

Deborah Duffield.

Research Practice Essay.

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The Death of the Flâneur?

This essay investigates theories surrounding my current research and practice considering the potential of the flâneur/artist as an observer of modern life. Part One examines the role of flâneur from 19th century to present day, considering its different interpretations and contemporary mutations. Part Two looks at the 2007 Hayward Exhibition, 'The Painting of Modern Life', and my own practice, considering the dominant theories surrounding photo-derived paintings and roles of the artist as a contemporary flâneur representing social existence.

Part One: The flâneur.

He has an aim more lofty than that of a mere flâneur.¹ He is looking for that quality you must allow me to call 'modernity'; He makes it his business to extract from fashion whatever element it may contain of poetry within history to distil the eternal from the transitory...by 'modernity' I mean the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable. Charles Baudelaire, 1863.²

In 19th century Paris, the poet and art critic Charles Baudelaire developed his own interpretation of the flâneur as a person who walks the streets, having a key role in understanding the city as both observer and participant. He challenged the artist to become a 'botanist of the sidewalk' and draw attention to the new experiential possibilities of space, time and sociality.³ It is through 'the psychic wanderings of the flâneur poet'⁴ that the plurality of the modern city is articulated through modern forms of subjectivity. Baudelaire's Flâneur heralded the advent of Modernity and accumulated significant understanding of the urban environment.

Paris at the time was in an era of social, cultural and economic transformation with the onset of modernization in Western Europe. The importance of aristocracy was subsiding as the industrial revolution gained momentum. Economic and political power was shifting towards the Bourgeoisie, a class characterized by ownership of capital and the means of production, and the Proletariat / working class were drafted into the factories. In the 1860s, Napoleon III appointed Baron Haussmann to 'turn Paris into a modern city full of sparkle, glitter and café life.'⁵ Many of the *arcades*⁶ and narrow streets were demolished making way for wide boulevards, merging isolated neighbourhoods, opening up new social, cultural and economic sites. 19th century journalist, Victor Fournel, in his essay, *Ce qu'on voit dans les rues de Paris*,⁷ described the world of leisure as expanding. Home life was becoming public, the street was a theatre on which the urban drama was played, with Baron Haussman its scenic designer, the play goer being the flâneur.⁸

¹ 'Flâneur', this term comes from the French noun meaning 'stroller', 'lounger', 'loafer'.

² Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*. Phaidon Press Ltd. London 1995 Ch 1, IV. P.12

³ Barry Smart, Keith Tester., (1994). *The Flâneur*. New York: Routledge. 'Digesting the Modern Diet', Ch 6, P160 He refers to Berman 1985 *All that is solid melts into air: The Experience of modernity*, Harvey 1989, *The Condition of Post modernity: An enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*.

⁴ M.E. Blanchard, 1985, *In Search of the City: Engels, Baudelaire, Rimbaud* Saratog: Anma Libri. P.89

⁵ Laurence Shafe 'Manet Modernity and Parisian life.' History-of-Art.blogspot.com

⁶ In the period from 1799 to 1855 26 arcades were erected in Paris.

⁷ Translation: That which one sees in the streets of Paris.

⁸ Gregory Shaya, 'The Flâneur, the Badaud and the Making of Mass Public in France c1860-1910', *American Historical Review* 109 (2004). PP. 18

There was an ambivalence towards Haussmanization as T.J. Clark describes in his 1985 book *The Painting of Modern Life*. Artists of this era painted both the grand perspectives of Haussman's Paris and the old Paris. Edouard Manet *Exposition Universelle 1867* is an outright satire of the city and its small enthusiasts, in comparison to Camille Pissarro's, *Avenue de l'opera, soleil, matin d'hiver 1898*, which celebrates Haussmanization.⁹



Exposition Universelle.



Avenue de l'opera, soleil, matin d'hiver.

One can also compare 19th century photographers, Charles Marville and Eugene Atget. Atget's clients belonged to the *Commission Municipale du vieux* who called for the preservation of old Paris, whilst Marville's was an official representation as he was employed by the city council to document Haussmanization.¹⁰



Marville, *Rue Soufflot, The Pantheon*, 1858-78



Atget, *Rue du maure* 1908

Victor Hugo aptly describes Paris during Haussmanization:

To wander in a kind of reverie....particularly in that kind of bastard countryside, somewhat ugly but bizarre, made up of two different natures...the end of the murmur of things divine, the beginning of the noise of humankind.¹¹ *Les Misérables*. 1861

Despite these differences it is undeniable that this change brought about a mixing of classes and public social life, a modern *spectacle*¹² for the flâneur to observe; in Gustave Caillebotte's *The*

