

**Freedom, Femininity, Danger: The Paradoxes of a Lesbian *Flaneur* in
Sarah Schulman's *Girls, Visions and Everything*.**

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Abstract

Resumen

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The sex of the flaneur

A kiss is not just a kiss when it is performed by a same-sex couple in public. Gill Valentine, in “(Re)Negotiating Heterosexual Street”¹ discusses the case of two lesbians thrown out of the supermarket for kissing in present day England. Valentine’s brief description of this incident reveals that the street/ public space is not asexual or neutral, but restrictive and punishing in relation to the performance of non-heteronormative behavior. The street, she underscores, is an environment that is strictly coded and is presumed to be a heterosexual space where ‘sexual dissidents’, gay men and lesbian women, are not allowed to enact or reveal their sexuality. Valentine also believes that in public places, such as the streets of the city, aggression becomes a direct way of regulating deviant behaviors and imposing unwritten rules of heteronormativity while

bypassing the police or authorities. Direct aggression, indeed, is the most straightforward indicator of the existence and strictness of these rules, and along with more subtle ways like looks of disapproval, whispers and stares, effectively contributes to the ‘heterosexing of space’. At the same time, she readily points out, these responses testify to the fragility of the hetenormative space, the codes and rules or which need to be constantly maintained and protected from the other possibilities that are never too far away.

In other words, the practice of *queering* of space, opening it up for disruption and change, goes hand in hand with its *heterosexing* and is just as omnipresent. In this paper, I want to discuss the practices and techniques of queering space as introduced by a figure of a lesbian city walker, a lesbian *flaneur*. Along with this, I want to address the complexities of imagining the city streets and urban public space in general as the place of enacting and writing lesbian sexuality. I will use the works of a New York based writer and activist Sarah Schulman in order to present streetwalking as a form of queering space and discuss a paradoxical figure of a lesbian *flaneur*.

The contradictory nature of a lesbian *flaneur* is related to the fact that her sexuality and gender subject her to a double exclusion – both patriarchy and heteronormativity – practices that regulate and restrict female and non-heterosexual access to public space. Despite this exclusion, the figure of the *flaneur* is a frequent reappearance in lesbian fiction. This persistence testifies to the fact that flanerie is a viable and successful technique of lesbian queering of space and its analysis might provide us with important information about lesbian, and ultimately queer relation to space. The notion of a lesbian *flaneur* contains an intriguing antinomy that leaves us with

the questions: what is the sex of the *flâneur*? How is lesbian *flâneur* possible? What are the conditions of this possibility?

The figure of the *flâneur* was first popularized by Walter Benjamin in his writings on Baudelaire and nineteenth century Paris, and for the last few decades has been subject to fierce feminist criticism. Benjamin's *flâneur* was repeatedly accused of being shaped by his masculine subject position. The women that appear on the pages of Benjamin's descriptions, are relegated to being object of his gaze, and generally constitute a context of his wandering and a subject matter of his physiognomies. Leslie Kathleen Hatkins, for instance, claims that misogyny limited Benjamin's analysis.

'Where are women in the bourgeois interiors, streets and cityscapes of Benjamin, and how do they function? Women in his streets are objects – of resentment and rebellion when he writes of the passive-aggressive rebellion against his mother he performed by lagging behind her on her shopping trips through the city, or objects of illicit desire, commodities, as in "Beggars and Whores". Women as subjects share the residence of the poor in Benjamin's urban analysis, existing, like the poor, 'at the back of beyond'.ⁱⁱ

Hatkins draws a comparison between Benjamin and his female contemporary, Virginia Woolf, pointing out the differences in terms of their accounts of space and their protagonists' relation to spatial mobility. Unlike Benjamin's narrators who are very much embodied and have access to a variety of spaces, Woolf's narrators, quite literary, constitute a moving target in the streets and require "androgyny or anonymity as a mask or an invisible cloak to confound gender identification".ⁱⁱⁱ

At the same time, a number of cultural and feminist theorists try to contest this prevailing view that the *flâneur* of modernism is essentially and necessarily male. In her book, *Heroic Desire: Lesbian Identity and Cultural Space*, Sally Munt turns a lesbian *flâneur* into “a hero of lesbian desire” (177), positioning her right along the famous male *flâneurs* of the past – Brummell, Wilde, Baudelaire, Benjamin, nineteenth century dandies and others. Despite a noticeable absence of women in the modernist *flâneurs*’ hall of fame, Munt goes on to state that ‘the figure of the *flâneur* encapsulates a poignant ambiguity’ and believes in this figure’s ‘fundamental plasticity’ (39). Munt reads the *flâneur* as a metaphor of urban anomie and uncertainty, devoid of such essentially masculine characteristics as control and mastery. The *flâneur*, she claims, is a cultural outsider, and points out the figure’s insecurity, marginality and vulnerability as opposed to voyeuristic mastery. This reading allows Munt to present the *flâneur* as a ‘vessel ready to be filled by the lesbian narrative’^{iv}.

