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The Wandering Woman

The Intersection of Capitalist Temporality, Non-Belonging, and Resistance

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The innumerable studies that explore the Durassian feminine body situate the body in complex economies of capitalism, colonialism, and sexuality. As Philippe Barbé describes it, the dispossessed woman crosses through “lieux féminins, des lieux politiques, des lieux coloniaux, des lieux de mémoire, des lieux de douleur, des lieux de mort, des lieux d’oubli, des lieux de désir ou encore des lieux d’aliénation”¹ only to arrive at absence and non-belonging. This body is at once opaque and transparent: her being is a frustrating limit that can often only be understood through others’ projections onto her. Or, she is herself a place, as would suggest scholar Pierre-Louis Fort², and so exists as a palimpsest of the sufferings brought

1 Philippe Barbé, “Mémoire des lieux : reterritorialisation de l’espace colonial chez Marguerite Duras”, *L’Esprit créateur*, vol. 43-1, 2003, p. 102-103.

2 Pierre-Louis Fort, “Les Lieux de Marguerite Duras : continent maternel et mère continent”, *Romance Notes*, vol. 44, No. 3, 2004, p. 299-308.

on by colonialism, maternity, and deterritorialization, with the scars and layers of each very visible. That said, if the socio-economic and historical backdrops of her oeuvre have been meticulously explored, a treatment of female characters' physical movements *themselves*, is less investigated. This article addresses *Un barrage contre le Pacifique* (1950), *Le Ravisement de Lol V. Stein* (1964), and *Le Vice-consul* (1966), three texts written during the thirty glorious years after World War II, and in which the mobile bodies of female characters are confronted with questions of space, time, and belonging. This paper argues that these wandering women, and wandering itself are the sites of Duras' complex feminism. First, I will examine feminine wandering in these texts as a sign of social non-belonging. Then, I will apply the paradigm of the pedestrian, as proposed by historian Joseph Amato, to the wandering woman, and thereby, to clarify the tensions between self-regulation and wasting time. Finally, in returning to the larger question of this edition—Duras, est-elle féministe ?—I will investigate the narrative linearity imposed on these characters by male narrators to better reveal the nuances of Duras' uneasy feminism.

Feminine wandering as social non-belonging

At the beginning of the novel *Le Ravisement de Lol V. Stein*, Lol is abandoned by her fiancé during a ball at T. Beach. Lol watches as Michael and Anne-Marie dance, then leave together. After a single cry, she faints, and is hidden in the family home during her subsequent illness, which is described as a series of "délire[s]"³. Lol "resta dans sa chambre, sans

3 Marguerite Duras, *Le Ravisement de Lol V. Stein* [1964], Paris, Gallimard, "Folio", 2013, p. 24 (henceforth, page references will be provided in the text with the mention R).

en sortir du tout, pendant quelques semaines. / Son histoire devint publique ainsi que celle de Michael Richardson" (R, p. 23). The two clauses of this sentence suggest social censure, and yet, paradoxically, a separation of the two characters involved. Lol's public abandonment and her self-imposed sequestration are reminiscent of the trope of the fallen woman, who doesn't conform to heteronormative expectations, while Michael's "story," separate from hers, is not one that shares in the responsibility. Indeed, this sentence seems to allude to the different treatments that men and women often receive in such situations, and it is Lol who feels "une infériorité" (R, p. 24) and avoids all visibility. One page later, with the same detached tone, the narrator describes the beginning of Lol's nightly wanderings: "La première fois qu'elle sortit ce fut de nuit, seule et sans prévenir" (R, p. 25). Walking here is characterized as a guilty pleasure, a clandestine activity that needs solitude, and yet, is also an activity that is directly linked to what she suffered at the ball. In fact, these walks trigger the recreation of her trauma *via* the "déplacement machinal de son corps" that "[fait se lever ses pensées] toutes ensemble dans un mouvement désordonné, confus" (R, p. 45). Her wanderings are a physical manifestation of her trauma and of her social non-adherence.

