration where moments earlier he saw a column of young soldiers who had along with the "exalted statues" "achieved at length a marble stare" (51). Though Peter kindly associates himself with the disciplined marching youths who are at home among the stoic landscape of Whitehall, something has changed. With "all India . . . behind him; plains, mountains; epidemics of cholera; a district as big as Ireland; decisions he had come to alone," his native city seems unfamiliar, and he fancies himself an urban ethnographer (48). London has become an exotic field of conquest and study, and Peter's lustful plunge into the present is inflected by tortured maps of the past. In following this modern Britannia wearing a red carnation away from the zone of imperial masculinity, Peter's movement replicates his withdrawal from the colonial periphery in order to secure a divorce for his lover and employment for himself as well as his most recent interaction with Clarissa Dalloway when he intrudes on a scene of imperial domesticity.

By the time his pursuit leads him to Great Portland Street, Peter has traveled approximately one mile, turning his back on or passing dozens of imperial public buildings and memorials to the south—including the recently opened headquarters for the Canadian Government, the Canada Club of Great Britain at 29–31 Trafalgar Square, the Archway, the Colonial Office, and the India Office. The "marble stare" of the uniformed boys in Trafalgar Square is finally eclipsed by the young woman's parting glance: "one look in his direction, but not at him, one look that bade farewell, summed up the whole situation and dismissed it triumphantly, for ever, had fitted her key, opened the door, and gone!" (54). Peter's journey is just one example of the novel's attention to the monuments of empire; his symbolic rejection of the imperial zones of the city is apparent in his trajectory across the city.<sup>12</sup> Equally important, yet only hinted at in Peter's confrontation with London's traffic, is Woolf's attention to precisely how spaces are experienced in the city at the level of individual consciousness.

In her writing on London, Woolf portrays a city of contradictory impulses and desires, which often leave the urban wanderer with impressions as vivid as they are fleeting. The psychic effects of apparently chaotic movement are evident in *The London Scene*:

The mind becomes a glutinous slab that takes impressions and Oxford Street rolls off upon it a perpetual ribbon of changing sights, sounds and movement. Parcels slap and hit; motor omnibuses graze the kerb; the blare of a whole brass band in full tongue dwindles to a thin reed of sound. Buses, vans, cars, barrows stream past like the fragments of a picture puzzle; a white arm rises; the puzzle runs thick, coagulates, stops; the white arm sinks, and away it streams again, streaked, twisted, higgledy-piggledy, in perpetual race and disorder. The puzzle never fits itself together, however long we look. (17–18)

The kind of consciousness described here not only makes Peter's distraction particularly understandable in light of almost any discussion of urban modernity, but it also emphasizes the planning and orchestration of human movement made possible by a white arm directing traffic. This attempt at order, appearing only in a flash as it does here, exists alongside the more familiar fragmentary experiences of the modernist city. Woolf is much more interested in expressing the insoluble aspect of urban spaces, no matter how disconcerting it might be. The "puzzle" of urban modernity that can never be solved offers the opportunity for discovery, which was largely unavailable in the monumental landscape of Wembley. Woolf's fic-

tion stages the battle between maps and lived experiences, between real and imagined spaces, and critics have long seen this "shuttling" as central to her experimental fiction.<sup>13</sup> This oscillation, I want to suggest, is also central to Woolf's critical geography and it serves to undercut the monumental formations of empire in metropolitan London, making a potentially ideologically controlled landscape open to contestation and invention.

### Topographical Dummies

A useful theoretical framework for discussing the politics and aesthetics of monuments and their power to locate individuals in a novel that is as frenetic in its movement as *Mrs. Dalloway* can be found in Walter Benjamin's writings. Early in his *Moscow Diary*, Benjamin describes the processes involved with properly orienting oneself in the city: "One only knows a spot once one has experienced it in as many dimensions as possible. You have to have approached a place from all four cardinal points if you want to take it in, and what's more, you also have to have left it from all these points. Otherwise it will quite unexpectedly cross your path three or four times before you are prepared to discover it" (25). He goes on to sketch a preliminary solution to the bewildering circuit of the city's neighborhoods: survey a place through movement, as often and as varied as possible.