However, while opening up new possibilities, this account leaves some questions open. For instance, even if the *flâneur* does not conform to the standards of normative masculinity and does not represent its hegemony, he can nevertheless embody other, marginal forms of masculinity. In this case, the sex of the *flâneur* does not cease to be male, but simply represents a variation of masculinity, or minority masculinity. Minority masculinity still shares important characteristics with normative masculinity; for instance, it still would allow one’s freedom of mobility and grant one access to spaces that are out of most women’s reach. Samuel Delany’s account on adult theaters in his *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*^v is a perfect example of how his masculinity, while remaining essentially a minority masculinity (Delany is a African-American gay man), grants him

access to spaces of adult entertainment, public sex, voyeurism and adventure that are male-only zones. And though Delany claimed that these spaces were safe for women as well as for men, it remains questionable whether women entering these space would actually *feel* safe, and whether the women's standards of safety are essentially the same as men's standards.

Like Sally Munt, Deborah L. Parsons in *Streetwalking the Metropolis* also suggests that the concept of the *flâneur* contains gender ambiguities that allow the figure to be the site of contestation of male authority rather than simply affirming it. More importantly, however, she insists that female writers of modernism have created *an alternative vision* of the city that is not predicated on omniscient vision and exclusions and is more difference-conscious^{vi}. She suggests that there are certain themes, interests, and techniques common to women novelists writing about their cities and believes that they all share a concern to validate women's space in the city.

Both theorist, however, succumb to male/female dichotomy and omit the question of *lesbian masculinity* that is crucial to the discussion of the lesbian *flâneur*. More importantly, they omit the discussion of *queer* characteristics present in the classical examples of the *flâneur* that allow contemporary *lesbian and gay* writers to appropriate the figure of the *flâneur* with relative easiness. In this paper, I will show that masculinity is an enabling, and not limiting, characteristic of a lesbian *flâneur*, and that it does not entail her participation in the logic of sexist exclusion. From the other hand, I will show that the classical examples of *flanerie* involve *queer* relation with space and time, as they do not succumb to the logic of reproductive temporality and challenge normative uses of space through trespassing. Overall, I will look at the figure of a lesbian *flâneur* as a sort

of a centaur, a complex creature who is both female and queer, which does not automatically entail double exclusion, like some previous authors suggest. Instead, this duplicity of the lesbian *flaneur* opens up a complex way of negotiating the space's possibilities by simultaneously identifying and disengaging with the 'queer' masculinities of the classical *flaneurs*.

Girls, Visions and Everything: and Overview

In this next part, I present a reading of Sarah Schulman's second novel, *Girls, Visions and Everything*, focusing both on the constructions of city space as experienced by the lesbian protagonists and the particular construction of the identity of the lesbian *flaneur*, that is, *flaneur-tomboy*. The lesbian space that Schulman draws out in this novel is not a ghetto, but is a diverse cultural space that has a capacity of incorporating many different perspectives and makes difference safe.

Schulman's *Girls, Visions and Everything* is the greatest story ever told - a tale of a romance between a woman and a city. Lila Futuransky, the protagonist and the narrator of the novel, is a city-lover, who is promiscuous and independent, and desires a significant amount of personal freedom. Lila also is a permanently underemployed writer who lives in East Village that still offers low-rent housing and access to low-scale artistic production. Although she is a hard-working writer, she never manages to get her work published. Nevertheless, just as her last name implies, she perceives herself as a cultural and political avant-garde.

