Mapping *Mrs. Dalloway*: London as a Networked City

Melba Cuddy-Keane

2019
The following pictorial essay provides a visual accompaniment for the print publication essay:


The following images simulate the novel’s multi-level mapping strategies, which enable a rich palimpsestic map to build in the reader’s mind. We don’t need to be conscious of all these details as we read the novel; embodied perception suggests that imagining space gives us the experience of being and moving in it. We can intuitively grasp the way Woolf’s mapping “thinks.” (Note the generalized meaning of palimpsestic: created from the superimposition of multiple diverse layers.)
Historical geographical London in the 1920s

Many of the novel’s original readers would have personal experience of London, either as residents or visitors, giving them an imaginative baseline on which to build.

The novel is set in 1923 and the baseline used here is a 1923 pictorial map produced for tourists. Even its most basic geographical features indicate a city with multiple dynamics, interweaving human and natural components with top-down design and bottom-up use:

- contrasts between natural (green spaces) and built environments (brown)
- random, non-grid like patterns of roads, evolving from ancient pathways which themselves followed early, now subterranean, rivers
- the winding snake-like Thames, as a connecting feature
- subdivisions into smaller districts (the inserts for Clubland and Theatreland)
Figure 1: The Pictorial Plan of London. London: Geographia, Ltd., 1923
http://www.geographicus.com/mm5/cartographers/geographia.txt [public domain]
The “storyworld” in *Mrs. Dalloway* builds its geography from literal reference points in the actual city of London, while the novel’s “storymind” tracks the movements of numerous characters, turning static space into a moving field. As the reader visualizes, and perhaps even cognitively reenacts, these journeys, the paths accumulate in the “readingmind,” creating a diverse and layered mental map.
Clarissa sees ducks and pelicans in St. James’s Park (likely entering on the south-east, close to Duck Island); she then stops to chat with Hugh Whitbread with his back against government buildings (likely coming from the Foreign Office on Horse Guards Rd., on the east side of the Park). Clarissa makes two detours: first, west through Green Park, and then east to look at books in Hatchard’s window, before reaching her destination in a florist shop. Even this short walk navigates through the natural, the political, and the commercial.
Figure 3: adding the path taken by Clarissa’s double, Septimus Smith

After variation and contrast (green and brown; natural and built environments), the first pattern of movement is continuity, as Septimus (pink) extends Clarissa’s trajectory (red) on his northward path.
Figure 4: adding the morning path taken by Peter Walsh

The second and third patterns of movement are **parallelism** and **convergence**: Peter’s morning walk (blue) doubles, just to the east, the trajectory of the combined Clarissa / Septimus walk, and then Peter and Septimus unwittingly see each other in Regent’s Park.
Figure 5: adding the afternoon paths taken by Septimus and Peter.

After their serendipitous encounter, the paths of Septimus and Peter diverge: Septimus walking (solid pink line) to Harley St., an area for the medical profession; Peter, taking a taxi (blue dashes) to Lincoln Inn’s Court, a centre for law. Yet in the later afternoon, their paths again begin to converge, as both walk to areas in Bloomsbury.
Figure 7: adding the paths of minor characters and Peter’s evening travel.

A fourth pattern is non-simultaneous overlap. Richard Dalloway (gold) follows some of his wife’s footsteps on his subsequent walk from Bond St. home, and their daughter Elizabeth (green) follows Peter up Victoria Street and Whitehall toward the Strand, but by bus, and later in the day. Peter’s evening walk returns to convergence as he, along with many others, congregate at the Dalloway house.
Varying intentions imply different motions and tempos of walking too: purposeful to get something (Clarissa); purposeful, to avoid something (Rezia); idling and wasting time (Peter); adventuring across boundaries (Elizabeth). Distinctive individual patterns need to be included too, but we need video mapping to capture such dynamics!
Multiple Schemas

As conceptual schemas, the characters’ movements create a palimpsest of continuity, parallelism, divergence and convergence, overlap, and distinctive paths.
A sound can bring people together in unconscious connection when they all hear the same thing: the tire exploding in Bond St.; the old woman singing at the Regent’s Park tube station; the ambulance bell in Bloomsbury that brushes Peter with Septimus’s death.
Figure 9: adding the sound of Big Ben

As a soundmark notating the symbolic power of the Houses of Parliament, Big Ben also figures as unconscious networking: its soundwaves expand over the city and into the sky beyond, bringing a multiplicity of listeners into temporal harmony as an aural community.
Figure 10: adding technology

The path of the official car (purple) elicits patriotic sentiments from observers on its route from Bond St to Buckingham Palace; the flight of a sky-writing plane (yellow), with its barely legible letters, stimulates freer imaginative response as it encircles London with wavy looping lines.
Written long before the advent of the digital, Woolf’s cartographic novel prefigures the complex networked models that are on the cusp of city planning today: bottom-up in addition to top-down processes; movements emanating from multiple centres; change at the local level impacting the whole in more than simply additive ways — all in all, a multi-level, interactive network, evidencing a mind that works on multiple planes.
The city is a vast mind; the mind is a vast city.

Clarissa’s self is also a complex networked system—what theories of distributed cognition would term an extended mind.
London as Clarissa’s extended mind:

“somehow in the streets of London, on the ebb and flow of things, here, there, she survived, Peter survived, lived in each other, she being part, she was positive, of the trees at home; of the house there, ugly, rambling, all to bits and pieces as it was; part of people she had never met; being laid out like a mist between the people she knew best, who lifted her on their branches as she had seen the trees lift the mist, but it spread ever so far, her life, herself.”
Mrs. Dalloway

Is the title of Woolf’s novel then the name of a character? Or — if the self is itself an extended network — is the title an alternative name for London?
The multiple dynamics of *Mrs. Dalloway*’s London take us beyond Michel de Certeau’s binary opposition between strategical planning and pedestrian tactics (power and its subversion).* In this novel, mapping (whether of space or the self) becomes a physical enactment of complex systems theory in the head. Visualizing the complexity requires us to imagine a multi-layered three-dimensional map.

---

Use this amazing photograph, taken at approximately the time when *Mrs. Dalloway* is set, to imaginatively tilt the previous mappings and create a 3-dimensional London in your mind.

Photo credit:
Captain Alfred G. Buckham, The View over London, c. 1920
Copyright © Richard and John Buckham
To cite this pictorial essay:


Maps created using ArcGIS with the assistance of Gerald Romme, GIS analyst, Map and Data Library, University of Toronto