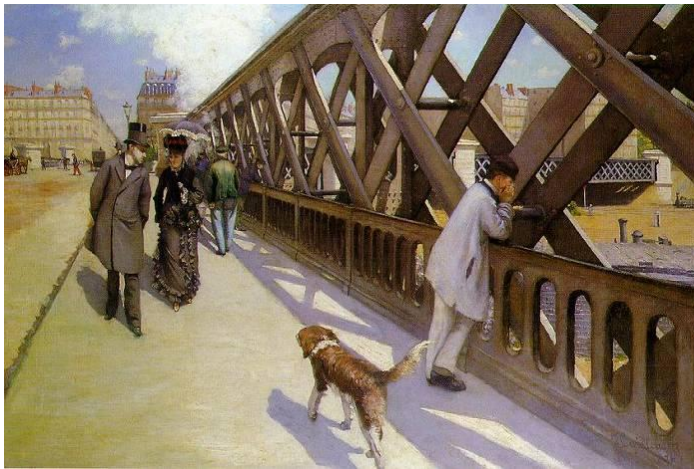
⁹ Timothy.J.Clark. (1985). *The Painting of Modern Life*. London: Thames and Hudson. Edition 1990. P 24

¹⁰ Colin Westerbeck,, Joel Meyerowitz. *Bystander, A History of Street Photography*. Thames and Hudson 1994. Ch6. P105

¹¹ T.J.Clark. (1985). *The Painting of Modern Life*. London: Thames and Hudson. Edition 1990. P.26

¹² The term *spectacle* was used by many theorists, Baudelaire, Fournel, Benjamin etc. to describe the new public social life in Paris during the rise of Modernity

Europe Bridge 1876, a flâneur strolls across the bridge and his gaze directs our gaze to a working class man leaning against the railings.



Gustave Caillebotte's *The Europe Bridge* 1876

Balzac supports Baudelaire's notion of the flâneur yet sees the necessity to distinguish between the *artiste-flâneur* and the *ordinary flâneur*. The artist cultivated a 'science of the sensual', their apparent idleness concealing intellectual activity, in contrast to the ordinary '*passive readers of urban text taken in by surface agitation*', who aspire to creativity yet fail through compulsion to act on sight without detachment.¹³ It is within this metropolis that the flâneur is at home and it is because of the metropolis that he is able to maintain detachment. How this could be achieved is discussed in Georg Simmel and Edgar Allen Poe's description of the modern city.

Simmel, in *The Metropolis of Mental Life*, describes the urban experience in sociological and psychological terms. He makes comparisons with socialization in a small town versus the metropolis, proposing that if we were to interact with everyone we meet in the metropolis in the same way as would be normal in a small town 'we would fall into an unthinkable mental condition.' The metropolis provides an opportunity for external reserve with an inner state of indifference and mutual strangeness.¹⁴ The flâneur has the ability to capture the dynamic reality of the metropolis through exploring the intersection of social circles and the broader processes of socialization and social differentiation within the metropolis.¹⁵

Edgar Allen Poe likens the city to a desert when describing Marie Roget and her anonymous routes through the town. People in the crowds have an understanding to treat each other as though alone in the desert. The flâneur's footprints alone fill the 'hollow space'¹⁶ with sequences of time spun by his imagination, unhindered by *objective* realities.¹⁷

The aim of the flâneur is to see without being seen. He has an imagined control and can make up scenarios about people, indefinite, unequivocal, producing new and unexpected connections in a serious kind of play. He is a well travelled *man*¹⁸ of leisure, not a *Badaud*¹⁹ (Gawker) distracted

¹³ Keith Tester., (1994). *The Flâneur*. New York: Routledge. 'Pricilla Parkhurst Ferguson'. Ch.2 P.29

¹⁴ Georg Simmel. *The Metropolis and Mental Life* Ch.1, P.15

¹⁵ Keith Tester., (1994). *The Flâneur*. New York: Routledge p.102.

¹⁶ Charles Baudelaire. *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*. Phaidon Press Ltd. London 1995.

¹⁷ Zygmunt Bauman, in Keith Tester. (1994). *The Flâneur*. New York: Routledge, Ch.7 P.141, 'The City and the desert.'

¹⁸ There is a distinction between a flâneur and *flâneuse* being the female flâneur. Baudelaire's masculinisation of the flâneur reflected the social constraints of the era. A women's proper place was in the home. The street was the domain of men and working class women or the unrespectable. Janet Wolff suggests the rise of the department

by sensational spectacle. He has a detached intelligence, being in, but not of, the crowd. 'An empty vessel to be filled by flânerie and his knowing of this emptiness is a precondition of the greater absorption and understanding of the urban environment, like child, wide open and unprejudiced'.²⁰

Walter Benjamin was also interested in the concept of flânerie. In *The Arcades Project* and *Charles Baudelaire: a Lyric and a Poet*, he attempts to disable Baudelaire's flâneur, proposing the *hollowness* of Baudelaire's empty vessel was a sign of alienation of the city, the individual's reason and intellect resigning itself to the relentless pressure of mercantile capitalism. When the arcades closed the flâneur was forced onto the streets where 'botanizing on the asphalt became a perilous business'.²¹ The department stores opened and intoxicated by commodity, he turned to shopping, marking the death of the flâneur. The bazaar and the streets were the last hang out for Baudelaire's flâneur.²²