Her continued wanderings increasingly suggest her deviance of social norms. One evening, she encounters Jean Bedford (who will become her husband). He finds her wandering oddly charming, and asks for her hand in marriage—a request that would also put an end to the rumors surrounding their meeting: that Lol was behaving improperly by being alone at night and that Jean had "d'étranges inclinations pour les jeunes filles délaissées, par d'autres rendues folles" (R, p. 30-31). The parallel between this story and Lol's previous experience with Michael Richardson suggests the credibilizing power of marriage: the scandal her wandering and

encounter with Jean could have provoked was totally suppressed by their subsequent alliance. Clearly aware of what is socially acceptable, Jean Bedford seems to attempt to put an end to her wandering. He calls her mother to come collect her, an attempt at keeping Lol's reputation respectable, and at returning her (literally) to her proper place as a young, unmarried woman.

If Lol's nightly wanderings connote disorder, then her family and position as housewife insert order into her life, seemingly characterizing proper family life as diametrically opposed to her wandering. She runs her household with an "ordre glacé, à la faire marcher au même rythme horaire" (R, p. 35) that seems to continue for a time, even when she, her husband, and her children move back to her natal town of S. Tahla. However, the wanderings that her marriage and motherhood seemed to put an end to, soon begin again. First, these walks seem to be nothing more than leisure time spent out of doors, and to follow the order of her daily life, as she walks "régulièrement, chaque jour" (R, p. 36). However, they ultimately redevelop the same clandestinity as before: "C'est peu de temps après qu'elle invente – elle qui paraissait n'inventer rien – de sortir dans les rues" (R, p. 39). Once again, Lol hopes that "ses promenades [passaient] inaperçues" (R, p. 40) and the few people that do recognize her "évit[aient] de la reconnaître pour ne pas se mettre dans la situation gênante de lui rappeler une peine ancienne" (R, p. 41). Here, we note that these wanderings have an insoluble connection to her past, an identificatory quality that disturbs her new and separate situation in life as a married woman. Her old life returns to the foreground, and her new identity as mother and housewife is undermined by her former identity as abandoned girl, single and out of place within heteronormative familial structures. Thus, her wandering, as it recreates the past, is that which prevents her total belonging to her current life.

In *Le Vice-consul*, Duras foregrounds movement as a symptom of the abject mother in an even more obvious way. A secondary plot follows the writing of Peter Morgan, who takes for his subject a vagrant woman, always heard singing at night, and always seeming to be nearby. Morgan describes the origins of this woman (though his credibility must always be questioned): she is exiled from her childhood home after she falls pregnant, and has no choice but to “se perdre”⁴ by wandering around for the rest of her life. After leaving home, her appearance and her mind become more and more abject. She loses her hair, she tries to vomit up her child, and descends further and further into madness. From the very first mention of this beggar woman, she exists outside of the structure of respectable maternity. Most shockingly, she tries to sell her child at the market. I highlight the capitalist setting of this abandonment to suggest her total non-belonging to society: she is not a producer (work) nor is she a proper reproducer (mother). She “ne travaillera jamais, son occupation, c’est une chose inconnue” (VC, p. 52). In fact, just before she is forced to leave the familial home, her father reminds her of “un cousin dans la plaine des Oiseaux, il est sans trop d’enfants, il peut peut-être te prendre comme domestique” (VC, p. 11), but she vows to go “dans la direction contraire à celle-là” (VC, p. 12). And yet, the only other acceptable role for her to hold as a woman is not one that she is fit for either. She gives up her child in favor of continuing her purposeless errances, a cycle that continues throughout the text. After the abandonment of her first child, she seems even less emotionally attached : “Les autres enfants qui viendront après cette petite fille, elle les laissera toujours vers la même heure où qu’elle soit” (p. 50) ; “Les autres fois

4 Marguerite Duras, *Le Vice-consul* [1966], Paris, Gallimard, “L’Imaginaire”, 2012, p. 9 (henceforth, page references will be provided in the text with the mention VC).

elle enregistre à peine une différence” (p. 51). Indifferent and monstrous as a mother, the beggarwoman’s wandering seems at once causal and correlative of her social non-belonging: because she does not stay in place, she establishes no household, works no job other than occasional sex work for food, and leaves her children randomly throughout her journey.

