chapter fifteen

Underground, overground, wandering free:

flânerie reimagined in print, on screen and on record

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**Following the Flâneur: Representations of the Metropolis**

This chapter provides a broad historical overview of how scholars and artists have chosen to interact with and represent the city via a range of creative expressive forms. It does this by examining the lasting impact and continuing relevance of the flâneur, the figure so “associated with urban wandering and observing.”[[1]](#endnote-1) An attempt is made to highlight how traits associated with the flâneur have been co-opted by those working in literature, film, visual art and music, who both think and create “urbanistically.”[[2]](#endnote-2) The output of these practitioners tries to convey the amalgam of sensations and experiences encountered in urban environments, a task that is rarely as straightforward as it appears. As Howell reminds us, there are pronounced but often unacknowledged epistemological difficulties tied to any attempt (artistic or otherwise) to understand and describe the sense and meaning of a city: “we are forced to note that the problem of ‘knowing’ the city is not restricted to fictional treatments, but bleeds unconfined between scientific and literary representations of the city.”[[3]](#endnote-3) Indeed, Howell argues that this wish “to know” the city, or indeed any place, is essentially futile and reductive, furthermore, it should be viewed with suspicion, and as being a by-product of rationalist attempts to quell unease about the modern city through seeking to givereassurance that “the city can, through description, be known and, by knowledge, be controlled.”[[4]](#endnote-4)

**Engaging with the Flâneur. And the Flâneuse**

The flâneur*,* a figure commonly associated with ideas relating to modernity has, over the last twenty years or so, become something of a divining rod for many in the humanities and social sciences, particularly among sociologists, such as Jenks and Tester,[[5]](#endnote-5) and cultural geographers, including Howell, Pinder, and Shields,[[6]](#endnote-6) all of whom have been interested in developing new ways of examining aspects of contemporary urban life. Engagement with the flâneur has informed research on mediated depictions of post-modernity,[[7]](#endnote-7) cyberflânerie[[8]](#endnote-8) and gendered dimensions relating to urban strolling and observing.[[9]](#endnote-9)

This relatively recent engagement by the academy with the flâneur occurred after a lengthy hiatus, following Walter Benjamin’s pioneering and celebrated studies on the subject in the 1930s. Benjamin’s work on the flâneur focussed on Paris in the mid-nineteenth century and, more specifically still, on the output and activities of the poet, Charles Baudelaire. In this research, and in his writings on his home city of Berlin, Benjamin was involved in a sustained search for the signs, metaphors and illusions of modernity. Following Benjamin’s work there then followed a lengthy period of abeyance in critical study of the flâneur. This occurred despite the fact that, during this interregnum, a diverse range of visual, literary and musical artists began to provide examples of urban representation which owed a clear debt to aspects associated with the flâneur*,* and which the remainder of this chapter will reflect upon.

Prone by its very nature to wandering, the flâneur is difficult to pin down. There is no set definition for who, or even indeed what, the flâneur is. It has however long been agreed that attached to this figure is “something of the quality of oral tradition and bizarre urban myth,”[[10]](#endnote-10) and that in an identity parade of urban archetypes one would have little difficulty detecting him from the following description:

The spectator and depicter of modern life, most specifically in relation to contemporary art and the sights of the city. The *flâneur* moves through space and among the people with a viscosity that both enables and privileges vision …The *flâneur* possesses a power, it walks at will, freely and seemingly without purpose, but simultaneously with an inquisitive wonder and an infinite capacity to absorb the activities of the collective – often formulated as ‘the crowd’.[[11]](#endnote-11)

