

UNRELIABLE WITNESS: THE FLÂNEUR AS SPECTATOR OF ART AND THE ARTIST AS FLÂNEUR IN 19TH-CENTURY PARIS.

At first sight, connecting the viewing of art with the *flâneur* – the quintessential exponent of a kind of observation which is both drifting and knowing – might seem to be too obvious to be worth commenting on, because of a long history of assuming that there is a natural sympathy on the part of the *flâneur* for art. This account has gone unquestioned because of the prestigious exponents this figure has attracted – Balzac, Baudelaire, Benjamin. Moreover, much has been made of an alignment between *flâneurs*' way of looking and that of artists; indeed, such a bond has been claimed as corresponding to a shared grasp of the radical, troubling nature of modernity. As a way to uncouple the *flâneur* and modernity, I argue that art historians' preoccupation with the *flâneur* as role model for artists is based on misreading some of *flânerie*'s canonical texts, and that there are several reasons for concluding that the *flâneur* is, in fact, an unreliable witness to the art world. However, this decoupling of art and the *flâneur* has the beneficial consequence of encouraging a reassessment of the type's origins and transformations.

Firstly, *flâneurs* do not really engage effectively with the Salon, the primary reference point for art's public display; because of its congested interiors, and the presence of an underlying coercive or programmatic ethos, these exhibitions are inimical to *flâneurs*' habitually erratic, elusive peregrinations.¹ The distinctive behaviour of the *flâneur* (however understood) is antithetical to the labour or duty of aesthetic contemplation required of, if not often achieved by, Salon visitors. Secondly, as a review of the primary texts (which forms the second part of this essay) cited in all accounts of the *flâneur* makes clear, when out and about in Paris, *flâneurs* do not attend particularly to art, and when they do it is little more than incidentally, as part of their meandering survey of public life. Indeed, in the case of canonical texts by Balzac and Baudelaire, the association between *flâneurs* and artists turns out to be as fleeting and contingent as the *flâneur*'s gaze itself. I will conclude by briefly considering the related matter of the role of aestheticisation as applied to urban life, notably the *passages* and their contents. The spectacle of modern commercial display, and the kinds of attention given to this by *flâneurs*, have been interpreted as a form of artistic commentary, both by contemporaries, and by modern scholars. In the case of the latter, this has reinforced the perception that the *flâneur* is an essentially apolitical phenomenon. However, contemporary writing on the *passages* and *flâneur* in the 1820s make clear that the use of artistic value as a criterion in judging such matters was part of an emphatically political polemic regarding the legitimacy of money and cultural authority as signifiers of status in Restoration society's fragmented and contested landscape.

The Flâneur and the Salon

One of the earliest instances of the *flâneur* as an authorial protagonist is the pamphlet *Le Flâneur au Salon ou Mr Bon-homme; examen joyeux des tableaux mêlé de vaudevilles* (1806).² Yet, in this text, the *flâneur*'s capacities are immediately

¹ 'Au seuil du Salon', in James Kearns and Alistair Mill (eds), *The Paris Fine Art Salon* (Peter Lang: Bern, Oxford, 2015).

² Although known to art historians, this text entered *flâneur* literature thanks to Tony Halliday, who is

downplayed, in so far as he is identified as ‘un cousin-très-germain de M. Muzard’ (‘a more than first cousin of M. Muzard’), that is, an aimless and dim bystander. That said, his itinerary includes printsellers, for example the print dealer Martinet’s shop on rue du Coq and later others on rue Froid-Manteau; he also inspects building works in the Louvre’s courtyard, continuing to the place du Louvre, the rue de Rivoli and its interesting new railings, the place Vendôme, where he finds a column under construction. He then proceeds to the Boulevards, which he follows until he arrives at the Passage des Panoramas. Here his attention becomes more systematic, first passing in review every boutique and its new stock, and new shop signs, but also having the flow of his scanning interrupted by the distracting sight of rotten awnings and precariously placed flowerpots, poised to provide points of departure for mishap, which he anticipates as if they will in due course become a focus for his attention. His cultural interest is then focussed more concertedly on the theatre – repertoire, casting, anecdote. However, the cacophony of opinions by which he finds himself surrounded during his lunch prompts him to act on the idea of writing down what he sees and hears during his ‘flâneute’. Only at this point does it emerge that the prime stimulus for putting pen to paper had been the prospect of visiting the Salon, and the scope ‘de flâner pendant six semaines’ (‘flâner’ for six weeks’) while the exhibition was open. The opportunity ‘flâner’ for such an extended period elicits ‘une joie indicible’ (an unspeakable joy’). M. Bon-homme prepares himself for the Salon by going to the café Lecuy, rue du Coq, a place frequented by artists, as if to surrender himself to a kind of osmotic acclimatisation. However, we are told that his ‘petites réflexions’ as published only correspond to his reactions to the first two or three days of the exhibition. Be that as it may, they are the least interesting part of this text (some 12 octavo pages), which mostly made up of jokes or jibes and generally terse remarks.

The protagonist’s leisurely approach to city life ends up rendering his encounter with the Salon inconsequential. There is an inherent sense of ambivalence in the conception of the pamphlet. On the one hand, we might lament the relatively trivial outcome of his ‘reflections’; on the other, we could also read this account of a *rendez-vous manqué* between a *flâneur* and the Salon as a way to avoid being browbeaten, if not humiliated, by the demands of art language and art viewing. To this extent, Monsieur Bon-homme’s encounter with the Salon was to be exemplary for his successors. It is not until 1836 that we find the *flâneur* revisiting the Salon. In the July Monarchy, reviews appear in the journal *Le Flâneur* in 1836 and 1837. As is true of the rest of its contents,³ the journal is little more than a list, a selected fraction of the overall mass of exhibits. Yet such a précis, rather in the manner of an expeditious cicerone, is wholly at odds with the detached and indeed solitary drifting of the *flâneur*. Amidst the ocean of reviews produced during the Second Empire, there are only three references to the *flâneur* in author names and titles, occurring in 1864, 1866 and 1867.⁴ As has already been suggested, the distinctive outlook of the *flâneur*

credited by Elizabeth Wilson in her ‘The Invisible Flâneur’, *New Left Review*, 1/191, January-February 1992, pp. 90-110.

³ As far as we can judge from the fragmentary surviving copies in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. See Benjamin’s note on this journal, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Belknap Press: Harvard University, Cambridge MA., and London, 1999), p. 448, and Mary Gluck’s brief discussion of this journal, *Popular Bohemia. Modernism and Urban culture in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Harvard University Press, 2005), p. 95.

⁴ Henri Raison du Cleuziou, ‘Flanerie à l’exposition’, in *Gazette littéraire, artistique et scientifique* (1864); ‘Un flâneur’, ‘Le Salon’, *Revue de Paris* (1866); and ‘Le Flâneur’, ‘Le Salon de 1867’, *Revue de Paris* (1867); full details are given in Christopher Parsons and Martha Ward, *A Bibliography of*

seems ill-suited to the business of getting to grips to what was acknowledged to be the daunting task of viewing and judging the Salon's thousands of exhibits. We need to look elsewhere for more significant potential links between the *flâneur*, art, and artists.