In *Un barrage contre le Pacifique*, Duras evokes the legitimizing power of the courtship of a rich man, through the gendered contrast between cars and the foot. Duped by colonial authorities, the mother bought a piece of land that is basically non-inhabitable, even after three Sisyphian attempts at constructing a barricade to block the sea from invading her farmed lands. The family has no assets, and lives in poverty. One day, the daughter Suzanne encounters M. Jo, son of a rich developer and owner of a Léon Bollée. This car, symbolic of the socio-economic advancement that Suzanne envisages, is constantly contrasted with her feet: long walks to the local bar become rides in a luxurious car while M. Jo courts her. However, she eventually loses his courtship and later in the novel, on a visit to the city, Suzanne is encouraged to wander through the city in order to find a new man. Carmen, the hotel owner, advises her to walk through rich neighborhoods. However, immediately upon her arrival, Suzanne notices that she doesn’t belong:

Tout le monde ne disposait pas des mêmes facultés de se mouvoir. Eux avaient l’air d’aller vers un but précis, dans un décor familier et parmi des semblables. Elle, Suzanne, n’avait aucun but, aucun semblable, et ne s’était jamais trouvée sur ce théâtre.

Elle essaya en vain de penser à autre chose.

On la remarquait toujours.

Plus on la remarquait, plus elle se persuadait qu’elle était scandaleuse, un objet de laideur et de bêtise intégrales⁵.

5 Marguerite Duras, *Un barrage contre le Pacifique* [1950], Paris, Gallimard, “Folio”, 2013, p. 186 (henceforth, page references will be provided in the text with the mention BP).

As historian Joseph Amato emphasizes, in Western consumer culture, mode of transportation is constitutive of social class: the rich only walked for leisure, not for transportation, a fact which would eventually become a visual code of the hierarchies of classes. The higher classes, first in carriages then in cars, literally sat taller than those on the ground. Amato emphasizes that aristocrats “used carriage, posture, and comportment to establish, so to speak, their social standing”⁶, as well as “promenading and strolling [which] required the correct place, the right occasion, and the proper surface”⁷ to distinguish them from the working and peasant class.

I argue that this class structure is still evident in Duras’ work, both as an indicator of class, but also of the gendered occupation of space. In this case, Suzanne unknowingly engages in *street-walking*, a preliminary of sex work, that at once marks her as a member of lower social classes and categorizes her as out of place in leisure culture. This discomfort and non-belonging are literalized in the text: Suzanne, perceiving the fact that she does not belong to the same class as these women, suddenly also discovers the ugliness of her own gait. This clumsiness is to her, hideously conspicuous: “Tous ceux qu’elle croisait maintenant semblaient être avertis, la ville entière était avertie” (BP, p. 186-187). Thus, because of her improper occupation of this public sphere, the space of the city itself now seems menacing, and no longer hers, a stark contrast to her privileged passengership of M. Jo’s car. Now, she is reduced not only to the status of a walker, but an incorrect walker at that.

6 Joseph Amato, *On Foot: A History of Walking*, New York, New York University Press, 2004, p. 72.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 80.

The pedestrian versus the walking woman: self-regulation and wasting time

The modern pedestrian, according to Joseph Amato, is the only acceptable walker in the temporal rigidity of urban life. He writes that it was expected of pedestrians to regulate themselves by following traffic patterns. This also marks a shift in value from the pedestrian to the car, which must be allowed more space and rhythmic efficiency:

Pedestrians now moved not only under the direction of behavioral self-control and hygiene but also in relation to an internalized clock, set by business, office, and train hours and the traffic of the surrounding environment. Punctuality now became a principal virtue of the self-regulating pedestrian, whose life fell under the shadow of multiplying public clocks and time schedules. In Paris, and throughout France and the rest of the West, the pedestrian internalized the habit of “considering not just hours but minutes.” The success of the first Paris Metro added and testified to the accelerated rhythm and punctuality of the city’s movement⁸.

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Gone are the days of the Baudelairean *flâneur*, or the promenades of a romantic poet hoping to commune with Nature. Instead, the good pedestrian is organized, determined, and certainly doesn’t interrupt the flow of traffic. Interestingly, the flood of Taylorism within the public space (work, commuting, shopping) also crept into the domestic sphere. Claire Duchén studies the economic situation of the French woman in the thirty glorious years. She highlights the increase of domestic manuals published and even quoted in popular magazines like *Marie-Claire* and *Elle*. These manuals contained “strong notions concerning the ‘proper’ way of doing something” and incredibly, included timetables to instruct housewives on “appropriate ways for women to spend

8 Joseph Amato, *On Foot*, *op. cit.*, p. 198.

their time"⁹. But the changes in the running of the household would have an incredible effect on women's public lives as well. I cite at length Duchen's example of running errands and grocery shopping to demonstrate how efficient time also led to less movement for women. Duchen writes that

[women] were said to be resistant to change and to remain attached to their habitual ways of doing things, for instance the shopping. French women were reluctant to give up the daily market. Doing a weekly shop was unthinkable: full-time housewives liked the market which got them out of the house, gave them contact with other people and was an integral part of the structure of daily life¹⁰.

