Rerouting/Rerooting:

Re-presenting the Urban Zone in Contemporary Non-Fiction

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Jawaharlal Nehru University
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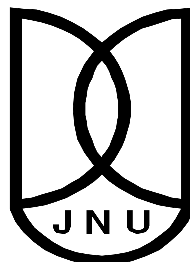
Doctor of Philosophy

by

Romain Camus



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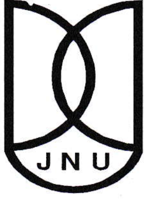

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Certificate

This dissertation titled "Rerouting/Rerooting: Re-presenting the Urban Zone in Contemporary Non-Fiction" submitted by Romain Camus, Centre for English Studies, School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, is an original work and has not been submitted so far in part or in full, for any other degree, diploma of any university or institution outside of the scope of the Erasmus Mundus programme that she is admitted under.

This may be placed before the examiners for evaluation for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Declaration by the Candidate

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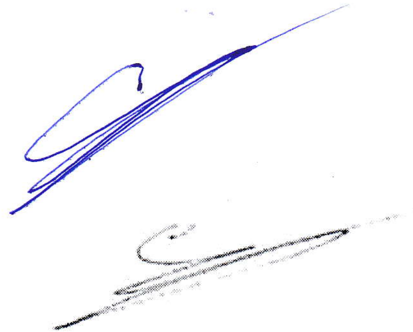

Introduction

According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)[1], since 2008, and for the first time in history, a majority of the world population is living in towns or cities. In other words, the dominant mode of living of our 21st century is an urban one, a domination which will only intensify in the coming decades, at least. As one travels from any major cities in the developing world and to a lesser extent around urban centres in more developed countries, one can only witness population growth and the desire to leave the countryside to come settle in the comfort of a city, or at least close to its opportunities. Leaving Delhi or Mexico by bus or train, and this in any direction, allows you to see sprawling constructions, legal or illegal, covering the Indian plain or the Mexican hills, a landscape dotted by upmarket real estate projects, shopping malls or abandoned grand projects and shanty towns.

Taking a southbound train heading to Jaipur from the stations Delhi Cant or Sarai Rohila offers a succession of different layers of recent urbanisations. First we have the 2-storey-high plus *barsati*[2] family buildings of West Delhi, then the railroad-side shanties which were, it seems, far more numerous when I started to write this thesis. Soon after leaving Delhi itself, we cross to the state of Haryana to another form of the Indian Capital in the shape of Gurgaon and its famous skyscrapers often waiting for a road or for a budget. A row of such towers looms over empty yet levelled plots near the tracks, plots ready for development and in the meantime used by locals to play cricket, enjoy rare free space for their vehicle or simply gather.

Such trip and such landscape is not specific to India or Delhi, even if it is particularly poignant there, as it can be virtually reproduced and witnessed in every major urban centres across the globe. This indicates clearly that the construction of the city we once knew, a city organised by a strong central power or alternatively by a small community and represented respectively by the stereotypes of the baroque city of straight avenues and the village organised around a square-cum-market, have dramatically changed. This change has happened because the scales of cities have changed due to an increase in population, but also due to new technologies which have considerably altered the landscape and our relation to it. Walking from your home to sell your product on the public square is not the same than leaving your factory in a truck to go to another state or another town. Both modes of exchanges imply a different shape of the city.

The apparition of new modes of transportation have modified the movements within a city

1 <http://www.unfpa.org/pds/urbanization.htm>

2 Rooftop room.

and between cities as it has opened new possibilities. This thesis will not look at recent developments under a nostalgic light, musing about the beauty of simple village life; instead we will just clearly state that the shape of a city is not produced *ex nihilo* but by a combination of various factors, among which the most prominent are the physical, political and economical context. Delhi is shaped like Delhi because no sea and no mountain opposes its expansion; Paris is shaped like Paris because of kings and central governments; London is shaped like London because its "City" is now—or at least for now?—a financial hub and its edges former industrial sites sometimes dating back to the industrial revolution.

Against these three great factors which are the physical, the political and the economical, what about the human aspect of a city? How are the arts and the way we think also affected and affecting the construction of our urban centres? This is this last question that we will obliquely answer in the course of this thesis. To do so we have chosen to focus on one art (literature) and primarily one urban centre (London), and therefore our primary sources will be contemporary urban non-fiction on the English capital based on walks.

The choice of the non-fiction genre will be explained in depth in the pages forming the second chapter of my work but it can be useful to explain this choice in this introduction too as it irrigates the whole logic behind this thesis. I have chosen non-fiction because I believe that most major cities have now many private builders instead of a central one. These "private builders" can be private companies or "private" individuals (citizens) as long as they effectively shape the city, through massive developments and the advertising billboards that go with it or simply through a stone left outside to sit or an small ad left on a wall. Regardless of their quality and the scale of their urban modifications, these "private builders" can be assimilated to one another in the sense that they do not represent a unified central power and therefore incarnate how cities are being constructed nowadays, not solely through all-encompassing plans (even if those still exist and are still of major importance) but also through additions.

In this regard, urban non-fiction has to be considered as one of such addition. Urban fiction could also be accepted as an addition to the city from this perspective, however we preferred non-fiction because the latter has a certain directness that fiction does not have. From a citizen to a citizen, that is essentially the transparent spirit of non-fiction, even if sometimes this transparency is problematic, as we will see in our second chapter. Non-fiction authors, and especially the ones we are going to study along this thesis, are embracing their status of citizens, not only because they write articles in popular papers (something which can seem irrelevant before one reflects when was the last time a painter produced a painting for a paper), but also because their writings is produced, at least partially, as a way to modify the political and economical realities of the city. In that sense

they truly are citizens: individuals with political power belonging to a nation, and a city.

What's more, non-fiction was the most obvious choice as we will examine a certain concreteness of the city, a physicality that is experienced first-hand by non-fiction authors has they walk the streets and write about these walks. This thesis has to do with the actual shape, the actual body of a city, and by extension of urban space, and therefore basing our study on non-fiction instead of fiction seemed more appropriate since pure fiction inherently presents itself as a bit more distant from the pavement and the facts. It does not mean that the non-fiction we are suggesting the study of is only a succession of data, which would make it belong to the genre of academic writing; it only means that the cursor between fact and fiction is collectively understood to be leaning toward fact in non-fiction. Again, the idea of a direct political action on the concrete aspect of space made us choose alleged fact over alleged fiction, and therefore literary non-fiction as a genre for our study.

Now that we have broadly explained why we have chosen literary non-fiction, we have to understand why I have selected London.

This choice has been made because London literature is not only produced mostly through the use of the English language (which is always a plus when one has to produce a thesis in English for an English department), but primarily because London is a city that represents thanks to its history the major changes of the past two centuries. If we had been interested by another historical period and another language we could have picked Rome, Palenque or Vijayanagara but we started with our mind set on studying a contemporary production in English, and therefore the possibility of choosing London imposed itself, especially considering that the English capital offers nowadays a revival of certain key concepts in urban writings like “psychogeography” or “flâneur”, concepts which emerged in Paris in the mid-19th century for the former and in the 1950s' for the latter.

London is capital for the 19th century and the 20th century, and its influence still continues to persist in the 21st century in the “West” and beyond. As a centre, London was the seat for the most important colonial empire of its time, the symbolical heart of the industrial revolution as well as a hub for the production of ideas. London was and still is a cosmopolis in the sense that it was and continues to be an international centre whose different elements are living in relative harmony. But what's truly essential in our case is that London is a perfect example of the transition we touched upon in the first paragraphs of this introduction, the transition between private builders and central power. When I started this thesis, London was part of the European Union, one piece of a whole, one private builder in a collective construction. As I write this introduction, it is, symbolically more than effectively, back to being a centre of its own. The question of whether or not London will regain a position of power some felt it had lost is still to be seen. However, what is apparent as of

today is that nowhere else in Western Europe the tension between centre and periphery are as starkly exposed and problematic as in London and the United Kingdom, whether it be on a political level with the results of the Brexit vote which clearly showed a gap between the City and the peripheral small towns, or on a spatial level.

Paris is by its organisation dating from the second half of the 19th century a village of twenty districts enclosed by the wall of the *boulevard périphérique.* Berlin due to its pre-1989 history is still celebrating reunification and was not in the past an universally recognised centre, even in its own country. Rome is still surrounded by an easily accessible countryside and its past layers forbid to build major grand projects at its centre or at its margins. Madrid stopped to be a colonial centre roughly a century before the French and English capitals and like Lisbon its place on the world stage, including the world stage of ideas, cannot be compared to the one it enjoyed in the Age of Discovery or to English-speaking London, without Spanish and Portuguese people being apparently much bothered about it.

On the other hand London's size and influence as well as his recent political history in the shape of the administrations of Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair makes it a perfect ground for our study since it offers a good illustration of the changes global urban centres underwent. Whether it be motorisation and orbital highways, gentrification, de-industrialisation, private-public partnerships for controversial grand projects or corporate-owned pseudo-public space[3], the city of London has it all and had it before many others. Because of this pioneer aspect of London in regard to these major contemporary changes and because perhaps more than any other city London is struggling with the centre/periphery dichotomy, I have decided to pick it as my subject of study.

We will discuss other cities in the course of this thesis, mostly London's long-time rival Paris, but our main concern will be the English capital. An early idea behind this thesis was to study literary flâneurs in Delhi, since in many ways the Indian capital also struggles with how to place itself in the centre/periphery dichotomy. Such plan was abandoned when I realised that the corpus in English of literary non-fiction on Delhi would have been too weak, and what's more not centred on the act of walking. The genre of what I would call “Delhi books” is becoming more important with every passing year, a growth exemplified by the recent success of Rana Dasgupta's *Capital*, a non-fiction text on Delhi published in 2014 which has very recently won the first Emile Guimet prize for best Asian translation into French. “Delhi books” is a genre interesting in itself as the label can bring together a wide array of books which always open on how awful yet lovely Delhi is and mostly give tips to live or reasons to be proud of their struggle to permanent or temporary Delhiites. This phenomenon of a sort of community-building literature around a common city is global and

3 <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2017/jul/24/pseudo-public-space-explore-data-what-missing>.

well-fitted for marketing purposes, and the London authors we are going to study in this thesis can also be considered to be mere authors of “London books”. However, these London authors have something that their Indian counterparts do not have: They walk to write and they evolve in a city that is already neatly fixed in the literary landscape.

The great majority of Delhi English-speaking authors don't walk and therefore making a thesis related to walking the city in literary non-fiction on Delhi would have been highly problematic. They don't walk because contemporary Delhi was not envisioned for walkers just like Shahjahanabad (or Old Delhi) was not made for cars and scooters. They don't walk also because their audience so far do not walk and explore the back alleys and abandoned plots. It is sure to change in the coming years but so far Delhi for the book-buying crowd is already unknown, disturbing and essentially foreign enough as it is to go explore some of its even darker areas. On the other hand, London, like other Western cities, is well-known by its inhabitants who explore it daily on foot but also by an international audience. Since London is recognisable by many when Delhi is still a great unknown one cruises the different elements in a car, Delhi book buyers want to discover when London book buyers want to rediscover, or go away from the known representations of the English capital. Since the publishing markets are different, the production is different, and if in Delhi authors don't walk much, in London the preferred mean of transportation becomes walking, because it is versatile, because it is part of a long literary tradition in the West but also simply because it is effortlessly accessible and enjoyable.

This thesis aims at studying the recent changes of the globalised metropolises. To do so, we will, as said above, focused on contemporary London and how it is produced in the literary non-fiction texts of a group of writers gathered around the figure of Iain Sinclair. These writers are exploring the English capital on foot and write about the *zone* between known areas, the unclaimed terrain between the centre and the periphery and the untapped layers and resources in the city's baffling accumulation of buildings, stories, people. An oft-used metaphor, the city is a book and these authors want to write the footnotes, the indexes, fill up the margins with pencil notes, but also open the spine and look between the folios.

If this thesis will gravitate around London, it aims also at giving a broader picture which can inform other researchers on other cities. The globalised metropolises are globalised because they tend to look and feel the same, and what is true for London and Paris will be at least partially true for New York, Nairobi and Hong Kong. Therefore, if I take London as my subject of study, I'll symbolically walk to and through London's urban non-fiction literature by first discussing how the concept of city has changed in the post-war period and how this change is mirrored in the history of

ideas, and vice-versa. The first chapter of this thesis will consequently be on the disaggregation of the centre/periphery dichotomy in urban centre and in dominant modes of thinking, and will suggest a new term to designate the demultiplication, neither negative nor positive, of both our city and mind: the z*one*. To arrive to this term inspired by Iain Sinclair who himself got it from Andrei Tarkovsky's movie *Stalker* (1979), we will first dwell on Lewis Mumford's influential and complete study on the city *The City in History* (1961) before looking more closely at the spatial turn in the history of idea through more contemporary authors like Edward Soja.

Following Baudelaire's famous quote in “The Swan”, “*La forme d'une ville change plus vite, hélas ! que le coeur d'un mortel*.” (“The form a city takes more quickly shifts, alas, than does the human heart” in James McGowan's translation[4]), the second chapter of this work will explore the connection between non-fiction writing and the construction of a city, or how writers try to construct the city through their non-fiction, how the imaginary aspect of a city can seem more concrete than its tangible reality, and at the end of the day how fact and fiction participate in the same collective effort for the localisation of a city's essence or core. After centre and periphery, this second chapter will therefore discuss another form of this dichotomy under the mask of fact and fiction, or how the geography informs the psyche and reciprocally, especially in our times.

Psyche and geography will meet again in our third chapter which will inch closer to the London authors we are interested in by discussing a term that they often use or which is often used to describe their works: “Psychogeography”. First an idea and term coined by French philosopher Guy Debord or one of the member of the avant-garde group the Letterists, “psychogeography” is an interesting concept because it has encountered a surprising success in the recent decades and because it is at the crossroad of everything we would have seen in the first and second chapter, namely the tension between centre and periphery and the problematic aspect of expressing a city's reality in non-fiction writing. Born from an avant-garde, the concept will virtually disappear in the 70s and 80s before re-emerging in the London of the 1990s and being popularised in the following years mostly thanks to the works of Iain Sinclair and the catchy and transparent aspect of the word. However simple, the combination of “psycho” and “geography” may have given only one term but this term has majorly evolved from its birth in the post-war and avant-garde French context to the post-Thatcher years. This is these evolutions that we will time and map through an extensive study of Debord's writings.

The fourth chapter that I will give to the appreciation of my reader will have to do with another French term that has crossed to English and became quite successful: The flâneur. Like what we will have done for the term and concept of “psychogeography”, we will first prune the tree

4 Baudelaire, *Flowers* 175.

this term has become to come back to its roots, before climbing back up to its newest leaves which stem again from Iain Sinclair's writings. Thanks to the London-writing Welshman, the contemporary flâneur exploring the *zone* has a new name, the “stalker”. The story of the evolution of the flâneur towards that new avatar of the stalker is worth telling because it mirrors the evolution of the cities of Western Europe as well as offer a sharp contrast with the traditional flâneur of the mid 19th century.

By our final and fifth chapter, we will have reached the London stalkers, their walks and their texts and we will examine what brings together authors like Iain Sinclair, Will Self, Nick Papadimitriou and others in the way they explore and write about the city of London. We will conclude on how stalking the city is a mirror of the tension the Western European cities are currently going through and how such practice can open the way to effective change in the way we consider urban space and how it is essentially a way to reconnect or reroot citizens with their physical environment and its multiple layers.

The London authors I will use as primary sources for my demonstration are Iain Sinclair, Nick Papadimitriou and Will Self. I will only study their non-fiction production, which is important for Sinclair or Self since they also have a sum of fiction texts to their names. I will also discuss other British and international authors writing on London and other capital cities as they can be related to the “stalker group”.

In terms of social and historical background, all our authors will be middle-aged White men with a privileged environment. Our goal in this thesis was not to find the marginal stream of urban writing but the mainstream, supported by major publishing houses as well as papers (Penguin and *The Guardian* for Sinclair, Bloomsbury and *The Independent* for Self). Therefore, and interestingly, the stalkers are similar in age, race and social background to the flâneurs, even when the former group wants to symbolically walk away from the more famous label of their predecessors. The fact that the stalkers are all privileged middle-aged White men also tells us something about the history of the movement since these people are products of the post-war period and have experienced first-hand the sea change in urbanism as well as the adventures of the avant-gardes or the counterculture of the 1960s-1970s.

By virtue of his central role in the movement that I will call the “stalker group”, our attention will be particularly focused on Sinclair's work since he coined the term “stalker” and the practice that goes with it in his work *Lights Out for the Territory* (1997). In this text he announced:

> The concept of “strolling”, aimless urban wandering, the *flâneur*, had been superceded.
> We had moved into the age of the stalker; journeys made with intent – sharp-eyed and

> unsponsored. The stalker was our role model: purposed hiking, not dawdling, not browsing. No time for the savouring of reflections in shop windows, admiration for Art Nouveau ironwork, attractive matchboxes rescued from the gutter. This was walking with a thesis. With a prey […] The stalker is a stroller who sweats, a stroller who knows where he is going, but not why or how. (75)

In this passage, Sinclair clearly breaks away from the passivity of the flâneur and suggests a new way of exploring the city. “Not dawdling, not browsing”, his purposeful walks which are often following a pre-defined pattern (a V arbitrarily drawn on the map of London, a circle following as closely as possible the M25 motorway or the London Overground, etc.) are original forms of urban exploration and have been emulated by the rest of the stalkers, a group which desires to re-root our relation to the city in an increasingly derealised environment whose main representations are generated by the computers of real estate developers.

Hence the title of this thesis: Rerooting through re-routing, or reconnecting with an urban environment which seems to many increasingly dehumanised by walking away from the centre and the known areas in order to discover lost layers, overlooked traces and simply “fresh narratives as Sinclair writes in *London Orbital*:

> I want to walk around the orbital motorway: in the belief that this nowhere, this edge, is the place that will offer fresh narratives. I don't want to be *on* the road any more than I want to walk on water; the soft estates, the acoustic footprints, will do nicely. Dull fields that travellers never notice. Noise and the rush of traffic twenty-four hours a day, has pushed “content” back. (16)

To retrace the inspirations of this new “stalker movement” led by Sinclair in an attempt to notice and register the concealed and the overlooked, and also to take full advantage of my personal background, this thesis will also heavily rely on French original texts.

As much as they can be discussed today, terms and concepts like “psychogeography” and “flâneur” appeared in a French context before being internationally known and their origins are often too quickly discussed., stamping it French and connecting it to Baudelaire and Debord for instant authority. This thesis will offer us the opportunity to go back to Baudelaire and Benjamin for the “flâneur”, or Debord and the Situationists for “psychogeography” in order to map the genealogy and bring the two terms back to the tensions of their origins.

This work has been greatly facilitated not only by the fact that French is my mother tongue but especially by the amazing collection of French texts I found in the libraries of the Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico City and the Universita Degli Studi di Bergamo, the latter offering to his

students all the words published by Guy Debord in his lifetime, including his correspondence. Since certain French texts I quote are not translated into English, I provide personal translations completed with the French original in footnote for comparison. Every time no translator is mentioned, I am the translator.

