

National College of Art and Design

Subverting the Gaze:

Visualising the Flâneuse in Photography and Cinema

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I declare that this **Critical Cultures Research Project** is all my own work and that all sources have been fully acknowledged.

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Introduction

The central focus of this thesis is the flâneuse. The text 'Flâneuse' by Lauren Elkin (2016) underpins my inspiration for this dissertation. I will attempt to define the flâneuse whilst addressing the importance of this figure. I will explore how this figure is visualised through the work of Dora Maar, Agnès Varda and Sophie Calle, as I feel they work in a way that is emblematic of the flâneuse. This thesis aims to develop a critical awareness of this figure whilst highlighting her relevance. My thesis is composed of three themed chapters. The first chapter analyses the etymology of the flâneuse, linked to the flâneur. It also evaluates the interconnection between the flâneuse and the camera. The second chapter assesses how the gaze of the flâneuse is self-referent in the films 'Cléo from 5 to 7' (1961) and 'The Gleaners and I' (2000) directed by Agnès Varda. The final chapter examines how artist Sophie Calle distorts the gaze of the flâneur and subverts the concept of the flâneuse. Ultimately, I hope to contribute to the ongoing debate concerning the significance of the flâneuse, arguing that she is a subject that should be reclaimed from literature and visual art.

There is a small body of literature that is primarily concerned with the flâneuse as most of the existing discourse focuses on the flâneur. French poet Charles Baudelaire (2010) provides a romanticised overview of the figure of the flâneur but fails to acknowledge a female equivalent. The German writer Walter Benjamin (1999) grounds his writings on Baudelaire's archetypal flâneur. What is known about the flâneuse is largely based on conjecture rather than on knowledge due to her ambiguity. Our image of the flâneuse is built from these speculations. The term flâneuse is poorly defined, thus leaving the term open to fresh insights. One of the main debates around the flâneuse has been whether she exists. The writer Janet Wolff (1985) and art historian Griselda Pollock (1988) have rejected the concept of the flâneuse in texts around female expression in the city of modernity. Despite their dismissal of the flâneuse, both critics cogently explain why the flâneuse is a controversial figure. In her book 'Streetwalking the Metropolis' (2003) the writer Deborah L. Parsons questions if the flâneuse exists, if so, assessing the different forms she might assume. Much of the texts on the flâneur fail to recognise his connection to the flâneuse. In her book 'Wanderlust: A History of Walking', Rebecca Solnit (2002) discusses the wanderings of the flâneur in nineteenth century Paris but does not acknowledge his female counterpart, the flâneuse. She does however give

a clear insight into the etymology of the word flâneur and describes how flânerie can quickly escalate into voyeurism.

The link between the camera and the flâneur/ flâneuse has not been widely acknowledged by academia, however, there are one or two exceptions. Susan Sontag (2010) briefly addresses the flâneur as a photographer in her book 'On Photography'. Commenting on Sontag's observations, the theorist Anne Friedberg (1993) explores this concept further by coupling it with theories that deal with the gendered implications of spectatorship in postmodern cinema.

To date, writer Lauren Elkin (2016) has offered the most comprehensive analysis of the flâneuse. Drawing on an extensive range of sources, as well as integrating autobiographical elements into the text, she effectively overcomes the challenge of writing about this enigmatic character. By writing about her experiences in the city, she implements the idea of flâneuse's relevance in the twenty-first century. In the same vein, Leslie Kern in her text 'Feminist City' (2020) notes the ways one might reimagine the flâneuse. It is only since the work of Elkin that the essence of the flâneuse has become a matter of interest.

To establish if the flâneuse is a figure whose essential character can be redefined, I will reference texts relating to psychogeography, feminist geography, critical theory, and visual culture. From there I hope to advance a hypothesis that will provide a basis for my argument. The first step in this process will be to search for texts that discuss the flâneur. I will then attempt to identify the flâneuse by extracting the similarities and differences between the flâneur and flâneuse. In investigating the relationship between the flâneuse and the flâneur, I will contemplate the agency of their gazes. A limitation of my enquiry is the elusive and amorphous nature of the flâneur/ flâneuse due to the lack of knowledge about them. This thesis proposes on developing a more definite image of the flâneuse despite her ambiguous nature by questioning the validity of past arguments. The research has highlighted to me the gaps that exist in the literature. As a result, this research carried out will extract information about the flâneuse from texts and passages on the flâneur.