While his diary entries offer the beginnings of a methodology for mapping and discovering urban spaces, Benjamin develops this further in his more familiar essay "Moscow." Written soon after his two month stay in the city, "Moscow" displays the sort of mingling of imagination and experience that characterizes all of his writings on urban modernity.<sup>14</sup> For the wandering individual, the city is coy, persistently masking and unmasking itself and enacting a constant rivalry between its real and imagined locations. Benjamin explains:

Before I discovered Moscow's real landscape, its real river, found its real heights, each thoroughfare became for me a contested river, each house number a trigonometric signal, and each of its gigantic squares a lake. For every step one takes here is on named ground. And where one of these names is heard, in a flash imagination builds a whole quarter about the sound. This will long defy the later reality and remain brittly embedded in it like glass masonry. In the first phase the city still has barriers at a hundred frontiers. Yet one day the gate, the church that were the boundary of a district become without warning its center. Now the city turns into a labyrinth for the newcomer. Streets

that he had located far apart are yoked together by a corner like a pair of horses in a coachman's fist. The whole exciting sequence of topographical dummies that deceives him could only be shown by a film: the city is on its guard against him, masks itself, flees, intrigues, lures him to wander its circles to the point of exhaustion. . . . But in the end, maps and plans are victorious: in bed at night, imagination juggles with real buildings, parks, and streets. (99)

Benjamin highlights the difficulties of creating a mental map of urban space through a series of movements. As the spectator cuts through the urban landscape, an ungraspable urban totality appears in flashes, renewing itself and reorienting the individual at every turn. The concluding lines indicate at least a limited victory for the city of maps and plans. Yet this is far from a relief. The stasis of the sleeper provides only physical rest while the "imagination juggles" the puzzling geography of dreams. In exhaustively adhering to the spatial challenges of urban modernity, Benjamin foregrounds the force of totalizing images and simultaneously locates the seeds for their contestation.

I point to Benjamin's rather marginal concept of the "topographical dummy" because I believe it can aid us when thinking about how empire is experienced in the city from the ground level, from the perspective *Mrs. Dalloway* so rigorously explores.<sup>15</sup> By seeing the novel as searching out particular frontiers, discovering variegated perspectives of the city, and foregrounding battles between the experiences of individuals and the intentions of imperialist planners and architects, *Mrs. Dalloway's* uncanny mixing of experiences and perspectives takes on a political significance that cannot be overstated—especially at a historical moment when Wembley sought to seamlessly narrate an imperial planetary vision in suburban London and when the editors of *Architectural Review* were proposing a Wembley geography for the city. The prospect that maps and plans would be victorious, that imperialism's scopic drive to map the periphery would be overlaid on the metropolis is countered not only in Peter's spatial renunciation of monuments to empire and nation but in the contests between competing mappings of the city and competing translations of global and imperial space.

Nowhere in the novel are the metropolitan spatial crises brought about by empire more clear than in Septimus and Rezia Smith's experiences of London. As Karen Levenback has noticed, Septimus, in his madness and shellshock, suffers from a temporal crisis; as much as he is told to "look," the accurate perception of past and present, life and death, fails him.<sup>16</sup> Septimus's problems are even more acutely experienced in terms of space. From the moment the reader en-

counters Septimus he is associated with physical stasis: "Septimus Warren Smith, who found himself unable to pass, heard [Edgar J. Watkiss announce the presence of the grey car]. . . . Everything had come to a standstill" (14). In fact few things, except perhaps monuments, are less mobile than Septimus, who feels himself bleeding into the environment around him, his body raw, "macerated until only the nerve fibres were left" (68). Moreover, all of Septimus's movements in the novel are informed by his wounded psyche that reflects (and brings to London) the effects of the historically novel spatial experience of the trenches, that terrifying immobility resulting from advanced European colonial expansion and competition. Unlike Peter, an imperial laborer of another sort who moves freely about the city having landed safely to England's "secure shores" (107), Septimus has visions of drowning on these same shores. He might have survived the zigzagging trenches across France, but he will not survive London, a fact forecast early in the novel in Woolf's memorable description of a carnivorous city: "London has swallowed up many millions of young men called Smith" (84).