Commentaries on Balzac and Baudelaire have had the effect of establishing the *flâneur* as a key player in the landscape of Parisian culture. By virtue of these prestigious intermediaries, the *flâneur* has crossed over from urban, commercial culture, to the more elevated reaches of French literature and become embedded within canon-centred literary studies. However, the *flâneur* has also been defined in terms of a complementary form of canon, made up of the panoramic literature of social types: *Paris, ou le Livre des cent-et-un* (1832), *Physiologie du flâneur* (1841), *Les français peints par eux-mêmes* (1841-2). Together, these texts have largely set the terms for writing on the topic; their recycling is exemplified in the various articles on the *flâneur* by Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson.⁵ (More recently, a much wider survey of less well-known texts has been given by Laurent Turcot.⁶)

Balzac and the 'flâneur artiste'

The case of Balzac and his usage of *flâneur* and *flânerie* has been studied by several authors, is revealing of the way his voice has been used to cement a certain reading of the *flâneur*.⁷ Pierre Loubier provides a detailed account of the heterogeneous, evolving forms of the *flâneur* in Balzac (that is, within an authorial corpus), writing illuminatingly on the way visual experiences form part of the narrative; for example, the way windows act as frames, rendering sights into pictorialised form. Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson has noted that, in Balzac's Parisian typology, the role of the *flâneur* and the artist are at odds. 'The successful flâneur may be a reader, he will never be an artist'.⁸ In *La Cousine Bette* (1846), Rivet advises Bette to keep the artist Steinbock working, and therefore away from Notre-Dame de Lorette where he would

Salon Criticism in the Second Empire (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1986), nos. 0782, 1066, 1176 respectively.

⁵ 'The flâneur on and off the streets of Paris', in Keith Tester, *The Flâneur* (Routledge: London, 1994), pp. 22-42; 'The flâneur: urbanization and its discontents', in Suzanne Nash (ed.), *Home and its dislocations in 19th-century France* (State University of New York Press, State University Plaza, Albany, N.Y., 1993), pp. 45-61; *Paris as Revolution. Writing the 19th-century City* (1994), Ch. 3 'The Flâneur: the city and its discontents', pp. 80-114; and 'The flâneur and the production of culture', in Anne Rigney and Douwe Wessel Fokkema (eds), *Cultural Participation: trends since the middle ages* (John Benjamins: Amsterdam and Philadelphia, 1993), pp. 109-24 [which is close to the previous text]; 'The Sensualization of Flânerie', *Dix-Neuf*, 16: 2 (July 2012), pp. 211-23. All four of her texts on the *flâneur* rely on the same small group of early nineteenth-century sources: *Le flâneur au Salon, ou Monsieur Bon-homme* (1806); [J.B. Auguste Aldeguier], *Le flâneur ou mon voyage à Paris* [1825]; Balzac, various texts; [Anon.], 'Le flâneur à Paris', in *Paris ou le livre des cent-et-un*, vol. 6 (Paris, 1832), p. 95-110; Louis Huart, *Physiologie du flâneur* (1841); Auguste de Lacroix, 'Le flâneur', in *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes*, 9 vols (L. Curmer: Paris, 1841-42), vol. 3, pp. 65-72. Ferguson's use of these sources is supplemented by reference to canonical literary texts, notably Flaubert's *L'Éducation sentimentale* (a text also used by Christopher Prendergast, *Paris and the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), pp. 111-25), and Zola's *La Curée*.

⁶ 'Did the flâneur exist? A Parisian perspective', in Richard Wrigley (ed.), *The Flâneur Abroad: historical and interstitial perspectives* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), pp. 40-65.

⁷ Pierre Loubier, 'Balzac et le flâneur', *L'Année Balzacienne*, 2001, 1:2, pp. 141-66. See also Catherine Nesci, *Le flâneur et la flâneuse: les femmes et la ville à l'époque romantique* (Grenoble: Presses Universitaires de Grenoble, 2007), pp. 113-16.

⁸ Parkhurst Ferguson, 'The Flâneur and the production of culture', p. 111.

risk succumbing to the temptation of prostitution: ‘Sans ces précautions, votre sculpteur flânera, et si vous saviez ce que les artistes appellent *flâner*! des horreurs, quoi!’ (‘without these precautions, your sculptor will wander, and you know what artists mean by *flâner*! horrid things what!’).⁹ Parkhurst Ferguson cites a remark from the same novel which equates inconsequential casual browsing with dissipation, as distinct from the concerted effort of creative work: ‘Ah bah! Il passe sa vie au Louvre, à la Bibliothèque, à regarder des estampes et à les dessiner. C’est un flâneur’ (‘Ah bah! He passes his life at the Louvre, in the Library, looking at prints and drawing. He’s a *flâneur*’).¹⁰ Nonetheless, Ferguson, a sociologist interested in historicising urban space and behaviour, reinforces the association of the *flâneur* with high culture and artistic creativity, channelling her account of changing forms of observation and mobility through canonical literature, i.e. Balzac and Flaubert. It is the presence in these revered authors’ works of such particular forms of observation which gives them not only substance and legitimacy, but also novelty. In this way, the *flâneur*’s gaze is strongly associated with literary innovation and modernity.

However, Ferguson’s informative account of the *flâneur* and Balzac is representative of a widespread confusion in writing on the *flâneur* and art, the *flâneur* as artist, and the artist as *flâneur*. In Parkhurst Ferguson’s account, Balzac’s ‘flâneur artiste’ becomes the ‘artist-*flâneur*’. While one might read this as simply an inversion resulting from translation, in the English version there is at least an implied invocation of the artist-as-*flâneur*: ‘The artist-*flâneur* of Balzac’s *Physiologie du mariage* (1829) belongs to a privileged elite, expression and manifestation of the higher, because intellectual flânerie.’¹¹ Similarly, Catherine Nesci quotes the term ‘flâneur artiste’ from the same text but then refers to ‘l’artiste’; while this is not, of course, an unequivocal reference to a painter, it nonetheless unmistakably shifts the primary meaning from ‘*flâneur*’ to ‘artiste’.¹² Yet Balzac clearly means to applaud a man (in fact a pair of male pedestrians) who make of *flânerie* an art (more specifically, when cruising the streets of Paris alert to the potential for flirting with women), as in a phrase such as ‘the art of flânerie’.¹³

Balzac’s phrase ‘un flâneur artiste’ occurs in ‘Méditation III. De la femme honnête’, as part of an eclectic paean of praise to wandering in Paris. Two smart young men meet at the exit of the Passage des Panoramas; their implicit purpose is to answer the ‘question un peu drue’ (rather blunt question): ‘Qui épousons-nous pour le moment?...’ (‘Who will we marry today?...’). Despite this basic motivation, they are evidently part of the superior class of Parisian pedestrian men who, like ‘musiciens habiles’ (‘able musicians’), are capable of recognising to which ‘key’ physiognomies people belong. Before the answer is addressed, Balzac digresses from the matter in

⁹ *La Cousine Bette* (Garnier: Paris, 1962), p. 65. On the following page there is a further remark about the artist, Steinbock’s proclivity ‘flâner au lieu de travailler’ (*flâner* instead of working).

¹⁰ *La Cousine Bette* (Gallimard: Paris, 1972), p. 70. See also Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, ‘The flâneur on and off the streets of Paris’, p. 34.

¹¹ *Paris as Revolution. Writing the 19th-Century City* (1994), p. 90.

¹² Nesci, pp. 116, and 113-16.

¹³ This usage is comparable to John Gay’s poem *Trivia: or, the Art of Walking the Streets of London*, (London, 1716); see Clare Brant and Susan E. Whyman (eds), *Walking the Streets of Eighteenth-Century London: John Gay’s Trivia (1716)* (Oxford, 2009); and Karl Gottlob Schelle’s *Die Spaziergänge oder die Kunst spazieren zu gehen* (Gottfried Martini: Leipzig, 1802).

hand to exclaim: ‘Oh! errer dans Paris! Adorable et délicieuse existence! Flâner est une science, c’est la gastronomie de l’œil. Se promener c’est végéter; flâner c’est vivre’ (Oh! To wander in Paris! Delightful and delicious existence! *Flâner* is a science, it is the gastronomy of the eye. To walk is to vegetate; *flâner* is to live’). For the two strolling protagonists, the sight of a ‘jeune et jolie femme’ (‘young and pretty woman’) is akin to, yet more irresistible than the smell of roast food to a Limousin.