Chapter One- On the Fringes of Modernity

The Emergence of the Flâneuse

The flâneur is a male urban observer who walks the city streets. The word 'flâneur' derives from the French verb 'flâner' which translates: "To wander" (Elkin, 2016, p. 3). He is a literary figure, synonymous with the literature of modernity. French poet, Charles Baudelaire recognized and characterised the flâneur in his essay 'The Painter of Modern Life', in which he labels the illustrator Constantin Guys as being a flâneur (1863/2010, p. 5). Baudelaire describes how the illustrations of Guys capture the essence of modern life at the time. The flâneur can be interpreted as being an artist who promotes the visual urban spectacle of modern life. The spectatorship of this observing character is queried as to whether he views with a passionate or impassive gaze. According to Baudelaire, the flâneur is "a passionate lover of crowds and incognitos..." (1863/2010, p. 5). From this description, it appears that the flâneur observes with an impassioned eye. He blends seamlessly in and out of the crowd. However, the aimlessness of his wanderings suggests the contrary is true. For instance, Elizabeth Wilson describes the flâneur as "...a detached observer" (1992, p. 54). Wilson instantiates the impassive gaze of the flâneur. Despite conflicting arguments about the agency of the gaze of the flâneur, he can be said to be a wanderer, who was both a part of and detached from nineteenth century Paris.

As the architecture of Paris evolved throughout the nineteenth century, the flâneur was obliged to adapt to the changing nature of the city and discover new methods of exploration. He roamed the streets, boulevards, and arcades of the city (Wilson, 1992, p. 54). The arcades were commercial passages that were covered in glass and steel where passers-by could gaze into the shop windows and admire the displays. Walter Benjamin had a theory the Parisian arcades were the primary location that the flâneur used to frequent. He describes the flâneur as being an "...observer of the marketplace" (1940/1999, p.426). The arcades were architectural features of old Paris before the construction of the boulevards designed by Baron Haussman (Wilson, 1992, p.5). Both offered the flâneur routes to discover the city. Lauren Elkin discusses the impact of this architectural evolution on the flâneur's urban strolling:

When Haussman started slicing his bright boulevards through the dark uneven crusts of houses like knives through a city of cindered chèvre, the flâneur wandered those too, taking in the urban spectacle (2016, p. 3)

This illustrates how the expansive boulevards replaced the narrow architecture of the arcades. The flâneur was adaptable to the ephemeral nature of the city during this period.

This architectural innovation had the potential to hold a threat to his existence but instead, he adjusted to this modern environment.

The centrality of the experiences of men in nineteenth century literature has led to a lack of understanding around the *flâneuse*, making the figure invisible or visible through a sexualised incarnation that tends to discredit the nature of her existence (Pollock, 1988, p. 66). As a result, the *flâneuse* gets overshadowed by the *flâneur*. When the *flâneuse* is discussed, she is scrutinised as being a streetwalker in nineteenth-century Paris. In the poem 'To a (Female) Passer-by', Baudelaire writes about a mysterious woman, presumably a prostitute (Elkin, 2016, p. 9.). On the exterior, this comparison would seem to sexualise the nineteenth century female walker. To elaborate on this point, the *flâneur* asserts his dominance as the principal urban, observing subject. However, the prostitute may well have been a *flâneuse*, as Baudelaire himself viewed the city of Paris as a metaphor for the prostitute. The writer Elizabeth Wilson explains this idea: "...Baudelaire saw the essential condition of Parisian city life as a kind of universal prostitution created by consumerism..." (1992, p. 55). This shows how whilst the literature of modernity is dominated by men's experiences, they did not completely discredit the female observer. The *flâneuse* has always existed but she was not visually evident the same way the *flâneur* was. Therefore, her existence is tentative. Despite the reluctance in accepting the *flâneuse*'s existence, that is not to say that she did not exist in the nineteenth century but rather she was difficult to identify.