Lila's identity is defined by the context of life in East Village. In her introduction to *Girls, Visions and Everything*, Schulman points out that in that novel she describes a community defined by its geography. Although ultimately it is a novel about the lesbian

community, the neighborhood in question is not a lesbian ghetto, but a patchwork of interacting national and cultural groups. What is significant about the context of this neighborhood's existence is that it provides the place of contact between diverse groups (inter-racial, cross-cultural, inter-class, inter-generational contacts), where the notion of sexual identity is not necessarily operative^{vii}. Schulman describes a unique geography where encounters between these subcultures are common and accepted, even assumed. These encounters range from linguistic or political to intimate and sexual. Despite the fact that Lila has a strong sense of who she is and has a detailed knowledge of the mechanics of lesbian desire that makes her attractive to other women (Lila has 'perfected that combination of softness and electricity that let her pick out the women she wanted to sleep with and then enabled her to do so'^{viii}), her own desires are open to adventure and chance. They also appear to be driven by a sense of affinity that is not necessarily or always based on her lesbian identity – a sense of place, a sudden feeling of intimacy or mutual comfort.

Half way through getting drunk and singing their selections, chatting with the leather-clad clientele and having a great time, Lila realized that she and Sal were going to go home together and have sex with each other. Surprisingly, this thought didn't bother her or Sal one bit. So that was exactly what they did... It was all vaguely reminiscent and fun, but most importantly, Lila found out that her pal Sal knew how to make love to a woman and it made her respect him all the more.^{ix}

The neighborhood constitutes Lila's identity through its *diversity* and provides her with the feeling of *belonging*. This diversity of the surrounding multicultural landscape

offers her the experience of being a part of a 'larger universe' rather than being a part of a self-enclosed lesbian community. One can say that Lila's own identity is thus not based on exclusion as well. Schulman's critique of the process of gentrification in this early novel is based on her observation that this process tends to shrink places of intercultural contact (for her, contact is what defines the experience of the city) and enforce social, economical, and political divisions.

Diversity is a crucial aspect for a lesbian *flâneur* as it allows for a unique geography of danger and safety. Lila's city, though filled with encounters of dubious nature, is not a menacing one. Gay men, women, ethnic minorities, immigrants, drug dealers, homeless and other outsiders interact in the commonly shared public space on a daily basis. These interactions create a psychic landscape in which these differences are not threatening since they are periodically experienced, negotiated and mentally comprehended.^x These repeated interactions allow Lila to feel protected from the strangers in the neighborhood and form a network of safety zones. Thus, her repeated encounters with a local drug addict give her a particular feeling of security. In one of the last scenes, he saves Lila and her lover from a group of young white men harassing them. Lila's logic might seem counterintuitive to someone not familiar with the way a big city dweller negotiates danger and safety on a daily basis. In Lila's particular case, a homeless drug addict proves to be more useful than police in terms of providing her a feeling of being safe, simply because he is always there, outside, sitting on a stoop, with no other place to go, and because she knows him *personally*. The geography that Schulman describes is thus not without its zones of danger, but allows for practices that negotiate ways around them offering the characters as much freedom of mobility as they desire.

The city becomes more and more menacing towards the end with gentrification looming in the background, an external force that threatens to disrupt a fragile balance of the neighborhood.

Masculine – Feminine

Apart from her nativity to the neighborhood, Lila's relation to space directly depends upon her appropriation of a certain type of non-hegemonic *masculinity*. Lila's masculine identifications allow her to believe that she is indeed a true *flaneur*, along with other great literary (male) *flaneurs* of the past. Her relative butch-ness, together with her working class upbringing, grant her access to the areas of the city that otherwise would be inaccessible – open up slums as the sites of pleasure.

The novel both exposes the possibilities of this appropriation and allows for the critique of this masculine identification. On one hand, Lila's relative masculinity allows her relative freedom and mobility within the city. On the other hand, it becomes a literary device through which Schulman exposes the differences in relationship to urban encounters, and therefore urban experience, between men and women, and also between butch and feminine women. Meeting a feminine woman with the memories of rape and violence eventually makes Lila, the butch protagonist, aware of the limitations and vulnerability that come with female gender, or more precisely, femininity. Walking the streets together with Emily makes Lila intimately apprehend the fear that her 'feminine other' feels and makes her feel 'visible', exposed in the streets of the city as well. Through Emily, Lila is introduced to the unique geography of women's fear – fear of the dark street, fear of a stranger, fear of the male sexual gaze. Lila's relative 'invisibility' in the neighborhood turns out to be a privilege of being a slightly more masculine woman, a

tomboy. Not knowing how to successfully negotiate these newly discovered dangers, Lila tries to conceptualize sexual violence as random city violence: ““Listen, Emily, who gets rapes and who doesn’t is a matter of chance. I haven’t been raped, but I might get raped in the future.”