Another small yet important information before closing this introduction and diving into the thesis itself is that I have chosen to not italicise the word “flâneur” since it is included in the Oxford English Dictionary[5] and can therefore be considered to be an English word. This addition to the reference dictionary of the English language shows how the topic of this thesis is rooted in this language and how consequently it is crucial to expose to an English-speaking audience the origins of the term and concept in connection with the manner how the new generation of flâneurs in London adds to this literary and cultural tradition.

5 “Flâneur.” Concise Oxford Dictionary. 11Th ed. 2008.

Chapter 1: Ideas and Cities: Going Beyond Centre and Periphery in Contemporary Spatial Discourse.

If modernity was the era of time, postmodernity is the era of space. This familiar, black-white maxim has often been used as a starting point for the difficult examination of postmodernity as an object of study. As an example, David Harvey in *The Condition of Postmodernity* starts his third part titled “An Enquiry into the Origins of a Cultural Change” on such premises. In the introduction on this segment which will be articulated around the experience of space and time under what seems to be a new cultural regime, he takes for himself the emphasis on space in postmodernity developed by previous thinkers, namely Marshall Berman, Daniel Bell and Fredric Jameson. Based on a passage from Jameson's essay “Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism”, Harvey states that the postmodern shift is a “crisis in our experience of space and time, a crisis in which spatial categories come to dominate those of time” (Harvey 201). What is interesting to us, what shows that the relation to space and its supremacy over time has consensually become accepted as an important marker of postmodernity, is that Harvey is uncritical about Jameson's view. He will base this part of his demonstration without discussing it in depths, instead he writes: “In what follows, I shall accept these statements at their face value” (Harvey 201). In other terms, Harvey does not feel the need to re-evaluate the claims of previous thinkers: Modernity was about time, postmodernity is about space. Allied with the general open-up towards the diverse, the multiple, the minor, the everyday enacted by the humanities around the 1960s, this assumption according to which the study of space has trumped the study of time is now an unavoidable node in the great “modernity vs. postmodernity” controversy, while simultaneously paving the way for original studies and fresh views on space.

Nowadays, this premise of a dominant space often takes its symbolical roots in (and authority from) the first lines of a lecture given by Michel Foucault to the *Cercle d'études architecturales* (Circle of Architectural Studies) in 1967. First published in 1984 as the article “*Des espaces autres*” and translated in 1986 in the journal *Diacritics* as “Of Other Spaces” (sometimes under the title “Different spaces”, depending on the translation; *see* Dehaene 22), the lecture starts with the following statement:

> As we know, the great obsession of the nineteenth century was history: themes of development and arrest, themes of crisis and cycle, themes of accumulation of the past, a great overload of dead people, the threat of global cooling. The second principle of

> thermodynamics supplied the nineteenth century with the essential core of its mythological resources. The present age may be the age of space instead. (Foucault 175)

The opening "as we know" of Foucault is similar to Harvey's decision to take Jameson's as "face value": both expressions show level of acceptance of the importance of space in postmodernity. As Edward W. Soja wrote in his introduction to *Postmodern Geographies*, which itself starts with a reference to Foucault's lecture: "[Foucault] would no doubt have resisted being called a postmodern geographer, but he was one, *malgré lui*" (16). Mentioning Foucault in the introduction of a work which aimed at defining a new method for geography to study the spaces of postmodernity, space perceived as new, is an illustration among many of how the postulate "modernity era of time, postmodernity era of space" has imposed itself on the world stage of ideas. And it did so *malgré* that debatable black-white distinction perhaps because postmodernity as a concept had to start somewhere, to take place, to become a common ground on which to build.

We could argue for or against this dominant thesis on many levels, but this chapter will not aim at validating, correcting or rejecting it. We shall not directly participate in the ongoing debate on modernity and postmodernity here, which was about time, which one was about space. As Nicholas Freeman has demonstrated in his brilliant study *Conceiving the City: London, Literature, and Art, 1870-1914* that many of the concerns we consider as coming with postmodern space were already at play in Victorian London, including the urban sprawl and the impossibility to *come to terms* (both naming and closing) with the immensity of the megalopolis. Hence, the urban structure may not have been affected that drastically by the advent of postmodernity. What may have really changed is the perception and thus discourse we have on it. Hence, the maxim "modernity was time, postmodernity is space" might be simply wrong if we consider truth to be only about the factual, and right if we consider, as I do, truth to be composed of fact and discourse combined. That is why I don't consider it inherently useful to dwell on the modern/postmodern controversy in this demonstration. To me, the maxim, the founding idea that postmodernity is about space, is true in itself because it served a purpose, namely shaping by contrast the two concepts of modernity and postmodernity, the past and the "post-", even when both are tightly connected. Instead of trying to make a point on the line between modernity and postmodernity, we will analyse in what follows how academic discourse dealt with "postmodern space", from what has been called the "spatial turn" of the humanities to nowadays. As indicated by our extended use of inverted commas, our focus in this chapter will be set on the concepts and terms brought by the emergence of "postmodern geography", concepts and terms which act as brands being traded from one text to the other.

It is here relevant to say why we have chosen to study academic discourse and not other kinds of texts. Academic discourse, whether it be articles, books or lectures, all aim at knowledge. They all aim at coming to terms with their objects, at defining it as clearly or as truthfully as possible in order to circulate that knowledge further. What's more, like our primary texts, they are non-fiction. This will allow us to draw a parallel later on, in our second chapter, and question the acquisition of knowledge related to urban space in both types of non-fiction: Academic and literary.

Hence this first chapter presents itself as an analysis of the academic discourse on “postmodern space” and will allow me to start my study by contextualising my research, placing it in ongoing debates as well as securing some points and notions. As we focus on academic production, we will not put under scrutiny every possible space which has ever been labelled “postmodern” since it would take us too far from our object of study, i.e. the contemporary city in non-fiction literature. Rather, we will focus in this chapter on how academics tried to come to terms with one feature of the city that will interest us throughout this thesis, namely what seems to escape previous definitions of the city, and incidentally the country.

We can already feel here the difficulty of describing such a space—this is precisely the difficulty we will analyse in the coming pages, the difficulty of *coming to terms* with that elusive “postmodern space” which is expressed differently in terms such as “suburbia”, “abstract space”, “non-place” and many others. Obviously, one could argue that these three first terms are describing three different spaces; that the term “suburbia”, even if itself unclear, is clearly different from Marc Augé's “non-place”, for instance. If this objection has some ground, terms such as “suburbia” or “non-place” are often mixed (together and with others), or at least overlapping in academic discourses. That is to say, each term, at least at first, has its quality and differ from the others; yet, a difference is not a limit, and these spaces, like the terms which aim at grasping them, are more often than not melting into one another. Terms and notions such as “suburbia” or “non-place” are different when they are first defined, but the more they are used, the more they intersect.

To illustrate this, let us come back to the root of the “non-place” in Augé's work. If the concept of “non-place” was present in Augé's earlier production, when it is first mentioned in the eponymous *Non-place* it is described in opposition to “the sociological notion of place, associated by [Marcel] Mauss and a whole ethnological tradition with the idea of a culture localized in time and space” (34). As first examples of such non-places, Augé suggests:

> The installations needed for the accelerated circulation of passengers and goods (high-speed roads and railways, interchanges, airports) are just as much non-places as the means of transport themselves, or the great commercial centres, or the extended transit camps where the planet's refugees are parked. (34)

Thus Augé gives his “non-place” a first mask, which will be refined later; the mask of a space somehow standing outside of time and culture (as opposed to Marcel Mauss's “place”), a globalised space, related to the “accelerated circulation of passengers and goods” and to the transitory. Following that first definition, wouldn't a non-place always be set in the suburbia? Can an historical central station, whether it be Milano Centrale or New Delhi Railway station, be considered a non-place following Augé's words? Certainly not; yet, staying in Milan and Delhi, how would be considered stations like Porta Garibaldi or Delhi Cantonment? Here a debate would occur, a debate which would most likely bring up at some point in its course the distance from the symbolic centre, the symbolic “place” of each city, but also historical aspects of each. What is interesting is that such debate that would legitimately arise while talking about train stations would sound out of place while talking about airports, the quintessential non-place, repeatedly referred to in *Non-Place*, which is for both historical and pragmatic reasons always set in the suburbia, on the outskirts, outside the city centre.

This playful demonstration highlights one thing: The terms “non-place” and “suburbia”, if different, are united by a common lack of history and culture and by their symbolical distance from the centre in most discourses in which they are used. But more deeply, places that could be perceived as “non-places” or part of the “suburbia” are located through discourse, just like the centre of a city (and incidentally its periphery) is located through discourse: Milano Centrale railway station is central because it says so and because its architectural style is perceived as historical, as compared to the Porta Garibaldi railway station. This applies to all terms we will see in this chapter: assumed lack of history and culture alongside symbolical distance from the historical and cultural centre, both perpetuated through discourse, is the common denominator of terms related to “postmodern space”. A space becomes a “postmodern space” when it is symbolically distant from what is considered to be the centre even when it is spatially close to that centre and actually central to its history and culture. The Centre Pompidou is easily labelled as a symbol of postmodernity, first because its architecture and time of conception are indeed postmodern, but also by its location in Paris 1st district and its odd relation with what is surrounding it. On the other hand, the Eiffel Tower is easily labelled as a symbol of modernity, because of its architecture and origin. Yet, the Eiffel Tower would have surely been considered a “postmodern space” when it was created in 1889. Like the Centre Pompidou, it looked like it had no symbolic relation to the cultural and historical centre of its time and was famously controversial, many Parisians calling it an abomination. What's more, and unlike the Centre Pompidou, it was supposed to be a temporary construction, a transitory creation. Yet the tower was obviously never called a “postmodern space” because there was not a strong centre at the time. The “modern” was in the

making and therefore such terminology modern/postmodern could not have been used even if the situation of the two buildings, Eiffel and Pompidou, are factually very similar. Therefore, the adjective “postmodern” is mostly relevant in discourse and when there is already a historically fixed “modern” centre. For this reason, the discussion about “modern” and “postmodern space” strongly apply to Western capitals while it becomes out of place in a postcolonial context, a context where the modern past is still not fixed and therefore can't project the shadow of the post-modern in space.

If it is accepted as being against the modern centre, as said above “postmodern space” is neither a delimited space nor a delimited term: Its plasticity gives it many guises and many names, both going hand-in-hand. This plasticity of “postmodern space” is thus both a concrete plasticity (what is *concretely* a postmodern space?) and a semantic plasticity (what does “postmodern space” *mean*?). To stay with *Non-places*, this ambiguity of the sign is well put into light by Augé when discussing the abstraction of the term “space” nowadays:

> The craze for the word “space”, applied indiscriminately to auditoriums or meeting-rooms (“Espace Cardin” in Paris, “Espace Yves Rocher” at La Gacilly), parks or gardens (“green space”), aircraft seat (“Espace 2000”) and cars (Renault “Espace”), expresses not only the themes that haunt the contemporary era (advertising, image, leisure, freedom, travel) but also the abstraction that corrodes and threatens them, as if the consumers of contemporary space were invited first and foremost to treat themselves to words. (83)

Our goal in this chapter will be to clear up the air of postmodern spatial discourse. First to analyse how the perspective on postmodern space evolved from the traditional city/country urban dichotomy, in parallel with the shift from modernity to postmodernity; second to help us secure a satisfactory and consistent terminology for the rest of our work.

In 1961, the list for the Non-fiction award of the National Book Award contained two works on the city in recent history: *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* by Jane Jacobs, and *The City in History* by Lewis Mumford. If they answered it differently, both books were concerned by how to deal with new forms of urbanism and how to avoid the dilution of civic society, symbolised by the street, at a time when the traditional concept of city had been and was still reshaped by demographic needs and an extending globalisation. The early answer to these issues had been brought in architecture by the modern school, a school of which the most famous, active and controversial proponent was Le Corbusier. If Le Corbusier's style thrived in the decade following decolonisation and the Second World War, as the National Book Award's list indicates, this dogma was strongly questioned in the 1960s. It turned out that Lewis Mumford won the National Book Award for non-

fiction that year. As I wish to study what was at work in the *zeitgeist* of ideas at that time, we will focus on his work rather than Jacobs's, even if the following demonstration could have been equally done with her.

Mumford's *The City in History* was a considerable work which planned to chronologically retrace the birth of the city to its current avatar. It has to be noted, as Mumford himself acknowledged, that his overview of urban history is almost entirely focused on what is being considered as part of Western tradition. Indeed, the spectrum of Mumford historical study stretches from the Sumerian city to the American suburbs via the Greek, Roman and European cities; other urban cultures are merely mentioned. In his preface, Mumford explains the omission of “large significant tracts” by his method of inquiry which demands “personal experience and observation, something unreplaceable by books” (Mumford, *City* 7). Mumford's monumental work is thus almost exclusively focused on “Western civilization”.

Through recurrent mentions of a looming nuclear holocaust, through environmental concerns, Mumford's reader feels sharply that the main goal of *The City in History* is to produce an archaeology of urbanism in order to lead the way for future developments. If Mumford can't decide if the city is “a natural habitation, like a snail's shell, or a deliberate human artifact, a specific invention that came into existence at one or more places under the influence of urban ideological convictions and economic pressures”, what is clear in his exposé is that, to him, the city is the preferred form of human settlement and will survive as such, as it did since “2500 B.C. [when] all the essential features of the city had taken form” (109). Therefore in Mumford's view the history of the city will carry on, but, with the gathered knowledge of past experiences, if the urban organisation wants to reach its full potential, it has to be rerouted from his 1950s tendency. As he wrote in his preface: “I have demonstrated, I trust, that the city will have an even more significant part to play in the future than it has played in the past, if once the original disabilities that have accompanied it through history are sloughed off” (7).

The chief disability of the urban form, according to Mumford, is that it creates the possibility of war. In Mumford's work, “war” has to be understood broadly. He rejects Hobbes's famous claim of the primal war of “each against all” based on two arguments. First, the lack of means primitive, “self-contained communities” suffered, describing them as “too tiny, too lacking in surplus manpower, too far apart, and too poor in easy means of movement until boats were invented, to have any need to crowd one another or encroach on each other's domains” (34). Second, adopting Bronislaw Malinowski's opinion thatconomic “if we insist that war is a fight between two independent and politically organized groups, war does not occur at the primitive level” (quoted in Mumford, *City* 35). In other words, primitive, “self-contained” communities were too small to

break their unity, divide themselves and struggle against one another. Only with the new organisation and scale historically brought by the city that division occurred, which explains how the "'nobles' at first achieved their age-old power over *their own peasantry*" (35). Mumford knows that this is part of what is "necessarily a mythic extrapolation from the known facts" (34)—he doesn't assert but only suggests. Although it is admitted as not so factual by the author himself, this suggestion reveals the pastoral ideal which sustains Mumford's argument: Before the city, unity prevailed; self-containment as a way to avoid outward way. This idea of a city of violence is carried throughout the book and pushed to an extreme in the conclusion: "War was one of the 'lethal genes' transmitted by the city from century to century", Mumford wrote, going further in adding that, in the context of the Cold War, if "civilization does not eliminate war as an open possibility, our nuclear agents will destroy civilization—and possibly exterminate mankind" (652).

This apocalyptic tone which foreshadows the Cuban missile crisis of the following year only represents one side of Mumford's argument. The other is that the city, concentrating and converting "power into form, energy into culture, dead matter into the living symbols of art, biological reproduction into social creativity" (650), possesses in essence the capacity to abolish said "evil institutions" and replace in the process "slavery, forced labour, legalized expropriation, class monopoly of knowledge" with "free labour, social security, universal literacy, free education, open access to knowledge, and the beginnings of universal leisure" (651). Therefore, in Mumford's view, the centralisation a city allows contains two opposite possibilities. The first of these possibilities is the accumulation of power in one place which greatly facilitates, if not creates, the urge for war. Going against the idea that war was historically brought by "primitive nomads, the 'have-nots' against peaceful centres of industry and trade", Mumford states that the ancient city, and its progeny, was first and foremost determined by war: "War and domination, rather than peace and cooperation, were ingrained in the original structure of the ancient city" (57). Against this ingrained violence made possible by the concentration, the centralisation a city implies, Mumford sets forth the other side of the coin, reminding that such concentration of people also created effective cooperation and enabled mankind to "controlled flood, repaired storm damage, stored water, remodelled the landscape, built up a great water network for communication and transportation, and filled the urban reservoirs with human energy available for other collective enterprises" (647). Yet, these undeniable successes made possible by a city's canalised energy and enforced order are somewhat disregarded by Mumford, calling them mere "improvements", to be opposed to "the darkest contributions of urban civilization: war, slavery, vocational overspecialisation, and in many places, a persistent orientation towards death" (647).

Hence, if Mumford acknowledges the positive effect urbanisation had on the development of

mankind, one can still feel a certain reluctance the author has in regard to the concept of city. For instance, following the passage on "effective cooperation" quoted above, he wrote that, under the urban order enforced by the rulers and the "internal fabric of order and justice" that it created, the city brought to its "mixed populations (...) some of the moral stability and mutual aid of the village" (647). In other terms, even when it is achieved in the city and thanks to urban organisation, "moral stability and mutual aid" are not something logically related to the urban environment but rather to village life. I think that this biased relationship Mumford has with the city is rooted in the difficulty one has to separate city and village. When does an urban settlement go from being a village to being a city and does it imply a change of essence? This question is not clearly answered in *The City in History*. In the first pages of his demonstration, Mumford tackles the question and declares that:

> Village life is embedded in the primary association of birth and place, blood and soil. Each member of it is a whole human being, performing all the functions appropriate to each phase of life, from birth to death, in alliance with natural forces that he venerates and submits to (...) The order and stability of the village, along with its maternal enclosure and intimacy and its oneness with the forces of nature were carried over into the city: if lost in the city at large, through its over-expansion, it nevertheless remains in the quarter or the neighbourhood (24)

This passage highlights that for Mumford the village is the primordial place of unity with nature, the realm of female power. Opposed to that golden-age environment is the city of the (male) hunter-hero whose "special virtue lay in feats of daring and muscular strength: moving huge boulders, turning the course of rivers, showing contempt for danger and death. In his big and burly person occurs the first general enlargement of dimensions that comes in with the city."[6] (37) Therefore, Mumford based from the start his demonstration on the idea that the village was a woman space while the city is a male space. Unity with nature versus transformation of nature. The farmer versus the hunter. "Maternal enclosure and intimacy" versus "general enlargement of dimensions". Yet, this difference made so clear by Mumford to support his demonstration reveals itself far from being so neat under scrutiny.