The rise of Baudelaire's flâneur went hand-in-hand with the rise of Haussmannization which Benjamin sees as leaving no room for Baudelaire's flâneur. Benjamin formed his own dialectic of the flâneur as not merely a passive spectator but an urban native, a distant cousin of the savage who tracks his prey. His apparent indolence disguises his acute observation as a skillful reader of the signifiers of modernity. He sees the flâneur as capable of grasping concrete historical experience and not merely subjective lived experience.²³ Benjamin shifts the focus from flâneur as idle stroller to flâneur as detective. He fuses Baudelaire's *incognito* with the suspicious person who in the course of his explorations possesses the capacity to read the signs of the crowds in the streets.²⁴

Benjamin's *objective* flâneur restricts the artist to photojournalism. Baudelaire's flâneur cannot be objective, he is part of what he observes. His reality is not scientific fact but the more indefinable essence of the transitory elements of modern life that he extracts with an almost mystical ability.²⁵

store made it respectable for women to wander the streets alone opening up the possibility for the female *flâneuse*. (Keith Tester. (1994). *The Flâneur*. New York: Routledge. Ch.6 P.119 'The Artist and the Flaneur: Rodin, Rilke and Gwen John in Paris' essay by Janet Wolff.) Yet Pricilla Parkhurst Ferguson pointed out that window shopping did not constitute flânerie since the desire for the object has purpose and is nothing to do with the detached aimless flâneur. A flâneur must be immune from such seductions. This distinction is pertinent to the era and I suggest is not relevant in contemporary society. Despite my gender when absorbed in flânerie I neither shop nor become distracted and experience a sense of detachment. (Parkhurst Ferguson, Pricilla, Tester, K., (1994). *The Flâneur*. New York: Routledge. Ch.2 P23-39.)

¹⁹ Badaud (gawker). 'The Badaud is curious, is astonished by everything s/he sees and shows contentment or surprise by open gaping mouth.'¹⁹ Gregory Shaya proposes the badaud suggests erasure of class and gender, wedging him/herself into the crowd, revealing morbid curiosity in street culture and the experience of the urban life, providing content for sensational stories appropriate for *Le Petite Journal*¹⁹ whose readers were not the bourgeois but the masses. Gregory Shaya, *The Flaneur, the Badaud and the Making of Mass Public in France c1860-1910* American Historical Review 109 (2004). PP. 15-17

²⁰ Keith Tester, (1994). *The Flâneur*. New York: Routledge. P.7, P.139

²¹ Walter Benjamin. *Charles Baudelaire: A lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, London, New Left Books, 1973. P. 36 (Smart P161)

²² Keith Tester. (1994). *The Flâneur*. New York: Routledge. P.13-16

²³ David Frisby, in Keith Tester., (1994). *The Flâneur*. New York: Routledge. Ch 5, P.92 'The flâneur and Social Theory'

²⁴ Rob Shields, in Keith Tester. (1994). *The Flâneur*. New York: Routledge. Ch 4. P.63 'Fancy footwork: Walter Benjamin's notes on flanerie.'

²⁵ Charles Baudelaire. *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*. Phaidon Press Ltd. London 1995. P.10.

Bruce Mazlish proposes an interesting evolution of the flâneur and its potential in a Post Modern framework. He discusses *representational theory*, citing Foucault's three stages of knowledge in, *The order of Things* (1966)²⁶. Firstly, pre 18th century knowledge, being *non hierarchical resemblances*: we viewed others with sympathy and selfless concern, looking outwards to reveal our inner self.²⁷ Secondly, 19th century *presumed reality*: scientific representation with its imposed hierarchy. It is this society that produces the flâneur who displaces sympathy with cool detachment.²⁸ This transition can be seen in the development of art. Early 19th Century Realist artists, such as Courbet and Claussen, portrayed the lower classes to evoke sympathy, whereas late 19th century artists showed its exotic spectacle in the spirit of modern life as can be seen below. Thirdly, 20th century knowledge that is constructed from *individual perceptions of reality*: there can be no objectivity only discourse from different cultures and classes.



The Girl at the Gate, 1889, George Clausen.



Masked Ball at the Opera, 1873, Edouard Manet.

Representational theory suggests that the 19th century flâneur's concerns anticipate postmodernism in their desire to capture the transient, subjective elements of modern life with its multitude of possible 'realities'. Is it possible that any concept of a new postmodern flâneur is really just a 19th century flâneur dealing with globalization? The flâneur as a dialectician of 19th Century modernity has been appropriated by social and cultural theorists to explore the nature of modernity and post modernity within urban society.^{29 30}

²⁶ *The order of Things* (1966) A complex analysis of the 'epistemes' - the systems of thought and knowledge - which across time have underpinned various kinds of social scientific enquiry. It pursues the claim that different ages have different understanding of the relations between language and truth: Taken from *The great philosophers* J Stangroom, J Garvey Foulsham LTD 2005

²⁷ This aligns well with Francis Hutchinson and Adam Smith's, '*impartial spectator*' in '*The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, one can only imagine the feelings of others by conceiving how we would feel in a similar situation, the impartial spectator being the internalizer of sympathy, constructing a view of society from within. *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (TMS) edited by D.D. Raphael and A.L. Macfie (Indianapolis: 1982) pp.12-17, 82-5 for Smith's discussion, my source being: Tester, K., (1994). *The Flâneur*. New York: Routledge. P. 43-5.