This is a shadowy figure thatacquires empirical data by strolling, looking, hearing, smelling and feeling, sometimes writing up the consequent findings in the form of poetry. The flâneur is more identifiable for what he does – engaging in the activity of flânerie – than for whom he is or what he looks like. And, traditionally, the flâneur has been assumed to be male, in part because the flâneur’snatural domain, the public spaces of the city, have been historically viewed as being inviolably masculine and shaped, in part, by the direction and desire of the male gaze. Janet Wolff contends there was no role as flâneuse available to women: “they could be prostitutes, widows, lesbians or murder victims but the ‘respectable’ woman could not stroll alone in the city.”[[12]](#endnote-12) It is a view that has provoked considerable debate. For example, concerning the era in which the concept of the flâneur emerged (the term being first referenced in 1806),[[13]](#endnote-13) Elizabeth Wilson argues that contrary to Wolff’s assertion, many lone women were present in the public spaces of the cities, and that, like men, they were often out “promenading.”[[14]](#endnote-14) However, a key difference was that women nearly always undertook such activities whilst wearing some sort of disguise. Given the faceless persona often associated with the flâneur, this stance could be deemed appropriate, particularly when one considers that a key desire of Baudelaire’s was to be “away from home, and yet to find oneself at home everywhere; to see the world, to be at the centre of the world; and yet, to remain hidden from the world.”[[15]](#endnote-15)

Over time the flâneur’s gendered role has become even less stable and attention has increasingly begun to be paid to aspects of female flânerie, particularly with regard to its representation in works of popular culture, including literature − both historical literary fiction[[16]](#endnote-16) and contemporary fiction[[17]](#endnote-17)– and film. With regard to the latter, Amy Murphy puts forward the notion of the flâneusein her study of *Roman Holiday* (1953) and *Lost In Translation* (2003):

in tracing the references to the *flâneur* / *flâneuse* as found in these two films, one can begin to map a certain trajectory of contemporary gender relations in respect to urban space from the post-World War II era to the present … [and] understand the context in which the “city” itself is seen as a site for such transformations.[[18]](#endnote-18)

A consequence of the flâneur being co-opted into so many locations, scenarios and guises is an increase in the confusion and intrigue that now surrounds the figure. This is compounded by the fact that the flâneur, whether in male or female mode, can be variously presented as a person, a metaphor, or a fictional character. Increasingly, theflâneur is also portrayed as a conduit through which writers or researchers can addresses issues of *being*, including psychological impacts perceived as resulting from the effects of modernity. As Tester puts it: “*Flânerie* is the observation of the fleeting and the transitory which is the other half of modernity to the permanent and central sense of self. *Flânerie* is the *doing* ... thanks to which the *flâneur* hopes and believes he will be able to find the truth of his *being.*”[[19]](#endnote-19)

Along with Tester, a growing number of other social scientists, including Jenks, Featherstone, and Pinder,[[20]](#endnote-20) contend that flânerieis not a time or place specific activity. They argue that this oxymoronic mode of detached engagement is a malleable concept as highlighted by its re-emergence at regular intervals and in different guises. Perhaps one useful way for us to regard the notion of flânerie is, in Featherstone’s words, as “a way of reading urban texts, a methodology for uncovering the traces of social meaning that are embedded in the layered fabric of the city.”[[21]](#endnote-21) Mike Savage adopts a similar stance when arguing for the utility of flânerie as an investigative tool. Continuing this theme, he contends one possible reason for flânerie having been out of fashion for so long may have been a misinterpretation of the intentions of the author most associated with it: “Walter Benjamin’s interest in the *flâneur*… is not primarily concerned with delineating it as an actual social type which existed in specific urban historical settings, but as a theoretical, critical, counter to the idea of the mass.”[[22]](#endnote-22)

Providing strident opposing views to those presented by the likes of Jenks and Savage, Michael Bull[[23]](#endnote-23) and Janet Wolff[[24]](#endnote-24) contend that any engagement with flânerie serves little purpose besides perpetuating a generalized aestheticization of urban experience and the individual’s engagement with urban space. But it could equally be argued that to wish away a tendency for such romanticization is futile and that the main task of researchers and artists should instead be to examine how this desire has been adapted and expressed across different time periods and locations, as well as in diverse artistic representations. If this latter view is adopted, then a fuller understanding of this elliptical notion of the flâneur presents a possible platform from which to examine the impetus behind and the resilience of the urban gaze and also offers a useful starting point for any interrogation of its “taken-for-grantedness.”