Firstly, Mumford's suggestion lacks historical evidence. When he sets to explain how the hunter and the farmer met and created the city, he admits that: "The actual evidence for this accommodating interchange is lacking, for it precedes the historic record: even the suggestive material remain that would indicate a new relation between palaeolithic and neolithic groups are scanty, and open to diverse interpretations" (32). One of these interpretations, the one Mumford embraces, is that the palaeolithic hunter first acted as a protector of the neolithic farmer, fending the

6 A symbolical figure of the city still very much alive today, as the Ambuja Cements ads best demonstrate.

rampaging beasts off the villagers, the herds and the crops, before he became the predator himself, demanding to receive "protection money" to the now (comparatively) wealthy villagers. This passage, like the passage on war quoted above, is also a mythic extrapolation, based on the Sumerian legends on hunters Gilgamesh and Enkidu.

Secondly, the transformation of the land that Mumford presented as being a chief characteristic of the city was already at play in the village: "In short, the shaping of the earth was an integral part of the shaping of the city—and preceded it" (26). He explains it by the fact that the village was a proto-city, inherently possessing what would later become urban features:

> Much of the city was latent, indeed visibly present, in the village: but the latter existed as the unfertilized ovum, rather than as the developing embryo; for it needed a whole set of complementary chromosomes from a male parent to bring about the further processes of differentiation and complex cultural development. (30)

The reference to the "unfertilized ovum" and the "complementary chromosomes from a male parent" brings us back to the female/male opposition: even when the city's potential was already contained in the village (and vice versa, as he says that a city's neighbourhood can act as a village), and even when the two notions are hard to distinguish on an organisational basis, Mumford keeps working with this antagonism full of imagery. Outside of Mumford's discursive opposition, an opposition which can be traced back to a familiar idea of village life and Mother Nature, as opposed to the alienating city, its coercive organisation and its destructive/creative overflow of masculine energy, the main difference between the two is not so much a difference in essence than a difference in scale.

This notion of scale is essential to understand Mumford's demonstration. Influenced by Patrick Geddes, Peter Kropotkin and especially Ebenezer Howard, three urban thinkers who rejected the pattern of the ever-expanding city and called for a return to organising urban life on a smaller scale, Mumford pictures the ideal city as a living organism and considers that the industrial city is failing at providing a decent environment to its inhabitants, not because of its industrial essence, but rather because it's too big to *not* fail. Opposing this tendency of the centralised megalopolis, he advocates for conurbation of middle-size cities, a key idea in Geddes's project, and "dynamic equilibrium and organic balance" (587), ideas borrowed from Howard's garden cities. Mumford on Howard's project:

> Against the purposeless mass congestion of the big metropolis, with its slums, its industrial pollution, and its lengthening journeys to work, Howard opposed a more organic kind of city: a city limited from the beginning in numbers and in density of habitation, limited in area, organized to carry on all the essential functions of an urban

> community, business, industry, administration, education; equipped too with a sufficient number of public parks and private gardens to guard health and keep the whole environment sweet. (586-7)

Against the squalor and giantism of his contemporary city, descendant of that Dickensian industrial city well-fixed in collective imagination, Mumford presses for a “sweet environment”, a term which recalls the first description of the New World by European sailors, for instance Captain Arthur Barlowe's 1584 report on what would later become the state of Virginia: “wher we smelt so sweet and so strong a smel, as if we had bene in the midst of some delicate garden” (quoted in Garreau loc. 363). A delicate environment in essence, the garden city needs clear boundaries, both in the way it is articulated with other garden cities and in its own design, so much so that Howard's “town of to-morrow” was also thought as being surrounded by a green belt acting as a “two-dimensional horizontal ‘wall’”, which would not only be a way to “keep the rural environment near”, but also to “keep other urban settlements from coalescing with it”, and last but not least, “like the ancient vertical wall, heighten the sense of internal unity” (Mumford 587).

These extensive quotes highlight that what Mumford praises in Howard's urban vision is the idea of limit, a limit which is the only viable way to come back from the foul air of the industrial city and head to the sweet environment distinctive of the mythical American land. The garden city is a contained containment in itself, highly regulated in every detail, an approach so restrictive that the adjective “organic” repeatedly used by Mumford seems out of place for today's reader: “If the city was to maintain its life-maintaining functions for its inhabitants, it must in its own right exhibit the organic self-control and self-containment of any other organism” (587). The term “garden city” in itself is telling: He is logically opposed to the connotation of anarchy in the proverbial “urban jungle” that traditionally came with the industrial city. Following Howard, and informed by his preference for the hypothetical village life of the “self-contained communities” of the past, Mumford wants to change the unhealthy jungle of the ever-expanding city into an *hortus conclusus*, a closed garden of the “optimum size” (587). It has to be noted that this “optimum size” in Mumford and Howard's idea of limit is as concerned with over-extension than with over-reduction: “Living organisms can use only limited amounts of energy. ‘Too much’ or ‘too little’ is equally fatal to organic existence” (650). Neither, nor—just perfect: Both author campaign for a middle-ground in urbanisation, an idea exposed in the famous “Three magnets” diagram opening Howard's *Garden City of To-Morrow* (16); and if this perfection can be achieved, it's only through organic limitations, where the terms “organic” and “organised” are related back to one another.

This idea of limit is so essential to Mumford's thought that it already appears explicitly in his first book *Story of Utopias* (1922) in the passage on Dickens's Coketown, a city only organised on

industrialism: “Up to a certain point, industrialism is good (...) Up to a certain point—but what point? The answer is, up to the point at which the cultivation of a humane life in a community of humane people becomes difficult or impossible” (220). Hence, the “organic” limit Mumford consistently defends in his work is less connected with natural processes than with social processes, with Mumford's idea of what a humane, good life ought to be. In other words, a limited organism that would sustain Aristotle's view on human society, quoted on that same page: Men come together to live; they remain together in order to live the good life.

If Mumford is repeatedly calling for more limitations in the city and a reconsideration from mankind of what it needs from urban organisation, it is because, when his book was published, the American city was inclined towards limitless expansion, a model he decries but which will soon be dominant in cities around the globe:

> What is the shape of the city and how does it define itself? The original container has completely disappeared: the sharp division between city and country no longer exists. As the eye stretches towards the hazy periphery one can pick out no definite shapes except those formed by nature: one beholds rather a continuous shapeless mass. (Mumford, *City* 618)

The main cause and symbol of what Mumford and contemporaries perceived as a “purposeless expansion” replacing a much-needed “purposeful growth” (615) is a not-so-recent urban form which acquired great cultural significance after the Second World War, especially but not exclusively in an American context: The suburbs.

The term and image of the suburbs has become so central and dominant that nowadays the garden city imagined by Howard or his disciples has been absorbed by it, and this for two reasons. First, the fact that the great majority of garden cities, originally designed in order to be independent from bigger urban centres, have been symbolically absorbed into the sphere of influence of said urban centres. Even if they are still successfully offering an alternative to Greater London, the historical garden cities of Letchworth and Welwyn in the United Kingdom, both designed by Howard himself, are overshadowed by the megalopolis London is. Their essential smallness didn't really put them on the map. Second, Howard's urban philosophy inspired many followers which often took the seductive label “garden city” and applied it on their creation without bringing along the core principles of the garden city movement, as Mumford writes: “Superficial students patently ignorant of Howard's work still unfortunately make the error of calling suburbs garden cities, or the suburban open plan a ‘garden-city type of plan’” (590). In the pair “garden + city”, the image of the garden has won, which explains why Lutyens's New Delhi, whether in newspapers article[7] or in

7 10 Nov. 2015. <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/delhi/Lutyens-drew-Delhi-with-a-garden-city-in-

UNESCO World Heritage presentation[8], can be referred as part of the garden city movement—mainly because there is verdure in it. Neither a suburb nor a new district, the garden city was in Howard's and Mumford's mind "first of all a city: a new kind of unit whose organic pattern would in the end spread from the individual model to a whole constellation of similar cities. It was in its urbanity, not in its horticulture, that the Garden City made a bold departure from the established method of building and planning" (590-1). In other terms, the garden city was designed not as a new, perfected version of the suburban settlement, but as an alternative to it, an independent urban unit, not *sub*-jected to any other centre. Yet, we can see in how the label "garden city" is commonly used nowadays that the more familiar, dominating concept of suburbs has absorbed it; or to put it another way, we can see how the two expressions, "suburbs" and "garden city", are used interchangeably to describe the same environment, evacuating the idea of an alternative urban form the theorised garden city first had. To illustrate this, besides the example of Lutyens's Delhi, we can refer to an article published in a Mexican review of urban studies which explains, because the author feels there is a need for it, that two of the most iconic affluent enclaves in Mexico city (Hipódromo Condesa and Las Lomas de Chapultepec) cannot be considered garden cities just because they are centred around a park (*see* Sanchez de Carmona).

What is striking with the history of the expression "garden city" and its relation with the dominating expression "suburbs" is how terms can be voided of their original meaning and only given value according to a network of labels. In this case "garden city", instead of recalling Howard's fully-theorised and alternative concept, is simply read as "garden + city", or a suburban settlement with extra greenery, thus acquiring a value based on how high or low considerations on nature are. Yet if nowadays a garden city is often pictured and traded as the good kind of suburbs, when Mumford's *City in History* was published, in 1961, the suburbs was the enemy, the garden city the solution.

According to the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, the term "suburb" comes from Old French "*suburbe*", itself coming from Latin "*suburbium*"; a compound of *sub*- "near to" and *urb*- "the city"[9]. This negative construction (outside the city but still next to it) renders the term "suburb" very evasive from the start: An in-between term, defined by a symbolical distance with the city, yet without being entirely excluded from its influence. If etymological dictionaries dates back the appearance of the term in the English language around the 14th century[10], Mumford, after quickly

mind/articleshow/48717039.cms>

8 10 Nov. 2015. <http://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/5743/>

9 "Suburb." *Concise Oxford Dictionary.* 11Th ed. 2008.

10 10 Nov. 2015. <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=suburb&allowed_in_frame=0>

mentioning possible suburban settlements around the Sumerian city of Ur (550), takes as the point of origin of the modern suburban environment the thirteenth century in Europe and the "dread of plague" which forced many to escape the city: "in that sense, one may say that the modern suburb began as a sort of rural isolation ward" (554). In giving this source to the development of the modern suburb, Mumford draws a striking opposition between the infectious, unhealthy urban environment and the escape represented by the suburban house. According to Mumford, the suburb appeared as a way to live in more salubrious conditions without distancing oneself too much from the city. Therefore, the early settlements outside the city walls were triggered by a demand for more space and hygiene, or in other terms, "pure air and water, freedom from raucous human noises, open fields for riding, hunting, archery, rural strolling (...) qualities that the aristocracy everywhere has always valued" (555). An haven far from the overcrowded centre, yet not as isolated as the countryside, the early modern suburb answered what Mumford consistently defines as the needs of mankind if it wants to achieve the "good life". With the advance of the industrial age and the safety brought by the centralised power of the nation-state, the desire to get away from the city centre was made available to more and owning a suburban house became synonym, in eighteenth century Europe, of social success for the bourgeoisie, or of a "bourgeois utopia" to borrow Robert Fishman's term. Yet, as he noted in his introduction to the eponymous book, *Bourgeois Utopias*:

> From its origins, the suburban world of leisure, family life, and union with nature was based on the principle of exclusion. Work was excluded from the family residence; middle-class villas were segregated from working-class housing; the greenery of suburbia stood in contrast to gray, polluted urban environment. (4)

This exclusion of the city's contamination and poor was ironically made more and more difficult as the demand for relative isolation was growing, eventually pushing the boundaries of the city and the boundaries of the suburb further and further, in a sort of "catch me if you can" pattern. The suburban retreat was going further away into the countryside, eventually far-off from the city it was still supposed to be "close to". Relative isolation turned into isolation, to such a degree that "once the suburban growth became untrammelled, the open plan made rapid locomotion and an extravagant road system a necessity, at the expense of most of the other qualities that had made the suburb originally attractive" (Mumford, *City* 558-9). Hence, in the post-war industrialised countries, with the advent of the personal car and the demographic boom, the suburban retreat became available to the majority, losing its sense of exclusion in the process. Symbolically, the "suburb" as an area became the "suburbs" or "suburbia", the latter being even capitalised by Mumford, as if it were a country in itself (584), or a Latin-named disease. The idea of individual haven the term had implied was now absorbed by the mass. To be as clear as possible in the coming pages, I shall use

"suburb" for early suburban settlements preceding the advent of the car and "suburbia" for later evolutions. This distinction is not only convenient, but also marks the moment when the suburb became the shapeless mass Mumford abhors: "As long as the railroad stop and walking distances controlled suburban growth, the suburb had a form" (575). The suburb lost its shape when it became universal, an universalism of the suburban desire only made possible with the personal car.

Favourable to the early suburb, Mumford fiercely opposed the suburbia. The arguments he uses against are also to be found in the great majority of critical texts on the topic which will flourish afterwards. One of his most direct attack towards the suburbia is that it is entirely centred on car transportation. Earlier in the book, Mumford praises the medieval town as the urban form in history which was the closest to the garden city. Defending its limitations and the interdependence it developed with other villages (360-1), Mumford also highlights the fact that the medieval town was built according to the scale of the pedestrian, which greatly helped creating a sense of community:conomic

> But even at its widest, no medieval town usually extended more than half a mile from the centre; that is every necessary institution, every friend, relative, associate, was in effect a close neighbour, within easy walking distance. So one was bound everyday to encounter many people by coincidence whom one could not meet except by pre-arrangement and effort in a bigger city." (359)

As opposed to the medieval town in Mumford's view, the prevalence of the car in the suburbia destroyed the pedestrian scale and thus simultaneously damaged the sense and fabric of community. The example he gives is that "the entire day-time population of historic Boston could assemble by foot on Boston Common, probably in less than an hour if the streets were clear of motor traffic" (578). On the contrary, with the congestion brought by mass car transportation, it would be impossible for people to gather if they were all coming using their own personal vehicles.

Once again, in this argument we can see the importance Mumford gives to the idea of limit since he does not consider the advantage the car also bring, namely the possibility to gather more people in Boston than just Bostonians. To him, the city has to be defined by a community, and both have to be quantitatively limited. Besides making the act of gathering more complicated than before, Mumford is also critical of parking lots as they encroach on green space, or as he puts it: "Instead of buildings set in a park, we now have buildings set in a parking lot" (576). Related to that, he generally deplores the loss of the wholesome environment the suburb was originally associated with, alongside with space as a whole. The early suburban values (wholesome environment, space, semi-isolation), its "individuality and charm" (575) have all been lost to the car.

Intrinsically related to the notion of city as a community, the defeat of the pedestrian against the

car also changes the place given to public space. The street, the square and the park, essential features of the city and vectors of socialisation are being reduced by the car's need for private space. Taking, like many others, Los Angeles as the epitome of that sacrifice of the public space in order to satisfy the new mobility, Mumford writes:

> Los Angeles has now become an undifferentiated mass of houses, walled off into sectors by many-laned expressways, with ramps and viaducts that create special bottlenecks of their own (...) More than a third of the Los Angeles area is consumed by these grotesque transportation facilities; *two thirds* of central Los Angeles are occupied by streets, freeways, parking facilities, garages. (581)

Last but not least, this loss of public space and sense of community opens the way to an attack on free speech and the access of information as a whole. To defend this position, Mumford argues that, since people can no longer meet each other in the street, since people can no longer consider that they belong to a given community, social interactions become minimal and thus, "all knowledge and direction can be monopolized by central agents and conveyed through guarded channels, too costly to be utilized by small groups or private individuals" (583). Instead of a collective construction through constant "direct contact and face-to-face association" (583), information and representation in the suburbia can now be more easily shaped by one single channel. The isolation from one another, as Mumford writes, is not forced on the people, it is not the result of a conscious conspiracy but of an individual desire: "it is an organic by-product of an economy that sacrifices human development to mechanical processing" (583).

Losing the pedestrian, public space and collective knowledge to the primacy of the car, private space and privatised and singular canal of information, Mumford sees the suburbia as the space of choice for the development of alienation and despotism, its shapelessness reducing the possibilities for socialisation and collective political actions to take place, as they were made possible by the limited, closed space of the earlier city organisation. Therefore, one of the most striking argument in Mumford's work is that the car and democratisation of the suburbia has not only destroyed the values the suburb once stood for: it has also heavily damaged the notion of city itself. First imagined as an escape from the noxious container the industrial city had become, the disease suburbia now directly threatens the age-old urban ideal, as Mumford says: "The actual coalescence of urban tissue that is now taken by many sociologists to be a final stage in city development, is not in fact a new sort of city, but an anti-city. As in the concept of anti-matter, the anti-city annihilated the city whenever it collides with it" (575).

To Mumford, the suburbia annihilates the idea of city and it also attenuates the "sharp division between city and country" (618), a division that, as we have seen above, was not so sharp to start

with. Nonetheless, to Mumford, its shapelessness and perceived novelty indicates the rise of a new paradigm in urban forms, a new paradigm Mumford saw as threatening all the good aspects the notion of city developed over the centuries.

To understand Mumford's rejection of the suburbia, and before concluding this sub-part on *The City in History*, let us come back to the roots he gives to that movement: the baroque city. According to him, the emergence of preconceived urban planning, allied with the straight avenue, replaced the organic planning of the medieval town which “does not begin with a preconceived goal” but rather “moves from need to need, from opportunity to opportunity, in a series of adaptations that themselves become increasingly coherent and purposeful, so that they generate a complex, final design, hardly less unified than a pre-formed geometric pattern” (348), the preformed geometric pattern being the basis of the later baroque city. Besides the fact that the medieval town was a collective creation (362), this type of urban organisation has Mumford's favour because it was more “informal than regular” (347) and fully integrated in its natural environment. Since the technology of the time didn't allow to deeply alter the landscape, in the European medieval town “the seizure of an accidental advantage may prompt a strong element in a design” (347).

As opposed to the accidental curve of the medieval town, in symbiosis with its environment and symbolising the collective work of a community, he opposes the “block achievement” of the baroque plan which must be “laid out at a stroke, fixed and frozen for ever, as if done overnight by Arabian Nights genii”, entirely designed by an “architectural despot, working for an absolute ruler, who will live long enough to complete their own conceptions” and devoid of any outside elements as to preserve its a-historical and pure perfection: “Their ruthlessness in clearing out the old was equalled only by their stubbornness in opposing the news: for only one order could harmonize with their kind of plan—namely, more of their own” (449). What is obviously the most striking thing in that opposition between the medieval and baroque town, with the latter's geometrical and functionalist plan announcing modern architecture à la Le Corbusier, is that it ironically goes against Mumford's praise of the Garden City movement. As said above, a garden city, the solution to urban problems Mumford presses for, is in essence a highly regulated, closed urban plan, designed by one man (*see*conomic Ebenezer Howard's Letchworth and Welwyn).