²⁸ Bruce Mazlish, in Keith Tester. (1994). *The Flâneur*. New York: Routledge. Ch.3 P. 43-6, 'The Flâneur: From Spectator to Representation.'

²⁹ Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson Keith Tester. (1994). *The Flâneur*. New York: Routledge. Ch.2. P.24 'The Flâneur On and Off the Streets of Paris.'

³⁰ Keith Tester. (1994). *The Flâneur*. New York: Routledge. P.1

However, Morawski discusses some differences between the 19th century and the postmodern flâneur. Firstly, the 19th Century flâneur, restricted by a world of established canons with specific codes and conventions, was unable to experience the succession of creative possibilities available to contemporary artists. The 21st Century flâneur's postmodern mode of thinking, feeling and behaving makes him attentive to profound shifts of values offering opportunity for self corrective beneficial dissent. Secondly, the absence of aristocratic superiority has broken the bond between the intellectual class and the ruling system widening the boundaries of eligibility for flânerie.³¹ Thirdly, technology provides opportunity for global communication and advanced transportation, a freedom to roam the world not confined to one city; this is the age of mass culture.

Another difference is that of consumption and its effect on the flâneur. For Benjamin, the 19th Century flâneur was seduced by the department store. The 21st Century flâneur is seduced by mass culture and media.

Flânerie as a form of perception...preserved in the characteristic fungibility of people and things in mass society, and in the merely imaginary gratification provided by advertising, illustrated journals, fashion and sex magazines, all of which go by the flâneur's principle of 'look but don't touch'. Benjamin³²

Buck-Morss is accepting of the undeniable existence of consumer society and proposes that the 19th C. flâneur reflects the signs of consumption, whilst the contemporary consumer of signs embraces and expresses flânerie as a necessary mode of being-in-the-world. This perceptive attitude embodies and saturates modern existence.³³

The success of flânerie appears to rely on the degree to which one should assimilate or resist civilizational transformations whilst continuing to align with Baudelaire in his desire to extract from fashion the poetry that distils the eternal from the transitory. Zygmunt Bauman considers the one-sidedness of sociocultural processes based on domination of unrestricted freedom, as well as the arbitrary fascination with masses of heterogeneous products, as problematic. However, 'A flâneur is exceptionally sensitive to the symptoms of present day cultural mutations.... Squeezing out of the reality whatever is worth emphasizing as a specimen of significant transformations of the public scene.'³⁴ Umberto Eco argues that when practicing flânerie one has to examine collected data and uncover its 'unwisdom'. By this means he reaffirms the special position of the intellectual who must realize it is futile to propose an ultimate truth binding every man.³⁵

If one is able to refrain from shopping is it not still possible to be a flâneur and observe the commodity as a characteristic of modern life? Does the flâneur have to die or can he enter into a new discourse? Is Benjamin's opinion a product of the newness of the commodity? After all, it is an integral aspect of human nature to subjectively observe others, no matter the era; it's just a

³¹ Stefan Morawski, in Keith Tester. (1994). *The Flâneur*. New York: Routledge Ch.9. P.183 'The Hopeless Game of Flânerie.'

³² Walter Benjamin. *Passagen-Werk*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Herman Schweppenhauser, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1982.

³³ Susan Buck-Morss, (1986), *The Flâneur the Sandwichman and the Whore: The Politics of Loitering*. Ch 3 P.37.

³⁴ Stefan Morawski, in Keith Tester. (1994). *The Flâneur*. New York: Routledge Ch.9. P.187 'The Hopeless Game of Flânerie.'

³⁵ Stefan Morawski, in Keith Tester. (1994). *The Flâneur*. New York: Routledge Ch.9. P.181-198 'The Hopeless Game of Flânerie.'

question of how conscious or unconscious one is of the degree to which one is drawn in by infectious media and their associated products.

..no residues persist to escape from the seduction by simulacra. Flânerie does exist if one does not surrender to the Disneyland...the more the identification with simulacra, the more imperious the glamorous spectacle of its goods and its vacuum which sucks everything in, the less chance of flânerie. Morawski³⁶

Part Two

In the late 1980s and early '90s I lived on Brick Lane E1 London. Like Victor Hugo's description of the edges of Paris, it lies on the edge of the CBD, a run down poverty stricken place surrounded by tenement blocks. It served the working classes with cheap, yet authentic, Indian eateries, sweat shops, a 24 hour bagel bakery with the best smoked salmon cream cheese bagels London had to offer, dispersed between early British versions of the \$2 shop. On the weekends the neighbourhood was filled with markets.