This radical change in the daily routine clearly demonstrates a new regulation of movement for feminine bodies. In this example, innovations like the supermarket, marketed as a way to take up less time, actually discourages excursions outside of the home. The phrase "got them out of the house" indicates non-Taylorist movement as less about shopping and more about taking a break, promenading, perhaps chatting with friends. Here, we confront two opposing temporalities that propagate a series of binaries: inside versus outside, wasted time versus efficient time, movement versus immobility. And, indeed, it becomes more and more evident that these opposing temporalities are also gendered. The ideal housewife of this time, particularly in the 1950s was transformed into a creature of uniform time that regulated her body according to capitalist and conservative imperatives: time spent well, and, thereby, space less occupied. The wandering woman is in direct contradiction to these new standards: not only does wandering waste time but also, by definition, is destination-less and purposeless. In other words, if the inefficient housewife is not up to standard of timeliness,

⁹ Claire Duchen, *Women's Rights and Women's Lives in France 1944-1968*, London, Routledge, 1994, p. 80.

¹⁰ *Loc. cit.*

there is still a level of work being done at a slower pace. The wandering woman, on the other hand, cannot even be said to occupy the spectrum of productivity.

The confused and non-productive temporality of the wandering woman is subtly elaborated in *Le Ravisement de Lol V. Stein*. Walking without destination—certainly not in acquiescence with the utility of the pedestrian—is, for Lol, a catalyst of the reconstruction of “cet instant” (R, p. 47). Duras describes:

— Ainsi c'était pour ça qu'elle se promenait, pour mieux penser au bal. Le bal reprend un peu de vie, frémit, s'accroche à Lol. Elle le réchauffe, le protège, le nourrit, il grandit, sort de ses plis, s'étire, un jour il est prêt. [...] Et dans cette enceinte largement ouverte à son seul regard, elle recommence le passé, elle l'ordonne, sa véritable demeure, elle la range (R, p. 46).

Here, movement is a mechanism of memory, but also suggests a complete (temporal) out-of-place-ness. Wandering daily evokes Lol's incapacity to completely adapt to her current domestic life, and thus, her past non-belonging becomes current and her stability as a reproducer (of order) remains precarious. This example demonstrates the multiple layers of waste that threaten uniform structures of time: she walks pointlessly, which keeps her from any kind of work, she also is often out of the home and thus order is disrupted, and finally, she continually relives a scene of non-belonging from the past, that keeps her from remaining in place and temporally progressing¹¹ forward.

The vague culminating point of the novel is marked by the return to T. Beach and to the dance hall that witnessed her humiliation. I insist on the fact that this visit is orchestrated by

¹¹ I use the word “progress” intentionally to allude to the word's usage in heavily-capitalistic lore as well as to hint at the linearity of narrative: moving forward, getting better, achieving more, are all intermeshed with consumerist and temporally linear signifiers.

the narrator, Jacques, as an attempt to impose linearity onto Lol's story. In her book *Wandering Women* (2013), Mariah Devereux Herbeck emphasizes Jacques' conviction "despite what Tatiana has said to the contrary—that the ball should be the beginning and end of her story and illness"¹². The train they take to T. Beach seems to mark the linear *dénouement* of her habitual wandering and subsequent voyeurism, and thus of a temporality that is both cyclical and atemporal. The banal sentences at the end of the novel—"— Vous êtes maintenant de ce voyage qu'on m'empêche de faire depuis dix ans. Que c'était bête" (R, p. 177)—can be read as the indication of the end of her obsession. This date of "ten years" makes clear the closure of her walks, and thereby, a final letting go of the past. The end of her wandering is a literal return to her social and familial place, as well as a metaphoric return to narrative linearity.