Mumford neutralise this inherent contradiction by, again, drawing a line and creating a potential space between the organic-medieval type and the geometric-baroque type of urban planning:

> This is not to say that geometric order cannot play a useful part in planning: quite the contrary. An age like ours, which has succumbed to purely capricious and aimless “free

> forms", may soon have to recover an appreciation of a more rigorous discipline, with its intelligible simplification and order, and its reasonable constraints. The function of geometry in planning is to clarify and guide. Like every other type of useful abstraction, it must be conditioned by the concrete situation in its wholeness and its variety, and give way to specific needs when the latter point to some aspect of life that has escaped the formula. (449)

By not completely throwing out the obvious advantages of geometric planning, Mumford puts the emphasis on the need for flexibility, the need for a preconceived, abstract plan to take into account the wholeness and variety of its setting, like the symbiosis medieval town did, forgetting that to his own admission, and as quoted above, the medieval town didn't start with a "preconceived goal" (348). Adding further that the mistake of baroque planners was to "tacitly assumed that their order was eternal" (449), Mumford seems to praise the effect of time and the possibility for a city's inhabitants to re-appropriate their environment. However, he doesn't directly address the issue of how a garden city could stay one if, first: it was not originally designed by one man, one central authority; second: it was open to informal modifications.

What's more, he underscores the fact that what really was revolutionary about the garden city idea was, not the mere contact with nature, but "the rational and orderly method for dealing with complexity, through and organization capable of establishing balance and autonomy, and of maintaining order despite differentiation, and coherence and unity despite the need for growth" (590). He also argued that with Howard's idea, ten cities of thirty-thousand people "connected by fast public transportation, politically federated and culturally associated" could be organised into a network which would allow them to obtain "these advantages without the disabilities of the larger unit" (592). An idea quite debatable when we look at how, for instance, the villages which were once around Mexico City or Delhi have been quickly absorbed into their capital districts. The villages which keep standing out of the urban sprawl are those with an historical value or which became commercial or tourist landmarks (and often both), like Coyoacán, San Ángel or Tlalpan in the South of Mexico City, or Shahpur Jat and the more tricky Hauz Khas in the South of Delhi. Yet, not by any stretch of the imagination these places have the autonomy Howard imagined for each garden city in a given network.

Mumford's view of how the city ought to be planned is a good illustration of the difficulty one faces when it comes to imagining a city without a preconceived centre while paradoxically calling for collective improvisation, a certain and abstract "organicity", this term meaning both organised and spontaneous, self-contained and open. I would submit that Mumford's reaction towards the shapeless suburbia and his praise for the regulated garden city can be historically read as an

illustration of the difficulty for a "modernist" vision (Mumford) to grasp and comprehend a new urban space (the suburbia) through the use of traditional yet obsolescent dichotomies (city/country, centre/periphery, mechanic/organic). Going further, and relocating my reading outside the restricted field of urban studies and inside the broader history of ideas, I argue that Mumford's opposition to the suburbia (social alienation, privatisation, shapelessness) is similar to lines of attack used by critics of postmodernity, therefore allowing an interesting parallel between the discourse on urban issues after World War II and the debate on postmodernity.

To make this argument clear, allow me to examine a last passage from *The City in History*. While describing the metropolitan explosion brought by the limitless suburban expansion, Mumford uses the image of the city-as-a-magnet to describe a dispersal of "fast moving particles" which are "no longer held together either by the urban magnet or the urban container"—particles which are becoming instead "emblems of the 'disappearing city'" (572). Mumford attacking decentralisation might seem odd if we remember, as we have seen above, that he is advocating for independent garden cities organised in a decentralised network: "instead of agglomeration, planned dispersal; instead of monopolistic concentration, decentralization; instead of disorganization, a higher type of unity" (588). The ambivalent attitude towards the ideas of decentralisation and dispersal, often reduced to a logical opposition in the context of the modern/postmodern controversy, are tensions similar to the ones expressed by some critics facing the rise of postmodernism, to such an extent that it would be tempting and fruitful to read certain passages of *The City in History* using the tools of the modern/postmodern controversy:

> Though potentially they provided the elements for a new kind of multi-centred city, operated on a regional scale, their effect has so far been to corrode and undermine the old centres, without forming a pattern coherent enough to carry on their essential cultural functions on anything like the old level. (573)

If we were to religiously follow David Harvey's list (Harvey 43), based on Ibn Hassan's 1985 definition of postmodernism in his "The Culture of Postmodernism", a list in which "centring" is opposed to "dispersal", we would notice that the position Mumford adopts towards both centre and dispersal, towards both the old centre and the multi-centred city, is more complex than mere opposition.

I argue that like the passage I just quoted, Mumford's demonstration, and sometimes confusion, embodies the complex tension at the heart of the relationship between "centring" and "dispersal" (or "city" and "suburbia" in urban terms, "hegemonic" and "subaltern" in cultural terms), as well as the difficulty to express and overcome that tension—a tension which is often toned down or simply replaced by logical opposition in the modern/postmodern controversy, instead of embracing

complexity and that very tension. Take Harvey's opposition of modern and postmodern themes or Hassan's list of postmodernists (Hassan 114-15): Both think it's dangerous to "depict complex relations as simple polarizations, when almost certainly the true state of sensibility, the real 'structure of feeling' in both the modern and postmodern periods, lies in the manner in which these stylistic oppositions are synthesized" (Harvey 42); and yet they both end up polarizing the debate, semantics being modern, rhetoric postmodern, as if both notions had no meeting point, no meeting place.

Obviously, my critic may sound simplistic and one could argue, like Harvey, that polarization is a "useful starting point" for a debate, to which I would happily agree. Yet, in my view what was supposed to be just a starting point not only created a certain mind-frame but also now influences the conclusion: What is postmodern, what is modern, etc. For instance, where to place Mumford if we follow Harvey's distinction between modernist city planning and postmodernist city planning?

> "Modernist" town planners, for example, do tend to look for "mastery" of the metropolis as a "totality" by deliberately designing a "closed form," whereas postmodernists tend to view the urban process as uncontrollable and "chaotic," one in which "anarchy" and "change" can "play" in entirely "open" situations. (44)

Admittedly, Harvey is cautious to not generalise, using the innocuous "tend to"; nonetheless, his presentation draw two sides, two tendencies, that one has to adopt, even if only in terms of intensity (more this than that). From what we have seen in *The City in History*, where to place Mumford's view? With "modern" town planners because he presses for the highly regulated garden city? With "postmodern" because he rejects the baroque city and praises the accidental, collective medieval town? Even in the case where we could shape a convincing argument in favour of the thesis "Mumford is more of a modern", or the reciprocal, "Mumford is more of a postmodern", we would have lost something of Mumford's view. Such polarized conclusion would have the advantage to make the notion of "Lewis Mumford" easier to trade on the market of ideas, at the expense of its complexity. Still walking the line between the urban debate of the 1960s and the modern/postmodern controversy in an allegory that brings together both, like the walls of a city, the two terms "modern" and "postmodern" are including as much as they are excluding: their bipolar articulation conveys the idea that there cannot be a place in-between, so much so that even if you ant to start imagining that place between these two poles you need to come back to them—very much like the man in Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City* who has to come to the city to oppose and reject it: There is no other ready way (229).

Needless to say that this call to break free from the rigid dialectic of centre/periphery in order to open a new space in-between is not groundbreaking in any way: It has been developed and

discussed in many works and by many authors in the last decades, so much so that I would argue that this opposition echoes the one of the Self and the Other which forms the heart and basis of most debates in the humanities, today and before. The fresh canon of the past decades is fuelled by the will to go beyond traditional and inherently oppositional dichotomies within an inherently oppositional language, to create grey zones between "item 1" and "item 2".

This attempt to escape the too narrow articulation between city and country at a time when such distinctions are less relevant than they once were opened the way to necessary reforms in fields such as architecture, urban planning, human geography and cultural studies as a whole, inducing the creation of new theories and terms to discuss buildings or places which appeared more recently.

Even if it applies differently to any given regions, I would submit that the years following the Second World War have not only seen the rise of a new world order created by both Cold War bi-polarisation and decolonisation but also witnessed a major social and cultural turn with the strengthening of the middle-class as the symbolically dominant class, a domination supported by a high natality rate and fuelled by a democratisation of society (extended political franchise, reduction of poverty, rise in education, etc.). Alongside this social turn a more political, cultural and economic one occurred through the accelerations of processes of globalisation and internationalisation (international political unions, mass media, facilitated international trade).

This fast-growing middle-class had to be accommodated somewhere and the city, quickly and efficiently, had to push its walls outwards and encroach on new territories around its core. In parallel, the new political and economic organisation had to secure places for this new consumption society to thrive, as well as to deal effectively with the new, global scale with which the world had to be lived, drastically changed by fast transportation and increased transborder exchanges. All this created a new urban geography with buildings and places that are now perceived as symbols of our contemporary times: Housing estates, tract housing, motorways, shopping malls, airports, etc. This new urban geography, breaking open the city itself, called for new terms and theories that would similarly break open the field of urban studies. This perception of the "outskirts" and the discourse on the spaces of post-1945 urbanisation is what we are going to focus on in the coming paragraphs.

It has to be noted that the term "post-1945 urbanisation" is highly debatable since the features it implies affected cities differently over time and space, and, what's more, since certain of these features predate 1945. Consider one of the most characteristic place of that post-1945 urbanisation I am trying to define: The shopping mall. Historically, if its recent, often peripheral, including and car-friendly avatar emerged after the Second World War with the advent of the middle-class, it would be senseless to deny it older roots in the 19th arcades and department stores. Likewise, the tension between an alienating suburban life based on consumption and material comfort and the

cultural, historical and more stimulating heart of the city is already at play in Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street* (1920), for instance; a far from marginal view on suburban life since its author was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1930.

Hence, needless to say that notions such as materialism and alienation didn't suddenly appear after 1945. If history of ideas is structured through dates and periods, it's first and foremost a constant flow, and pinpointing cultural shifts is always an arbitrary move. In the case of "post-1945 urbanisation", I use it to avoid using expressions such as "modern", "postmodern" or even "high modern" urbanisation. It doesn't mean that I don't deem these terms useful and relevant, orconomic that I don't consider the modernism/postmodernism controversy to be fruitful. Only that in the course of my argument such name-giving, *en passant*, might bring more confusion than clarity, that it would be in contradiction with what I am trying to demonstrate, and that I simply do not wish to dwell on such topics that have been better tackled by many others.

Let me take advantage of this pause in my demonstration to clarify a methodological point: This dissertation is not a dissertation on urban planning, architecture and human geography *stricto sensu*, but instead a demonstration which aims at being considered as part of the study of the history of ideas *via* urban literature. Our main concern is culture, not society, even when the two are intimately connected. To break it down from the two general terms of "culture" and "society", let us say that this dissertation focuses on cultural movements and evolutions of ideas, not on political and economic institutions and their impact on living conditions. The line is thin between the two, perhaps even unnecessary, but I will keep it throughout this dissertation and use from now on "modern" and "postmodern" in relation with modernism and postmodernism, as a way to avoid adding to the confusion between "-ism" and "-ity", and also because I'm not sure to be versed enough in politics and economics to use "modern" and "postmodern" in relation to modernity and postmodernity properly. Hence the necessarily imperfect, yet neutral, "post-1945 urbanisation" to talk about a dominant urban process motivated by a set of political and economic changes—a failure of a term that I embrace as such.

I allow myself to do so because "post-1945 urbanisation" is not our main object, but rather our second-degree object of study: We are primarily going to focus on the intellectual response and academic reaction to this new type of urbanisation, a reaction which started taking momentum in the 60s and really soared in the 80s thanks to the consolidation of postmodern theory (*see* "Introduction: How to Map a Radical Break", in Dear and Flusty 1-12).

To treat equally all the terms and theories that have been written on the perceived-as-new spaces of post-1945 urbanisation would be an impossible task since, not unlike the urban sprawl, it took too many forms and too many names, overlapping too many different fields, each author adding on

previous ones in an attempt to come to terms with an inherently evasive and new *urban* environment; all that in an inherently evasive and new *cultural* environment. This is best illustrated by Alan Berger, and Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Robert, who respectively authored *Drosscape* and *Edgelands*, two books which include a list of "Contemporary Names for the Urbanization of Landscape" established by Berger in 2006 (Berger 244; Farley & Simmons 3-4), before themselves coining a new term—namely "drosscape" and "edgelands".

I would submit that this proliferation of terms to describe new forms of the urban environment is an example of how our relation to knowledge of the city has evolved, from a monolithic term ("city") to a terminology of differentiations based on nuances. There once was, at least in discourse, an evolving yet constant consensus on what a city was, a consensus symbolised in the use of a single term: Even when the meaning of the term was moving according to the evolution of its signified, for instance in the shift from medieval *city* to industrial *city*, there was a consensus on the term "city" as being appropriate, something to start a study on, something to challenge, even when the term was made in such a way that it was cancelling otherness, the exception. With the advent of post-1945 urbanisation and with the fresh insights of postmodern theory, that logic of knowledge may have changed, to say the least in urban studies: While we once focused on the monolithic "city", smoothing down the its contradictions, now we tend to focus on the various cracks of that overarching concept.

We will come back later to this image of the cracked monolith but what I wish to establish now is that academic discourse produced on the post-1945 urban space is mirroring their object of studies: The urban sprawl is tackled with a linguistic sprawl. To study this proliferation of terms and theories as an attempt to bring out a pattern, I will draw three categories. The distinctions I am about to make between the different reactions towards the post-1945 urbanisation doesn't have to be taken as isolating or hermetically distinguishing sealed compartments: The three movements, and the terms and theories which come with them, are constantly overlapping, leaking into one another. The logical reaction to that sentence would be: If it is so, why make a distinction in the first place? To which my answer is that even if this distinction is imperfect, approximate, it still allows us to give this dissertation a common ground on which to start on, even if that common ground is shaky.

Therefore, instead of taking terms one by one, I have classified them in three categories based on what I consider to be the three main reactions towards spaces of post-1945 urbanisation in published intellectual discourse, this being understood as discourse aiming at participating in the creation of collective knowledge and approved by the publishing process. As said above, like any classification, it is inherently flawed and selective but it will allow us to start drawing some points and conclusions which will recur in coming chapters, as well as sketching an overview of the types

of reaction, the types of discourse these new urban forms generated, which will resonate with and add to what we have seen in Mumford.

The first of these three reactions, probably the dominant one, is a negative one, often supported by authors often coming from Marxism (Jameson, Harvey) who see the post-1945 urbanisation as a perfect illustration of the deep alienation brought by postmodernism. It more often than not focuses on space symbolising global capitalism (shopping malls, airports, hotels) rather than the suburbia as home.

This first reaction and its focus on alienation is perhaps best illustrated by Augé's simple definition of what a "non-place" is: "If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place" (Augé 78). Hence, *not* relational, *not* historical and *not* concerned with identity is Augé's definition of his concept of non-place, a rather successful term in the field and still influential today (Sinclair, *Ghost* loc. 3294). This negative reaction towards the new spaces of postmodernity/supermodernity/late-capitalism, depending on which slogan you prefer, is based on the underlying idea that such spaces are the opposite of places, "places" being understood as localisations of community, history and identity, in short a space where a certain unity can be achieved, where history can be shaped and which is not generic but recognisable by a certain group. In other terms, according to authors belonging to this category, these non-places are manifestations of the cultural dominant and must be opposed if one wants to escape the "overwhelmingly present" condition of fragmented, a-historical and anonymous contemporaneity (Harvey 336).

Related to a critic of the Spectacle as exposed by Debord and the dominance of the signs over the idea of "true" reality *(see* the passage on the League of Black Revolutionary Workers in Jameson, *Postmodernism* 413-14; Augé 95-99), the most radical and direct example of that reaction towards what we have called post-1945 urbanisation is to be found in Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas's articles, especially "Junkspace" and "Generic City".

In these articles Koolhaas tries to express the paradox of the architecture supporting these non-places (again, more shopping centres than suburban housing), a globally homogeneous architecture but connected to nothing outside itself, just like these buildings are isolated from their environment through air-conditioning:

> Air-conditioning has launched the endless building. If architecture separates building, air-conditioning unites them. Air-conditioning has dictated mutant regimes of organization and coexistence that leave architecture behind. A single shopping center is now the work of generations of space planners, repairmen, and fixers, like in the Middle Ages; air-conditioning sustains our cathedrals. (All architects may unwittingly be

> working on the same building, so far separate, but with hidden receptors that will eventually make it cohere.) (Koolhaas 176)

What is to be noted in regard to this negative reaction is that it is not only an attack on one particular field, like architecture when it comes to Koolhaas, but rather an assault on what is perceived as a whole ideology/cultural logic/overwhelming condition (again, pick your slogans based on your affinities), a dominant which is cancelling change or progress. Therefore, if someone like Koolhaas starts with buildings, he quickly drifts to a more general critic of dominant views on time and space. Still in "Junkspace":

> While whole millennia worked in favor of permanence, axialities, relationships, and proportion, the program of Junkspace is escalation. Instead of development, it offers entropy. Because it is endless, it always leaks somewhere in Junkspace; in the worst case, monumental ashtrays catch intermittent drops in a gray broth... When did time stop moving forward, begin to spool in every direction, like a tape spinning out of control? Since the introduction of Real Time™? Change has been divorced from the idea of improvement. There is no progress; like a crab on LSD, culture staggers endlessly sideways... (178)

These themes and frustration at a global culture actualised in contemporary urbanisation which seems to be unable to progress are found in many other books on contemporary space, but this quote by Koolhaas perhaps sums it up best, not only because it repeats, in different terms, the trinity seen above with Augé, but also because it underscores the tension between progress and excess already at play in what we have seen with Mumford's *City in History*. Koolhaas's Junkspace is both entropy and escalation, a parody of progress through excess, and what needs to be dismantled if one wants to be able to go forward. Just like human relation, history and identity mentioned above, that notion of progress is rarely defined in texts which, I believe, belong to this first reaction, and similarly the destination of that forward is kept vague; but what is sure is that it can only be achieved by coming back from these non-places to more localised places.

This negative reaction is dominant in the discourse on new contemporary spaces. In mainstream cultural production, most particularly and much paradoxically in TV shows and popular films produced by and fuelling a global consumption society, the shopping mall still denotes a certain superficiality and lack of true human relationships, living in suburban residential areas is still represented as living in an immutable bubble of boredom and airports are still the quintessential place of anonymity. If this negative perception of the new spaces of the post-1945 urbanisation are widespread, whether it be in academic discourse or mainstream culture, there also exists a, if not thoroughly, at least *more* positive reaction to contemporary trends in urban planning and

architecture, as well as towards the dominant contemporary cultural logic, since we have seen that they are often connected.

As we have tried to demonstrate with Mumford, the 60s were dominated by the idea that the contemporary urban sprawl of that time was something inherently nefarious to the idea of city and that it had been stopped by coming back to past models, whether it be the Garden City for Mumford or the village density in Jacobs. Against the grain of such approach, the American architect Robert Venturi and his associates Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour edited and published *Learning from Las Vegas* in 1972, incidentally the year Harvey, based on Richard Jencks, pinpoints the start of postmodernity (Harvey 38).