It's a weekend in January 2010, minus 7, a grey day in London. People are wrapped in layers of clothing, adding to the sense of being insulated in their own thoughts. I return to Brick lane as an observer. It has become a 'cool' place attracting a greater mélange of cultures. The working classes have been joined by the Bourgeois, the art collector and the trendy. There are contemporary art galleries, the derelict Spitalfields market has become a handmade goods market where up and coming designers present their wares. Columbia Street Flower Market is flanked with shops selling antiques and gifts in the old terraced state houses. The rail arches towards Liverpool Street support the influx of Eastern Europeans selling second hand electrical goods and tools.

My current investigations find me in the role of flâneur, interested in the everyday, people in the street lost in thought, a state of contemplation suspended in time out of their immediate environment. Voyeuristically I photograph them, unaware as I covertly take shots from the hip.

I liken the photographs I use as preparatory material for my paintings to that of Matt Weber and Henri Cartier-Bresson, the latter being described as an *antigraphic* photographer as he prefers grey days producing mid tones and subjects that are not dramatic with no specific story to tell. The focus is approximate, the person may be blurred as importance of capturing the moment overrides sharpness.

³⁶ Stefan Morawski, in Keith Tester. (1994). *The Flâneur*. New York: Routledge Ch.9. P.183 'The Hopeless Game of Flanerie.'



Duffield, Purple Pants



Henri Cartier Bresson, La Vilette Paris 1929



Matt Weber, NYC 2010



Matt Weber, Election eve 2008

The relationship between painting and photography has been the subject of exhibitions since the advent of the camera in the 1860s. Artists such as Charles Negre painted directly onto the *calotype*³⁷ creating an *ébauche*³⁸, the result being that some detail was lost. This was considered as problematic for the development of the quality of photograph, but not so within the framework of painting at the time (1851) when the idea of creating a perfect, naturalistic copy was giving way to the immediate impression of the fleeting moment. Paul Delaroche³⁹, referred to the ‘Theory of sacrifices’ with its idea that detail should be suppressed in a painting, which Eugene

³⁷ William Henry Fox Talbot invented photography in 1839, they were small proto-cameras the size of a box Brownie that produced a *calotype* with a negative that could make multiple prints.

³⁸ An *ébauche* is a preliminary sketch/under painting allowing the artist to quickly record information.

³⁹ Eugene Delaroche was not so radical in his practice as his theory producing highly polished works in an academic manner. He was more famous for having said in 1839, in response to the invention of photography: ‘From this moment painting is dead’.

Delacroix suggests allows for certain resting places for the eye.⁴⁰ Baudelaire, who was scathing of photography, was an ardent supporter of this kind of rendering. He wanted a mode of painting that did not compete with photography but fuse it with the imagination of fine art, as photography on its own lacked the potential for imaginative invention and 'extraction of the eternal immutable from ever changing modernity.'⁴¹

In 2007 the Hayward Gallery in New York held an exhibition, 'The Painter and Modern Life,' curated by Ralph Rugoff, its antecedent being the 1964 exhibition, 'The Painter and the Photograph' curated by Van Deren Coke.⁴² Rugoff's title was taken not only from T.J.Clark's *The Painting of Modern Life*, but Baudelaire's essay, *The Painter of Modern Life*, inspired by Baudelaire's challenge that artists forego traditional themes and capture modernity. In the exhibition catalogue Rugoff suggests 'the tense relationship between painting and photography slackened as painting withdrew into abstraction (a comment on modernity in its own right), and photography has become the dominant means of modern imaging'⁴³ The exhibition picks up modern life a century after Baudelaire's essay when 1960s artists such as Gerhard Richter, Richard Artschwager, Andy Warhol and Malcolm Morley began making paintings that translated images taken from archives, snapshots, adverts and newspaper photographs.

Hal Foster sees a dominant consideration in the Hayward show as that of *spectorial distance*, a term that relates to Baudelaire's detachment of the flâneur, the distance offering a removal from the spectacle. Foster suggests the works in the show manage to mix the effects of distance and proximity, detachment and insistence, through a precise complication of paint and photography.⁴⁴ Spectorial distance is a complex issue involving many aspects of the creative process and its relationship with perceived reality, temporality, subject distance and abstraction. I will consider how the conventions used by artists in this exhibition and my own works consider the key concepts of reality, temporality, subject distance and abstraction to provide a useful means of 'updating' the flâneur.

Reality.

Rugoff believes the selected artists provoke us to reconsider how photography is seen as the only means of accurately documenting the world, their use of photographic imagery not being used as a preparatory sketch but a questioning of how we forge our views of reality. The artists deconstruct traditional understandings of *realism*, emphasizing the activity and consequences of translation from one medium to the other, creating an intricate mixing of pictorial signs and blurring the line between both media and their ascribed values. This fuses the immediacy of a

⁴⁰ Gustave Le Gray a student of Delaroche adapted this theory to photography and the imperfection of the process leaving gaps for the eye. Westerbeck, Colin, Meyerowitz, Joel. *Bystander, A History of Street Photography*. Thames and Hudson 1994. P. 71.