Balzac continues: ‘*Flâner*, it is to enjoy, it is to gather witty episodes, it is to admire sublime scenes of misfortune, love, joy, graceful and grotesque portraits; it is to plunge one’s gaze into a thousand lives; for a young man, it is to desire everything; for an old man, it is to live through the lives of young people, it is to embrace their passions. Oh! How many answers has an *flâneur artiste* not heard to the question we have been considering?’.¹⁴

Yet, in a sense, such a deceptive elision is predicated on a retrospective logic, based on a widely shared assumption that the supreme example of the identification of the artist as *flâneur* is to be found in the writings of Baudelaire, i.e. ‘Le Peintre de la vie moderne’ (1863). However, this pre-eminent source also needs reassessing.

The equation of the *flâneur* with an artist is no more than contingent, and only one facet of Balzac’s championing of the pleasures of finely tuned pedestrian observation. Misreadings, or misconstruals, by Ferguson and Nesci of Balzac’s text (interestingly early in the chronology of the *flâneur*’s evolution) provide an apparently authoritative justification for assuming the existence of a compelling association between the *flâneur* and the artist.

Baudelaire

In order to get at Baudelaire’s actual use of the term *flâneur*, we need to take a detour via one of his most influential commentators, Walter Benjamin.¹⁵ Benjamin’s account of the *flâneur* has been powerful in sustaining the idea that there is a deep link between *flânerie* and art. In his review of Franz Hessel’s *Spazieren in Berlin* (1929), he wrote of ‘the perfected art of the *flâneur*’ – which seems likely to have been a self-conscious echo of Balzac.¹⁶ In this review, he reflects on the remarkable fact that, while Paris was the accepted ‘home’ of the *flâneur*, Rome might, indeed, perhaps ought, to have been the site of its invention. These comments are worth looking at

¹⁴ ‘Flâner, c’est jouir, c’est recueillir des traits d’esprit, c’est admirer de sublimes tableaux de malheur, d’amour, de joie, des portraits gracieux ou grotesques; c’est plonger ses regards au fond de mille existences: jeune, c’est tout désirer, tout posséder; vieillard, c’est vivre de la vie des jeunes gens, c’est épouser leurs passions. Oh! combien de réponses un flâneur artiste n’a-t-il pas entendu faire à l’interrogation catégorique sur laquelle nous sommes restés?’ (Honoré de Balzac, *Physiologie du mariage*, in *La Comédie humaine*, 11 vols (Gallimard, Pléiade: Paris, 1950), vol. 10, pp. 619-20).

¹⁵ For a critical account, see Martina Lauster, *Sketches of the Nineteenth Century: European Journalism and its “Physiologies”, 1830-50* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); ‘Walter Benjamin’s Myth of the “Flâneur”’, *Modern Language Review*, 102: 1 (January 2007), pp. 139-56.

¹⁶ Walter Benjamin, ‘The Return of the Flâneur’, review of Franz Hessel, *Spazieren in Berlin* (Leipzig and Vienna: Verlag Dr Hans Epstein, 1929), in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, II 1927-1934, trans. Rodney Livingstone et al., ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1999), pp. 263-7; *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 3, ed. Hella Tiedemann-Bartels (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main, 1991), pp. 194-9; first published in *Die literarische Welt*, October 1929; and see also Kathrin Yacavone, ‘Arcades and Loggias: Walter Benjamin’s Flâneur in Paris and Berlin’, in Richard Wrigley (ed.), *The Flâneur Abroad: historical and international perspectives* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing : Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 2014), pp. 269-80.

closely because of the way they are slightly but significantly different from the corresponding paragraph in the *Passagen-Werk*, and therefore illuminate how we understand the development of Benjamin's conception of the *flâneur*.

'The *flâneur* is the creation of Paris. The wonder is that it was not Rome. But perhaps in Rome even dreaming follows well-trodden paths. And isn't the city too full of temples, enclosed squares, and national shrines to be able to enter undivided into the dreams of the passer-by, along with every paving stone, every shop sign, every flight of steps, and every gateway? The grand memories, the historical frisson – for the true *flâneur* these are only rubbish, which he willingly leaves to travellers. And he would give all his knowledge of artists' cells, birthplaces, or princely residences for the scent carried by a single doorstep, the touch of a single paving stone, like any dog who came along. And much may have to do with the Roman character. For it is not the foreigners but they themselves, the Parisians, who made Paris into the Promised Land of *flâneurs*, into "a landscape made of living people," as Hofmannsthal once put it. Landscape - this is what the city becomes for the *flâneur*. Or, more precisely, the city splits into its dialectical poles. It becomes a landscape that opens up to him and a parlor that encloses him.'¹⁷

For Benjamin, the fact that the *flâneur* was not born in Rome could be explained in three ways. Firstly, Rome was too overloaded with works of art, which prevented wandering viewers from relaxing or drifting – the past was uncomfortably, inescapably, and rapidly exhaustingly, omnipresent. Secondly, there was an implicit didactic expectation that rather than maintaining a level of impressionistic perusal, the viewer should connect their experience of sites and monuments to a pre-existing body of art-historical knowledge. Finally, it is interesting that Benjamin invokes the finely tuned sense of smell of a dog as an alternative mode of sensory knowledge. The contrast is between a prescribed itinerary of historical features, to be encountered using properly tutored attention – a mix of visual scrutiny and historical information -

¹⁷ The translation given here is adapted from Walter Benjamin, 'The Return of the Flâneur', review of Franz Hessel, *Spazieren in Berlin* (Leipzig and Vienna: Verlag Dr Hans Epstein, 1929), in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, II 1927-1934, trans. Rodney Livingstone et al., ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1999), pp. 263-7. 'Den Typus des Flaneurs schuf ja Paris. Daß nicht Rom es war, ist das Wunderbare. Aber zieht nicht in Rom selbst das Träumen schon allzu gebahnte Straßen? Und ist die Stadt nicht zu voll von Tempeln, umfriedeten Plätzen, nationalen Heiligtümern, um ungeteilt mit jedem Pflasterstein, jedem Ladenschild, jeder Stufe und jeder Torfahrt in den Traum des Passanten eingehen zu können? Die großen Reminiszenzen, die historischen Schauer – sie sind dem wahren Flaneur ja ein Bettel, den er gerne dem Reisenden überläßt. Und all sein Wissen von Künstlerklausen, Geburtsstätten oder fürstlichen Domizilen gibt er für die Witterung einer einzigen Schwelle oder das Tastgefühl einer einzigen Fliese dahin, wie der erstbeste Haushund sie mit davonträgt. Auch mag manches am Charakter der Römer liegen. Denn Paris haben nicht die Fremden, sondern sie selbst, die Pariser, zum gelobten Land des Flaneurs, zu der »Landschaft aus lauter Leben gebaut«, wie Hofmannsthal sie einmal nannte, gemacht. Landschaft – das wird sie in der Tat dem Flanierenden. Oder genauer: ihm tritt die Stadt in ihre dialektischen Pole auseinander. Sie eröffnet sich ihm als Landschaft, sie umschließt ihn als Stube' (Hessel review: Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 3, ed. Hella Tiedemann-Bartels (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main, 1991), pp. 194-8. The passage underlined does not appear in the corresponding paragraph (M, 1, 4] in *Convolute M*, on the *flâneur*; but as part of a separate paragraph (M, 1, 1) (Walter Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, ed. Rolf Tiedem, 2 vols (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1983), vol. 1, pp. 524-5). For a discussion of this passage in the context of how *flânerie* could be adapted to Rome, see Richard Wrigley, *Roman Fever: influence, infection and the image of Rome 1700-1870* (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 2013), pp.

and the more powerful level of experience equated with unconscious reflex, activated through touch and smell. It is clear that, in his review of Hessel, Benjamin is intent on aligning the *flâneur* with the latter type of knowledge - at once visceral and highly sensitive, and to that extent fundamentally alien to the more self-conscious, predictably bourgeois protocols for viewing art.