As has already been alluded to, Charles Baudelaire − the bourgeois, well-connected Parisian poet who also engaged with those on the fringes of society − is widely recognized as having been an instrumental figure in representing and embodying the position of the flâneurin relation to the wider urban environment. His actions and work articulated its liminal role both in society and in space, as sociologist David Frisby was later to allude to when commenting on “the marginality of the *flâneur*’s location within the city (seeking asylum in the crowd) ... The *flâneur*’s gaze upon the city is veiled… It is the metropolis at a distance.”[[25]](#endnote-25)

In mid-nineteenth-century Paris this distance was partly facilitated by the construction of pedestrian shopping arcades, created by erecting glass roofs across inner city streets or passages. The significance of their construction was that, prior to this, it had been

impossible to stroll about everywhere in the city. Before Haussmann, wide pavements were rare; the narrow ones afforded little protection from vehicles. *Flânerie* could hardly have assumed the importance it did without the arcades… It is in this world that the *flâneur* is at home; he provides the arcade … with its chronicler and philosopher.[[26]](#endnote-26)

These arcades (*passages*) can be interpreted as being “the first international style of modern architecture [and] hence part of the lived experience of a worldwide, metropolitan generation.”[[27]](#endnote-27) Walter Benjamin believed these particular material circumstances were of such crucial importance that the flâneur was a figure that was historically specific to the arcades of mid-nineteenth-century Paris. But in much of their writing Benjamin and Baudelaire fail to distinguish between Paris and modernity*,* and indeed imply the French capital was the sole site of modernity during this time. Not only do they suggest that flânerie began with the building of the arcades, but Benjamin also insists it ended with the construction of the department stores at the end of the same century, a development that Parkhurst Ferguson similarly claims, “alters flânerie almost beyond recognition. If, as contemporaries reiterate, the arcades offer the flâneur a privileged site, they do so because the space they offer is at once public and private.”[[28]](#endnote-28)

With regard to the origins of flânerie*,* Shields, expanding on earlier work by Benjamin,[[29]](#endnote-29) observes that: “The *flâneur*, or street prowler and wanderer, is glorified in the work of Balzac and Alexandre Dumas and later in a different tone in the work of the modernists such as Aragon and Baudelaire.”[[30]](#endnote-30) Meanwhile, if a family tree of flânerie is extended beyond the confines of Gallic literature one encounters what looks to be a close relative in Thomas De Quincey’s autobiographical *Confessions of an English Opium Eater,* a book set in London and published in 1821, the year of Baudelaire’s birth.[[31]](#endnote-31) The narrative conceit of *Confessions* is of a life lived amongst, but separate from, the crowd, whilst the perspective De Quincey’s offers – downwardly mobile, leisured, drugged and male – is remarkably similar to that later adopted by Baudelaire, who wrote a French translation of the work. Another tale set in the British capital, the short story *The Man of the Crowd,* written by an American, Edgar Allen Poe,[[32]](#endnote-32) was also an acknowledged major influence on Baudelaire and, later, on Benjamin,[[33]](#endnote-33) a fact which could call in to question the latter’s insistence on the exclusivity of the French metropolis in the formulation of the flâneur.

Meanwhile, moving forward rather than back, Alain de Botton, in his meditation on travelling, landscapes and art, *The Art of Travel*, identifies pronounced thematic similarities between the work of Baudelaire and the American artist, Edward Hopper. The painter first discovered Baudelaire’s poetry on a visit to Paris in 1906 and was supposedly instantly drawn to it, reading and reciting it throughout his life. As de Botton states “the attraction is not hard to understand: there was a shared interest in solitude, in city life, in modernity, in the solace of the night and in the places of travel.”[[34]](#endnote-34)

**Postwar Transmogrifications of the Flâneur**

The idea of the flâneur has proven to be both historically resilient and geographically restless, as reflected in the wide range of cultural works where its trace or influence has continued to be detectable. In literature, in song, and on canvas, on the big screen, the small screen and, more recently, the CCTV screen,[[35]](#endnote-35) the imprint of the flâneur has been repeatedly invoked, often providing “an emblematic representative of modernity and the personification of contemporary urbanity.”[[36]](#endnote-36) For much of the first four decades of the twentieth century, the popular image of the city was one of expansion: upwards, outwards, and onwards. It was an impression reflected in the Futurist art movement, led by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, one whose momentum was stalled by the onset of the Great War. Futurism extolled industrialisation, speed, modernity and automation, “virtues” ironically associated with the Great War and later questioned in film maker Fritz Lang’s visionary critique of the future, *Metropolis,* released in 1927.