⁴¹ Charles Baudelaire. *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays 1863*. Phaidon Press Ltd. London 1995 Ch 1, IV. P.12. Baudelaire asserted that traditional art with its grand themes of myth and history was inadequate for the new dynamic complications of modern life he proposed a shift towards individual autonomy and the every day activities of urban life especially of middle class leisure.

⁴² 'The Painter and the Photograph', covered more than a century from Eugene Delacroix to Warhol, it was seen as a revelation that so many painters surreptitiously relied on photographs as aids to composition, tonality and realism. Company, D. Frieze Magazine Issue 12 January 2008

⁴³ Hal Fosters review of 'The Painting of Modern Life', exhibition at the Hayward Gallery in New York, 2007. London Review of Books Vol. 29 No. 21 P.16. www.lrb.co.uk

⁴⁴ Hal Fosters review of 'The Painting of Modern Life', exhibition at the Hayward Gallery in New York, 2007. London Review of Books Vol. 29 No. 21 P.17. www.lrb.co.uk

captured moment with accumulated memory of an ancient medium.⁴⁵ The translation of the photographic image into paint incorporates a more complex mediation between reality and representation. This produces a resemblance to the world which is less direct and artists employ different methods to achieve this:

Richter describes his use of the photograph as a crutch to get to reality but the reality is achieved through the painting process.⁴⁶ He depicts a grief stricken Jackie Kennedy after the assassination. The white border references the newspaper it was taken from yet subverts its context by removal of the text, a delicate veil of blur offering anonymity/protection, whilst mimicking the focal depth of a photograph.⁴⁷ Richter said, 'I can make no statement about reality clearer than my own relationship to reality; and this has a great deal to do with imprecision, uncertainty and transience'⁴⁸ Which relates well to Baudelaire's Flaneur's extraction of the transitory elements of modern life.



Gerhard Richter, 'Woman with Umbrella', 1964, Oil on canvas.

In Warhol's silk screening of photographic imagery onto canvas he considers handmade versus mechanical, using repetition as a form of anaesthesia, a comment on the reality of mass production.

⁴⁵This quote was removed due to its similarity to Foster's but I can't bear to lose it!! *'The artists mix the codes of two types of realism, the photographic representation becomes absurd precisely because it has been translated into a medium where its indexical status and the corollary of truthfulness is commingled with the conventions of a competing sign system. The result denatures our reading of both media, and underscores the artificiality of how we look at realist painting and photography as faithful representations of the world.'* Rugoff, Ralph. *The Painting of Modern Life 1960 to Now*. Hayward Publishing, 2007. p.11- 16

⁴⁶ Interview with Peter Sager', in Gerhardt Richter, *The Daily Practice of Painting: Writings 1962-1993*, ed. Hans-Ulrich Obrist. Thames and Hudson, London, 1995, P.66.

⁴⁷ Hal Foster's review of *The Painting of Modern Life*, exhibition at the Hayward Gallery in New York, 2007. London Review of Books Vol. 29 No. 21 P.17. www.lrb.co.uk

⁴⁸ Gerhard Richter, *The daily practice of Painting: Writings 1962-1993*, ed. Hans-Ulrich Obrist, Thames and Hudson, London and New York, 1995, p.99



Andy Warhol, 'Orange Car Crash', 1963

Richard Hamilton paints onto an enlargement of a newspaper cutting. The magnified pixilated black dots remind us of its source whilst the pale painterly hues are reminiscent of 'touched up' photographs.



Richard Hamilton, 'Whitely Bay', 1965.

In my own work I adopt modern technology using Photoshop. The results offer interesting similarities to the calotype. The diffused detail of the calotype was a result of a limited process: a person moving was blurred, mid tones were reduced, contrast and focal points were largely uncontrolled due to the rudimentary process. My suppression of detail results from a deliberate manipulation in Photoshop, the technological advancement that I have embraced.



Petit marché à Paris, 1851/1853, Charles Negre



Petticoat Lane Market, 2010.

Martin Herbert discusses how photography typically intends to contextualize information with a specific time and place.⁴⁹ I use cropping and a foreign environment to subvert the contextual nature of the image which insistently draws into focus key aspects of the work.



Liu Xiaodong proposes that photographs offer numerous details of the objective world, whereas in paintings there are more psychological details. In his painting, as opposed to the source photograph, accentuated colours and brushwork exaggerate its expressive quality.



Liu Xiaodong Three girls watching TV. 2001



Source photo

⁴⁹ Martin Herbert in, Ralph Rugoff, *The Painting of Modern Life 1960 to Now*. Hayward, Publishing 2007, 'Rehearsing Doubt: Recent Developments in Painting After Photography'. p.42-49.

This can be seen in my work by comparing the photograph above with the painting where the detail is obscured and the hazy dreamlike veil reduces the specificity and mediates between the viewer and the context of the moment.



Fag Man

Instead of reaffirming the photograph the artists in *The Painting of Modern Life* unsettle it, opening up a representation encompassing multiple meanings, inviting us to continually renegotiate how we view images, and offering potential for new modes of expression for the contemporary flâneur.