There are similarities between the experience of the superabundant, unrelenting artistic sights of Rome and the Salon, in that both overwhelmed the alert but essentially dilatory sensibility of the *flâneur*. In the Parisian Salon it was precisely the profusion of pictures and objects on view that made it impossible for the *flâneur* to settle into a sense of detached flow - to be, indeed, a *flâneur*. Interestingly, given the importance of Benjamin for defining the prevailing terms by means of which the *flâneur* has been understood, his remark about Rome draws on older ideas of the *flâneur* as self-indulgent urban stroller (as with Monsieur Bon-homme), rather than the later nineteenth-century and twentieth-century conception of the *flâneur* as protagonist and symptom of modernity.

More generally, while his *Passagen-Werk* adds up to a massive accumulation of diverse historical notes (but yet with a distinct weighting towards the twentieth century), their central purpose was to explicate Baudelaire's Paris as the city of modernity, 'the capital of the nineteenth century': that is, to define the kinds of urban, historical knowledge which had been transformed into poetry and literary prose. However, Baudelaire's most resonant text in relation to shaping later expectations that the *flâneur* was the perfect model for a modern artist is 'Le Peintre de la vie moderne' (1863).¹⁸ In this essay he projected his own experience of and ideas about *flânerie* and its discontents onto the figure of Constantin Guys, thereby condemning him to being a role-model for generations of subsequent 'artiste-flâneurs', and also obliging art historians to pursue this conjunction.

An example of this text being pulled into the *flâneur* canon is Paul Smith's reference to Baudelaire's essay as a 'eulogy of the flâneur's central role in what his 'Salon de 1846' described as 'l'héroïsme de la vie moderne'.¹⁹ However, when we look closely at Baudelaire's usage of *flâneur*, even his alleged advocacy is much less clear cut than normally assumed. There is no reference to the *flâneur* in the Salon de 1846, more specifically, not in the section on 'l'héroïsme de la vie moderne'.

In the 1863 essay, there are only three references to the *flâneur*. Firstly, when the 'peintre de la vie moderne' is claimed to be equivalent to an 'observateur, flâneur, philosophe, appelez-le comme vous voudrez' ("observer, *flâneur*, philosopher, call him what you like").²⁰ Here, clearly, it would be misleading to isolate the qualification of *flâneur* from the other categories mentioned. That is, in this instance, the *flâneur* has no monopoly on the workings and calibration of the artist's sensibility. Moreover, Baudelaire is evidently relaxed about how he characterises Guys, rather than insisting

¹⁸ 'Le Peintre de la vie moderne', *Le Figaro*, 26 and 29 November, 3 December 1863; republished in *L'Art romantique* (Paris, 1868).

¹⁹ Paul Smith, "'Le Peintre de la vie moderne' and 'La Peinture de la vie ancienne'", in Richard Hobbs (ed.), *Impressions of French Modernity. Art and literature in France 1850-1900* (Manchester University Press: Manchester and New York, 1998), p. 76.

²⁰ *Œuvres complètes* (Gallimard: Paris, 1961), p. 1155.

on an orthodoxy wherein the modern artist is coterminous with the *flâneur*. Secondly, Baudelaire describes the pleasure of the crowd: ('For the perfect *flâneur*, for the passionate observer, it is an enormous pleasure to be living amongst the mass, in the flow, in movement, in the ephemeral and the infinite').²¹ Again this seems a generic type of experience, by means of which there is a simultaneous dissociation from, yet relish of, the mobility of the urban mass, rather than a particular type of aperçu to which the artist is peculiarly privileged.

Indeed, Baudelaire goes on to make a significant distinction between the aims of the 'pure *flâneur*' and the artist who is 'le peintre de la vie moderne': 'this solitary figure ... has a purpose more elevated than that of a pure *flâneur*, a more general aim, beyond the fugitive pleasure of circumstance'.²² Baudelaire here insists on the way that the artist and the *flâneur* occupy imaginative spaces of a quite different order: the former active, dedicated to the pursuit and seizing of 'modernité' (indeed, an alternative title for the essay had been 'Le peintre de la modernité'),²³ the latter continuous with the spectacle which provides his stimulation, onto which he projects his contingent, putative mastery. It is worth recalling that Guys himself repudiated the ideas which he thought were being imposed on him. In 1864, Baudelaire reported that: 'The articles which I wrote on his curious talent have so intimidated him that he refused to read them for a month'.²⁴ It seems to me to be essential to take these reservations into account before lapsing into the commonplace that Baudelaire's essay is a paean of praise to Guys as an artist who is exclusively synonymous with the *flâneur*'s outlook, and visual purchase on the city. Even Paul Smith, who offers a refreshingly different reading of the essay as unresolved and inconsistent, does little to dislodge the privileged equivalence of artist and *flâneur*.²⁵

Therefore, on the basis of this review of some key texts by Balzac and Baudelaire, we must conclude that there is little justification for treating the *flâneur* as an artistically-oriented observer, or the artist as a *flâneur*. It would require a separate study to consider this question from the point of view of nineteenth-century artists, based on evidence of their use of the term to define or characterise their experiences and aims.²⁶ We will now turn to the series of canonical texts which have dominated the literature on the *flâneur* cited earlier, addressing them in chronological order.

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²¹ 'Pour le parfait flâneur, pour l'observateur passionné, c'est une immense jouissance que d'être domicilié dans le nombre, dans l'ondoyant, dans le mouvement, dans le fugitif et l'infini' (*ibid.*, p. 1160).

²² 'ce solitaire ... a un but plus élevé que celui d'un pur flâneur, un but plus général, autre que le plaisir fugitif de la circonstance. Il cherche ce quelque chose qu'on nous permettra d'appeler la modernité' (*ibid.*, p. 1163),

²³ *Correspondance*, vol. 2, p. 346, cit. *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 2, p. 1415. Pichois here notes other contemporary usage of the word, notably by the artist Alfred Stevens.

²⁴ 'Les articles que j'ai faits à propos de son curieux talent l'ont tellement intimidé qu'il a refusé, pendant un mois, de les lire' (*ibid.*)

²⁵ Paul Smith has pointed up inconsistencies in this essay, yet remains faithful to the conventional equation of 'peintre de la vie moderne' as *flâneur*: 'In places Baudelaire enthusiastically proclaims that the painter of modern life is a "flâneur"' (OC, vol. 2, pp. 687, 691, 694, cit. Paul Smith, "Le Peintre de la vie moderne", pp. 76-96).

²⁶ I am preparing an article on this: 'Selfportrait of the artist as *flâneur*'.

The *flâneur* appears in the sixth volume of *Paris, ou le livre des-cent-et-un*, one of the first catalogues of Parisian life published in the early years of the July Monarchy.²⁷ The anonymous author of 'Le flâneur à Paris' begins by noting a prestigious series of forebears (Homer, Herodotus, Pythagorus), going on to lament that: 'The *flâneur* such as he has become in our view, is no longer poet or philosopher. This is one of the effects of the division of labour in our societies which believe themselves to be perfected because they have grown old. They also offer such a huge field of observation that those who engage in this have neither the energy nor the time to achieve any other task'.²⁸ Being an observer is an all-consuming end in itself, so much so that it prevents any more synthetic cultural translation of such awareness:

'Be advised that the *flâneur* of which I have been speaking, the *flâneur* of the nineteenth century, is *flâneur* and nothing else. He could have, he should have exercised some other profession; but, from the moment he embraced this one, it absorbed him completely; it did not allow him to do anything else'.