By contrast with the Futurists’ optimism, in the post World War II period, an image of the city as a site for artful melancholia began to appear, and with it came a new manifestation of the flâneur. By this time, this *Zelig*-like[[37]](#endnote-37) character had long since left the Parisian arcades. He was now more likely to be found in a shabby office with a broken Venetian blind covering its door, or behind the wheel of a battered Buick. His language had changed too, though this was hard to tell, since he remained taciturn. He criss-crossed the city in the pages of pulp fiction and through the medium of film gaining, in the process, a sheen of sophistication via the epithet *noir*. As with the flâneur*,* there is no one agreed definition for *noir*; Simpson suggests the following: “a look, a feeling (of uncertainty, cynicism and of being trapped) which often turns into paranoia, a theme (usually crime or corruption) and a tone far removed from the corporate optimism which typified most Hollywood films in the war years.”[[38]](#endnote-38)

In this sombre, after-hours urban setting a new variant of the flâneur thus emerges. The guise he most commonly adopted was that of private detective, as investigated by cultural geographers including Schmid,[[39]](#endnote-39) Howell[[40]](#endnote-40) and Farish.[[41]](#endnote-41) However, moral ambiguity was central to *noir* and the anti-hero was just as frequently a gangster or racketeer, as demonstrated by Harry Lime, a character in Graham Greene’s novella, *The Third Man*. But regardless of profession, these adrift-in-the-city men all possessed traits associated with the flâneur, most notably, there is a sense that they can see us but we cannot see them. In true flâneur fashion, the character of Lime is invisible for much of Carol Reed’s film adaptation, before finally, and briefly, emerging from the expressionistic shadows, camouflaged in black.

Many noir films relied to a considerable extent on their soundtracks for their creative potency and on the influence of photography and art for the impact generated by their striking cinematography and production design.[[42]](#endnote-42) Thus, films from the post-war period need to be understood within a broader artistic mediation on urban representation, but nonetheless it is difficult to underestimate the considerable degree to which films have “contributed to the image, legibility and branding of our cities. Controlled narratives … primarily male-authored and metropolitan, have shaped the way we see ourselves in relation to the spaces we inhabit.”[[43]](#endnote-43) And this is particularly true of noir films, a genre in which the city becomes “a realm of dark spaces through which the sense of danger is visually constructed … The social divisions of urban life are mapped out in these light and dark spaces … The city is as much an actor in the accounts as the characters.”[[44]](#endnote-44)

In many noir works the central character − usually a private investigator operating from a detached, socially marginal vantage point – often appears to be in possession of almost otherworldly abilities. In looking at the special qualities possessed by stereotypical noir anti-heroes, such as Dashiell Hammett’s Sam Spade and Raymond Chandler’s Philip Marlowe, Christophe Den Tandt has observed the ways in which the city:

though fragmented, can nevertheless be reconstituted by the efforts of a protagonist who serves as a retotalizing device … Chandler or Hammett’s protagonists are white male fantasies of empowerment endowed with a quasi-miraculous license to exercise their skills wherever they please … eccentricity and alienation informs the canonical figure of the private investigator.[[45]](#endnote-45)

This sense of the private detective possessing an all-seeing eye / ‘I’ is also taken up in Paul Auster’s influential *The New York Trilogy*, particularly in the first part of the novel, *City of Glass*. This story examines the nature of identity in, and of, the city: how one constructs and inhabits identity, projects it, and interprets the identity of others. The narrative plays on and with the conventions of the pursuit thriller, with the central character, Quinn, drawn into a voyeuristic relationship with Manhattan and with the individual he is pursuing:

Private eye. The term held a triple meaning for Quinn. Not only was it the letter ‘I,’ standing for ‘investigator,’ it was ‘I’ in the upper case, the tiny life-bud buried in the body of the breathing self. At the same time, it was also the physical eye of the writer, the eye of the man who looks out from himself into the world and demands that the world reveal itself to him.[[46]](#endnote-46)