Though it is true that violence, including sexual violence, can be random, there is an important difference in terms of the meaning of this violence. Thus, a butch body is more likely to expose itself to homophobic violence, ‘gay-bashing’ that seeks to punish sexual deviance and reinstall heteronormativity in space, but might render one invisible in other scenarios. For instance, a masculine-looking woman can actually *pass* as a man in a dark street and thus would be more likely to be perceived as a potential *source* of danger by other women or men rather than attract unwanted sexual attention. Some accounts of butch women support the idea that their masculinity makes them appear as a threat in some contexts (for instance, in women’s public bathrooms) and expose them to homophobic violence in others^{xi}.

However, if we turn to the literature written on the topic of lesbian space, we will see that most theorists share the belief in the relative *safety of passing* as a heterosexual woman in public spaces as opposed to publicly exposing one gay though masculine dressing codes or non-normative gender performance. Most agree that being a butch lesbian, or just looking like one, is what makes you a target. Sally Munt writes, for instance:

My butchness makes me indiscreet; its visibility alerts those around me to my lesbianizing of space. My butchness makes me appear like one of those ‘tough-looking, promiscuous women who are into roles’ that

frequent the homophobic hinterlands of the middle-class appetite for secrecy, privacy and a quiet life” (Munt, 172).

Gill Valentine also believes that lesbian women experience violence in public places not because they perform their *sexuality* but primarily because they don’t perform their *gender* identity in normative heterosexual manner.

Many women who identify as heterosexual but do not perform their gender in a way that can be read as differentiated from opposite sex in a heterosexually desirable way also encounter harassment in the form of anti-lesbian abuse.^{xii}

It is important to remember, however, that heterosexual women who perform their gender identity in a normative fashion also experience violence and are subject to attacks in public places. There is another, dangerous side to looking ‘heterosexually desirable’. And just like I mentioned above, it also seems evident that one’s masculinity, like one’s race or class can be read differently in the context of different environments: the city *versus* rural setting, day *versus* night, working class *versus* middle class context, etc^{xiii}. Thus, a shared belief that passing as a heterosexual woman in public spaces is safer, might reflect the fact that researchers think primarily of public space as a *crowded* space (a shopping mall, a busy city street during the day, etc), rather than, say, a parking lot or an empty city street at night time. In this case, this shared belief might reflect the fact that homophobic violence is still considered more *acceptable* than men’s sexual assaults of women and thus is more likely to happen in a *crowded* public space. It is important, however, to consider public space in its complexity. Even a street is a multiplicity of spaces that enables and restricts one’s behavior differently depending on the varied

characteristics of these places (the block, the businesses surrounding it, the presence of a police nearby) and depending on temporal modalities (rush hour, day and night, the day of the week, weekend versus business day, etc).

The other issue sometimes overlooked by the researchers, is the issue of *class* in relation to female masculinity. Thus, one's butch looks might be appropriate in a working-class bar setting, while it would make one stand out in the context of middle-class home interiors. *Girls, Visions and Everything* describes a geography where a certain degree of masculinity is acceptable and in many ways is the protagonist's ticket to street freedom. Partially, this is due to the fact that the neighborhood in question, Lower East Side, is historically a working class neighborhood that incorporated immigrants, the urban poor, and bohemian newcomers at later stages. Masculine-looking lesbian *flaneur* thus appears to share some spatial privileges with working-class women. Unlike middle-class women, often bound to their homes and conventional gender role-playing, working class women in an industrialized city have always enjoyed some autonomy at least on their way to or from the place of work^{xiv}. This affinity of a butch lesbian to working class heterosexual butch women is thoroughly documented in Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues*. While in a middle-class context one's butchness is immediately read as sexual deviance, in a working-class community it can be read as one's ability to take care of oneself and the evidence of one's history of hard physical labor. Butch-but^h camaraderie resembles working-class women camaraderie and creates a sense of mutual support and protection. A working-class woman who has masculine traits is not necessarily read as transgressive by her immediate environment, neither her butchness implies her lesbianism. This, Lila's masculinity in the Lower East Side can be read as toughness and

her ability to talk back or stand for herself if she has to, which allows other street dwellers to relate to her and feel affinity with her rather than seeing her as an outsider.