Yet the *flâneur*'s repertoire is relatively familiar, albeit that he is credited with an active curiosity:

'Nothing eludes his investigative gaze: a new arrangement in the display of a lavish shop, a lithograph newly visible to the public, the progress of a building which seemed to be endless, an unfamiliar face on the boulevard of which he knows each inhabitant and every regular, everything interests him, everything is for him a text to be scrutinized'.²⁹

Despite his omnivorous appetite, he is associated with a certain static inertness:

'He savours the pleasure of breathing, of looking, of being calm in the midst of this hurried agitation; in sum, of living: as does the Turk who, seated in a cemetery in Constantinople, intoxicates himself with opium'.³⁰

If, on the one hand, his attitude or point of view might be read as resembling an aesthetic one - adopting a detached form of scrutiny, which nonetheless enables him

²⁷ 'Le flâneur à Paris', *Paris, ou le livre des-cent-et-un*, vol. 6 (Paris, 1832), pp. 95-110.

²⁸ 'Le flâneur tel qu'il se développe à nos yeux, n'est plus ni poète, ni philosophe. C'est un des effets de la division du travail dans nos sociétés qui se croient perfectionnées, parce qu'elles sont vieilles. Elles offrent d'ailleurs un champ si vaste à l'observation, qu'il ne reste à ceux qui s'y livrent, ni force ni temps pour accomplir une autre tâche' ('Le flâneur à Paris', p. 97).

²⁹ 'Tenez-vous donc pour averti que mon flâneur à moi, le flâneur du dix-neuvième siècle, est flâneur, et rien de plus. Il a pu, il a dû exercer quelque autre profession; mais, du moment qu'il a embrassé celle-ci, elle l'absorbe tout entier; elle n'admet pas de cumul'. 'Rien n'échappe à son regard investigateur: une nouvelle disposition dans l'étalage de ce magasin somptueux, une lithographie qui se produit pour la première fois en public, les progrès d'une construction qu'on croyait interminable, un visage inaccoutumé sur ce boulevard dont il connaît chaque habitant et chaque habitué, tout l'intéresse, tout est pour lui un texte d'observations' ('Le flâneur à Paris', p. 101).

³⁰ 'Il savoure le plaisir de respirer, de regarder, d'être calme au milieu de cette agitation empressée; de vivre enfin: ainsi le Turc assis dans un cimetière de Constantinople, s'éivre de l'opium' ('Le flâneur à Paris', pp. 101-2). The role of exoticism in helping to explain the contrast between seated bourgeois and pedestrian *flâneur* is also evident in the *Physiologie du parapluie* (1841), which shows Louis-Philippe as a cross-legged Oriental on its title-page.

to experience strong emotions – he lacks the crucial further ability to synthesise and create something out of these impressions. Indeed, his attention is compulsively attracted to the superficial flux of life in the streets and passages, that is, without discrimination.³¹ Similarly he goes to the theatre because of the social spectacle, not what happens on stage.³² There is no mention in this text of the *flâneur* as an artist, or achieving any kind of productive outcome from his state of mobile observation. This condition of being a perpetual observer is rather a symptom of the state of modern society, whose competitive profusion generated a self-consciousness which was ultimately inconsequential.

It would have been astonishing if the *flâneur* did not appear in the series of *physiologies* which proliferated in the 1840s, and indeed, one of the early examples of typological journalism was dedicated to this character, Louis Huart's *Physiologie du flâneur* (Paris, 1841). Amongst the justifications Huart gives for celebrating *flânerie* is that it is an 'art d'agrément' ('an art of pleasure').³³ But this is to use 'art' as a secondary qualification; moreover, it is not inherent to the activity of *flânerie* as such. Further, in so far as *flânerie* can be thought of in this way as an art, it is a passive activity: the *flâneur* receives and savours impressions, but does not act on them in any transformative way. When the *flâneur* is sighted as an habitué of artists' studios, he characteristically sits on the sofa, smoking and chatting. Not only does he fail to engage with the art which is all around him, his presence interferes with the business of making art.³⁴ Indeed, he becomes indistinguishable from the *musard*, whose inattention, and casual, unfocused outlook is censured elsewhere in the *Physiologie* as being a nuisance for artist acquaintances.³⁵ Such incomprehending intrusiveness was sufficiently prevalent to justify an article in *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes*, ironically titled 'L'ami des artistes'.³⁶ When we find the *flâneur* in the museum, it turns out to be an alternative, inferior form of observer, one who is doubly compromised, for this is a 'badaud étranger' ('foreign gawper').³⁷

When the *flâneur* is compared to poets and artists, this is not because of any creative equivalence, but rather, like 'petits clerks d'avoués' ('solicitor's junior clerk'), because they all have considerable physical stamina and sturdy, well-exercised legs.³⁸ However, once again, this comparison cuts against the idea that the artist was intimately related to the *flâneur*, for this is merely a shared physical attribute. What is more, artists have acquired this trait precisely because they neglect their art, leaving unfinished paintings behind in their studios, while they prefer to saunter around the streets of Paris.³⁹ In another respect, there is a mismatch between *flânerie* and high culture or art, since, according to Huart, no poet yet worthy of the task of singing praises of this particular form of social and cultural activity has made poetry out of

³¹ 'Le flâneur à Paris', pp. 104-5.

³² 'Le flâneur à Paris', pp. 106-7.

³³ *Physiologie du flâneur*, p. 16.

³⁴ *Physiologie du flâneur*, p. 118.

³⁵ *Physiologie du flâneur*, pp. 35-6.

³⁶ Francis Wey, 'L'Ami des artistes', *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes. Encyclopédie morale du dix-neuvième siècle publiée par Léon Curmer*, 2 vols (Omnibus: Paris, 2003), vol. 1, pp. 333-46; Gavarni's portrait of this type appears on p. 332.

³⁷ *Physiologie du flâneur*, pp. 42-3.

³⁸ *Physiologie du flâneur*, p. 55.

³⁹ *Physiologie du flâneur*, p. 126.

the topic.⁴⁰

Finally, we re-encounter the ‘flâneur artiste’. This is a ‘flâneur solitaire’ who, in sedentary mode, sprawls on two or more seats in the Tuileries gardens in spring-time, chuckling to himself at the ‘ridicules’ he has seen through his lorgnette. As in the formula coined by Balzac, he makes of *flânerie* an art, albeit a decidedly solipsistic one.⁴¹

Like most texts on the subject, Auguste de Lacroix’s essay ‘Le flâneur’ in *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes* tries to capture his protagonist’s identity by summarising a remarkable breadth of interests, and in so doing ends up creating an ensemble which is inherently contradictory.⁴² In part this follows from the primary identification of the *flâneur* as an omnipresent observer of Parisian life; yet, if nothing escapes his attention, he functions as no more than an unresponsive witness. While Lacroix makes no attempt to focus the analysis around a single purpose, as in Baudelaire’s characterisation of the painter of modern life, there are nonetheless quite strong parallels between the two texts.

For Lacroix, the *flâneur* is a chameleon: ‘The *flâneur* is an essentially complex being, he has no particular taste, he has all tastes; he understands everything, he is capable of experiencing all passions, explain all oddities and has an excuse ready for any weakness’. However, when he goes on to applaud his ‘necessarily malleable nature’, and the fact that he has, ‘an artist’s constitution’,⁴³ this seems to refer to his versatile appetite, capable of dealing with every facet of life as it flows by him; while this is certainly a compliment, it is not a claim that the *flâneur* is an artist. When his attention is turned towards to the arts, he behaves like ‘un roi constitutionnel’ (a constitutional king) – that is, his taste is eclectic and conciliatory:

‘He is dilettante, painter, poet, antiquary, bibliophile; he appreciates as a connoisseur an opera by Meyerbeer, a painting by Ingres, an ode by Hugo; he savours a fine edition by Elzévir, frequents actors, and falls upon grisettes. He is willing to admire Mademoiselle Rachel and has tender feelings for Odry. You will meet him everywhere, on the promenades, at the Bouffes, at concerts, at sermons, at the Funambules, in the salons, at the guinguette, on the boulevard de Gand and in the rue de la Grande-Truanderie. He stands before the windows of Susse, takes up his station before Notre-Dame and by the display of a secondhand bookseller in turn’.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ *Physiologie du flâneur*, p. 82.