The *flâneuse* has been interpreted as being a woman who walks in the city, observes its visualities and creatively responds to these observations. She is and in so doing the female counterpart of the *flâneur*. Despite the fact Baudelaire was accredited with inventing the concept of the *flâneur*, the words '*flâneur*' and '*flâneuse*' existed before he wrote his famous essay 'The Painter of Modern Life' (1863/ 2010). The term *flâneuse* is yet to be formally defined and therefore it is easier to identify the *flâneuse* in literary and visual culture. The term has been used colloquially reinforcing its appropriation in the context of artists and writers. The etymology of the *flâneuse* is explained by Lauren Elkin: "The usage (slang of course) began in 1840 and peaked in the 1920s, but continues today..." (2016, p. 7). This informal use of the word has demystified how one might imagine a *flâneuse*. Whilst the chances of *flâneuserie* were greatly reduced in the nineteenth century, women were breaking rigid social conventions. To create a cohesive synthesis of the

flâneuse, one must address alternative modes of female observation. The writer George Sand is a prime example of a nineteenth-century of female flâneur. She cross-dressed as a man, strolling through the streets of Paris, and from this was able to forge an identity as a flâneuse (Wilson, 1992, p. 52). By concealing her identity as a woman, she was able to perform the attributes of the flâneur, but underneath the exterior, she was a flâneuse. Thus, the flâneuse is a figure who is difficult to visualise as she hides her true identity, as she is an artist, who sees the city as a subject matter to capture.

Looking through the Female Lens

Photography was crucial to the evolution of the flâneuse. The French artist Maar sees the city through the perspective of a flâneuse as she is fascinated by its stark realities (Amao et al. 2019, p. 11). The flâneuse is aware of the spectacle of the street. Maar's early work illuminates her talent for documenting the different facets of the city through photography. She photographed the poor suburb 'La Zone' on the outskirts of Paris before travelling to London and Barcelona to photograph the inhabitants of those cities (Hessel, 2020). In 1929, there was an economic crash in Europe which hit France and Spain in particular. Maar felt compelled to document the urban blight that she witnessed (Amao et al, 2019, p. 54). From this period, she created an expansive body of work that serves as visual records of the realities of urban life in Europe. As a result, her work is a social commentary of the European cities during this period. The camera brought these figures to life and has reinforced the flâneuse's existence in visual culture. The critical thinker Susan Sontag writes: "The photographer is an armed version of the solitary walker..." (1977, p. 55). Photography rendered visible an invisible figure. The camera was instrumental in framing the ways that women interacted with the city, as it is an apparatus that enables the flâneuse to conduct her observations, realising ephemeral, urban moments. It was first envisaged as a device of the flâneur, but this idea can be extended to consider it as a device of the flâneuse also. This demonstrates the agency that photography gives to the observations of the flâneur, and by extension the flâneuse. It equips them with the camera which is a tool that allows them to record transient moments from the street.



Fig. 1 – Dora Maar, 'Untitled', 1934, Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Dora Maar is a flâneuse behind the camera whereas her female subjects can be interpreted as being flâneuses in front of the camera. As mentioned previously, she photographs the inhabitants of the city who are ignored. The gelatine silver print 'Untitled' (1934), illustrated in figure one depicts a ragpicker on the streets in London. At first glance, the woman appears to be well dressed in a fur hat and coat. However, her face is forlorn, and she is clinging onto scraps of fabric. Nonetheless, Maar's photograph confers a sense of dignity and humanity in this woman. The gaze of the ragpicker is very direct and is consciously aware of the photographer's presence. By photographing her overlooked subjects Maar is reinforcing her place as

a flâneuse as well as identifying how these people see through a similar gaze. Just as the flâneur and the flâneuse were marginal, so were the subjects of their gaze. Urban spectatorship is defined by figures such as the flâneur, flâneuse, prostitute and ragpicker. They were all marginal figures but were connected by their shared experience of being on the outskirts of society (Parsons, p. 19). This photograph illustrates how the flâneuse assumes a variety of guises surveying the street and its occupants. However, a negative impact of this comparison is how the existence of the flâneuse is not viewed as equal to the flâneur. The flâneur and the flâneuse were marginal figures drawn to the essence of their condition which they saw reflected into the city's materiality. They observed life from the outside, looking in. Elizabeth Wilson comments on the flâneur's marginality: "He caught the fleeting fragmentary quality of modern urban life and as a rootless outsider, he also identified with all the marginals that urban society produced" (1992, p. 54). Wilson illustrates the flâneuse's viewpoint as a bystander of the urban experience. There is interchangeability in the roles between all peripheral perspectives.



Fig. 2. Dora Maar, Mannequin in Window, 1935, Gelatin silver print, MoMa, New York.