Here a dialectic connecting the private detective, the flâneurand the urban voyeur is revealed: although the apparent interest of all three is in the crowd invariably there is a fundamentally more solipsistic and narcissistic agenda at work, one principally concerned with matters of selfhood and the feasibility of forging connections to the urban environment and to other people within it; a feeling perhaps most succinctly summarised by E.M. Forster in *Howards End*: “Only Connect! ... Live in fragments no longer.”[[47]](#endnote-47)

**Frank Sinatra and the Nocturnal American City**

Thus far, my focus has been principally on the visual contribution that has been made to debates concerning flânerie and forms of urban representation but for the remainder of this essay I wish to reflect on the rather less commonly encountered part played in such discussions by popular music, starting first with a case study of Frank Sinatra’s output in the late 1950s and then moving on to consider more contemporary works which in different ways can plausibly be said to evoke evolving notions of the flâneur.

In the mid-to-late 1950s, some years after the late 1940s highpoint in popularity for *noir* films, Frank Sinatra recorded a series of concept albums. Among these were, *In The Wee Small Hours* and *Only The Lonely,* both of which similarly revealed a discernible tension between stasis and restless movement in unnamed urban spaces. These records also drew on the angst and heightened sense of observation associated with noir and on a mood of post-war social and cultural uncertainty, and, most consistently of all, dwelt upon the theme of loneliness. Two of the best known examples of this type of material were ‘One For My Baby (And One More for the Road)’, included on *Only The Lonely*, and also that album’s title track. The latter song was composed by the celebrated songwriters, Sammy Cahn and Jimmy Van Heusen, who also wrote the sleeve notes for the album which expanded on its central theme:

Loneliness is many things to many people. For the keeper of the lighthouse it is the loneliness that attends endless days and nights of watching the angry sea. For the New York policeman on the dawn patrol it is the measured loneliness of his beat to the accompaniment of the nocturnal noises of the city.

The dejected urban persona Sinatra inhabited on this album, and on others he produced in the period, was also reflected in the distinctive artwork that accompanied them. These sleeves, owe a debt to stylistic conventions associated with film noir and with the artist, Edward Hopper, who had earlier produced etchings and paintings that attempted to reflect “modern urban anomie, exploring the meditative mood of his subjects through the ... space he portray[ed],”[[48]](#endnote-48) as demonstrated in celebrated works such as *Night Shadows* and *Nighthawks*. The sleeve of Frank Sinatra’s *No One Cares* album, in particular, echoes a trait discernible in many Hopper paintings in that the subjects frequently seem to be “anonymous and withdrawn, as if Hopper wanted to stress their separateness from each other, rather than what brought them together.”[[49]](#endnote-49)

The sense of despair on Sinatra’s downbeat saloon-song albums, which alternated with his upbeat, swing albums, was pronounced, and at times unremitting. Indeed, ahead of the release of *In The Wee Small Hours* album, executives at the label Sinatra was signed to at the time, Capitol, expressed concern that a “work so relentlessly dark might be received as oppressive and alienating.”[[50]](#endnote-50) Likewise, it has been said of *Where Are You?* (1957), a record dominated by Gordon Jenkins’ mournful string arrangements, that, “the tempos are crawling ... the mood is doggedly downbeat ... the anguish unfettered.”[[51]](#endnote-51) The atmosphere on the album is perhaps best reflected by Sinatra’s sombre rendition of the Leonard Bernstein song, ‘Lonely Town’:

New York, New York  
Or a village in Iowa  
The only difference is the name  
If you're alone  
Whether on Main Street  
Or on Broadway  
They are both the same  
A town's a lonely town  
When you pass through  
And there is no one waiting there for you.

T.H. Adamowski contends that on such lachrymose urban reveries the singer was projecting a distinct pop-existentialist persona,[[52]](#endnote-52) one in keeping with what Keith Tester states were “existentialist attempts to discover the secrets of *being* in the modern (namely urban, metropolitan, public), world.”[[53]](#endnote-53) Such questions were in vogue in the mid-1950s, as demonstrated by the publication of philosophical essays such as Jean-Paul Sartre’s *Existentialism and Human Emotions*[[54]](#endnote-54) and by the development in America of different forms of musical practice , which extended from Sinatra’s forlorn urban wanderings to Miles Davis’ melancholy jazz reflections, which were clearly articulated on his 1959 album, *Kind of Blue.*.