In a similar vein, the beggar woman in *Le Vice-consul* injures her foot sometime during her aimless journey, and thereby reveals the total incompatibility between wandering and maternity. When she arrives at the market, she lays her child down and proclaims that "[c]ette belle enfant est à qui la voudra, [...] parce qu'elle ne peut pas l'emporter avec elle, regardez mon pied et vous comprendrez" (VC, p. 52-53). Interestingly, the use of the imperative in this sentence suggests that, at least according to her, the act of giving up her daughter is both the effect of her injury, and the most logical response. She assumes a universal understanding; that in order to wander with her injured foot, she cannot be a mother. A few lines later, she is described as resting her foot "le long de l'enfant" (VC, p. 53), a posture that equates both her foot and her child as commodities for exchange. This is

¹² Mariah Devereux Herbeck, *Wandering Women in French Film and Literature: A Study of Narrative Drift*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p. 107.

made all the clearer when, after having given her child to the white woman that comes along, the *mendiant*e is finally given medicine for her foot (VC, p. 63). The exchange of child for medication is a direct echo of some pages earlier in the text, when the child is indirectly exchanged for “une piastre” (VC, p. 54). Indeed, though she initially attempts to return the white woman’s money *and* give her the child, later in the text, she leaves the child and keeps both the medicine and the money. Thus, this scene demonstrates that in a capitalist setting, wandering is totally incompatible with acceptable female professions. It is constantly evoked that she survives only through thievery and limited sex work, or, through *bad walking*. And, while both of these, it can be argued, certainly have had their place historically in European and French market economies, the beggar woman seems to believe that in order to remain a wanderer, she must relinquish the role of mother (reproducer: though giving birth, she does not raise these children, nor, it would seem to be implied, do many of them survive their abandonment), and the role of producer (her foot, which remains infected due to her relentless walking drives away her male customers, rendering her all the more financially precarious).

Seeking a capitalist advancement which would allow her to escape her monotonous daily life, Suzanne in *Un barrage* transforms the car into a symbol of escape, an end to her life in the bungalow, and of marriage. Suzanne dreams that “[l]e jour viendrait où une automobile s’arrêterait enfin devant le bungalow. [...] Un jour un homme s’arrêterait, peut-être, pourquoi pas ? parce qu’il l’aurait aperçue près du pont. Il se pourrait qu’elle lui plaise et qu’il lui propose de l’emmener à la ville” (BP, p. 21). This sentence is basically the central plot of the story, and the car becomes an obsession for Suzanne and her brother. One day, Suzanne’s desire seems to take shape: she encounters M. Jo, who begins his courtship by proposing

to drive Suzanne home in his car. He returns, always in the same car, with gifts for Suzanne, but his dishonest goals in seducing her are rejected by Suzanne's mother, who insists that Suzanne may only leave with him as his wife. M. Jo's car, in perfect contrast with the old and dilapidated car of Suzanne's brother Joseph, incarnates capitalist and heteronormative legitimacy¹³: the car is the source of Suzanne's lukewarm attraction for M. Jo, and is also the medium through which Suzanne could enter into a socio-economic class that wouldn't otherwise be accessible to her. As Amato emphasizes, since the epoch of feudalism, innovations in transport like the carriage and the car were used to signal social superiority. To take her place as a permanent passenger of the car, Suzanne must belong to one of the roles outlined for women in a consumerist society: in this case, she must be the respectable wife of M. Jo¹⁴. It is only when she loses the courtship of M. Jo that Suzanne takes on her role as a walker once again, and is encouraged to look for another car in which she could ride.

Narrative linearity

Narrative linearity is revealed as one of the stakes of this movement—in particular, of masculine narration versus feminine illegibility. Mariah Devereux Herbeck uses examples like André Breton's *Nadja*¹⁵ and *Le Ravisement de Lol. V. Stein* to differentiate the narrative voice from that of the

13 A longer article would be able to further elucidate the long history of the automobile as a strictly male technology.

14 The marriage plot itself is a prime example of narrative linearity, and implies the patriarchal infiltration of women's lived experience: girls grow up, menstruate and become women, get married, and have babies, are all expectations (with a strict order).