Learning from Las Vegas presents itself as a "revolutionary" break from modern architecture a la Le Corbusier, not by going back to smaller scales and older, canonic styles, but by embracing "ugly and ordinary" forms which spontaneously appeared in the post-1945 context. Venturi & co. start their work as follows:

> Learning from the existing landscape is a way of being revolutionary for an architect (...) Architects are out of habit of looking nonjudgmentally at the environment, because orthodox Modern architecture is progressive, if not revolutionary, utopian, and puristic; it is dissatisfied with *existing* conditions. Modern architecture has been anything but permissive: Architects have preferred to change the existing environment rather than enhance what is there. (3)

To make their call for a more pragmatic approach, an approach less abstract and more in touch with what is already there without judging it based on both misplaced and out-of-place ethics, Venturi & co. focus their demonstration on the "commercial vernacular" of Las Vegas architecture, an architecture made for the car and based on communication and symbols more than concrete forms:

> Symbol dominates space. Architecture is not enough. Because the spatial relationships are made by symbols more than by forms, architecture in this landscape becomes symbol in space rather than form in space. Architecture defines very little: The big sign and the little building is the rule of Route 66. (13)

Where the authors of our first category, the negative one, are perceiving this overabundance, this excess of signs and symbols as an overwhelming Spectacle barring access to true reality, Venturi & co. are instead calling for putting the emphasis on the symbols. In other terms, while the first reaction was all about moving forward by negating new contemporary spaces, even through the terms used (*junk*space, *non*-place), *Learning from Las Vegas* aims at giving legitimacy to this new style, this type of spaces perceived as new. Hence the constant comparisons between the symbolical architecture of the Las Vegas Strip with glorious past references, for instance the Gothic cathedral

(6), Versailles (13) or Rome (18).

Therefore, we have so far two reactions towards post-1945 urbanisation, one of negation and one of acceptance, both claiming to be to some extent revolutionary and more social and popular than the other, a relation best illustrated in that direct reference from Fredric Jameson to Venturi:

> I have mentioned the populist aspect of the rhetorical defense of Postmodernism against the elite (and Utopian) austerities of the great architectural modernisms: it is generally affirmed, in other words, that these newer buildings are popular works, on the one hand, and that they respect the vernacular of the American city fabric, on the other; that is to say, they no longer attempt; as did the masterworks and monuments of high modernism, to insert a different, a distinct, and elevated, a new Utopian language into the tawdry and commercial sign system of the surrounding city, but rather they seek to speak that very language, using its lexicon and syntax as that has been emblematically "learned from Las Vegas." (Jameson 39)

As said above, if the negative response to contemporary new spaces is dominant, more recent authors are following Venturi's approach and accept new contemporary spaces not as mistakes which have to be corrected, but as opportunities, as relevant expressions of our times which shouldn't be condemned on an ethical basis. This is for instance the case of the notion of Edge city developed by Joel Garreau in his eponymous work.

Garreau goes even further than Venturi & co, who seemed neither reluctant nor enthusiast about applying their own theories of the "ugly and ordinary" to their buildings (Venturi 128), by connecting the urban areas proliferating at the outer edge of traditional city centres as a new avatar of the American Frontier, opening by saying that "not since we took Paul Revere's Boston and Benjamin Franklin's Philadelphia and exploded them into nineteenth-century industrial behemoths have we made such dramatic changes in how we live, work, and play" (Garreau loc. 21) and that people living in Edge Cities are the "sons of the pioneers" (loc. 151). Unlike Venturi & co., he is not only paying attention to Edge Cities because it is there, he also argues that such spaces are absolutely central to the American culture, connecting it to its most sacred figures. Moreover, against Mumford's view of suburbia and against the negative response to new contemporary spaces we have first seen, he states that Edge Cities are fully-fledged cities (loc. 518) and that they are historical places (loc. 408). In other words that they are relational, historical and concerned with identity, both personal and national.

Quite similar to Garreau's defence of the results of the urban sprawl, Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Robert in *Edgelands: Journeys into England's True Wilderness* are defending, legitimating what they call edgelands, places "where urban and rural negotiate and renegotiate their

borders" (5) and based on their childhood "on the edge of two cities—Liverpool and Manchester" (2). Borrowing the term from Marion Shoard, the edgelands are to the symbolically charged English countryside what Garreau's Edge City is to the American settlement: The most recent offspring who has to be legitimised.

Therefore so far we have seen two types of reaction towards what we have referred to the umbrella term of post-1945 urbanisation, one of negation which can stretch to rejection, and one of acceptance which can stretch to defence. I would like to conclude this part of our demonstration by what I perceive to be a third kind of reaction, neither negative nor positive and both at once, which is mostly expresses in literary texts, whether it be fiction or non-fiction.

To support this claim I will base my argument on the works of Bruce Bégout. A French philosopher by trade and education, Bégout has written a lot on what he refers to as the suburbia in the last fifteen years, with non-fiction works such as *Zéropolis* (2002) on Las Vegas, *Lieu commun* (2003) on the American motel, and most recently *Suburbia* (2013), but also short stories and novels, even if the distinction between fiction and non-fiction here might not be of prime importance. I have chosen Bégout to exemplify this third category because his intellectual evolution in regard to the suburbia is striking and subtle at once. If the two other reactions we have seen above were quite clear, the reaction of Bégout and others, including the British authors that I will use as primary sources later, is more ambiguous.

In his first work on the suburbia, he focuses on Las Vegas, which has become helped by Venturi the stereotype (with Los Angeles) of what the American, then global, suburbanisation ought to be. To the question "What have you learned from the urban experience of Las Vegas", echoing again Venturi's work, Bégout answers: Nothing (Bégout, *Lieu* loc. 19). This "nothing" is not aiming at denying the importance of Las Vegas, but only at highlighting that the logic supporting Las Vegas as a city is already so diffuse that the author has not seen there anything that he had not seen elsewhere: "We are all inhabitants of Las Vegas, regardless how far we are from South Nevada[11]". Saying so, Bégout is globalising the issue.

So far in this dissertation the authors we have discussed were in the great majority from an American (or rather *étasunien*[12]) context, because texts from this context are still today the most influential in the fields we are studying because contemporary urban practises we are and will be discussing here are connected to an economic and political organisation dominated by the United

11 "*Nous sommes tous des habitants de Las Vegas, à quelque distance que nous nous trouvions du sud du Nevada*" (loc. 33).

12 The world is still waiting for an English equivalent of French *étasunien*, Italian *statunitense* or Spanish *estadounidense*, i.e an adjective for "from/of the United States" to replace the wrongly continental "American".

States of America. Once that said, I think, following Bégout (and Koohlaas as quoted above), that these new urban spaces are more globalised than localised, i.e. they are produced by rules and/or means which are shared and travel worldwide, yet without really being a descendant of one single culture, not even the American one. Or as Bégout writes in *Lieu Commun*:

> If I have chosen the American city it's not simply due to the strength and steadiness of its influence over the world but rather because the virgin aspect of the New World's space allowed to build a urban reality *ex nihilo*, a almost diaphanous urbanity, in the sense that its meaning completely matches its date of creation.[13]

In *Zéropolis* or *Lieu commun*, Bégout is rather critical towards its object of study, the American (and global) suburbia, but this point of view is nuanced in the more recent *Suburbia* (and before that in *Lieu commun*, but mainly through the scope of the everyday life).

In this later work, Bégout presents the contemporary urban experience in the city outskirts not so much as a big nothing centred around the vain idea of fun and game (Bégout, *Suburbia* loc. 93) but as an favourable environment for philosophical investigation on the nature of man. After stating that the new urban experience forces us to concretely engage with our relation to endlessness or the difficulty to understand, meet and interact with the Other, Bégout writes that philosophical anthropology is best practiced in the suburbia rather than in the historical centres because, if the suburbia is indeed a condensation of negativity ("hyperconsumerism, ecological pressure, urban violence, individualistic and defensive retreat, the defacing of city gates, fear, isolation, cultural void, boredom", or later "ugliness, monotony, anomie"[14]), it is then where life will be thriving the most and thought expressing its freedom the best:

> When we observe behind our windscreen this world made of warehouses and signboards, roundabouts and motorway junctions, it is hard to believe that this is a station on mankind's emancipatory road, we would rather convince ourselves that alienation has finally found a home for itself. Yet it is the purpose of this book to demonstrate that, notwithstanding (or thanks to) this apparently value-less, senseless and beauty-less space, mankind is inclined, constantly and everywhere, to freedom,

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13 "*La sélection de la ville nord-américaine ne tient pas ici seulement à la force et à la constance de son influence mondiale, mais plutôt au fait que la virginité de l'espace du nouveau monde a permis de construire une réalité urbaine ex nihilo, une urbanité quasi diaphane, au sens où sa signification coïncide totalement avec son édification*" (loc. 89).

14 "*l'hyperconsumérisme, la pression écologique, la violence urbaine, le repli individualiste et défensif, l'enlaidissement des entrées de ville, la peur, l'isolement, le vide culturel, l'ennui, … laideur, monotonie, anomie*" (*Zéropolis* 8).

even with the poorest means available.[15]

Koolhaas rejected such space as junk, Venturi was attracted by it and Garreau praised it altogether. On his side, Bégout, with other literary writers, is both disgusted and fascinated by this space, a relation to contemporary spaces which evolved, as we see in the shift from the term “Zeropolis” to describe Las Vegas to the use of the term “suburbia”: “The suburbia is not only the endless and sinful belt around a city, its dark and worthless margins, it turns out to be a new way to think and make urban space”[16]. The message being that although humanity could do better we should still find a certain value to the suburbia of the post-1945 urbanisation, yet keeping in mind at the same time that it is still a highly negative environment.

To illustrate this idea, even if in this text he discusses more our relation to the routine than the life in the suburbia, Bégout uses the expression *magie grise* (grey magic), a compromise between rejection which tends to paint everything in black and a certain acceptance which, on the contrary, can lead to take as positive, normal and even inherently good an urban environment on the basis that it is “vernacular” and echoing our time. Discussing the motel as a stereotypical non-place, or “vernacular” place for our time, and making a pun on the polysemy of “*lieu commun*” (meaning both commonplace and ordinary, bland place), he writes: “As common as the place can be, it always allows original appropriations to take place, which often take the mischievous form of violations”[17].

We can see with this first chapter that whether it be the studied space or the discourse on this space, both are consistently and consciously escaping traditional binary oppositions in recent decades, or are at least trying to engage with them from a different angle, putting the emphasis on the meeting-point, the merging, the grey. We have also seen that the terms are numerous to discuss the various spaces opened by post-1945 urbanisation. Now might be the time to choose one and justify such choice. To do so, I first suggest to see how Edward Soja, one of the most notable authors who worked on escaping the rigid dialectics centre/periphery, dealt with this terminological issue, which will also allow us to start discussing Henri Lefebvre's influential *Production of Space*.

15 “*Lorsqu'on observe derrière son pare-brise ce monde fait de hangars et de panneaux, de ronds-points et de noeuds autoroutiers, on a peine à croire que le processus d'émancipation de l'humanité passe par là, et on se convainc plutôt que l'aliénation a enfin trouvé un territoire à sa mesure. Mais c'est tous le sens de ce livre de montrer que, malgré, ou grâce à, cet espace en apparence sans valeur, sens ou beauté, les hommes aspirent sans cesse et partout à leur liberté, même avec les pauvres moyens que l'on met à leur disposition*” (9).

16 “*La suburbia n'est plus simplement ce qui ceinture la ville et constitue ses abords interminables et honteux, ses marges obscures et sans intérêt, elle devient une nouvelle manière de penser et de constituer l'espace urbain*” (13).

17 “*Si commun soit le lieu, il laisse sans cesse place à des appropriations originales qui, bien souvent, doivent prendre la forme délictueuse de la violation*” (*Lieu commun* loc. 2057).

Edward Soja is known in the field of theoretical human geography with a special interest for the urban for his theorising of what he refers to as "Thirdspace". Starting in 1989 with *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*, Soja developed over the years a reflection on "postmodern space", taking Los Angeles as the stereotype of the postmodern/late-capitalist city (190-1). In publishing *Postmodern Geographies*, Soja aimed at unravelling the origins of postmodern geography and demonstrating that postmodern space can be political, that discourse on the production of space can be performative, that spatialisation is not, as a certain branch of Marxism has it, a natural enemy of universalism and political action as a whole (35). In his work, whether it be in *Postmodern Geographies* or *Thirdspace*, Soja is calling for going beyond what have now become the central opposition: modernism against postmodernism, often disguised or replaced by Marxism and post-Marxism. In his introduction to *Thirdspace*, here is how Soja describes the state of affairs in the academia:

> Just as reductionist as the anti-modernists, [the modernist critics] deflect the power of the epistemological critique of modernism by associating it exclusively with nihilism, with neoconservative empowerment, or with a vacuous anything-goes "new age" philosophy. In this simplistic caricaturing, there is no possibility for a radical postmodernism to exist unless it is self-deluding, really modernism in oxymoronic disguise.
>
> Not only have the debates on modernism and postmodernism polarized around these reductionist stances, a kind of ritual purification has been practiced to rule out any alternative possibilities. If you are a postmodernist, it is proclaimed, then you cannot be a Marxist or be committed to a continuation of the progressive projects of the European Enlightenment. And vice-versa: to be committed to radical social change one must resist the enchantments of postmodern thinking. (4-5)

As an attempt to break away from these "reductionist stances" which are often boiling down thought to a binary opposition based on two camps, two schools, Soja describes his notion of the Thirdspace as "the space where all places are, capable of being seen from every angle, each standing clear; but also a secret and conjectured object, filled with illusions and allusions, a space that is common to all of us yet never able to be completely seen and understood, an 'unimaginable universe,' or as Lefebvre would put it, 'the most general of products'" (Soja, *Thirdspace* 56).

Many things can be said about Soja's Thirdspace, first of which being its strange and ironic relation towards the different yet eponymous Third Space of Homi K. Bhabha: Bhabha writings and theorisation on the notion of Third Space, which precedes Soja's book, are quickly mentioned but neither challenged nor really presented (139-44). Indeed, Soja quotes extensively *The Location of*

Culture yet without acknowledging in details the possible debt he has towards the book or in which ways his own one-word concept of Thirdspace is different from Bhabha's Third Space. Only mentioning Bhabha's concept at the end of a sub-chapter on postcolonialism (which he shares with the unavoidable Said and Spivak) leaves a strange taste in the mouth, especially in a book focused on, as quoted above, “a space that is common to all of us yet never able to be completely seen and understood.”

Second, I think that comparing *Postmodern Geographies* (1989) and *Thirdspace* (1996) can tell us a lot about Soja's itinerary as a thinker. The two texts have a lot in common, not only because they share the same topic of interest (human geography) or because they are reaching the same conclusion (the need and possibility to (re)assert the essential role of space in critical political praxis), but perhaps more strikingly because they use the same references, whether it be Henri Lefebvre's influence (*Postmodern* 41; *Thirdspace* 26-onwards), Los Angeles (*Postmodern* 190-246; *Thirdspace* 1996, Part II) or Borges and his short story “The Aleph” (*Postmodern* 2, 222; *Thirdspace* 54-60). Yet, there is a major, and obvious, difference between the two, and this difference is to be found in the peritext of the works: The title “Postmodern Geographies” is replaced by “Thirdspace”. I would argue that Soja leaves the “postmodern” out as an attempt to avoid his theory to be co-opted by one pole or the other of the binary opposition modernism/postmodernism, a controversy he denounces in his introduction (4). In order to escape such classification and dodge the negative homogenisation of postmodernisms he condemns (94), Soja chooses the term Thirdspace.

Soja's Thirdspace draws heavily on the first chapter in Lefebvre's *Production of Space*, a work first translated into English in 1991 (with an afterword by David Harvey) and which will become highly influential in later studies orbiting around space, especially space as a mean to political action, and its representation. In publishing this book in 1974, Lefebvre aimed at creating a science of space and analysed in depth the relation between mental and social space:

> No limits at all have been set on the generalization for the concept of *mental space*: no clear account of it is ever given and, depending on the author one happens to be reading, it may connote logical coherence, practical consistency, self-regulation and the relations of the parts to the whole, the engendering of like by like in a set of places, the logic of container *versus* contents, and so on. We are forever hearing about the space of this and/or tge soace if that: about literary space, ideological spaces, the space of the dream, psychoanalytic topologies, and so on and so forth. Conspicuous by its absence from supposedly fundamental epistemological studies is not only the idea of “man” but also that of space—the fact that “space” is mentioned on every page notwithstanding. (3)

Lefebvre goes forth by directly criticising the careless fashion with which most of his contemporaries (including influential figures like Blanchot, Foucault, Chomsky, Kristeva, Derrida or Barthes) are using the word "space" without really defining it or at least drawing a line between what is part of mental, social or physical space: "This school, whose growing renown may have something to do with its growing dogmatism, is forever promoting the basic sophistry whereby the philosophico-epistemological notion of space is fetishized and the mental realm comes to envelop the social and physical ones" (5). Lefebvre's objective is to clearly determine these different types of space and their interactions in order to undermine the power of the "*mental space*" of "theoretical practice" which has cut its links with "real space" (6).

Lefebvre's call for a science of space is twofold. First of all it is a way to clarify the terms of a recent and ongoing debate on space. As he notes in his opening lines to the *Production,* "Not so many years ago, the word 'space' had a strictly geometrical meaning", meaning that space was essentially a mathematical concept, "to speak of 'social space', therefore, would have sounded strange" (1), a mathematical background that still pervades the way Lefebvre's contemporaries in philosophy are considering space as primarily mental. This inclination for blindly assimilating mental space with real space paradoxically creates a gap between the two: "The quasi-logical presupposition of an identity between mental space (the space of the philosophers and the epistemologists) and real space creates an abyss between the mental sphere on one side and the physical and social spheres on the other" (6). To Lefebvre, this assumed identity between mental space and real space, that hegemony of the absolutely abstract/mental space over the real space has to be broken down to allow a study of the nature of space, or what he calls the "truth of space" (9).

Following that and supported by this "truth of space" he aims at demonstrating, Lefebvre's plan is to put the emphasis not on mental space but on social space in order to avoid "theoretical practice" and the fragmentation of the "knowledge of space" it created. After mentioning the authors listed above and semiology which considers space as a message to be read, he writes:

> As for the above-mentioned sections and fragments, they range from the ill-defined to the undefined—and thence, for that matter, to the undefinable. Indeed, talk of cross-sectioning, suggesting as it does a scientific technique (or "theoretical practice") designed to help clarify and distinguish "elements" within the chaotic flux of phenomena, merely adds to the muddle. (7-8)

Therefore in this first chapter, Lefebvre presents himself as the guardian of a certain epistemology, a certain scientific approach he opposed to the specialised and specialising "cognoscenti" and "whatever claim [they] may have to scientific status" (8). In other words, Lefebvre wants to create a single and consensual science of space to counteract the fragmentation of

the discourse on space, a fragmentation he perceives as another form of the division of labour: "Under this mode of production, intellectual labour, like material labour, is subject to endless division" (8).