In the artwork and music associated with Sinatra’s concept albums, street life, particularly as experienced in the early hours, is presented as a site for contemplation, as demonstrated most effectively by songs such as ‘I Cover the Waterfront’ and ‘I’ve Been to Town’. But in addition to lyrics, titles and artwork, attention should be also paid to the significant impact on audiences brought about by the melismatic swoops and mannered sighs of Sinatra’s vocals.[[55]](#endnote-55) As David Toop observes, it is principally the voice that “maps the limitations and extent of the human body, connecting and separating inside from outside, self and other… the voice articulates the body and its orientation in space.”[[56]](#endnote-56) By thinking in such ways, perhaps flâneriecan be reconsidered as not just a visual activity but also as something that can be reflected on from an oral/aural framed standpoint.

**Conclusion**

Through his music, Frank Sinatra, wittingly or otherwise, supplemented existing scopic and literary manifestations of cities which often owed much to the flâneur’s poetic gaze in nineteenth-century Paris, to strands of mid-twentieth-century American painting and to *noir* influenced fiction and cinema. Arguably, the key factor connecting these apparently diverse artistic urban representations is that they all reflected Georg Simmel’s view of the modern city as being “simultaneously the site of freedom and of isolation,”[[57]](#endnote-57) a statement that alludes to a central contradiction associated with the city, namely that the pull of liberation it is seen to afford is also a freedom that is implicated in a resultant sense of drift and ennui.

Much of the work produced by Frank Sinatra in the late 1950s and early 1960s, can be viewed as part of a long continuum of urban creative expression. Such art has the capacity to vividly evoke the ways in which people’s everyday experiences of city life can often be, as Stuart Allen puts it:

deeply contradictory, being, simultaneously, sources of exhilaration, fear and apprehension…. The articulation of these experiences in the cultural representation of cities – from the norms and values embedded in urban landscapes [and] buildings ... to their inscription in art, literature and film, among other types of texts…are pivotal in shaping the ways in which we know and imagine the city, framing its past but also the prospects for its future renewal. The city of tangible surfaces … is inseparable from the city of popular culture, and memory.[[58]](#endnote-58)

Moving on from Sinatra, this theme of movement through after-hours city spaces, and the accompanying romantic mythology of nocturnal urban meandering, has once again recently begun to infuse several genres of contemporary popular music. Firstly, an aestheticized atmosphere of late-night urbanism in which the city is presented as “an ambivalent object of love and fear, of hope and despair”[[59]](#endnote-59) was discernible in the plaintive, urban-themed work of The Blue Nile, a cult 1980s Glaswegian band who stylistically owed much to Sinatra. Meanwhile, during the past decade, such a preoccupation has also been observable in the place-based nostalgic ruminations of Sheffield singer and guitarist, Richard Hawley, the atmospheric minimalism of London band, the xx, and the glistening beats created by Detroit techno-musician Carl Craig. The motif of movement through the darkened city also informs work by the young, contemporary British soul singer, Jamie Woon. On tracks such as “Night Air” and “Street,” he “drifts alone through the city at night ... despondent sensuality, haunted lust ... Jamie Woon is one for the lonely ... wondering what the night will bring.”[[60]](#endnote-60) Similar preoccupations also concern an occasional musical collaborator of Woon, Burial.

A Croydon-based, critically acclaimed producer, Burial is best known for popularizing a genre known as dubstep ( a principally electronic form of music which combines the bass heavy, brooding atmospheres of dub with the shuffling rhythms of the 2-step strand of UK garage). Burial’s self-titled debut album explored “a sustained mood: it’s dark, dense and sorrowful. It feels somehow wet… like a bus window pressed flat against your cheek, in mid-winter, as you leave an ex-lover's city for the last time. Track titles like ‘Night Bus’ and ‘Broken Home’ don’t exactly dissuade one from such slightly maudlin flights of fancy.”[[61]](#endnote-61) It was an impression that Burial’s follow-up, *Untrue*, which featured unsettling instrumental tracks with titles such as ‘Near Dark’ and ‘Shell of Light’ did little to assuage. The main difference between the two records is that “if his debut was the sound of wandering around London on foot at night. *Untrue* is the same journey undertaken in a car, with rain spattering on the windscreen.”[[62]](#endnote-62)