The nineteenth century brought with it a new age of consumerism and the flâneur and flâneuse were creatures of this new culture. They were both drawn to the spectacle of shopping. Writer Deborah Parsons states that the 'flâneur/ flâneuse' are loiterers, consumers as well as observers of the crowd, according to the nineteenth-century Encyclopaedia Larousse (2003, p. 17). The flâneur and flâneuse would enjoy the delights of window shopping. In the twentieth century, the same idea applies. As illustrated in Dora Maar's photograph 'Mannequin in the Window' (1935) in figure two, the shop window captivated the gaze of the observer on the street. It charges the eye of the consumer with a curated display. The window and the arcades are similar in this respect, they offer visual spectacle from the inside to the passing flâneur or flâneuse on the outside. Furthermore, the marginal perspective of the flâneuse fed into this method of observation. Besides

Hausmann's boulevards, there was another new architectural development in Paris, the department store. The arcades may have been the domain of Benjamin's flâneur but the department store was the territory of the flâneuse (Friedberg, 1994, pp. 34-36). Friedberg articulates the gendered spaces and how they influenced the characteristics of the flâneur and flâneuse. A modern commercial, architectural feature such as the department store incorporated the gaze of the flâneuse, denoting her marginality. Maar's observations are included in this new commercial vision that swept through European cities in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Chapter Two- From Object to Subject

The Evolution of the Flâneuse



Fig. 3- Still from the film 'Cléo from 5 to 7' (1962) Directed by Agnes Varda, Independent.co.uk, online.

There is a relationship between the embodied flâneuse and the performative flâneuse. The film *Cléo from 5 to 7* (1962) is a prime example of the performative flâneuse wandering the city streets of the city. It was directed by the French, New Wave filmmaker Agnès Varda and the storyline charts Cléo, a pop singer, walking around Paris for two hours from five to seven in the evening while awaiting the results of a biopsy (Elkin, 2016, p. 219). The flâneuse is presented both in front of and behind the camera. As the flâneur was created as a literary type, it can be said that along with the flâneuse, they are fictional figures (Solnit, 2002, p. 198). Notwithstanding, both terms can be appropriated to relabel walkers who execute the attributes of flânerie and flâneuserie in reality (Elkin, 2016). The character Cléo walks preoccupiedly through the city, emulating the essence of the flâneuse however she is a fictional character who exists only in the context of the film. Varda as the

director operates the camera to enhance our vision of this flâneuse and traces her progress through the city of Paris. In this respect, Varda is herself the epitome of a cinematic flâneuse. Elkin indicates this idea: “It is powerful to see the evolution of the flâneuse in front of the camera, but every step Cléo takes reminds us of the one behind the camera” (2016, p. 221). This demonstrates the idea that Varda is a flâneuse, thus recognising the interplay between the flâneuse on either side of the camera. Cléo as flâneuse exists solely in the film whereas, Varda transforms the concept of the flâneuse from abstraction to reality. In engaging with the fabric of the city, she pays homage to the flâneuse through her filmic eye.

Besides the association between the flâneuse in front of and behind the camera, there is another doubling of visions that occurs in the film; the reflection of the self. As mentioned previously, there is a strong relationship between the flâneuse and consumerism. The act of shopping is an omnipresent feature in this film, as there are several shots of Cléo walking past shops on the street, gazing into shop windows as well as a scene where she is seen buying a hat (Cléo from 5 to 7, 1962). As she walks through the Parisian streets she pauses at every opportunity to look at her image in the mirrors and the reflections of shop windows. These reflective surfaces become the second character in the film (Elkin, 2016, p. 222). While she is looking at her reflection, it is looking back at her. In the film’s first chapter, there is a scene where Cléo gazes into a mirror, admiring her looks. Her subconscious voice narrates this moment saying: “As long as I’m beautiful, I’m more alive than others” (Cléo from 5 to 7, 1962). She increasingly becomes aware of her mortality as the reflective surfaces become a reminder of the fragility of life. In continuously looking at her image, Cléo is drawn to the shop window which allures the gaze of the consumer. The presence of the shop window is evocative of the photograph ‘Mannequin in Window’ (1935) by Dora Maar (fig. 2). Both examples indicate the intrinsic relationship between the flâneuse and the shop window. Anne Friedberg explains this phenomenon: “The shop window succeeded the mirror as a site of identity construction, and then gradually the shop window was displaced by the cinema screen” (1993, p.66). Friedberg explains how the shop window was a transformative urban element that enabled flâneuserie. The mirror image was reflected into the shop window which is then projected onto the cinema screen through Varda capturing Cléo’s observations. In this way, the gaze of the consumer is translocated into the perspective of the viewer.