Similar to Mumford who was advocating limits to the urban sprawl, Lefebvre wants to limit the openness and vagueness dominating the discourse on space with the help of what will later be called post-structuralism. To do so, he distinguishes three elements in space: physical, mental and social space, which he also refers to as perceived, conceived and lived space. This triad is unsurprising in the sense that one can apply on it well-known patterns, can consider it according to the traditional dialectic of physical and mental, body and mind, perceived and conceived, yet this time with an extra element, namely lived space, acting as an interface between the two. This is the kind of reading we have been accustomed to do, especially in recent decades: Item 1 against item 2, and item 3 in-between. Just like it was the case when I discussed Mumford on city centre and suburbia, my goal here is not to reject such processes of thought, such dialectics (or trialectics, to paraphrase Soja) as wrong, or to distribute "modern" and "postmodern" points to one or the other. My only aim is to highlight the tension at work in authors like Mumford and Lefebvre, authors who have attempted to describe space at a time when its very conception was moving from a simple binary opposition to a more complex pattern, following, triggering or reacting to the shift towards post-structuralism.

What is interesting in Lefebvre and in the way Soja uses him to craft his concept of Thirdspace is how the relation Soja creates with Lefebvre's text shows the difficulty, if not the impossibility, to sail away from binary opposition. It has to be noted to start this demonstration that both authors are explicitly trying to overpass, to go beyond binary oppositions. They are both advocates of the introduction of a third element: Social space against physical and mental spaces in Lefebvre; Thirdspace itself in Soja. Yet, if they start from the same point, from a will to go beyond binary opposition, a will to treat space and the discourse on space as a political tool, even an explicitly revolutionary one for Lefebvre, the two authors take different directions when it comes to overcoming this difficulty.

First, it has to be taken into account that if Soja founds his concept of Thirdspace on Lefebvre's triad (perceived, conceived and lived space; Soja's Thirdspace being directly connected to the triad's third element), Lefebvre only uses in *The Production of Space* the term "third space" to describe the special case of a theatrical stage:

> It would have been extended, for one thing, to take in theatrical space, with its interplay between fictitious and real counterparts and its interactions between gazes and mirages in which actor, audience, "characters", text, and author all come together but never

> become one. By means of such theatrical interplay bodies are able to pass from a "real", immediately experienced space (the pit, the stage) to a perceived space—a third space which is no longer either scenic or public. At once fictitious and real, this third space is classical theatrical space. (Lefebvre 188)

Similarly, we can keep in mind that Lefebvre does not use the word trialectics, even when his argument in the first chapter is centred on the triad aforementioned.

Inspired by Soja's confession in *Thirdspace* where he admits that he advised his students to read only the first chapter of the *Production of Space* since he first considered the rest of the book as badly-planned (8), I will argue that the reason why Lefebvre can seem so hard to understand at first is mostly due to the fact that he *actively* goes beyond binary opposition, in the sense that his triad, even if it creates a "dialectical relationship" between three elements, is never displayed as oppositions of these three but as, "a triad: that is, three elements and not two"; a triad as opposed to "relations with two elements" which "boil down to oppositions, contrasts or antagonisms" (39). To illustrate that point, take for instance his treatment of the group "perceived, conceived and lived space". It is accepted in academic discourse (if not in any form of discourse) that when one presents a list of items, he has to consistently keep the original order of that list in further references. In the case of Lefebvre, he first tells us about the "perceived, the conceived, and the lived" before shuffling this order and writing "lived, perceived and conceived" (39). This shuffling of the three cards "perceived", "conceived" and "lived", constant in Lefebvre's demonstration, is strangely disturbing and, I think, significant in regard to his whole argument, especially when he articulates or overlays that first triad on another triad, namely "the physical, mental and social" (39) and "spatial practice, representations of space, representational spaces" (40). In other words, while praising "dialectical relationship" he tries to avoid creating logical oppositions, suggesting instead active, moving interrelation between different elements.

I would argue that this confusion is voluntarily created by Lefebvre as a way to remind its reader that he does not want to present a system (the book tellingly concludes on: "And we are concerned with nothing that even remotely resembles a system", 423) and as a way to prevent his audience to apply his abstract theory, unmediated, to social space. Speaking of the revolutionary project sustaining the whole book, Lefebvre writes:

> No doubt this project could be explicitly formulated; to do so would involved heightening the distinctions between "projet", "plan" and "programme", or between "model" and "way forward". But it is far from certain that such an approach would allow us to make forecasts or to generate what are referred to as "concrete" proposals. The project would still remain an abstract one. Though opposed to the abstraction of the

> dominant space, it would not transcend that space. Why? Because the road of the "concrete" leads via active theoretical and practical negation, via counter-projects or counter-plans. And hence via an active and massive intervention on the part of the "interested parties". (419)

Therefore, and even when we have seen that he starts the book with the purpose of clearing what he considers to be a "muddle" created by the multiplication of spatial terms in order to create a "science of space" focused to determine "the truth of space", Lefebvre paradoxically decides to stay in the vague, to stay in the unsystematic, the debatable, to open his text to further claims, in both senses of the word.

Hence, when Soja says of *The Production* that it is a "bewildering book, filled with unruly textual practices, bold assertions that seem to get tossed aside as the arguments develop, and perplexing inconsistencies and apparent self-contradictions [yet] its meandering, idiosyncratic, and wholesomely anarchic style and structure are in themselves a creative expression of Lefebvre's expansive spatial imagination" (*Thirdspace* 8), I think he is right, and what's more, like Soja, I don't think it renders Lefebvre's demonstration useless or *wrong*, on the contrary.

As said above, Soja draws heavily on Lefebvre to give a theoretical backbone or at least a symbolical root to his concept of Thirdspace. Lefebvre is the primary authority in his demonstration, before he calls over other thinkers, like bell hooks, Foucault, and feminist and postcolonial critics, to support his claim and virtually create a sort of community, gathered by a shared interest towards what Soja himself describes as the Thirdspace. But how does Soja manage to read, to extract the concept of Thirdspace from Lefebvre's text since, as we have seen, Lefebvre, first, only uses once and in a precise context the expression "third space"; second, explicitly says that the triad of "perceived,conceived and lived" or "physical, mental and social" space should not be absorbed in terms of oppositions or hierarchical order; third, actively and consistently sabotages his own demonstration in order to prevent it from becoming part of the abstract space, part of the "theoretical practice" he obsessively denouncing?

According to me, Soja's reception of Lefebvre is a perfect illustration of the issue we have to think—in this case, "to think space" but more generally simply "to think"—outside binary opposition and, what's more striking, even when we denounce said oppositions as being reductionist. To come back to Soja, based on his reference to Borges's "Aleph" and his interpretation of Lefebvre as deliberately subverting usual academic discourse in the *Production*, he is clearly conscious that his attempt to circumscribe, to define the Thirdspace is bound to fail, and yet writes:

> *Everything* comes together in Thirdspace[18]: subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential, structure and agency, mind and body, consciousness and the unconscious, the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, everyday life and unending history. Anything which fragments Thirdspace into separate specialized knowledges or exclusive domains—*even on the pretext of handling its infinite complexity*[19]—destroys its meaning and openness. (56-7)

Thus, Soja describes his Thirdspace as a whole, a sort of ideal space transcending traditional binarisms (subjectivity/objectivity, abstract/concrete, etc.), yet whose essential meaning and openness can be altered if one is to fragment it back to more easily intelligible system, like said binarisms.

What is interesting to me in Soja is that, even when he calls for this ideal and united Thirdspace, a space where the traditional pairings created by binary opposition are cancelled, in the same movement and few pages down, he starts referring to the process at work in his Thirdspace as “Thirding-as-Othering”, an expression he had already introduced at the start of the book. To Soja, the “third” in Thirdspace has to be considered and understood in relation to a “Firstspace”, “focused on the ‘real’ material world”, and a “Secondspace”, “that interprets this reality through “imagined” representations of spatiality”(6). In reaction to a discourse on space which has, according to Soja, mostly focused on one or the other type of the two spaces (physical and mental), Soja suggests that from the late 1960s onwards a new form, “an-Other form of spatial awareness” emerged, which he offers to call “Thirdspace”.

> I have chosen to call this new awareness Thirdspace and to initiate its evolving definition by describing it as a product of a “thirding” of the spatial imagination, the creation of another mode of thinking about space that draws upon the material and mental spaces of the traditional dualism but extends well beyond them in scope, substance and meaning. (11)

Therefore, this concept of Thirdspace which will be defined, as seen above, as united and non-oppositional, as a reaction to binary thought and as subverting more traditional dichotomies such as centre/periphery, dichotomies we had argued could all be boiled down to the self/other pairing, Soja quite paradoxically words his concept as “Thirding-as-Othering”. I use the verb “to word” here, and

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18 To be compared to Soja's *Postmodern Geographies*'s eighth chapter: “It All Comes Together in Los Angeles”. A passage which further validates the hypothesis according to which “Thirdspace” replaced “Postmodern Geography”, most likely to avoid Soja's argument being easily classified in the “modern” or “postmodern” column.

19 Emphasis mine.

not to define, because I believe we have to make the distinction. Soja defines, theorises, thinks his concept of "Thirdspace" as this new spatial awareness freed of old oppositions, *but* he words it using terms that inevitably connote such old oppositions, a sense of hierarchy, of above and below, namely "third" and "othering".

Let us be clear: We do not think that Soja's "wording" make his theory invalid; only that this tension and quasi-impossiblity of thinking and writing outside binary opposition even when one is criticising it directly, is mirroring what we have seen on centre and periphery in Mumford and will inevitably inform our choice of words and reflection throughout this dissertation besides sustaining the tension in spatial studies as a whole. Once that said, can we so easily go from self/other to centre/periphery or is it just a way for me to support my argument in a not so intellectually honest way? In order to clarify this point, let us come back to Soja's Thirdspace one last time.

Soja is explicitly relating his concepts of Thirding-as-Othering, of Thirdspace, to "Third Worlds" and marginality in general, based on his reading of Lefebvre's "representational spaces", which the French philosopher described as:

> embodying complex symbolisms, sometimes coded, sometimes not, linked to the clandestine or underground side of social life, as also to art (which may come eventually to be defined less as a code of space than as a code of representational spaces). (Lefebvre 33)

And also:

> space as directly *lived* through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of 'inhabitants' and 'users', but also of some artists and perhaps of those, such as a few writers and philosophers, who describe and aspire to do no more than describe. This is the dominated—and hence passively experienced—space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate. (39)

Following this definition from Lefebvre of representational space as clandestine and related to arts, philosophy and social practice, Soja sets his Thirdspace(s) in the margins, perceived as the favoured terrains for political action to grow:

> They are 'dominated spaces', the spaces of the peripheries, the margins and the marginalized, the 'Third Worlds' that can be found at all scales, in the corpo-reality of the body and mind, in sexuality and subjectivity, in individual and collective identities from the most local to the most global. They are the chosen spaces for struggle, liberation, emancipation. (*Thirdspace* 68).

The "they" in this last quote stands for Lefebvre's representational spaces. What Soja interestingly overlooks as he reads Lefebvre's representational spaces as inherently part of the

"margins", as subversive in essence, is that Lefebvre's definition is more complex.

The difficulty of explaining Lefebvre's thought without falling back to oppositions arises again because I would argue that the use he has of words and concepts of "unity" and "difference" go beyond their common acceptance. As he writes towards the end of the *Production*: "The answer to separation and dispersion is unification, just as the answer to forced homogenization is the discernment of differences and their practical realization" (418). As we have seen, Lefebvre wants to reboot the consideration on space by creating a consensus which will allow the development of a "science of space", to discern a "code" of space; yet, he does so while rejecting system-building. In other words, it may appear to some that he avoids doing what he is calling for. I would rather argue that this tension and paradox in Lefebvre's *Production* is participating in what makes it successful, but also what makes it *fail*: elements are distinguished but not isolated, they continually interact with one another, not only in Lefebvre's discourse (like Soja) but most importantly in Lefebvre's "practice" of his own discourse (unlike Soja). Lefebvre's thought, to me, is at the cross-road between structuralism (constant talk of a master code which would help understand the city) and post-structuralism (knowing that said code is impossible to find), which makes it hard to grasp, very to classify. Just like urban space in a contemporary context, Lefebvre navigates *across*, more than between, centre and periphery.

Like Soja nicely interprets, now adding the trendy "nomad" to his reading, Lefebvre's thought is an "endless series of theoretical and practical approximations, a critical and inquisitive nomadism in which the journeying to new ground never ceases" (*Thirdspace* 82). I wouldn't use the term "nomadism", which is, like peripheral, now inevitably connoting a certain marginality (whose centre is unknown), since a virtual opposite team could equally describe Lefebvre as "sedentary" or "conservative" since in his ceaseless "journeying", he is still looking for the ultimate spatial code and does not entirely reject the contribution of oppositional thinking. In other words, using "nomadism" here is just another way to retrospectively classify a thought, *malgré elle*, a thought which tried its best to keep its complexity. Hence, if I share Soja's view of Lefebvre's thought being all about a positive, fruitful kind of approximations, where my reading of Lefebvre's *Production* distances itself from Soja's is that I think the latter did not manage to transcribe this "approximativeness" (Lefebvre 65) in his own production, in *Thirdspace*.

When Soja's Thirdspace is defined as marginal, marginalised, "Third Worlds", based on his interpretation of Lefebvre's "representational spaces", in the original, in the *Production*, "representational spaces", *approximately* "lived space" (to be compared and confused with "representations of space", *approximately* "conceived space"), are not inherently subversive, not inherently revolutionary, not inherently "peripheral" in a political sense: It is the space of symbols,

practice and ideology. When Soja talks about margins and coming together, Lefebvre adds "[representational space] has an affective kernel or centre: Ego, bed, bedroom, dwelling, house; or: square, church, graveyard" (42). Hence my critique of Soja's definition of Thirdspace is that, while advocating to escape the centre/periphery or self/other binary opposition, it falls right back into it, first, by presenting his concept of Thirdspace as the space of an ever-present Otherness; second by his, possibly unconscious, implied hierarchy between "Firstspace", "Secondspace" and "Thirdspace"; last but not least through his use of the idea of marginality.

In doing so, I would argue that Soja, following his utopian idea of a pure "space" in which all discourses and ideas could mingle and engage in a perpetual otherness (*Thirdspace* 5), gives the notion of marginality a certain subversive glow which can only work if this marginality is opposed to a normative centre, if such periphery is opposed to a dominant centre. Yet, what we have seen in an urban context also applies, in my opinion, to the history of ideas: marginality and centre are concepts which are porous to one another. Which does not mean that we should get rid of them and start building knowledge without such binary opposition, without the traditional, dialectical tools; only that we should find a moving compromise between these two poles, a middle-ground, without trying to pull this middle-ground towards centre or periphery, a moving middle-ground which would also reminds us of the instability of such notions as centre and periphery. As we have seen above, if Soja first presents his Thirdspace as a viable way to escape opposition, by focusing on an idealised notion of marginality he paradoxically encloses its theory and destroys it, making it just another item of just another opposition, whether it be with an implied and unified Self, Firstspace and Secondspace, or an implied centre.

Yet, if Soja fails at following his own inclinations towards perpetual otherness, firstly perhaps by referring to it as "otherness", his theorisation is interesting to us because it highlights yet again the difficulty to find a common ground on which to build knowledge when we have collectively and rightfully agreed that such a common ground would eventually be dominated by someone at the expense of others. In other words, how to conciliate the tension between the modernist logic of an universal ideal and the postmodernist logic of a perpetual otherness, or in urban terms, how to conciliate the historical centre of Nation-state capitals with the proliferating spaces of what we have called post-1945 urbanisation? I am afraid that I will not single-handedly solve a question which has been intensely debated for at the very least a century, but let me try and fail anyway.

Soja presents his concept of Thirdspace because he feels there is a need for escaping the nihilism of postmodernism (according to its harshest critics) and the destructive totality of modernism (according to its harshest critics), as well as a need for opening a space for radical change to be possible. As we have suggested, trying to do so he ends up creating another "marginal space" of

expression opposed to a denied centre, another fragment opposed to a non-existent unity, yet this failure is still interesting and open new ways to deal with this problem. As we have seen, Soja based his spatial theory on Lefebvre, and he is also inspired by Lefebvre's idea on creating knowledge through approximations. Still in the *Production of Space*, Lefebvre calls for retrieving or reconstruct a “spatial code”, that is “a language common to practice and theory, as also to inhabitants, architects and scientists” and whose first priority would be to “recapture the unity of dissociated elements, breaking down such barriers as that between private and public, and identifying both confluences and oppositions in space that are at present indiscernible” (Lefebvre 64); a passage which reminds us of his introduction where he called for reconstructing a method towards knowledge, a science of space. Hence, to Lefebvre, discussing the production of space is also a way to discuss the production of knowledge. Take for instance this passage on spatial code which naturally drifts towards knowledge:

> A code of this kind must be correlated with a system of knowledge. It brings an alphabet, a lexicon and a grammar together within an overall framework; and it situates itself—though not in such a way as to exclude it—vis-a-vis non-knowledge (ignorance or misunderstanding); in other words, vis-a-vis the *lived* and the *perceived*. Such a knowledge is conscious of its own approximativeness: it is at once certain and uncertain. It announces its own relativity at each step, undertaking (or at least seeking to undertake) self-criticism, yet never allowing itself to become dissipated in apologias for non-knowledge, absolute spontaneity or ‘pure’ violence. This knowledge must find a middle path between dogmatism on the one hand and the abdication of understanding on the other. (Lefebvre 65)

This passage is on what Lefebvre calls the “spatial code”, but it could easily, and I think rightfully, applied to the creation of knowledge in our current intellectual context, and incidentally inspires the method I will follow in this dissertation.

Trying to find a middle-ground between knowledge and non-knowledge, without excluding one or the other, Lefebvre advocates a constant approximativeness, a middle path which he calls the “regressive-progressive” approach (65), similar to Jameson's conclusion at the end of *Postmodernism*: “We have to name the system” (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 418), in his case “postmodernism”: Even when this name will be wrong since applied to a ever-changing concept, “an approximate proper use” has to be conceded (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 65). Later on in his intellectual life, yet still discussing the problem of knowledge and terminology after the postmodern theory and still trying to conciliate the modern with the postmodern approach, Jameson writes in *Valences of the dialectics*:

> I believe that theory is to be grasped as the perpetual and impossible attempt to dereify the language of thought, and to preempt all the systems and ideologies which inevitably result from the establishment of this or that fixed terminology. Deconstruction is thus the very paradigm of a theoretical process of undoing terminologies which, by virtue of the elaboration of the terminology that very process requires, becomes a philosophy and an ideology in its own turn and congeals into the very type of system it sought to undermine. (9)

Hence theory has to be grasped in a "perpetual and impossible attempt" and so the system has to be named to create knowledge, even when this "name" in itself participates in a certain reification of the concept it signifies.

This first chapter of my dissertation aimed at giving some context to what follows, at quickly discussing notions of centre and periphery in regard to the urban context and the history of ideas in order to locate our discourse, and also to set a terminology: How to call the urban space, and the discourse on it, I consider original and relevant enough to write a dissertation on? Non-place, non-space, postmodern space, high modern space, Thirdspace, suburbia, outskirts, edge-space, etc.? Without rejecting these terms and their usefulness, I suggest to try something else.