⁴¹ *Physiologie du flâneur*, p. 105.

⁴² Auguste de Lacroix, ‘Le flâneur’, *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes*, 9 vols (L. Curmer: Paris, 1841-42), vol. 3, pp. 65-72.

⁴³ ‘Le flâneur est un être essentiellement complexe, il n’a pas de goût particulier, il a tous les goûts; il comprend tout, il est susceptible d’éprouver toutes les passions, explique tous les travers et a toujours une excuse prête pour toutes les faiblesses’; ‘nature nécessairement malléable ... une organisation d’artiste’ (Lacroix, ‘Le flâneur’, p. 67).

⁴⁴ ‘Il est *dilettante*, peintre, poète, antiquaire, bibliophile; il déguste en connoisseur un opéra de Mayerber [sic], un tableau d’Ingres, une ode de Hugo; il flaire l’Elzévir, hante les baladins et court sus à la grisette. Il a des admirations pour mademoiselle Rachel et des tendresses pour Odry. Vous le rencontrez partout, dans les promenades, aux Bouffes, aux concerts, au sermon, aux Funambules, dans les salons, à la guinguette, au boulevard de Gand et dans la rue de la Grande-Truanderie. Il pose devant les carreaux de Susse, stationne tour à tour au pied de Notre-Dame et près de l’étalage d’un

The implication here is that the *flâneur* is consistently indiscriminating. In Lacroix's account, it is more in the matter of urban observation that he comes into his own as a mythic all-seeing, all-knowing spectator, for whom Paris has no mysteries, no barriers:

'Paris belongs to the *flâneur* by right of conquest and by right of birth. Each day he traverses it in every sense, inspecting its depths and notes in his memory the most obscure corners. He sees everything by himself, and ceaselessly walks Paris with his hare's ears and lynx's eyes. Nothing escapes his attention, he knows each day's news and tomorrow's happenings in their merest detail'.⁴⁵

Despite his urban ubiquity, and the need to know everything that is going on, Lacroix is unequivocal in locating the *flâneur* within the world of literature:

'But the elite of *flânerie* belongs above all to literature. Here, names crowd under my pen. *Flânerie* is the distinctive characteristic of the true man of letters. In this species, talent only exists as a consequence; the instinct of *flânerie* is the primary cause. Such that we can say, with a slight variation, *littérateurs* *because flâneurs*. To say *although* would be an absurdity borne out by experience. Would you be able to understand a *littérateur*, that is to say a man making his trade principally from depicting the customs and passions, who was not intensely driven by a secret inclination to observe, to compare, to analyse, to see with his own eyes, to surprise, as one says, nature in the act'.⁴⁶

The ambiguity surrounding the word 'peindre' – the writer as word painter, rather than as faithful witness to the process of observation leading to the making of art by a painter - is another parallel to Baudelaire's essay.

This seems a fairly unequivocal alignment of the *flâneur* with the literary translation of Parisian life and its distinctions and foibles. Yet this convergence was not without its risks, as in the story of the poet who neglected his job and his poetry because he could not resist prolonging his dawdling on the boulevard; indeed, since his employer

bouquiniste' (*ibid.*, p. 67). The paper and stationery shop of Susse frères was at number 7-8, in the Passage des Panoramas.

⁴⁵ 'Paris appartient au flâneur par droit de conquête et par droit de naissance. Chaque jour il le parcourt dans tous les sens, en scrute les profondeurs et marque, dans sa mémoire, les recoins les plus obscurs. Il voit tout par lui-même, et promène incessamment dans Paris ses oreilles de lièvre et ses yeux de lynx. Il n'ignore rien de ce qui s'y passe, il connaît, dans ses moindres détails, la nouvelle du jour, l'événement de la veille' (*ibid.*, p. ?). On this theme see Richard D.E. Burton, 'The Unseen seer, or Proteus in the city: aspects of a nineteenth-century Parisian myth', *French Studies*, 42, Jan. 1988, pp. 50-68.

⁴⁶ 'Mais c'est surtout la littérature qui possède l'élite de la flânerie. Les noms ici se pressent sous ma plume. La flânerie est le caractère distinctif du véritable homme de lettres. ... Le talent n'existe, dans l'espèce, que comme conséquence; l'instinct de la flânerie est la cause première. C'est le cas de dire, avec une légère variante: littérateurs *parce que* flâneurs. Le *quoique* serait une absurdité démontrée par l'expérience. Comprendriez-vous un littérateur, c'est-à-dire un homme faisant métier de peindre principalement les mœurs et les passions, qui ne serait pas vivement sollicité par un secret penchant à observer, à comparer, à analyser, à voir par ses yeux, à surprendre, comme on dit, la nature sur le fait?' (Lacroix, 'Le flâneur', p. 69).

had only given him a job so as to provide a platform for his poetic writing, this was a kind of cautionary tale, rather than a celebration of the creative potential of *flânerie*. In so far as this final example comes at the close of the essay, it stands as a compelling illustration of the fundamental mismatch between *flâneurs*, *flânerie* and artistic production.⁴⁷

Aestheticisation

A final manoeuvre by means of which the *flâneur* has been aligned with art is through the concept of aestheticisation. The notion of viewing the city through expectations and preoccupations rooted in aesthetic terms has in turn been inseparable from the promotion of innovative modernist cultural practice.⁴⁸ In this way, the *flâneur* is elevated to a privileged status as someone who, while appearing to go with the urban flow, in fact is at heart committed to forging an outlook which is against the grain. In this context, aestheticisation is usually characterised as a two-sided phenomenon. On the one hand, the received idea that *flâneurs* have close links with art and artists has been used to accentuate the claim that aestheticisation is a primary feature of *flânerie*. Several writers have reinforced this proposition. It underlies Rémy G. Saisselin's account of the *flâneur* and his voyeuristic approach to commodities.⁴⁹ Christopher Prendergast argues that the 'logical terminus of literary *flânerie*, [is] the construction of the city as aesthetic object', as if the *flâneur* was the agent of a relentless process of cultural transformation.⁵⁰ Mary Gluck used the category of the avant-garde *flâneur* oriented towards Realism in opposition to a popular variant which had its roots in Romantic bohemianism, adapting a term inextricably tied up with cultural modernity to the indigenous Parisian *flâneur*.⁵¹ In these terms, aestheticisation is a means to rescue the *flâneur* from accusations of vulgarisation. By picking up on clumsiness as a recurrent feature of *flâneurs'* conduct (or rather of those who fail to achieve this status) during the July Monarchy, Pauline de Tholozany draws attention to the way the *flâneur's* superior powers of observation are essentially a myth. Nonetheless, while I agree with Tholozany about the relative fragility of many accounts of the history of the *flâneur* in so far as they are based on a very limited set of literary texts rather than a more substantive historical analysis, I would argue that one could also understand the way that *flâneurs'* behaviour is represented as leading them into perilous situations is testimony to a non-utilitarian way of seeing. While this may not be precisely equivalent to the kinds of attention usually focused on art in different

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 69. Chapter 27, 'Le flâneur', of Jules Janin's *Un hiver à Paris* (Paris, [1843] 1846), reiterates this non-alignment. Despite equating him with the figure of the poet and artist, his creative activity is always frustrated by the vicissitudes of the weather; indeed, for all Janin's apparent championing of the *flâneur*, he makes clear that his true activity is to do what he should not be doing – always busy, but elsewhere, a master of self-justifying distraction (pp. 194-5), eternally contemplative, never creative (p. 196).