Cléo from 5 to 7 (1962) explores the relationship between the gazes of the flâneur and the flâneuse. One of the characteristics of the flâneur is how he directs his gaze at the flâneuse. At the start of the film, Cléo is presented in a way that illuminates her aesthetic qualities as she is an attractive woman. The still image (fig. 2) illustrates how she walks the street as a flâneuse and of bystanders. In addition to this, it is reminiscent of the many different types of observation that are enveloped in the figure of Cléo. These bystanders stare at her in admiration or with envy over her good looks. In particular, the males walking or standing in the street look at Cléo in a sexualised way. The still image (fig. 2) encapsulates this idea as the male streetwalker pivots to look back at Cléo by looking at her in a way that encompasses the male gaze. This man can be seen to be a version of the flâneur. Cléo contrasts herself with the seemingly invisible flâneuse of the nineteenth century by being hyper visualised in the nineteen sixties. Feminist Geographer Leslie Kern explains this notion: "...Women can never fully escape into invisibility because their gender marks them as objects of the male gaze" (2020, p. 24). This demonstrates how the flâneur's gaze is directed at the flâneuse. He looks at her through a sexualised perspective, presenting the idea that flâneur looks through the male gaze. The flâneur looks at the flâneuse as an object, not as a subject. Moreover, Cléo subverts the idea of the invisible flâneuse, if anything this film renders the flâneuse visible.

The film is sharply attuned to the visual spectacle of Paris in the nineteen sixties. Her two-hour walk around Paris becomes much more than a leisurely promenade, instead, it becomes a voyage of discovery, a journey that allows her to carve her own identity. The role of the flâneuse is to subvert the gaze of the flâneur. Varda as a filmmaker observes through the female gaze in Cléo from 5 to 7 (1962). The film develops the observations of the flâneuse from still into moving images, fluctuating from observer to subject and back. There is a flipping of perspectives between the people who observe Cléo and her observation of them. The flâneuse becomes real in this film in contrast to the flâneur who exists as a type in literature. As previously mentioned, there are a few shots that depict men and women alike watching Cléo as she walks down the Parisian streets. Cléo's observations of Parisian street life becomes more prominent as the film progresses (Cléo from 5 to 7, 1962). In saying this the flâneuse (Cléo) subverts this gaze that is directed at her, offering an alternative perspective. Reclaiming the flâneuse in visual culture is paramount to asserting her existence. Varda turns Cléo from being a figure who is

watched to a figure who watches. For instance: “Varda explained that the emotional thrust of the film is about Cléo’s journey from image to a subject, the pivot from being “the object of look’ to ‘the subject who looks” (Elkin, 2016, p. 220). This exemplifies how she turns her into an independent observer. The status of Cléo as a flâneuse is confirmed as the film promotes the notion of the flâneuserie in the city.

The Flâneuse and the Glâneuse



Fig. 4- Agnès Varda, *The Gleaners and I*, 2000, (still); image, SFMoMa, online.

There is a strong connection between gleaning and flâneuserie. In her documentary film ‘The Gleaners and I’ (2000), Agnès Varda explores the different aspects of gleaning through her perspective as the flâneuse behind the camera (fig. 2). She investigates this concept by talking to farmers, psychoanalysts, artists and members of the travelling community in urban and rural contexts. The film is almost like a video diary or travelogue of her experiences of meeting gleaners in different parts of France. Gleaning is a term that derives from the French verb ‘glâner’ meaning the act of collecting leftover grain from the harvest. The glâneur/ glâneuse are the people who glean. The film’s title in French is ‘Les Glâneurs et La Glâneuse’ which translates to ‘The gleaners and the female gleaner’ (The Gleaners and I,

2000). It is through this translation that it becomes apparent that Varda sees herself as a gleaner. Her presence in the film is a striking one, with her voice narrating exactly what she sees. Varda visits Paris, where she attends the fruit market after closing, to engage with the urban gleaners who are harvesting the remnants of the unsold produce. In addition to interviewing gleaners, Varda examines her relationship to gleaning. Lauren Elkin describes how Varda, the *flâneuse* is also a *glâneuse*: “I call her a *flâneuse*. She calls herself a *glâneuse*” (2016, p. 228). This shows the inseparable link between the two figures. The verbs ‘*glâner*’ and ‘*flâner*’ both have gendered implications depending on whether it is a male or a female conducting the activity. Varda alludes to the fact that gleaning was traditionally a process that females carried out, whereas nowadays it is an activity that both males and females conduct. While the film documents the activities of other people, the visual narrative incorporates personal touches such as her voice narrating the film. Not only does Varda narrate this film, but she includes her ideas about gleaning, as a result, the film is a memoir of Varda’s own experiences. ‘The Gleaners and I’ (2000) is a tribute to both the rural and urban gleaner and *flâneuse*. In the duality of both *glâneuse* and *flâneuse*, she observes and documents this incidental process.