As seen above with Soja, I would argue that theoretical discourse in the humanities is idealistically focusing on the margins: Even if there is no centre, the periphery is less central, more subversive. As an experiment against that and as a way to follow Lefebvre and Jameson but also the new organisation of urban space, I would rather suggest to study this new space not as a negation or a peripheral object, but as a central approximation.

In 1981, Samuel Beckett created *Quad*, a television play for West German television, whose script was later published in 1984. The staging of *Quad* is rather simple: Four hooded and undistinguishable players crosses a square ABCD strictly following a mathematical pattern in which all possible journeys between the four points of the square are made and all possible combinations between the four players are completed. The play is an image of Beckett's inclination towards mathematical perfection as opposed to the failure of language. To represent this tension one point of the stage is consistently avoided by all the players, the point E, right at the centre of the square diagonals. "E supposed a danger zone. Hence deviation", writes Beckett (Beckett 453). All the possibilities of the square are exploited, except for the centre, very much in the same fashion than in Greimas's semiotic square every point are articulated according to the others yet the centre is never defined.

I will take this image of a central danger zone and the walking/deviation in Beckett's play to conclude this chapter by saying that our contemporary urban space, a space that can no longer be

only analysed using the rigid terms of city and country, centre and periphery, or the often excluding modern and postmodern theories, is a *zone* similar to the point E in Beckett's *Quad*, in the sense that it has to be considered and studied as central and marginal at once (it is at the centre of the stage yet the players are forced to walk its margins), hence without putting on it a name that would make it “more” or “less” (more postmodern than modern, less periphery than centre, etc.) I would therefore suggest to keep this neutral approximation found in the term “*zone*” to discuss contemporary urban space in this dissertation.

This terminological choice is not only a way to avoid a classification using other terms that are still debated and that would inevitably orientate the reception and understanding of my argument, it is first and foremost an attempt at finding a middle-ground between different theories, walking that thin line described by Lefebvre between knowledge and non-knowledge, centre and periphery, the Self and the Other, and while doing so mimicking the authors writing about or around London we will discuss later in this dissertation. For if the term “*zone*”, that I will keep italicising as if it were a foreign word (another way of keeping alive the fruitful conflict between the Self and the Other), is not only the most neutral term one can find to define a space, it is also central to the figure of the “stalker”, a figure which is now, as we will see, challenging the more traditional flâneur in urban writings. Without excavating and studying in details the origins and the life of the term “stalker” (something we will do later), we can nonetheless already say that it borrows its name from the Russian novel *Roadside Picnic*, published in 1971, written by Arkady and Boris Strugatsky and later adapted in 1979 by Russian director Andrei Tarkovsky under the tit*le Stalker*. In this novel (and in its movie adaptation, which both uses the English term in a Russian context), a stalker is a person who can enter and orientate himself in the Zone, an area recently created by the interaction with an extraterrestrial power and whose physical properties are nothing close to what we once knew. The stalker's quest is thus to unravel the mystery of this zone, to understand how it works, in order to eventually find and bring back from it one of the artefacts left behind by the extraterrestrial power. A quest which can somehow be compared to the one undertook in London by authors like Iain Sinclair, Patrick Keiller or Nick Papadimitriou, as well as others in different cities: Exploring a space considered uncharted and new and bringing something valuable out of it.

Therefore I believe that the term *zone* is a way to break open a new middle-ground in the maelstrom of theory as well as making a fitting parallel with our primary texts. The purpose of this dissertation is not only to write about a literary movement, it is also the occasion to highlight the similarities between the study of space and the creation of knowledge, and doing so to suggest that what is done in one field can be mirrored in the other; in other terms that the “quest” for London and the method used to achieve it can be relevant in regard to the quest for knowledge in our times.

Chapter 2: The City and the City: Fact and Fiction in non-fiction urban literature.

"*La forme d'une ville change plus vite, hélas ! que le coeur d'un mortel*." Or, "the form a city takes more quickly shifts, alas, than does the human heart" if we choose James McGowan's English translation in the Oxford University Press bilingual edition of the *Flowers of Evil* (Baudelaire, *Flowers* 175). This maxim which illustrates the constant struggle of the writer when it comes to describing a city has become, at least in the French cultural sphere, a recurring sentence one often stumbles upon when reading on urban writings (*see* Solnit 205, among others). What transpires in the ubiquitous Baudelairian quote is the issue of pinpointing an entity (the city) which appears to be, in its very cumulative essence, an ever-changing body; an urban trope often reinforced by opposing the ever-modern city to the eternal village in the heart of the heart of the country, to paraphrase American author William H. Gass. In this accepted allegory of the sprawling metropolis overtaking the human and country hearts moving at a slower pace, the book is traditionally considered as a tool thanks to which one can attempt to encapsulate the chaotic and ephemeral side of urban life. However, such an attempt is often in vain, as Jonathan Raban highlights in his non-fiction work *Soft City*:

> For the city and the book are opposed forms: to force the city's spread, contingency, and aimless motion into the tight progression of a narrative is to risk a total falsehood. There is no single point of view from which one can grasp the city as a whole. That, indeed, is the central distinction between the city and the small town. (242)

Raban equates the small town with unity, a single point of view, in a similar fashion that Mumford earlier did in *The City in History*, as we have seen in our first chapter. If I find this reduction of the small town to a perfectly coherent entity problematic in many ways, this thesis focusing on the allegedly opposite side of human settlement (i.e. the city), I shall not go deeper into this debate. Instead, I shall rather stop on Raban's argument that the city and the book are opposed forms, that the latter cannot catch the former; an argument similar to the one we find in Baudelaire's maxim. Therefore, after our first chapter which aimed at tackling the evolution of urbanism in recent years and the multiple reactions to it, I now suggest to narrow my study to urban literature *per se* in order to give context and bearings to the corpus of non-fiction British authors I will study in the coming chapters.

The insight from Baudelaire on the form of a city comes from "The Swan", a poem included in the "Parisian Scenes" section of the *Flowers of Evil*. This text, with others in the collection, is an expression of the narrator's nostalgia and spleen as he sees the city of Paris changing, especially

through the new urbanism brought by Georges-Eugène Haussmann, commonly known as the Baron Haussmann, whose rather destructive renovation of medieval Paris was under way when Baudelaire was writing his famous *Flowers.* The poem explicitly refers to the Carrousel, a vast public square between the Seine and the Louvre which was made possible by the obliteration of the network of narrow lanes surrounding the former royal palace, now museum, as the narrator remembers the olden days with the help of a river, the commonplace for the passing of time and by extension memory, and figures from the Greek mythology:

> *Andromaque, je pense à vous ! Ce petit fleuve*
> *Pauvre et triste miroir où jadis resplendit*
> *L'immense majesté de vos douleurs de veuve,*
> *Ce Simoïs menteur qui par vos pleurs grandit,*
>
> *A fecondé soudain ma mémoire fertile,*
> *Comme je traversais le nouveau Carrousel,*
> *Le vieux Paris n'est plus (la forme d'une ville*
> *Change plus vite, hélas ! Que le coeur d'un mortel);*
> (Baudelaire, 172, 174)[20]

We could have focused on the importance of the river in this poem and in a number of other urban writings. As of now, I would like to use Baudelaire's poem to start a discussion on the relationship between city and human consciousness.

Dedicated, in another line and in a very lyrical manner, "*A quiconque a perdu ce qui ne se retrouve*" (176) ("[To] all those who have lost something they may not find [again]", 177), the narrator presents himself as an exile. As the poem is dominated by the allegory of the poet's soul struggling in a new environment from which he feels cut off like swan looking for water in the dust, Baudelaire also conveys this general feeling of loss by calling out to the mythical and noble figure of Andromache, married and widow at once, but also to a poor "n*égresse, amaigrie et phthisique/ Piétinant dans la boue, et cherchant, l'oeil hagard/ Les cocotiers absents de la superbe Afrique*"[21](176). These three figures—the noble Greek mythological figure, the poor and the Baudelarian dandy poet oscillating between these two poles—are embodiments of the universal

20 "Andromache, I think of you—this meagre stream,/ This melancholy mirror where had once shone forth/The giant majesty of all your widowhood,/ This fraudulent Simois, fed by bitter tears,/ Has quickened suddenly my fertile memory/As I was walking through the modern Carrousel./ The old Paris is gone (the form a city takes/ More quickly shifts, alas, than does the mortal heart);" Translated by James McGowan in Baudelaire, *Flowers* 175.

21 "I think of negress, thin and tubercular/ Treading in the mire, searching with haggard eye/ For palm trees she recalls from splendid Africa", Baudelaire, *Flowers* 177.

difficulty to live in the present when one longs for the past, a feeling which is experienced for all of them on the public street of the capital, a natural magnet for both the high and the low. Overcharged with melancholy, Baudelaire's poem is centred on the sentiment of powerlessness experienced by the narrator as he is not able to keep up with the city's evolution, shifting faster than his heart and soul do, monuments and streets disappearing before he can forget them:

Paris change! mais rien dans ma mélancolie
N'a bougé! palais neufs, échafaudages, blocs
Vieux faubourgs, tout pour moi devient allégorie,
Et mes chers souvenirs sont plus lourds que des rocs. (174)[22]

The paradox of urban writing is laid bare in this stanza and its poetic image in which the narrator's intangible memories feel more solid and concrete than rocks and buildings. Therefore, following the Baudelairian metaphor, if memories are somehow “heavier than stone”, hence paradoxically heavier than a city's monuments and streets, heavier than its material reality, and if the mind itself is too slow to keep up with its ever-changing aspect, how can mankind hope to grasp the perpetually changing urban environment? By extension, how can literature, as a favoured medium of expression for the human mind, help in this difficult process? Are the book and the city opposed indeed, like it is suggested in Jonathan Raban's quote mentioned above? It is this relation between literature and the city it writes both *on* and *about* which we will be discussing in the following pages, with a special interest on non-fiction urban writing and how it deals with the fictional.

As we have started our first chapter with Mumford, let me summon the American author once more, but this time not to focus on *The City in History* but on his first book, published in 1922, *The Story of Utopias*. Written shortly after the First World War, this text presents itself as a catalogue of great utopias (mostly coming from the Western tradition) in an attempt to revive a tradition which could be a way to move from the destruction and despair the conflict brought and start anew. Mumford consciously follows the path of the like of Plato and Thomas More who wrote their utopias in times of crisis, and that the interwar is the best period for a return to utopian thinking as “it is only after the storm that we dare to look at the rainbow” (Mumford, *Story* 12). At the heart of this hopeful and positive book is the argument that the natural utopian inclination is responsible for half of the history of mankind; the other half being “the history of what has happened on earth—the history of cities and armies and of all the things that have body and form” (13). In other terms, Mumford differentiates the “world within”, the utopian inclination or what he calls “idolum”, to the

22 “Paris may change, but in my melancholy mood/ Nothing had budged! New palaces, blocks, scaffoldings,/ Old neighbourhoods, are allegorical for me,/ And my dear memories are heavier than stone.” (175)

"world without", material things. A differentiation which looks very traditional.

Where Mumford's paradigm is interesting is when, like Baudelaire's "heavier than stone" memories, he acknowledges that the border between the material and the immaterial seem to fade:

> But if the physical environment is the earth, the world of ideas corresponds to the heavens. We sleep under the light of stars that have long since ceased to exist, and we pattern our behavior by ideas which have no reality as soon as we cease to credit them. Whilst it holds together this world of ideas—this idolum—is *almost* as sound, *almost* as real, *almost* (italics mine) as inescapable as the bricks of our houses or the asphalt beneath our feet (...) An idea is a solid fact, a theory is a solid fact, a superstition is a solid fact as long as people continue to regulate their actions in terms of the idea, theory, or superstition; and it is none the less solid because it is conveyed as an image or a breath of sound. (14)

Mumford's argument is that the ideal, the utopian, can indeed model reality, that it can be *almost* as concrete as bricks.

It has to be said in order to be clear that this type of argument is often discarded because, quite rightfully so, an idea will never be a brick, just like a memory will never be heavier than stone. But what that discarding, commonsensical approach does not take into account is that our material environment is indeed produced by ideas (or Mumford's idolum), that even if it is only "almost as real" as reality, the idolum can challenge and modify reality. If today a good part of the "soft humanities" are looked down on, as opposed to "hard sciences", forgetting in the process that these two families were not long ago just one, it is mostly because the former are perceived as ineffective. This thesis does not aim at vainly showing that ideas are "effective" and that, like a machine or scientific tests, they do create reproducible effects—they don't, not directly. Yet, following Mumford, I would argue that they are *almost as effective*, in the sense that if, in our case, urban writing is not directly producing urban environment, written production and other media are *almost* doing so. A street is certainly not planned to answer a literary call but less romantically an economic and practical one. However, both economics and practice are influenced by ideas: A highway does not appear *ex nihilo* but is produced by dominant ideas, or ideology. If a book of fiction or non-fiction is not as effective as blueprint when it comes to urban planning, it is yet *almost as effective*, its effects being only more dispersed and therefore hard to trace.

Once that said, the influence that ideas have on our material environment should not mean that the cursor of importance has to be moved from the "hard realities" to the "soft ideas", only that in my opinion we would gain from admitting that they go hand in hand, and that this cursor of importance is an image too mechanical to properly illustrate their relationship. The word *almost*

used by Mumford is interesting in this aspect because it creates a void through the articulation of "all" and "most", a blind spot where the positive, hard "all" and the equivocal, soft "most" meet to create a sort of mental grey area, a *zone* in which the "world within" and the "world without" merge, just like city and country merge at their edges, in inclusion and exclusion.

A great advocate of direct experience with nature and yet a writer, Mumford embodies in *Story of Utopia* and later works the complex relation between writing and reality when it comes to urban space. The term "utopia" in Mumford's work is at the same time anchored in the realm of ideas and the realm of reality, as he discards in one single movement the withdrawal to pure abstraction or pure reality. Instead, he is calling for an alternative between "an aimless utopia of escape and a purposive utopia of reconstruction" (16), an alternative combining the real and the abstract. To him, the first type of utopias, the "aimless utopia of escape", belongs to what we would call today the entertainment industry, with a strong delusional aspect, in which Mumford includes most of popular literature, or what he refers to as "pure literature" (20)—the kind which does not open the way for imagination to enter the real world but instead give mankind a substitute, a way to move away and shelter oneself against the storm of reality: "Once we have weathered the storm, it is dangerous to remain in the utopia of escape; for it is an enchanted island, and to remain there is to lose one's capacity for dealing with things as they are" (20). Opposed to this inward utopia, the outward utopia of reconstruction is instead exclusively interested in shaping the material world, in reconstructing it anew in a revolutionary way. If the second type is more successful since it deals first-hand with reality, Mumford suggests that such utopia can be nefarious if not combined with a spiritual approach: "Our physical reconstructions however have been limited; they have touched chiefly the surfaces of things. The result is that people live in a modern physical environment and carry in their minds an odd assortment of spiritual relics from almost every age" (22).

Hence, if he acknowledges the fact that utopias have influenced and improved reality from Plato's *Republic* to Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, he also thinks that the utopias of reconstruction have disregarded the spiritual need of mankind and by doing so have proven to be coercive for both ideal and material realms, eventually bending them in one single mould and leaving spiritual needs behind. In order to perform a *reconquista* of both over-practical utopian thought and space, Mumford attacks, as he will forty years later in the *City in History*, the conditions of the time brought by what he considers to be the dominant utopia in the years his book is published: the National Utopia.

According to him, if the National Utopia of the nation-states allow some minor barriers to be broken down through the establishment, in a given space whose borders are mostly drawn in an arbitrary fashion (224-225), of common ground thanks to common rules and common language, it

also sacrifices to the national idea natural differences, or as he puts it: “In the utopia of the National State there are no natural regions” (224). It has to be noted that Mumford's views on nationalism are not well-backed by thorough investigation since he mostly considers the nation-states as enemies of what he calls the “Kingdom of the Spirit”, the natural community of mankind, without describing such “Kingdom” in depths or discussing how it would be, or is, more natural than a constructed nation. In other terms, I would argue that while defending himself from the temptation of being pulled towards pure abstraction and pure reality in the introduction of *The Story of Utopia*, Mumford ends up opposing the ideal and unnatural National Utopia to his own utopian “Kingdom of the Spirit”, which might be as ideal and unnatural as its opponent, even if he chooses to present it as “the real men and women, the real communities, the real regions, the real workaday occupations” as opposed to the purely ideal National Utopia (230). If the National Utopia, the national community is a construct which as to be willed, as Mumford repeats, he doesn't bring forth elements which would prove that his universal kingdom of the human spirit is not. Therefore, as it will later be the case in *The City in History*, Mumford's use of the authority of what is natural and what is not stays highly problematic and undermines his demonstration. Nonetheless, Mumford's argument on nationalism is interesting in the course of my demonstration when it comes to a description of the main tool the National Utopia has at hand to both produce itself and survive: The capital city, or what Mumford calls the Megalopolis.

> The chief instrument of the National State is Megalopolis, its biggest city, the place where the idolum of the National Utopia was first created, and where it is perpetually willed into existence.
>
> In order to grasp the quintessential character of Megalopolis we must shut our eyes to the palpable earth, with its mantle of vegetation and its tent of clouds, and conceive what might be made of the human landscape if it could be entirely fabricated out of paper; for the ultimate aim of the Megalopolis is to conduct the whole of human life and intercourse through the medium of paper. (226)

Hence, in Mumford's view, the National State can only smooth down the conflicts its reductive essence creates with mankind's natural inclination towards the good life through the use of paper, of the written, favoured medium of the national ideal, born and raised in the Megalopolis.

As said above, and even if he is a writer himself, Mumford praises direct contact, first-hand learning, without the paper acting as a middleman; a direct approach which puts nature and paper against each other since the latter acts as a buffer against reality and the discovery of the Other. But what might be even more dangerous according to Mumford is that paper is a mean used by the National State to reach national uniformity and therefore cancelling out the universal spiritual

community of mankind of which he is a strong advocate:

> Finally, by the devices of "national education" and "national advertising" all the inhabitants of the National Utopia are persuaded that the good life is that which is lived, on paper, in the capital city; and that an approximation to this life can be achieved only by eating the food, dressing in the clothes, holding the opinions and purchasing the goods which are offered for sale by Megalopolis. (229)

Similarly to what I have done in the first chapter of this dissertation, I would like to use Mumford to once again highlight a paradox. In the first chapter, such paradox was the fact that while calling for an organic, more natural organisation of the garden cities which should be ideally planned based on the flexible example set by medieval towns (as opposed to the geometric/baroque suburbs of the 1960s), he eventually presented a very geometrical and mechanical regulation of the city's shape and organisation. In this second chapter, the paradox on which I would like to shed some light and use as a step up to what follows is the fact that Mumford decries paper as an obstacle to direct contact with nature and a tool the Megalopolis uses to annihilate individuality, yet he does so on paper and by using the Megalopolis' paper industry.