Temporality

Temporality is a contemporaneous concern of the flâneur artist and will be considered in relation to a painting's link to a photograph, the conventions that offer an ephemeral quality to the work and the *slowness* of the painterly process.

Firstly, the temporality of these paintings is provocatively ambiguous as the photograph's relationship to a specific moment in time merges with the unfolding present of the paintings. This engages a shifting experience of time and presence, confusing the sense of first or second hand experience that gives a sense of *déjà-vu*, the sense, 'seen before', a product of our media saturated culture.⁵⁰ Secondly the de-saturation in my work offers a means of complicating temporality as a play on memory and the faded photograph. Similarly, Luc Tuymans's pallid hues and rationing of pictorial information add to a fragile sense of insubstantiality.



Tinned Peaches



Tracksuit Man.

⁵⁰ Ralph Rugoff. *The Painting of Modern Life 1960 to Now*. Hayward Publishing, 2007.p.14.



Luc Tuymans, Passenger 2001.

Thirdly, the slowness of paint worked over time can influence both the artist and the viewer. Peter Doig maintains that this slowness allows things to evolve through the making process. Xiaodong says the image is only enjoyable when it is painted slowly.⁵¹ Vija Celmins sees the photograph as an alternate subject matter, this distance giving opportunity to work slowly and explore her relationship with it.⁵² Rugoff describes the layering of glazes and myriad colours and brush strokes as being absorbed by the viewer more slowly. Painting is linked to 'slowness', this deceleration of our response allows a detachment from the fast pace of the Postmodern world of simulacra reinvesting feeling into the anaesthesia of repetition. Baudelaire's stance differs, as he favoured the rapid sketch as a means of capturing the transient moment which is understandable considering his lack of faith in the camera and the development of art at the time that embraced 'en plein air' and capturing the fleeting moment

Subject distance.

Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev discusses the portrait painted from life and from a photograph, considering the difference between the intimacy and reciprocal gaze of the model and painter versus the distance between the painter and the subject in a photograph, a second remove, a third removal being the subject depicted from behind.⁵³ This can be seen in the works of Sasnal and Doig, Eggerer and myself.

⁵¹ Ralph Rugoff. *The Painting of Modern Life 1960 to Now*. Hayward Publishing, 2007.p.139

⁵² Ralph Rugoff. *The Painting of Modern Life 1960 to Now*. Hayward Publishing, 2007.p.71

⁵³ Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev. *A Strange Alliance: The Painter and Subject*. Cit. Rugoff, Ralph. *The Painting of Modern Life 1960 to Now*. Hayward Publishing, 2007. p.32-41



Wilhelm Sasnal Girl Smoking (Anka) 2001.



Peter Doig Lapeyrouse Wall 2004



Man with Green Anorak



Thomas Eggerer, Mezzanine, 2004.

Thomas Eggerer describes the artist as having a blend of detachment, assumed control and voyeurism, not part of the situation but in a privileged position to observe it.⁵⁴ This highlights interesting comparisons to 19th century painting where the painting depicts the view point of the flâneur, people viewed from behind, commenting on the sense of being both observer and observed, as can be seen in Beraud's painting below.



On the Boulevard 1880 Jean Beraud.

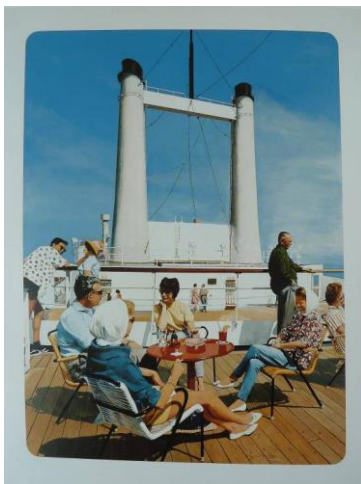
⁵⁴ Ralph Rugoff *The Painting of Modern Life 1960 to Now*. Hayward Publishing, 2007.p.156

Whilst the persuasions of the 19th and 21st Century flâneur are similar, the connotation may be different in that the 21st Century flâneur has a somewhat dysfunctional relationship with the subject as we deal with issues of surveillance/ CCTV which may result in a sinister interpretation of the works.

Abstraction.

In 'The painting of Modern life' Clark suggests that prior to Manet, representational art was that of illusionism creating the perfect likeness. However, artists such as Velázquez, Hals and Rembrandt were not concerned with such precision and there is no doubt Manet turned to them, his works being characterized by loose brush strokes, black outlines, simplification of details and suppression of transitional tones. Manet returned attention to the surface and the material quality of paint. Mallarmé had a sense that Manet's art was a turning point in culture and stated in his 1876 article 'not proclaimed by authority of dogmas yet none the less clear is that painting shall be steeped again in its cause..' heralding the beginning of Modernism.