The *glâneuse* or gleaner, the ragpicker and the *flâneuse* are marginal figures, observing and collecting on the fringes of the urban environment. The film, ‘The Gleaners and I’ (2000) is evocative of Dora Maar’s photograph of the ragpicker (fig. 1). Both Varda and Maar can be redefined as *flâneuses* as they both were concerned with the peripheral aspects of the urban environment. They documented the lives of people living on the margins of urban society who ‘glean’ the discards. As a *flâneuse*, Varda has a strong interest in people living on the edges of society in the context of capitalism. The gleaner is the counterpart of the ragpicker as these two characters salvage what others throw away. They existed simultaneously; the ragpicker in the city and the gleaner in the countryside. It is through this film that Varda comes to express gleaning as an act that is not simply about picking up rubbish or its environmental impacts but instead it is an activity closely linked to psychogeography. For instance: “...The point at which psychology and geography collide, a means of exploring the behavioural impact of urban place” (Coverley, 2010, p. 10). This illustrates how activities like gleaning happen in response to the urban environment. The city is built on an economy of consumerism which the *flâneuse*, gleaner and ragpicker all rely on. The gleaner and the ragpicker are concerned with

leftover materials. Therefore, Varda as a director challenges and subverts the official representation of the city by exploring the lives of these marginal characters. An interdependent relationship forms between the flâneuse, gleaner and ragpicker. The way that Varda explores gleaning in the city reasserts her personification of the flâneuse using her camera as her apparatus for flâneuserie.

Chapter Three- Voyeuristic Flâneuserie

The Transgressive Flâneuse



Fig. 5- Sophie Calle, 'Suite Vénitienne', 1980, photograph, AnOther Magazine, online.

The French artist Sophie Calle incarnates the flâneuse as an insubordinate walker. The philosopher, Frédéric Gros postulated that walking in the city can be a subversive activity (2015, p. 177). This idea is echoed in Calle's work 'Suite Vénitienne' (1980) (fig. 5). The work involved following a man (whom she calls Henri B.) around Venice whom she had previously been following in Paris. The title of Calle's work reflects the purpose of her trip, as the word 'suite' derives from the French verb 'suivre' which translates as 'to follow' in English (Elkin, 2016, p. 142). To expand on Gros's point, stalking is a subversive activity that involves the act of waking. The artist, Sophie Calle documents her stalking by recording his movements with her specialised Leica camera and Squinter lens which takes photographs at an angle (Elkin, 2016, p. 132). This specialised mechanism in the camera enabled her to photograph him without drawing attention to herself, alluding to ideas about the flâneuse's visibility. As she meandered through the narrow Venetian streets, Calle lost track of Henri. B, so not all of the photographs were of her intended victim. As a

result, 'Suite Vénitienne' (1980) is a series of diary extracts and photographs formulated into a book format (Weintraub et al, 2009, p. 46). The black and white photographs (fig.5) methodically narrate Calle's passage through the city of Venice. Her stalking can be interpreted as a perverse form of urban walking, lending itself to flâneuserie. The writer Rebecca Solnit explains how urban walking can turn more sinister:

"Urban walking has always been a shadier business, easily turning into soliciting, cruising, promenading, shopping, rioting, protesting, skulking, loitering, and other activities like that" (2002, p. 74)

This illustrates how flâneuserie can quickly escalate from being an innocent act of female expression to becoming something altogether more problematic. The intentional use of the camera in this situation indicates Calle's awareness of the delinquent quality of the work. 'Suite Vénitienne' (1980) reinterprets the flâneuse as a troublesome observer, recorder and scrutineer. By stalking a man and documenting it, she creates a heightened awareness of the gendered implications of walking. In so doing Calle transitions the quintessential flâneuse into a stalker thus pushing the seemingly benign nature of the flâneuse to the limit.