In the figure of Septimus, Woolf merges the dual crises of representational systems of language with spatial experience—feeling and desire are united with movement and mobility. This is particularly evident when Rezia helps Septimus sift through his papers: "Diagrams, designs, little men and women brandishing sticks for arms, with wings—were they?—on their backs; circles traced round shillings and sixpences—the suns and stars; zigzagging precipices with mountaineers ascending roped together, exactly like knives and forks; sea pieces with little faces laughing out of what might perhaps be waves: the map of the world. Burn them! he cried" (147). The psychotic dreamscape sketched by a schizophrenic cartographer is a graphic example of the toll war has taken on the global image. After all, it is none other than Septimus who claims that "he knew the meaning of the world," but only from his "straying on the edge of the world, this outcast, who gazed back at the inhabited regions, who lay, like a drowned sailor, on the shore of the world" (66, 93). Put to paper it is clear why in its translation into the local geography of the city London becomes unnavigable. To Wembley's realist endeavor, its intricate mappings, Septimus's map is fragmented, violated, failing, and even modernist in its rendering.

While Septimus's mind juggles imagined and real experiences, Rezia shepherds him through the city carrying her own dreams of leaving England and returning to Italy. But these dreams must be reconciled with the current limitations of London's present with Septimus, where her quiet pastorate must be balanced with embarrassed shoving. When alone something different presents itself to Rezia, unfettered from space and time:



There was nobody. Her words faded. So a rocket fades. Its sparks, having grazed their way into the night, surrender to it, dark descends, pours over the outlines of houses and towers; bleak hillsides soften and fall in. But though they are gone, the night is full of them; robbed of colour, blank of windows, they exist more ponderously, give out what the frank daylight fails to transmit—the trouble and suspense of things conglomerated there in the darkness; huddled together in the darkness; reft of the relief which dawn brings when, washing the walls white and grey, spotting each windowpane, lifting the mist from the fields, showing the red-brown cows peacefully grazing, all is once more decked out to the eye; exists again. I am alone; I am alone! she cried, by the fountain in Regent's Park (staring at the Indian and his cross), as perhaps at midnight, when all boundaries are lost, the country reverts to its ancient shape, as the Romans saw it, lying cloudy, when they landed, and the hills had no names and rivers wound they knew not where—such was her darkness. (23–24)

Here Benjamin's dizzying pursuit of topographical dummies in the modern metropolis mingles with the tones of Joseph Conrad's Marlow's ruminations on a precolonial landscape. Woolf endows this outsider with the knowledge of the space as it was experienced as an imperial outpost, foregrounding the ghostly aspects of the city lying in wait as well as the fragile nature of all enduring maps and plans. This terrifying yet somehow also familiar ancient geography is contrasted with a more pleasant geography of the recent past. For Rezia has not forgotten her first experiences of London with Septimus: "They went to the Tower together; to the Victoria and Albert Museum; stood in the crowd to see the King open Parliament. And there were the shops—hat shops, dress shops, shops with leather bags in the window, where she would stand staring" (89). The geography of tourist and fashionable London, as if recorded directly from a "London in One Day" catalog, remains submerged beneath the more immediate trauma of the city; immobility is no longer associated with consumption and spectacle, but rather stagnation and madness. The pathos of this rendering stems from Rezia's geographical predicament: she must encounter this other geography as it is expressed around her where she remains an outsider, a tourist who has stayed too long. The London of outbursts in the park and trips to Harley Street is always haunted by a London just a half mile south, yet as interminably far away as her childhood home where once all England meant was horses, shops, and tailor-made suits.