15 André Breton, *Nadja* [1928], Paris, Gallimard, 1963.

wandering woman: the typically male narrator attempts to recount the woman's story as linear while he follows her, to better frame her tale in "the tradition of omniscience"¹⁶. On the contrary, this attempt to achieve a clear narrative reveals these narrators as fallible: the wandering woman exceeds their comprehension and rejects any easy rendering-legible of her movements. As Devereux Herbeck writes, "the wandering woman's influence as she moves beyond the narrative gaze," creates "plot gaps with which narrative agents and voices must grapple"¹⁷. These narrators' credibility is constantly undermined, as "narrative drift can paradoxically underscore the heavy-handed actions of stifling male narrative agents who choose to *forcibly move* the narration of the woman's story in *directions* that flatter their own masculine image"¹⁸. This language of movement written by Devereux Herbeck is in fact a dynamic illustration which echoes the designation of good or bad bodies in public space according to the pedestrian paradigm. Forcing this body to move in a particular direction connotes both a violent gesture toward the woman and her body, but also alludes to the unique temporality of wandering. Wandering is without temporal limit, without specific destination, and without narration that yields to an Aristotelian organization and thus, is a threat to capitalist temporal uniformity and unity that is expected to occupy every sphere of life.

Paradoxically, in the very act of appropriating the wandering woman's narrative, the narrator must engage in a certain reciprocity with the object of his story. To follow this woman, regardless of his controlling and patriarchal

16 Mariah Devereux Herbeck, *Wandering Women in French Film and Literature*, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 5-6.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 12 (my emphasis).

motives, is risky: the male narrator must also participate in the waste of time, and has to violate the laws of the pedestrian. Jacques, obsessed by Lol, “[yearns] to know and control [her]”¹⁹, and by watching and following her, becomes complicit in her destabilization of linearity and facilitates her voyeurism. In other words, Jacques, like Lol, is also in “a state of flux”²⁰. In a similar way, Lol’s husband attempts to impose order and destination to her wandering. During their first encounter, he asks her several times where she is going but, never receiving an answer, he takes on the direction of their walk. She follows him, “[d]ocile” (R, p. 27), and Jean makes a game out of manipulating her course: “S’il s’arrêtait, elle s’arrêtait aussi. Il s’amusa à le faire. Mais elle ne s’aperçut pas de ce jeu. Il continua. Il s’arrêta une fois assez longtemps : elle l’attendit. Jean Bedford cessa le jeu. Il la laissa faire à sa guise” (*loc. cit.*). However, the mastery of her movements falters almost immediately when Duras remarks that “[t]out en ayant l’air de la mener, il la suivit” (*loc. cit.*). In this way, it is evident that wandering necessitates a certain porosity between the walker and the one who follows—even in an attempt to control.

Toward the end of *Le Vice-consul*, Peter Morgan discusses his literary practices with his friends. With certainty, he describes the manner in which he must also enter into his story, and into the psyche of the beggar woman, in order to write better. However, he is conscious that this is not without danger: he would also be prey to her madness. He insists that he will “l’abandonn[er] avant la folie [...], ça c’est sûr, mais j’ai quand même besoin de connaître cette folie” (VC, p. 179). Scholar Caroline Rupprecht writes that Morgan “express[es] his territorial fantasies as a writer in a colonial

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

²⁰ *Loc. cit.*

society”²¹ which in turn positions him as a palimpsestic political agent who establishes and maintains order that is both colonial and patriarchal²². But Rupprecht goes on to note his linear defeat as soon as he also participates in this wandering. To participate in the beggar woman’s story “is also where his narrative fails: like the beggar woman, who wanders aimlessly, he no longer seems to know where he is going with this and as a result, his novel remains unfinished”²³. To achieve even a semblance of a linear story, these male narrators must become wanderers themselves. In this way we can understand the subversive potential of wandering: attempting to master the woman by rendering her movements and therefore her narrative legible is to follow the demands of capitalist temporality, but the patriarchal agent must also engage in this act of social deviance and as such, inevitably loses the linearity he sought to impose.

The scene I have already cited of Suzanne in the rich neighborhood highlights both her alienation and her precarity in this *milieu*. She also inhabits a no-man’s-land in society,

21 Caroline Rupprecht, “Post-War Iconographies: Wandering Women in Brecht, Duras, Kluge”, *South Central Review*, vol. 23, No. 2, 2006, p. 43.