The novel plays with the idea of Lila's masculinity, but goes on further to critically examine it and put it into question. Lila meets Emily, her feminine other and future lover, accidentally, in a bar. Like many other bohemians of *Girls, Visions and Everything*, Emily works at the factory during the day and makes costumes for the lesbian feminist theater (the Kitch-Inn) in the evenings. In a sense, Lila's meeting Emily is her homecoming, both desired and feared. Emily's femininity becomes a promise of comfort for Lila, who fears but also eventually succumbs to the lure of domesticity, never being sure that she has made the right choice. Lila's understanding of femininity as the sign of conservatism and stagnation, something which a radical feminist/ promiscuous tomboy must oppose clashes with the reality of her desire for Emily and the growing intimacy of their relationship.

The ending of the novel shows Lila being overwhelmed with early nostalgia, one that stems both from a stark realization of the city's changing and the feeling of loosing the city though her growing intimacy with Emily who fears and resents the streets as the site of trauma. Lila's nostalgia in a way is an impossible feeling, since it comes together with a realization that women do not have an equal place in the streets of the city. It strikes her hard together with the recognition of her lover's and her own 'womanhood'. In the end of the novel, Lila breaks down in tears as she is faced with a necessity to choose between the city (her first love) and Emily (her second love). She is depicted sitting on the roof of her building, a space in between inside and outside, which can be metaphorically read as a paradoxical space of the lesbian *flaneur*:

The next morning Lila climbed up of her roof and sat there in the hot sun, looking out over the city. She felt very quiet. Her city was the most beautiful woman she had ever known, and yet, it was changing so quickly... A tear formed in Lila's gut. *I don't know who I am right now. I want to go back to the old way.*^{xv}

But returning to the old way is impossible – the truth is, Lila has already lost her city and abandoned her position as a *flaneur*. She gives the symbol of her independence - her copy of Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* to Isabel Schwartz, her single friend and a playwright, thus ensuring the continuity of the lesbian *flaneur*.

“Someone is asking me to do something that will never be right. And I am going to do it because I love Emily, even though I don't know what it means...”

”Don't do it buddy,” Isabel was prancing, she was singing like Sal's saxophone, touching the whole neighborhood. But Lila was sobbing so hard, she was swimming through her tears.^{xvi}

Masculinity and Queering

Like I mentioned earlier, *Girls, Visions and Everything* offers a dream of queering heteronormative culture and space through direct identification with the masculine point of view. It pictures the protagonist that is both *in love* with the dominant culture's heroes and aware of her own difference.

Lila, the narrative voice of the novel, often wonders why she chooses ‘to write lesbian fiction when she never read any’. Instead of looking for a lesbian literary space in ‘the safe sea of women’, she turns to such heterosexual and male centered texts as Jack

Kerouak's *On the Road* and an all time classics *Streetcar Named Desire*, offering a way of reading them as queer texts. Schulman's perspective is this early novel walks a narrow trail rejecting both lesbian separatism and queer assimilation into normative culture. Appropriation of the dominant culture's literary texts and iconography allow Schulman to create a space that is lesbian-centered, but does not exclude heterosexual and masculine desire as something foreign or threatening. Instead, it allows the reading of masculine desire both with and against the grain, utilizing it for the purpose of expressing, extending, and finding analogues for lesbian desire.

A lot of feminist critics would find such identifications with masculine desiring subject problematic. For instance, Teresa De Lauretis argues that a woman's identification with a male narrative plot entails a loss of her identity, since masculine narrative plot inscribes women characters as narrative *topoi* and elements of the plot rather than allowing them to be agents of their own desire. Continuing De Lauretis's argument, Marilyn Farewell suggests that lesbian narrative plots can and should produce transgression of the heterosexual narrative by creating the syntax of 'sameness' as a replacement of the masculine perspective. However, the structure of *Girls, Visions and Everything*, does not follow either of scenarios: it does not construct the logic of 'sameness' (since Lila Futuransky actively identifies herself with a masculine literary hero), and it does not follow a heterosexual plot reducing women to the *topoi* or narrative's turning points.

Alexis Lothian in her article "Jack Kerouak in the Lesbian Village" demonstrates that Lila's identification with Jack Kerouak's protagonist of *On the Road* is strong, but allows for a critical distance. First of all, she points out that although the plot of *Girls*,

Visions and Everything is structured around Lila's desiring encounters with women, she perceives herself *both* as subject and object of desire: "The trick was to identify with Jack Kerouac and not with the women he sleeps with." Secondly, she demonstrates that women that Lila encounters on her journey 'slip out' of their role as object, breaking the tight seal of Lila's projections.