While Septimus might be the only character with an actual map, Woolf suggests that everyone on the streets on that June day carried their own mental maps with which they navigate the city. If the novel shows us anything about his condition, it is that in the blurring of temporal and spatial categories we might associate with madness Septimus is not alone. Clarissa's movement around the city is punctuated by her mental journeys back in time to the pastoral landscape of the Bourton of her youth, a space as equally structurally determined by empire as any other in the novel. Appropriately then, it is easy to see how these mental journeys to Bourton are largely a response to the uncanny presence of Peter Walsh who figures quite clearly as the return of the imperial repressed. While Clarissa's actual movements are largely confined to a small portion of London and never outside the safest zones of the imperial metropolis, her psychic journeys are to the endangered territories of the irretrievable past—a space in which, Woolf ultimately implies, monuments will forever be inadequate. Woolf again endows a place of ruin with the promise of knowledge, much as in the beginning of the novel when it is suggested that the personage in the grey car will be known "when London is a grass-grown path" and even earlier when the swirling dust of Wembley reveals an impending imperial catastrophe (16).

In October 2002, much as Woolf had imagined three-quarters of a century earlier, humans ultimately proved to be the "ruin of Wembley." This time they sat behind the controls of a battalion of bulldozers and wrecking cranes that set to tearing down the only remaining structure of the exhibition, the 100,000-seat Empire Stadium, known more recently as Wembley Stadium and former home of the Football Association. In many respects, it seems appropriate to see the site as among the final ruins of imperial Britain, if more than a half century in the making. In the fate of Wembley, we can read the fate of continental empires and the challenges their remnants pose for cultural and political life in the age of late capitalist society. For the New Wembley will follow a controversial American model of stadium building: a convention center will be erected nearby and a large portion of the seating in the new Stadium has already been reserved for Corporate Sporting Fans—or what the captain of Manchester United called the "prawn sandwich brigade" (Chaudhary 4). But like so many things associated with the exhibition and the empire it celebrated, the remains of the Empire Stadium will have a second life and will be scattered around the globe. Most of the fixtures from the old stadium were sold to collectors and sporting facilities in Europe, but the Football Association has asked the Australian contractor charged with demolishing the old stadium to save the rubble. The debris will be crushed and resculpted into miniature rep-

licas of the Stadium. As key-chains and paper weights, the ruins of Wembley are available for purchase on the internet.

## Notes

1. Over the following two days *The Times* devoted almost an entire column to detailing the "British Cable Feat."
2. It might seem strange to us now to call Wembley a suburb of metropolitan London, and this is not unrelated to the existence of the exhibition. The Empire Exhibition participated in the massive growth of suburban London. The town of Wembley is remarkable in this regard. In 1921 the population was 18,239; by 1938 this figure had exploded to 121,600, a 552 percent increase (Jackson 117). Moreover, by building the exhibition outside the city, the planners of Wembley were able to take advantage of the notion that the spaces of the empire most closely resembled the English countryside, all the while reiterating the exhibition's proximity to London—just up Harrow Road: 10 miles by road from the Bank of England, 10 minutes from Marylebone Station, as the advertisements proclaimed.
3. In her groundbreaking study, Friedman offers a compelling geopolitical analysis of Woolf's unique position as a modernist regarded as at once international and domestic. Advancing her examination of *To the Lighthouse*, Friedman suggests that "as vital as discussions of Woolf's relation to empire are, the geopolitical axis of Woolf's life, work, and reception is broader than the politics of imperialism. For an English writer born at the height of the British Empire and dying in its twilight, the story of empire is clearly central. But it is not the whole geopolitical story" (119).
4. Brewster suggests *The Years* holds the title *the* London novel.
5. Wembley left its impression on a startling array of cultural productions, from advertising and architecture to popular film and, most notably, dance music of the 1920s. For example, Jack Hylton's "Wembling at Wembley with You" and "Let's Go to Wembley," and Billy Merson's "In My Little Wigwam, Wembley Way" (MacKenzie 110).
6. As MacKenzie notes, "there were in fact a number of complaints about the representation of Africans at Wembley. The union of Students of Black Descent (a mainly West African London student group) complained to the Colonial Office about the manner in which Africans were help up to 'public ridicule'" (110). He further notes that "some of the publications of the exhibition took an essentially nineteenth-century line. The three-page leaflet distributed at the Anthropological Section referred to 'native customs' like human sacrifice and cannibalism, and to the 'town boys' of Africa who provide material for every political agitator in that Continent" (111).
7. See, for example, Edward Said on the social space of fiction (62–80).