Appropriating the Gaze of the Flâneur

As aforementioned, the flâneur directs his sexualised gaze at the flâneuse. However, the flâneuse does not simply walk and observe the city's visualities, she also subverts this sexualised gaze that is often directed at her, offering different modes of observation instead. Sophie Calle distorts the concept of the flâneuse, pushing the flâneuse's attributes to the limit in 'Suite Vénitienne' (1980) (fig. 5). The flâneuse has come to represent the liberated woman in the city, seemingly free to walk and observe whatever she likes, however, the question remains; what does it mean for her to follow a man? After all, there is a common theme of men stalking women in the literature of modernity (Elkin, 2016, pp. 141-142). This trend of men stalking and women getting stalked sends a clear message regarding women's safety. By assuming the guise of a flâneuse, Calle draws and averts attention to herself at the same time. By following Henri. B around Venice, Calle skews this idea by taking on the position of the stalker. The flâneur and flâneuse are the archetypal figures that distinguish male and female walkers. She breaks the method of differentiation between male and female walkers by straddling somewhere between being a flâneur and flâneuse. Her gender is a key consideration in this work, how she subverts the link between males and stalking by becoming a female stalker. The artist

incorporates the sexualised gaze of the flâneur through the guise of the flâneuse.

The sexualised gaze of the flâneur is addressed by Pollock:

“The gaze of the flâneur articulates and produces a masculine sexuality which the modern sexual economy enjoys the freedom to look appraise and possess, is a deed or in fantasy” (1988, p. 79)

This demonstrates the masculinist sexuality that is incorporated into the flâneur’s gaze, how Calle’s method of observing is charged through this gaze. She reverses the roles between the flâneur and flâneuse. Calle appropriates the liberated gaze of the flâneur, therefore articulating the male gaze whilst also simultaneously subverting this gaze. She appropriates the male gaze and in so doing, challenges it.

In ‘Suite Vénitienne’ (1980), not only does the artist assume the guise of the flâneuse incorporated with the gaze of the flâneur but she can be described as a disobedient pedestrian. In comparison to Dora Maar in chapter and Agnès Varda’s representation of the flâneuse in chapters one and two, Sophie Calle’s version of the character is far more menacing. Both Maar and Varda are examples of the idealistic flâneuse, whereas Calle presents the flâneuse as a transgressive figure.

Unchallenged by convention, she goes where women rarely go, she walks through Venice challenging the preconceived idea of how women should behave in public space (Kern, 2020, p. 25). Calle disrupts tidy notions of space by crossing spatial and mental boundaries. Stalking is an act that does not neatly fit into the concept of flâneuserie, therefore an alternative model might prove more fitting. Pedestrianism is a concept that is closely connected to flâneuserie but it does not seek to differentiate on the basis of sex. The writer Marsha Maskimmon describes the concept of the ‘user’ of the city which does not invert the figure of the flâneur into the flâneuse but instead promotes a version of pedestrianism. Maskimmon’s pedestrian is not exclusionary figure in terms of their gender, they can be male or female, instead, this figure is concerned with “the condition of knowing space through embodiment” (1997, p. 21). As a pedestrian, Calle is navigating urban space, challenging conventions but is not restricted in terms of her gender. It is problematic to simply describe Calles guise in ‘Suit Vénitienne’ (1980) as a flâneuse, as the work has many layers. There are aspects of the work that allude to elements of flâneuserie such as the artist’s position as a female walker. In addition to this Calle embodies the gaze of the flâneur. Sophie Calle instead uncomfortably questions the characteristics of the flâneuse and presents herself as the disobedient pedestrian. It is far too

simplistic to define Calle as a flâneur or flâneuse for that matter, she is not simply walking but she is stalking, something altogether different.

'Suite Vénitienne' (1980) (fig. 5) appears to be an artwork that is full of passion and intrigue, however, Calle's motives for producing this work contradict this speculation. As previously mentioned, the gaze of the flâneur is passionately passive, he aimlessly wanders but through a gaze that is charged with a sexual economy. By incorporating the flâneur's gaze, Calle's recorded observations and journey through Venice are concurrently passionate as they are passive. According to Elkin, Calle pursued this voyeuristic escapade in response to her boredom however she describes how her journey through the streets does not completely lack passion (2016, pp. 131-141). By stalking Henri B. she is performing a passionately perverse act, she acts like a bitter lover who was rejected, never letting go. For instance: "Calle embarked on a thirteen-day escapade that mimicked a romantic melodrama but was devoid of its most essential ingredient- passion" (Weintraub, 2009, p. 79). This demonstrates how there are conflicting viewpoints as to Calle's sentiments for creating the artwork. Stalking is an activity that typically is an act of passion but as 'Suite Vénitienne' (1980) (fig. 5) is a performance enacted for the sake of art (and boredom) it lacks the passion and obsession of a real-life stalker. She stalks for the two weeks but does not continuously pursue Henri. B therefore, this work is complex but comparatively does not equate to the passion of such a crime.