In *Girls, Visions and Everything*, "universalizing" a lesbian heroine does not prevent Schulman from allowing other voices to speak out, and other subjects to emerge. On the opposite, it occurs almost as a natural consequence of "universalization" of the lesbian protagonist within the diversity of her city. Lila's wandering/walking coincides with her desire to write and her rejection of separatism goes hand in hand with her embracing of the neighborhood's patchwork of cultures. Her streetwalking comes around as a desire to enact the adventures of Kerouac's protagonist, and is experimental in its essence, is open for the encounter and chance. Her journey, like Kerouac's, is a sexual odyssey, and it is structured as a road trip. Lila says once: "Road is perhaps the only metaphor of freedom that as American can understand." Although the street is not the same as the road, I want to suggest here is that Lila's plan is *to imagine* the streets as Kerouac's road, as a space of infinite possibility, and to reproduce Kerouac's road trip, adventure and freedom in the East Village, NY. Her desire, it seems, in a true hitchhiker's fashion, can attach itself to different identities, starting from the identity of Kerouac himself, and 'catch a ride' with them for a period of time, exploring the possibilities these identities provide without merging or submitting to them, or losing sight of her own subjectivity and desire.

Queer Time of the Flaneur

In the novel, the *flaneur*'s unique relationship with time is emphasized as much as her relationship with space. Thus, Lila advocates a self-conscious practice of managing her personal time, working two or three days a week in order to secure survival and leaving other days open to insure freedom. She has no specific activity such as a hobby to fill this vacant time. Time is used both as a resource and an optical instrument, allowing one to develop an alternative vision of life. This characteristic relation to time that can be briefly described as idleness, is common to all incarnations of Schulman's *flaneur* and can be seen as her 'condition of possibility'.

Idleness is a form of temporal practice, or a temporal 'havoc' that does not fit into the categories of either work or leisure, and is a part of an alternative, *queer* temporality. An idler trespasses the lines of stratified time producing an alternative vision of temporality just like a streetwalker trespasses and transforms stratified places producing an alternative structure of social space. This idleness is a characteristic basic to classical examples of flanerier. Benjamin, for instance asserts the importance of idleness when he writes: 'Basic to flanerier, among other things, is the idea that the fruits of idleness are more precious than the fruits of labor'^{xvii}. These 'fruits of idleness', he claims, consist in one's ability to loose oneself in the city. Idleness as a relation of temporality thus becomes a condition of flanerier as a relation to space. Idle walk renounces the busyness of a goal-oriented movement, as it does not have an aim or a purpose.

The *flaneur*'s idleness and rhythm are presented as a crucial aspect of her queerness. Schulman foregrounds this queerness of her characters as one that is not reduced simply to their sexuality or gender. This further explains Schulman's desire for

utilizing male-centered dominant culture's texts and the easiness with which she does so. In *Girls, Visions and Everything*, by focusing on the masculine and heterosexual aspects of Kerouac's text, we risk to forget what is essentially queer about his writing – its construction of a queer temporality and selfhood through hitchhiking, being 'on the road'.^{xviii}

Kerouac's ideology of having a good time outside of normative social structures – family, steady job, ownership, investments, planning – renounces normative temporality that demands structuring of daily activities around such respectable activities as work, leisure, hobby, family time, etc. Not living according to schedule, depending on the kindness of strangers, becomes the way of liberating oneself from the rhythms of the structure and opening oneself up to encounter and chance. This allows Schulman's character to appropriate his already queer narrative with relative ease, allowing her to explore the adventurous spatial possibilities that this position provides.

In her latest book, *In A Queer Time and Place*, Halberstam points out the heterosexual aspect of the normative temporality by calling it 'reproductive temporality'^{xix} in terms of its privileging of the practices that accompany child raising and nuclear family activities. This includes privileging day time over night time, stability over rapid change, and, we can add here, busyness over idleness. Transition from erratic, changing, idle behavior to responsible, productive, busy activity is categorized as transition from youth to adulthood, thus conceptualizing the former as temporary, as a phase to be surpassed. Since idleness as a way of deconstructing 'reproductive temporality' can be read as a queering technique already present in Jack Kerouac and other examples of classical flanerier, Halberstam opens up ways of thinking queer time

and space across a large variety of gender and sexual identities, including the identity of a lesbian *flâneur*.