8. The disjunction of particular and universal is, according to J. Hillis Miller's classic reading of *Mrs. Dalloway*, at the center of the novel's creative intervention. Reading the darker aspects of the novel with great attention, Miller suggests, "the novel seems to be based on an irreconcilable opposition between individuality and universality. By reason of his or her existence as a conscious human being, each man or woman is alienated for the whole of which he or she is actually, though unwittingly or at best half-consciously, as part. That half-consciousness gives each person a sense of incompleteness" (183).
9. Wang rightly argues that the fluidity of Woolf's inner worldly investigations registers deeper political significance: "*Mrs. Dalloway* provides a good occasion to investigate the connections between the symbolic network of power, the constitution of the subject, and the psychic resistance. The novel can be read not so much as a systematic penetration into individual consciousness as an exploration of the ways the individual tries or fails to establish his or her own identity as the subject of the state" (179). In his focus on the novel's "shifts from one discursive position to another, from one mental image to another" (181), Wang's Althusserian reading powerfully reconstructs the novel's linguistic resistance to ideological hailing and subject formation. The classic political readings of the novel are found in Edwards and Zwerdling 120–43.
10. *A Pictorial and Descriptive Guide to London* quotes Sir Lawrence Weaver on the aims of exhibition architecture, aims that the guide insists Wembley brilliantly achieved: "Exhibition architecture is an architecture of experiment, of humour, of adventure. . . . In such work it is not only permissible but virtuous to experiment with novel forms and effects of colour, while retaining those traditions which are based on common sense" (F).
11. It should not be forgotten that what Wicke has rightly characterized as an "almost perverse mobility of narrativity, where there are no boundaries or borders to narration" plays out in the physical and social geography of London where very often the influence of monuments is demonstrated by their failure (123).
12. As Bowlby has recognized, particular modes of transport are "often used in Woolf's novels to dramatize the complexity of the representation or 'reading' of character (including the observer's)" (99).
13. Woolf's dedication to the investigation of consciousness has been the focus of so many chapters, articles, and monographs that I hardly need rehearse it here. From Auerbach, Hartman, Miller, and Ruotolo through Ryan, the exploration of what Hartman eloquently described as Woolf's "shuttling between realistic and expressionistic forms of style" has produced remarkable insights to Woolf's contribution to modernist experimental fiction. In fact some of the most insightful analyses have not strayed far from Auerbach's formulation: "In Virginia Woolf's case the exterior events have actually lost their hegemony, they serve to release and interpret inner events, whereas before her time (and still today in many instances) inner movements preponderantly function to prepare and motivate significant exterior happenings" (539).

14. For an excellent account of the geographical coordinates and progression of Benjamin's writings, see Buck-Morss 25–41.
15. Recent scholarship has been helpful in drawing out the connections between Woolf and Benjamin, especially their mutual interest in cultural critique and the role of technology in modernity. Hankins has rightly suggested that "the urban critiques of Woolf and Benjamin enable us to survey city spaces through the critical trajectories of the revolutionary modernist outsiders—the neo-*flâneur* and the striding feminist—and to interrogate the vanishing and emerging sites for the intellectual in commodity culture" (9).
16. As Karen Levenback helpfully points out, "To Septimus, the numbing finality of death was not a given in the trenches and it is not a given in the postwar world" (49). Yet just as much as Septimus's madness blurs the temporal categories, the horrors are registered in terms of space. As Wang comments, "this experience involves a loss of identity. In merging with the external world, a schizophrenic knows no boundaries, no limits, and no distinctions" (183). For a more recent investigation of Septimus's condition and its medical and literary genealogy see DeMeester 649–53.

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