⁴⁸ For all the rich amplification offered in Aimée Boutin's edited set of articles, 'Rethinking the Flâneur: flânerie and the senses', one of the primary reasons for addressing this topic was to analyse the development of modernity in the crucible of the city, and to address its literary products; that is, to remain faithful to a traditional reading of the *flâneur's* raison d'être (*Dix-neuf* special issue, vol. 16, no. 2, 2012, 'Rethinking the Flâneur: flânerie and the senses', pp. 125, 129).

⁴⁹ Rémy G. Saisselin, 'Paris and the aesthetics of the flâneur', in *Bricobracomania. The Bourgeois and the Bibelot* (Thames & Hudson: London, 1985), pp. 17-30.

⁵⁰ *Writing the City. Paris and the Nineteenth Century* (Blackwell: Oxford, 1992), p. 4.

⁵¹ Mary Gluck, 'The flâneur and the aesthetic appropriation of urban culture in mid-19th-century Paris', *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 20, no. 5, 2003, pp. 53-80; this text is very close to the same author's chapter on the *flâneur* *Popular Bohemia. Modernism and Urban Culture in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Harvard, 2005).

forms, it nevertheless accords with an idea of the *flâneur* as an essentially otherworldly being, somehow at one remove from the tangible flux of urban life.⁵²

On the other hand, making aestheticisation an essential characteristic of *flâneurs'* outlook has the effect of depoliticising both the way in which they observe, and their relation to the world in which they wander. In so far as the *flâneur's* perceptions are preponderantly attuned to aesthetic appearances, this sharpens the sense that we are witnessing a mode of alienated viewing, as in the encounter with commodities displayed in *passages*. Emphasising the way that the *flâneur* enthuses over the superficial glitter and allure of shops' displays, as if this was their prime purpose, has the effect of obscuring matters of value, labour, and socio-economic hierarchy.

This reading derives, of course, from Benjamin. Although Benjamin claims the *passages* as the *flâneur's* natural home, and therefore gestures towards the Restoration and the July Monarchy, his research was weighted towards understanding Baudelaire's writing as a sublime symbol of modern Paris, that is, the Paris of the Second Empire. The *flâneur* as observer of the *passages* and their wares is an antecedent to the consumers who populated the expanded world of commerce which boomed after the mid-nineteenth century. In her pioneering article on the *flâneur*, Elizabeth Wilson had written of the way in which aestheticisation is equivalent to depoliticisation (which she regarded as a problem prevalent in the 1980s as much as in earlier forms of modern writing).⁵³ For Gluck, who primarily deals with the later nineteenth century, the *flâneur* is associated with 'a certain kind of fluid, aestheticised sensibility that implies the abdication of political, moral or cognitive control over the world'.⁵⁴ However, the accusation that the aestheticisation of urban experience necessarily involves detachment from matters of politics ignores the fact that public discourse on art in France had always been inseparable from consciousness of its political significance. Even the propensity to see art as a refuge from unpalatable social realities was a choice made as an alternative to more explicitly engaged arguments in favour of art's political nature.

There is not space here to explore these arguments fully, but by way of a conclusion, I will suggest why the characterisation of the *flâneur* as an essentially depoliticised phenomenon and paradigm of 'alienated viewing' in the *passages* needs to be challenged. The examples I will use to make this case come from the Restoration. Interestingly, but revealingly, it is this period which saw the rise of the *passages*, the social-commercial spaces which Benjamin identified as the 'home' of the *flâneur*. Yet there has been no proper study of the currency of the *flâneur* during this period (Benjamin's sources for his *Convolute* on the *flâneur* contain no more than a handful from the Restoration).⁵⁵

⁵² Pauline de Tholozany, 'Chronicles of Clumsiness: Hyperopic Flâneurs and Myopic Bourgeois in the Streets of Nineteenth-Century Paris', *Dix-neuf*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2012, pp. 162-80.

⁵³ Elizabeth Wilson, 'The Invisible Flâneur', *New Left Review*, 1/191, January-February 1992, pp. 90-110

⁵⁴ Mary Gluck, 'The flâneur and the aesthetic appropriation of urban culture in mid-19th-century Paris', *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 20, no. 5, 2003, p. 53 [53-80]. The argument is repeated in Gluck's *Popular Bohemia. Modernism and Urban Culture in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Harvard, 2005).

⁵⁵ Of the XX paragraphs, only X% are from before 1830.

Firstly, contemporaries recognised that the entrepreneurs who established or refurbished *passages* employed the trappings and codes of classical architecture and painted allegory in order to raise the status of these new, rival venues. Observers were in no doubt about the explicit aesthetic prestige of these architectural spaces. They recognised the finely tuned adaptation of sophisticated design and luxurious materials. They also were perfectly capable of assessing the commercial efficacy of the displays. While the pleasure of perusing new *passages* might seem complicit in their commercial function, reviews are consistently both empirical, in listing contents and their proprietors and staff, and also at times sceptical. Indeed, as in the case of the journal *La Pandore*, such commentaries are premised on providing a critical review of Parisian life and news, across a broad spectrum which could include anything apart from political; in this way, apparently trivial incidents are recounted as a means to signal injustice and institutionlised venality. Moreover, claims to represent *flâneurs'* experience of viewing the *passages'* contents as being monopolised by dazed delectation need to be counterbalanced by properly researched awareness of their contents as this developed over time. To this extent, recent characterisations of *flâneurs* as gullible dupes of the ruses of commercial inveiglement and which cast them as premonitory victims of Guy Debord's 'société du spectacle',⁵⁶ ignore the worldly, streetwise outlook which the evidence of flâneurial journalism illustrates in abundance.

Secondly, the kinds of commentary on the *passages* which we find in the press during the Restoration make clear that it was possible, one might say inevitable, that the existence and use of the *passages*, and also their relation to Parisian public spaces in general, be explained and judged in political terms. During the Restoration, the assertion underpinning oppositional or dissident journalism was that those public spaces which had been synonymous with protest and the forging of a new political culture during the Revolution had been interfered with, if not smothered, by official repression (certainly in terms of press censorship, as well as surveillance by police and the visibility of an ongoing military presence). In these conditions, opposition commentators turned their attention to other spaces, where Parisians might hope to step away from such irksome interference. Publicly displayed art was a useful channel for displaced political commentary.

One of the distinctive features of the Restoration art world is that we increasingly find attention being given to alternatives to the Salon - churches, dealers' premises, sales, ad hoc exhibitions, private collections, museums, studios.⁵⁷ Faced with this heterogeneous array of artistic activity, Art, it was commonly argued by critics of the status quo, was out of place: 'Paris will soon be no more than a museum, and one will find the arts everywhere but where they should be'.⁵⁸ This was not just a matter of enviable superabundance – as if Paris's artistic professions were so productive that the city was overflowing with their creations. Rather, it signalled a loss of decorum, a kind of indiscriminating incontinence. To that extent, such excess was a symptom of a social and cultural malaise.

⁵⁶ Michael Marrinan, *Romantic Paris. Histories of a Cultural Landscape 1800-1850* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 280.

⁵⁷ See Marie-Claude Chaudonneret, *L'Etat et les Artistes: de la Restauration à la Monarchie de Juillet (1815-1833)* (Flammarion: Paris, 1999).