Fig. 6- Sophie Calle, 'La Filature', 1981, Diptych: one color photograph, 28 black and white photographs and text panels, Hamburger Kunsthalle, online.

After completing the work 'Suite Vénitienne' (1980), artist Sophie Calle would continue to explore wandering in the city and observation. In 1981 she created the work 'La Filature' (fig. 6)) translating to 'The Shadow' in English (Weintraub et al, 2009, p. 81). This is a series of photographs of Calle walking around Paris, as she is being followed by a private detective who was hired by her mother. This investigation was instigated by Calle herself. "The detective produced a written chronicle of Calle's day which she exhibited along with her diary account" (Weintraub et al, 2009, p.81). In comparing 'La Filature' (1981) (fig. 6) with 'Suite Vénitienne' (1980) there is a continuous thread of interest in the act of following Calle's work. The roles are

reversed in 'La Filature', as Calle is taking on the position of Henri B., being the person who gets followed. Furthermore, the person doing the observing is flipped, as Calle goes from being the one who observes in 'Suite Vénitienne' (1980) to the one being observed in 'La Filature' (1981). 'Suite Vénitienne' (1980) is a project that is about control. It is clear that Calle enjoys the level of control that she feels she has over Henri. B in 'Suite Vénitienne' (1980). For instance: "...Sometimes she relinquishes control; sometimes she grabs hold of it" (Elkin, 2016, p. 146). This illustrates how both projects grapple with the concept of power in terms of observation, as Calle plays with this idea in these works. However, the main difference between the two works is the fact that Sophie Calle is aware that she is being followed, unlike Henri B. She is the personification of the disobedient flâneuse as she manipulates the differentiated roles between male and female, flâneur and flâneuse.

Conclusion

In this thesis I have defined the flâneuse and contextualised her within the context of visual culture. As well as that I have discussed her existence and how her identity she is for the most part, less problematic than her male counterpart, the flâneur. This thesis has demonstrated the importance of readdressing this figure and it highlights the ways that women have made work inspired by the cities that they visit and inhabit. This thesis has confirmed the findings of Elkin (2016) which found that the flâneuse is a figure that should be reclaimed rather than ignored. As well as that, my work has identified the manner in which the flâneur observes with the male gaze. The role of the flâneuse is to subvert this gaze, offering instead a more positive way of seeing, as expressed through the production of photographs and films.

When conducting research for this essay, several problems occurred. The scope of this study was restricted in terms of the literature on this topic. The available literature was repetitive as there were very few new perspectives being drawn about the flâneuse. Another problem encountered when conducting research is the issue around labelling Maar, Varda and Calle as flâneuses as they may not have agreed with the concept. However, it has offered a deeper insight into their work and allows me to appreciate the challenges that these women may have faced whilst making such interesting and complex works. Furthermore, these issues challenged me to create a new understanding of the flâneuse.

Despite its exploratory nature, this study offers some insight into the ways one might envisage and appropriate the flâneuse. This work contributes to existing knowledge of gender in the city by providing examples that help one to imagine the ways that women have chronicled their experiences in the city. This paper has provided deeper insight into the concept of the flâneuse and how she has been brought to life by Dora Maar, Agnès Varda and Sophie Calle. Their work in film and photography reasserted the connection between the flâneuse and the camera. Reclaiming the flâneuse allows one to reframe the ways that women have documented their observations in this environment and address the implications that their gender may have on their work and therefore their way of seeing the world around them. It is their way of looking and method of depicting women that facilitates their construction of the flâneuse.

The question of the flâneuse is an intriguing one that could be explored in further research. This essay contributes to this field of study by assessing some of

the knowledge that already exists around this topic. Although this study focuses on appropriating the flâneuse, the findings may well have a bearing on other areas such as feminist geography and feminist art theory. Further work needs to be done to validate the existence and diverse character of the flâneuse. Such work might re-evaluate how other women artists can be re-defined under this term, offering a means of connecting artists working in different media. This work has broadened my knowledge of the flâneur and the flâneuse and has helped me to understand the complexities of their histories and interpretations by others. Overall this essay has sought to question the validity of the concept of the flâneuse as well as redefining her characterisation.

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