The architect and theorist, Rem Koolhaas, has stated “the *flâneur* has become an anachronism in this world: The street is dead ... Pedestrianization – intended to preserve ­– merely channels the flow of those doomed to destroy the object of their intended reverence with their feet.”[[63]](#endnote-63) However, in terms of flânerie’s current applicability, one could contend that contemporary shopping arcades comprised of brightly lit chain-stores have had the reverse effect to that envisaged by Koolhaas. Their existence has arguably strengthened the desire of artists, and their followers, for a return to a more involving engagement with urban space. Perhaps the decentred, subject-less soundscapes constructed by Burial, which update the urban “outsider” rhapsodizing associated with Sinatra in the 1950s and The Blue Nile in the 1980s, provide just such a response, conveying, as they do, the experience of moving through cities after dark when “the streets lie largely empty – little traffic, few buses, just the occasional pedestrian along the way. Lit only by the moon or the odd street light, the landscape acquires a kind of hyperrealism.”[[64]](#endnote-64)

Further research which updated ideas of flânerie by drawing on the sensory impact of car travel,[[65]](#endnote-65) interrogated effects relating to the growing prevalence of listening to music on the move,[[66]](#endnote-66) and attempted to respond to new forms of electronic music frequently heralded as being soundtracks to movement through urban (and suburban) spaces, could offer fresh possibilities to those wishing to push work on links between the city, flânerie and recorded music in new directions.

Such an undertaking could be enhanced still further if focussed on city-orientated musical works which themselves reflect on the passing through of time, as well as of space. Indeed, certain forms of contemporary urban music, notably dubstep, lend themselves to this, with Burial’s work, in particular, having frequently been cited in ongoing debates concerning the notion of “hauntology,”. Stemming from a term first used by Derrida[[67]](#endnote-67) proponents of this idea of hauntology, who include writers working in the fields of geography, popular music studies and cultural studies, such as Edensor,[[68]](#endnote-68) Reynolds[[69]](#endnote-69) and Fisher,[[70]](#endnote-70) persuasively argue that the current age is largely characterized by a collapse in cultural innovation and that shades or ‘spectres’ of the past are now often more vivid than anything being turned up by the present. Such beliefs follow on from ideas expressed by Frisby,[[71]](#endnote-71) himself echoing sentiments expressed by Benjamin,[[72]](#endnote-72) when he highlighted the similar role that the flâneur had once played via its active participation in “an ‘archaeological’ process of unearthing the myths and ‘collective dreams’ of modernity.” Thus, a contention can be made that through an engagement with hauntology, current artists and researchers can potentially better understand the contemporary urban realm. As a result of such activities, the following suggestion presents itself, namely that the figure of the flâneur, so often assumed to be specific to the changing landscape of Paris, continues in fact to provide a useful model for helping to explain current forms of civic habitation and practice and for exploring how best to represent the complexity of contemporary urban life.

1. D. Pinder, “flâneur/flânerie,” in D. Gregory et al*.* (eds), *The Dictionary of Human Geography* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 256. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. M. Savage, review of “Myth and metropolis: Walter Benjamin and the city,” *Environment D: Society and Space*, 14: 6 (1996): 776. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. P.M.R. Howell, “Crime and the City Solution: crime fiction, urban knowledge, and radical geography,” *Antipode* 30 (4) (1998): 360. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid.. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. C. Jenks, *Visual Culture* (London: Routledge, 1995); K. Tester (ed.), *The Flâneur* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994). [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Howell, “Crime and the City Solution,” 357-78; Pinder, “flâneur/flânerie”; R. Shields, “Fancy footwork: Walter Benjamin’s notes on *flânerie*,” in Tester, *Flâneur*, 61-80. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. G. Bruno, “Ramble City: Postmodernism and ‘Bladerunner’,” *October*, 41 (1987): 61-74. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. D. Stevenson, *Cities and Urban Cultures* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2003). [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
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10. Shields, “Fancy footwork,” 63. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
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