Conclusion

In short, the idleness of the lesbian *flâneur* is structurally akin to the idleness of the classical *flâneur* in terms of its ability to incite an alternative vision, but ceases to be a product of bourgeois and male privilege. Schulman's *flâneur* uses idleness like she uses masculinity, that is, critically, and emphasizes its queer aspects. One can say that Schulman's lesbian protagonist discussed in this paper inherited what was queer in the classical examples of the *flâneur*, without inheriting his dominant position. Both a cultural and sexual outsider, she identifies with the perspective of the oppressed and chooses critical engagement with reality over classical *flâneur*'s voyeurism, while sharing a concern for making space livable and safe for women, gay men and other oppressed groups. Overall, Schulman's novel produces an intriguing and complex figure that, in taking further the queerness of the classical male *flâneur*, both establishes continuity with the city's past and opens up possibilities for a new, more radical and fair, future.

Notes

ⁱ Gill Valentine, "(Re-)Negotiating Heterosexual Street" in *Bodyspace: Destabilizing Geographies of Gender and Sexuality*, ed. by Nancy Duncan (Routledge, London, 1996), 147

ⁱⁱ Leslie Kathleen Hatkins, "Virginia Woolf and Walter Benjamin Selling Out(Siders)" in *Virginia Woolf at the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, ed. By Pamela L. Caughie, (Garland Publishing, New York and London, 2000), 19

ⁱⁱⁱ *ibidem*, 19

^{iv} Sally Munt, *Heroic Desire: Lesbian Identity and Cultural Space* (New York U P, 1998), 36. Munt based her approach on the analysis of Elizabeth Wilson's who suggests that in his marginality and lack of social control the *flâneur* is essentially *feminine*.

^v Samuel Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (New York U P, 1999)

^{vi} Deborah L. Parsons, *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, The City and Modernity* (Oxford U P, New York, 200), 15

^{vii} Schulman is not unique in her perception of Lower East Side as culturally diverse. In his book, *Selling The Lower East Side*, Christopher Mele shows how the diversity of the neighborhood was shaped by the successive waves of immigration, settlement, industrialization and economic depression creating its unique portrait. See Christopher Mele, *Selling The Lower East Side: Culture, Real Estate and Resistance in New York City* (University of Minnesota P, 2000)

^{viii} Sarah Schulman, *Girls, Visions and Everything* (Seal Press, Seattle, WA, 1986), 2

^{ix} Sarah Schulman, *Girls, Visions and Everything*, 143

^x In her analysis of contact space and encounter, Schulman is very similar to the analysis provided by Samuel Delany in *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*.

^{xi} Compare the accounts in Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, or Leslie Feinberg, *Stone Butch Blues*

^{xii} Gill Valentine, “(Re-)Negotiating Heterosexual Street”, in *Bodyspace: Destabilizing Geographies of Gender and Sexuality*, ed. by Nancy Duncan, 149

^{xiii} Compare Judith Halberstam’s analysis of the Brendan Teena’s case in *In a Queer Space and Time: Transgender Bodies, Transgender Lives* (New York U P, 2005) .

^{xiv} Munt, *Heroic Desire: Lesbian Identity and Cultural Space*, 37

^{xv} Sarah Schulman, *Girls, Visions and Everything*, 177

^{xvi} *ibidem*, 178

^{xvii} Walter Benjamin, cited in Diane Chrisholm, *Queer Constellations: Subcultural Space in the Wake of the City* (University of Minnesota P, 2005), 293

^{xviii} Alexis Lothian reminds us of Kerouak’s own ‘reluctantly acknowledged’ homosexual relationships which fills the novel with traces of latent homosexuality. However, I do not agree that the queer aspect of the novel consists mainly or primarily in the homosexual context that has been allegedly ‘edited out’ by the author himself. Instead, I want to suggest that the queer aspect of Kerouak consists in his construction of alternative, queer temporality, and that this is the aspect, apart from the idea of universalization, that intrigues Schulman the most. Alexis Lothian, “Jack Kerouac in the Lesbian Village: Reading Straight Narratives, Writing Queer Desire” (Course paper Sexuality, Fiction and Subculture, University of Sussex, Autumn 2003) Available online at: <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/cssd/courses/Alexis1.pdf>

^{xix} Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, 5