22 Though the colonial context of this text certainly warrants further explanation, I will simply note here that given the white Western background of Peter Morgan, who appropriates and writes the supposed story of the beggar woman, I argue that Amato’s paradigm of the urban and European pedestrian still applies. In other words, Morgan’s background informs and defines, in his narration of her, the social deviances she is guilty of. What’s more, the frequent parallels made between the beggar woman and established, colonial and maternal characters (Anne-Marie Stretter, for instance) emphasize the European structures of comportment and of gendered economy that the beggar woman is depicted as wandering in and out of. The culture of the consulate is described as “France aux Indes” (VC, p. 96), suggesting that, while certainly imbued with the colonial and Indian contexts, French structures, culture, and norms have been transplanted, and without a doubt guide much of this microcosmic society’s norms.

23 Caroline Rupprecht, “Post-War Iconographies: Wandering Women in Brecht, Duras, Kluge”, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

constantly teetering between two poles. As examples of her non-belonging, Duras describes both women and other young girls. It is stated two times that the feminine sex of the neighborhood always walks “en bande” or “en groupe” (BP, p. 185-186). Suzanne, on the contrary, is alone, unmarried, but also no longer a young girl. What’s more, the descriptions of these groups of young girls, dressed “en robe de sport[, c]ertaines, une raquette de tennis sous le bras” (BP, p. 185) clearly references the acceptable leisure activities to which walking must belong. As Amato explains, “people of innate superiority and true refinement would not deign to compete on the dirty streets and thoroughfares of city and business. Rather, in diametrical opposition to the rest of humanity, which walked when and where life, work, and lord commanded, they promenaded and strolled where they pleased”²⁴. Emphasis on sport and strolling echoes the tradition of promenading as leisure activity of a certain class, and in this case, situates these groups of girls as correct walkers, as pedestrians. But Suzanne cannot be said to inhabit this category either: though she makes references to the cinema as a potential destination, it is clear that the true reason she walks is to find a new suitor. It is only once she has already begun her walk that she realizes that this act is none other than *street-walking*, making her one of the ultimate bad walkers: “pas plus qu’avant les autos ne s’arrêtèrent devant cette fille à robe bleue, à robe de putain” (BP, p. 320). In short, the very act of walking in this way ensures she will never be able to stop walking and once again become a rider.

Jean-Luc Godard and Jacques Demy, contemporaries of Marguerite Duras, included wandering women in their films to signal a feminine archetype that is precarious, unstable, and perhaps even in danger. In *Vivre sa vie* (1962), Nana leads

24 Joseph Amato, *On Foot: A History of Walking*, op. cit., p. 72-73.

an ambulatory and unstable life before she dies, a secular *deus ex machina* that restores order and officially condemns the vagabond, female sex worker. Jacques Demy's recurring character, Lola, is a burlesque performer that is alternately pursued by Roland, Frankie, and the camera. Lola is always in motion until she is reunited with Michel, her husband. Use of wandering as a method of characterization, as a signal of a feminine archetype in a large number of texts in the French canon, and by Duras' contemporaries encourages us to question the imbrication of gendered norms within movements and gestures that seem the most innocuous. By exploring the constellation of the wandering woman in Duras' *oeuvre*, the act of wandering becomes a *locus* of multiple feminist considerations: the inaccessibility of the wandering woman and her rejection of capitalist temporalities suggests an alternative to the docile pedestrian. Furthermore, this movement clarifies the confused and worrying balance that French women post-World War II had to occupy: the imperative to return to the home, to avoid wasting time, and the diminishing of public space occupied by women creates a constant threat of non-belonging and sharper divisions of gendered spaces. Wandering connotes excess, disruption, turbulence, and waste. But it also remains a complex motif: wandering as an example of women's liberation could also suggest the opposite. After all, the beggar woman is crazy, Suzanne is left alone and vulnerable after the death of her mother and the departure of her brother, and Lol finally sleeps, a sign of the end of her voyeurism and a return to the home. It would be no exaggeration to claim that these descriptions of the wandering woman are virtually identical to the diagnostic language of hysteria, or at least, express a somewhat essentialist pathologization from which Marguerite Duras is not innocent. However, participation in this act, like a Venus fly trap for those who attempt to speak over these often-

silent women, points to some sort of space for the subversion of norms. And perhaps the only appropriate conclusion is to cite Duras herself: "laisser les femmes à elles-mêmes, libres"²⁵ to wander, to live non-linearly, and to occupy public space. And perhaps, what we must do is follow them.

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25 Susan D. Cohen, « Entretien avec Marguerite Duras » [July 1972], republished in *Initiales*, No. 3, "M. D.", Jan. 2014, p. 48.