Abstraction, with its removal from representation, offers an obviously detached spectorial distance. Yet it is interesting to consider how Art Historian Arnold Hauser and some of the artists in the Hayward Gallery show have their own take on abstraction and its alteration of spectorial distance. Hauser discusses the use of the grid system which he describes as destabilizing the unity of the image, de-individualizing its parts highlighting an abstraction of the photographic source. This creates a tension between the parallel pictorial systems of source and transformation.⁵⁵ Whilst I do not use the grid this statement aptly describes my process as I project the image, painting from right to left, maintaining an intimacy with the abstract details of the reproduction whilst introducing transformations led by my own imaginative yet purposeful invention. Morley uses the grid system and describes a strategic detachment between the image and the painting as a modernist plane of non differentiation.⁵⁶



Malcom Morley, On Deck, 1966.

Richter brings together abstract painting and photographic figuration without denying the distinction between them, by working the pigment with a squeegee, producing blur, eliminating the details. Richter selects areas to blur without the normal constraints of photographic depth of

⁵⁵ Ralph Rugoff. *The Painting of Modern Life 1960 to Now*. Hayward Publishing, 2007.p.14.

⁵⁶ Barry Schwabsky, in Rugoff, Ralph. *The Painting of Modern Life 1960 to Now*. Hayward Publishing, 2007. 'Sheer Sensation: Photographically- Based Painting and Modernism.' P..30.

field, leaving the torso of the woman with outstretched arms un-blurred, makes for an unsettling experience of visual narrative.⁵⁷



Gerhardt Richter, Motorboat, Version I. 1965.

I achieve similar results using both Photoshop's Gaussian blurring and fan brush/dry brush techniques, as can be seen in the shifts between abstraction and representation in *Black Man with Bobble Hat*. It is not to say that the sharp figures are always the focal point as the out of focus areas can be the focal point, their rendering evoking an ephemeral, contemplative state.



Black Man with Bobble Hat.

Johannes Kahrs states, 'I reproduce photographic affects in my paintings because I see the photograph as an object.'⁵⁸ Similarly, Celmins confides she is in love with the 'look' of the photograph as an alternate subject. She sees it as a 'surface' in a non image orientated way reinventing it in other terms with an abstract quality.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Kaja Silverman, in Ralph Rugoff. *The Painting of Modern Life 1960 to Now*. Hayward Publishing, 2007. 'Photography by Other Means.' P.19.

⁵⁸ Ralph Rugoff. *The Painting of Modern Life 1960 to Now*. Hayward Publishing, 2007.p.156.

⁵⁹ Ralph Rugoff.. *The Painting of Modern Life 1960 to Now*. Hayward Publishing, 2007.p.71



Explosion at Sea. Vija Celmins 1966

I have discovered a similar fascination with the photocopy as my technique has developed. *Red Bow* is an earlier work where my rudimentary technique has resulted in clogging the tooth of the canvas, whereas *Black Man* leaves no traces of brushwork as though it were a photograph printed onto canvas. There is a play between a detachment from the image focusing on surface and material qualities of paint, the dissolve and the image vainly pursuing one another.



Red Bow



Black Man with Bobble Hat.

In summary, I use both photographic, Photoshopic and painterly techniques to alter the spectral distance versus proximity, and detached versus insistent. The moment of photographing draws the viewer closer with its intimate voyeuristic technique offering a sense of being an observer of a private moment. Photoshop technique's, blur, crop, hue saturation, superimposition and scale transformation have multiple effects in shifting the distance, and pale palette plays with time/memory. All of the above can be achieved in Photoshop yet it is through painterly investigations that I experience an intimacy with the individual's state of mind and a greater distancing from the documentary event. I make subtle alterations and decisions to reduce or heighten detail of the photographic reproduction, push and pull aspects back and forth through tone, colour and shifts in sharpness, to achieve what I see as an improvement on the source photograph's ability to convey both the intimacy of the psychological moment and the distance of the viewer.

In conclusion I return to flânerie and ask the question, what is left for the flâneur? 19th century artists such as Manet, through painterly technique, transformed art from that of illusion into a reflection on the experience of modern life. Myself and the artists discussed in the 'Painting of Modern Life' have utilized modern tools, methods and theories, playing with spectatorial distance in sympathy with the concerns of flânerie. There will always be a modernity, with its noise of humankind, which by its very nature has the potential to extract whatever poetry may be found in the 'ephemeral, fugitive, the contingent.' 'Art seeks out the edge of things'⁶⁰, of understanding, and artists are dialecticians of contemporary society able to celebrate and interrogate by turns, ensuring that the role of the 'artiste-flâneur' will never be obsolete.

To be a minority in ones own time could be seen as a virtue, or a state of melancholic grace opening the vistas on the human lot. ... without the presence of flânerie the social/human condition would be crippled, the greater the triumphs of the post-modern mentality and lifestyle the louder the intellectual (artist) protest. Morawski.⁶¹

⁶⁰ T.J Clark. (2001). *Farewell to an Idea*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

⁶¹ Morawski Stefan, in Keith Tester., (1994). *The Flâneur*. New York: Routledge Ch.9. P.197. 'The Hopeless Game of Flanerie.'

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