⁵⁸ 'Paris ne sera bientôt qu'un musée, et l'on trouvera les arts partout ailleurs qu'ils ne devraient être' (*Annales françaises*, vol. 6, no. 2, 1820, pp. 61-2.)

Indicative of this is to find a ‘Revue des passages de Paris’ in, of all places, the *Journal des artistes* in 1827, a journal edited by Charles Farcy outspoken in its promotion of a Davidian traditionalist academicism. Whereas the Passage du Caire fared badly – it had no columns, no sculpture, no mirrors, no gas lights etc.: ‘Its excessive simplicity recalls all the humility of the first enterprises of this kind... a narrow, dirty street, covered with a glass roof which, in many places, lets in rain or snow’ - the Passage de l’Opéra was in a different league: ‘To see these interior constructions and the luxury which the wealth of speculators has lavished on them, one might doubt their purpose; one would rather believe oneself to be in the palace of a prince than in the home of commerce and industry’.⁵⁹ Critical attention has been displaced from the scrutiny of official artistic manifestations onto the questionable appropriation of the vocabulary of high cultural paraphernalia. And comments were, indeed, critical, when attention focused on the specific details and character of the architecture and decoration:

‘Despite so many claims to our praise, all these *passages*, considered in terms of art, are only feebly worthy of note. None offers a truly monumental character in its ensemble, and one can see that this lack has been tried to be compensated for by a mass of accessories more suited to charm the eyes than to satisfy the spirit.’⁶⁰

Such artistic pretentiousness was considered to be a lamentable complement to the shortcomings of the official culture of Salons and royal patronage. I have discussed elsewhere the ways in which the visual culture of the street, as in the burgeoning presence of shop signs, was perceived as taking on greater significance as a kind of alternative form of artistic expression and exhibition space in so far as official culture was in decline and artificially propped up by the state and the crown.⁶¹ That is to say, the kind of surveying of *passages* associated with forms of writing identified with the *flâneur* was inseparable from attitudes to the official control and surveillance of public space.

A final link between *flâneurs*, *passages* and politics during the Restoration can be

⁵⁹ ‘Son excessive simplicité rappelle encore toute l’humilité des premières qu’entreprises de ce genre. ... une rue étroite et sale, couverte d’un vitrage qui, dans beaucoup d’endroits, donne un très libre accès à la pluie ou à la neige’; ‘A voir ces constructions intérieures et le luxe que la richesse des spéculateurs y a prodigués, on pourrait douter de leur destination; on se croirait plutôt dans le palais d’un prince que dans le séjour du commerce et de l’industrie’ (R.D., ‘Revue des passages de Paris’, *Journal des artistes*, no. 10, 11 March 1827, pp. 153-4). In 1801, the passage du Caire was described as being paved with tombstones whose inscriptions and emblems were still visible: ‘Le nouveau passage du Caire, près la rue Saint-Denis, est pavé, en partie, de pierres sépulchrales, dont on n’a pas même effacé les inscriptions gothiques ni les emblèmes’ (Joseph de Girard, *Des Tombeaux, ou de l’influence des institutions funèbres sur les mœurs de Paris* (Paris, 1801), p. 184, cit. E. Fournier, *Chroniques* (1864), p. 154, cit. Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelten Schriften*, vol. 1, p. 104).

⁶⁰ ‘Malgré tant de titres à nos éloges, tous ces passages, considérés sous le rapport de l’art, ne sont que faiblement remarquable. Aucun n’offre, dans son ensemble, un caractère vraiment monumental, et l’on voit qu’on a voulu racheter ce qui pouvait manquer à cet regard, par une foule d’accessoires plus propres à charmer les yeux qu’à satisfaire l’esprit’ (R.D., ‘Revue des passages de Paris’, *Journal des artistes*, no. 10, 11 March 1827, pp. 153-4). See Werner Szambien, ‘De l’architecture à la mode’, in Werner Szambien and Simona Talenti et al., *Le Sentier Bonne-Nouvelle: de l’architecture à la mode* (Action artistique de la Ville de Paris: Paris, 1999), pp. 131-6.

⁶¹ Richard Wrigley, ‘Between the Street and the Salon: Parisian shop signs and the spaces of professionalism in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries’, *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 21, no. 1, 1998, pp. 43-67.

underlined with reference to Charles Philipon. In the first place, one of Philipon's earliest print series from 1825 has the title 'Croquis d'un flâneur'.⁶² More significantly, Philipon's publishing house, the Maison Aubert, was to be found on the corner of the Galerie Véro-Dodat.⁶³ Given Philipon's celebrity, and also that of the Galerie Véro-Dodat (created 1826) as one of the early *passages* which fashioned neoclassical architecture into a chic attribute of commercial display, it is surprising that this point has not been made before. The presence of the Maison Aubert, a veritable epicentre of critical, political journalistic culture, adjacent to the entrance Galerie Véro-Dodat suggests how we might rethink attitudes to the *passages*. Rather than treating this juxtaposition as a piquant coincidence, I would argue that it exemplifies the way in which new forms of commercial display cohabited with critical, that is, politically engaged, print culture. By the same token, rather than reading prints such as that which forms a vignette on the cover of the *Physiologie du flâneur* as merely an illustration of idle windowshopping, we should connect it to interest in the polemical imagery which poured out of the Maison Aubert's presses – until censorship intervened. Another version of this print from 1831 by Traviès includes the figure of a worker addressing the viewer: 'you have to admit the head of government looks pretty funny'.⁶⁴ An affiche for the Maison Aubert produced between July 1832 and December 1834 makes a similar point using a different visual vocabulary.⁶⁵ Framed by a coiffeur and a café at the west entrance to the Galerie Véro-Dodat, the *Charivari* leads a dance of stacks of coins topped with *bonnets de la liberté*. In the window of the Maison Aubert we see the hallmark prints of *poires*, Philipon's satirical alter ego for Louis-Philippe, the constitutional monarch who had betrayed his political promises. Apart from anything else, these examples encourage us to reconsider how far the imagery of contemporary prints might constitute a visual correlative to the *flâneur's* gaze, that is, a gaze which was fully conscious of the contested political environment in which urban promenaders experienced the *passages*.

⁶² Charles Philipon, 'Croquis d'un flâneur', 6 plates, [S.l.] : [s.n.], [1825], drawn by Philipon, hand-coloured lithographs by Langlumé (Bibliothèque Nationale de France: Richelieu, Estampes et photographie, DC- 179 (A) Pet Fol). See also Victoria & Albert Museum, London, 'T'auras de belles Panaches'; 'Y's font des bosses là dedans', 'Croquis d'un flâneur' (Prints & Drawings Study Room, level C, case MB2E, shelf SH96, box O3C).

⁶³ 'In July 1832 the firm moved from its small boutique in the middle of the Passage Véro-Dodat to larger premises on the corner of the passage and the rue de Bouloi' (David S. Kerr, *Caricature and French Political Culture 1830-1848: Philipon and the Illustrated Press* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2000), p. 59).

⁶⁴ Illustrated in Judith Wechsler, *A Human Comedy: Physiognomy and caricature in 19th-century Paris* (Thames & Hudson: London, 1982), Fig. 42, p. 67. For another account of the commercial and political significance of the passages, see Ralph Kingston, 'Capitalism in the Streets. Paris Shopkeepers, *Passages Couverts*, and the Production of the Early Nineteenth-Century City, *Radical History Review*, Issue 114 (Fall 2012), pp. 39-65. I am grateful to Richard Wittman for drawing my attention to this.

⁶⁵ Discussed in Johann Friedrich Geist, *Arcades: the history of a building type* (MIT Press: Cambridge, MA., 1980), p. ??; and James B. Cuno, 'Charles Philipon and La Maison Aubert: the business, politics and public of caricature in Paris 1820-1840', PhD Harvard 1985, Fig. 145.