It goes without saying that, again, I'm not rejecting Mumford's thought due to these evident paradoxes: *The Story of Utopia* and *The City and History* are invaluable books which both present compelling arguments which have greatly inspired my own work. Rather than that, what I want to do is drawing your attention on the tensions, the paradoxes, the cracks in his writing on the city, on both how it is materially (as in our first chapter) and ideally planned. Even if *The Story of Utopias* will soon be a century-old text, Mumford's paradoxical charge against paper and its relation to the city still echoes in urban writings today and brings forth, I believe more clearly than in other authors, the question which sustains this thesis: How to *come to terms* with the urban space? Or in Mumford words, How to have direct contact with the nature of our urban environment without running the risk of falling into escape utopia or reconstruction utopia devoid of mankind's natural spiritual needs? What's more, if paper, if the written world is a tool the National State uses to reach national uniformity, how can we transcend it to still be able to produce personal accounts of a city, especially of the capital city, the Megalopolis?

Needless to say that such questions are related to greater issues such as the circulation of knowledge, the very possibility of knowledge for that matter, or the oral versus written debate. All the issues will be discussed but solely tangentially, *en transparence*—both transpiring in and inspiring my argument.conomic What we will closely study though is how contemporary urban non-fiction literature handles this paradox.

Mumford, in the two last quotes given above, clearly states that the National Utopia, the sense of belonging shared by a given group of people on a given national territory, is perpetuated through paper. In this claim, Mumford mostly targets bureaucratic paper, or how an urban child education is decided on paper, how rules are decided on paper, how property is decided on paper, how political action is decided on paper—and not through direct intercourse. Yet, besides his assault of bureaucracy, Mumford also puts the blame on what we consider as more noble forms of the written words: journalism and literature.

> The daily newspaper, the ledger, the card index are the means by which [a citizen] now makes contact with life, whilst the fiction magazine and the illustrated paper are the means by which he escapes from it. Through the translucent form of paper known as celluloid, it has been possible to do away on the stage with flesh-and-blood people; and therefore the drama of life, as the Megalopolitan story writers tell it, can be enacted as one removed from actuality. (Mumford, *Story* 227)

Instead of seeing the written production as an obstacle to experience of reality, I would rather argue that if reading is not a direct interaction with the material world, the relation between the two realms, the ideal and the material, is more complex in the sense that written and reality produce each other. If writing comes from physical experience of the physical environment, the whole process is a two-way street in which physical experience and environment are conditioned by the written in a neither positive nor negative but neutral way. This simple idea can be sum-up as follows: The real and imaginary, the material and the ideal, are producing one another. To apply it to our context (the city) would lead to say that the urban space *in* and *upon* which a huge body of writings is produced is reciprocally produced by this written production.

That the written actually produces the hard city is simply indubitable today since, as said above, a street and a house cannot be build without the appropriate amount of written documents, from the eventual blueprints to the ledgers and signed papers criticised by Mumford above. Yet, if we moved beyond that kind of administrative use of paper, it might not be commonly accepted that what I would call “soft writings” have an impact on a city's perceived reality, an impact which can eventually result in modelling the hard reality itself, not via administrative, “hard” writingsconomic (blueprints, signed papers) but through direct action triggered by new perception of said space.

Before coming back to the issue of perception and how, through writings and their reception, it can shape the hard urban reality, I shall first clarify my position on what I consider as “soft writings”. First of all, I understand the term “writing” here in a very narrow way: Signs belonging to any linguistic system written by any possible mean to create any kind of sense. Which means that I am aware to be banning from this demonstration what can be considered as other kinds of

"writing", for instance through other medium than the written word (still images, moving images, pen or paint strokes, etc.) I also consciously reject oral expression to be somewhat written. By doing so, I do not mean to create any kind of controversy or make any kind of statement. What I mean though is to clarify my object of study which will thus be "writings" as simplistically defined above.

Second, I use the term "soft" to narrow once more this still too broad notion of "writings". If it is fated to be opposed to "hard writings" in the mind of my reader (or in mine for that matter), therefore creating another kind of these dualities from which I am trying to steer away, I would recommend to myself and my audience to keep in mind, whenever the terms "hard" and "soft" occur, the wax argument in Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy.*

In this notorious passage, Descartes wonder on the nature of a piece of wax, first solid then liquid after melting, coming to the conclusion that the image (or idea from physical experience) he had in the first place of the nature of the piece of wax was incomplete:

> *Peut-être était-ce ce que je pense maintenant, à savoir que cette cire n'était pas, ni cette douceur du miel, ni cette agréable odeur des fleurs, ni cette blancheur, ni cette figure, ni ce son ; mais seulement un corps qui un peu auparavant me paraissait sensible sous ces formes, et qui maintenant se fait sentir sous d'autres. (...) Considérons-le attentivement, et, retranchant toutes les choses qui n'appartiennent point à la cire, voyons ce qui reste. Certes il ne demeure* rien que quelque chose d'étendu, de flexible et de muable (emphasis mine). (Descartes, *Discours* [23])

Borrowing Descartes' terminology to explain what I'm trying to convey by quoting him, the terms "hard" and "soft" are here to be taken as perceived forms of the nature of the written; forms which can eventually change since, like the piece of wax, the nature of the written is primarily extended, flexible and movable. Besides the cartesian combination "nothing-except-something" which creates another kind of these movable *zones* of meaning we are trying to navigate, terms such as "soft" and "hard" are arbitrarily use here as a step (even if a misstep) to reflect deeper on the nature of the written itself, and in our context on how the written influences urban space.

Although it is a complicated case to defend since it implies to draw a line between two different kinds of writing based on unstable notions, I would still suggest that "soft writings" are writings

23 "It was perhaps what I now think, viz., that this wax was neither the sweetness of honey, the pleasant odour of flowers, the whiteness, the figure, nor the sound, but only a body that a little before appeared to me conspicuous under these forms and which is now perceived under others. (...) Let it be attentively considered, and retrenching all that does not belong to the wax, let us see what remains. There certainly remains nothing, except something extended, flexible, and movable." Descartes, Meditations 37.

published for a potentially universal audience by one or more individuals for the sole purpose of expression. With this refined definition I intend to put aside from the “soft writings” other types of writings which are not targeting potentially universal readership (private correspondence and the like) or which are not solely interested in expressing personal ideas. Fall under this second category writings such as scientific equations, but also the blueprints and signed papers mentioned above whose purpose is not only to express one or more individuality but answer to other necessities. As an illustration of this second excluding feature of the “soft writings” concept, consider a grocery list. It is written, it is the expression of an individual, yet its production is not solely motivated by this expression as it answers primarily to other necessities; namely remembering to purchase one thing or the other. However, one could argue that a grocery list can be written without the intent to buy but solely as a way to express oneself, for instance in an artistic performance. In this case such grocery list could be consider as part of the “soft writings”, precisely because of that shift in the intent which motivated its production: In that scenario the sole purpose of that grocery list would be expression.

This boiling down of the expression “soft writings” still leaves us with an amazingly vast body of works since internet comments, blogs and other publicly-displayed forms of writings can still be included in it, alongside published ones. What's more, moving away from the easy demonstration of the grocery list I have made above, how should be considered writings produced to answer other necessities yet being indubitably an expression of an individual? I think here of texts such as advertising copies and other forms of ordered writings whether it be prefaces, books themselves or articles. If we put the problem under that light we have also to ask the question of what belongs to spontaneous expression and what belongs to motivated expression; in shortconomic where does the “sole purpose of expression” begins and where does it mingle with other purposes, whether it be economic or personal purposes? Even if we change our formula to “primarily motivated by expression” we are still stuck as it would amount to qualitatively differentiate what is primarily and what is secondary in the motivations behind the production of a written text—a task verging on the impossible and the absurd. To escape this quagmire yet try to take another step forward, let us stop on the notions of producing and publishing a text.

If the author was reigning supreme over the written world before the advent of modern schools of literary criticism which have moved the focus from the text itself to its reception or its translation, there is one agent of the written word that didn't and still doesn't get much scrutiny: The publishing institution. To make it simple, if we know that parts of Derrida's work have been translated by Spivak and how these translations have been received, I would argue that we often ignore how the publication actually materialised; not only which publishing houses did it but which

editors worked on it and how they interacted with the author (Derrida) and his translator (Spivak). In short, if textuality has notoriously killed the author as complete master of his text while at the same time giving some recognition to the reader and the translator in the production of this text, the process of publication is, most of the time, still barely touched on. Not only we don't have access to economic information about how much the production of a given text actually costs or who worked on it besides the names mentioned in the text itself (author, translator, preface, introduction or postface author, editor but only in a collection of texts without a single author), but perhaps more importantly we rarely consider why a text was produced in the first place.

If studying the reception of a text is widespread today, such study rarely takes into account what happened during the first step of reception, i.e. when a given text was first received by its future publisher. It might be the case when a text faces obstacles in the course of his publication, like censorship or the infamous "mistakes" by famous publishers, but in the great majority of cases this crucial step is often neglected. The simple answer of why a text written by an individual to express himself was picked up by a given publishing institution for publication is more often than not left unanswered.

Coming back to our struggle with the expression "soft writings", and in an attempt to slightly turn the spotlight towards publishing, I would suggest to create a category of "soft writings" in which belongs my primary texts on London, a category which would be based on that production process, a category centred on two overlooked common denominators between the different authors. First, they have all been published by London-based publishing institutions, whether it be publishing houses or media groups, and sometimes both since, for instance, *The Guardian* has published some of Iain Sinclair's and Will Self's texts before their book publication. This implies that the publication of these texts have been partially motivated by economic gains since they have been published by investing money in them and are subsequently sold for a price. Second, they are all presented as the expression of a personal experience of the city of London, mostly through walking on the outskirts of the English capital. Whether it be Iain Sinclair, Will Self, Nick Papadimitriou, Patrick Keiller or China Mieville, each author has been through the process of publication with an London-based institution.

With that first feature, I intend to arbitrarily evacuate from my corpus the endless body of texts produced by individuals without crossing the path of a publishing institution: blogs, notes and other primarily expressive texts which have never undergone the process of selection by an outside entity than its original producer before publication. This does not mean that such written production is a minor one as compared to the written word printed and circulated by publishing institutions, sold in stores and archived and borrowed in libraries. Only that unlike my primary texts, such texts don't go

through selection by a given publishing institution and thus their relation with a given culture and a given society, and what they can tell us about them, is different from a text which is selected and published. In other terms, and without discarding blogs and the like as non-literature or non-culture, such texts, if they do belong to the category “soft writings”, are not published and circulated at a national level and thus are not part of the production of culture, a culture whose agents consider historically important and consequently worthy of implementing a selective procedure to gain access to it.

Hence, if above I have stumbled on the issue of defining the primary and/or secondary motivations behind the production of an expressive “soft writing”, I would now suggest to solve this issue by shifting the focus, not on the motivation of the author but on the motivation of the publishing institutions: If a “soft writing” has been published, whether it be in the form of an article or a book, it is primarily because it has been selected by a cultural agent which deemed it as relevant to the production of the historically-minding culture. Whether they have been produced by an established, mainstream writer or and underground newcomer, or published by a transnational group or a local house, as soon as the publication of two different texts happen, both become part of the same cultural pool in the sense that both texts, in its own way, were perceived by a cultural agent as answering a cultural demand.

Therefore, in the vast body of “soft writings” which I tried to draw in the last paragraphs, I would only focus on writings on the city of London which have undergone the process of cultural selection in the context of London. Doing so I intend to make it easier to see the interaction between a given society's social space and cultural production since such writings *in* and *upon* said space have been selected and published by this given society's cultural agents who were considering that such texts were answering some kind of cultural demand. In doing so I aim at joining movements which have been interested in bridging the traditional gap between material reality and literature, between a society and its written and published products considered as part of literature, among which is the New Historicist movement.

Presented by François Cusset in *French Theory* as a short-fused American alternative in the field of literary criticism to both equally widespread deconstruction or Marxist approaches, New Historicism was a movement led by academic Stephen Greenblatt which aimed at cutting out a middle ground between the two major schools, finding a compromise between the interest in the open and the minor of post-structuralism and the focus on the historical and social of Marxist criticism. Aware of this unstable position, Greenblatt wrote:

> One of the peculiar characteristics of the “new historicism” in literary studies is precisely how unresolved and in some way disingenuous it has been—I have been—

> about the relation to literary theory. On the one hand it seems to me that an openness to the theoretical ferment of the last few years is precisely what distinguishes the new historicism from the positivist historical scholarship of the early twentieth century. (...) On the other hand the historicist critics have on the whole been unwilling to enrol themselves in one or the other of the dominant theoretical camps. (Veeser 1)

In Greenblatt's opinion, the answers provided by both "theoretical camps"—the post-structuralist and the Marxist schools of literary criticism reciprocally embodied in Greenblatt's argument by Jean-François Lyotard and Fredric Jameson—to the historical relation between art and society are unsatisfactory because, due to their eschatological vision and their moral biases, they don't take into account the contradictions of cultural discourse under their contemporary form of capitalism:

> The difference between Jameson's capitalism, the perpetrator of separate discursive domains, the agent of privacy, psychology, and the individual, and Lyotard's capitalism, the enemy of such domains and the destroyer of privacy, psychology, and the individual, may in part be traced to a difference between the Marxist and poststructuralist projects. Jameson, seeking to expose the fallaciousness of a separate artistic sphere and to celebrate the materialist integration of all discourses, finds capitalism at the root of the false differentiation; Lyotard seeking to celebrate the differentiation of all discourses and to expose the fallaciousness of monological unity, finds capitalism at the root of the false integration. (5)

Instead of seeing capitalism as a "unitary demonic principle", Greenblatt suggests to see it as a "complex historical movement", a formula which concentrates the historical aspect dear to Marxist theory and the complexity as a way to avoid totalisation dear to post-structuralist theory, for in his view "capitalism has characteristically generated neither regimes in which all discourses seem coordinated, nor regimes in which they seem radically isolated or discontinuous, but regimes in which the drive towards differentiation and the drive towards monological organization operate simultaneously, or at least oscillate so rapidly as to create the impression of simultaneity." (6)

I would borrow to Greenblatt's analysis the notion of oscillation, a notion which goes hand in hand with the idea of negotiation repeatedly used by the new historicists. I would relate this oscillation with the metaphor of the *zone* I tried to develop in my first chapter, namely a metaphorical territory which would gain at being taken in its dynamism, "extended, flexible and movable", even when it secludes it to being unstable, an approximation. What's more, I think that this oscillation, this *zone* which cannot be pinpointed, also provide us with, paradoxically, the most accurate metaphor of the relation between a text and the space it writes *in* and *upon*.

It has to be noted that one of the interesting additions to literary criticism defended by New

Historicism was an emphasis on the role of the critic. Of course, such focus was well-shared at the time of post-structuralism and reception theory. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy to consider the originality of what the New Historicists have written about the role of the critic (hence themselves), destabilising even their own demonstrations in order to acknowledge the fact that a historical literary criticism, a literary criticism which aims at considering the context of production of a given work, is condemned to constant instability yet can have direct impact on the outside world as such criticism is bound to reject the conception according to which literature belongs to an autonomous aesthetic order which shares no connection with social realities. Instead of going for that conception which believes in a complete autonomy of literature in regard to material realities, including its own production and publication, Louis A. Montrose, another eminent new historicist, suggests to consider that literature enjoy a *relative* autonomy, neither inside nor outside the Real (as Montrose calls it):

> Thus, to speak of the social production of "literature" or of any particular text is to signify not only that it is *socially produced* but also that it is *socially productive* (italics mine)—that it is the product of work and that it performs work in the process of being written, enacted, or read. Recent theories of textuality have argued persuasively that the referent of a linguistic sign cannot be fixed; that the meaning of a text cannot be stabilized. At the same time, writing and reading are always historically and socially determinate events, performed *in* the world and *upon* the world by gendered individual and collective human agents. We may simultaneously acknowledge the theoretical indeterminacy of the signifying process and the historical specificity of discursive practices—acts of speaking, writing, and interpreting. The project of a new socio-historical criticism is, then, to analyze the interplay of culture-specific discursive practices—mindful that it, too, is such a practice and so participates in the interplay it seeks to analyze. (Veeser 23)

We find again this desire for a space neither/nor, a relative, an oscillation, an almost; a metaphorical space I called *zone* and which might be impossible to reach yet offers interesting new ways of thinking about the production of culture and the creation of knowledge. Besides this vision of literature as yet another utopian ground, neither in nor out, what is of some interest to us in Montrose's long quote is the notion of a reciprocity between the text and the space, a reciprocity inspired by the acceptance by readers, among which critics, that a text doesn't appear magically but is produced in and by a social and cultural context, just like a social and cultural context doesn't appear magically but is produced in and by an ideal and often textual context. This reciprocity implies many possibilities for a change brought by the written word, and if we keep in mind what

we have said of Greenblatt we can clearly see through it the theoretical addition of both post-structuralism (for the porosity between text and real and the indeterminacy) and Marxist literary criticism (for the emphasis on production and historical action), making the new historicist approach an hybrid of the two. Maybe so successfully compromising between the two dominant and lasting schools of thought that it failed to become one on its own.

When it comes to the city and literature, this reciprocally productive relationship between space and text exposed by the new historicists has been taken as sole object of study by a group of academics which gathered under the banner of *géocritique* (geocriticism in English) and around the person of Bernard Westphal. In 2007, Westphal published what could be taken as the manifesto of the movement in the form of a book, *Géocritique*, a text which develops the approach its members should take when they consider space in literature, and urban space in particular. Inspired by Lefebvre's *Production of Space* and the trinity of lived-perceived-conceived space I mentioned in my first chapter, Westphal presents the geocritical approach as having two premises.

The first premise of geocriticism is that time and space share a common but chaotic plan "subject to an entirely oscillatory logic whereby the fragmentary ceases to be oriented to a coherent whole" (Westphal 37). With that first pillar, the geocritical approach states, following Lefebvre, Soja and the conception of space of the postmodern school, that space can no longer be lived, perceived and conceived as an abstract whole but instead has to be taken as an ever-changing construct in which representation, including literary representation, has a role to play.

Complementing that first idea, the second premise of geocriticism is that "the relationship between the representation of space and real space is indeterminate. Rather than considering a spatial or spatiotemporal representation as not 'real', we view every representation (whether literary, iconographic, etc.) as referring to a broadly imagined reality that, in and through its extreme extension, is subject to a weak ontology" (37). Greatly indebted to Lefebvre, the geocritical approach thus suggest that, in the terms used in *The Production of Space,* social space or lived space is "constituted by the spaces of representation, which is to say, lived spaces are experienced through images and symbols" (76). In other words, that representations of space, among which the written word, are instrumental in producing the reality of space.

Following these two premises which creates a network of interactions between space and literature, geocriticism mostly focuses on the study of narrative fictions in a given city, on how a city produces its fiction."Does the Text Precede the Place?" asks Westphal in a title (153), a question which could imply that reality is not real without its own fiction, that the experience of the real place is partially created by its representation, in literature and elsewhere. It has to be noted that Westphal does not go as far as doubting the primacy of reality over representation, yet he states

repeatedly, following the relativism of postmodern theory, that real space as a “weak ontology”, and that reality and fiction are tightly embracing one another: “Where is the referent of the fiction? What is it? What is its status? In a context in which a strict hierarchy between reality and fiction is questioned, the excursions between them range from one level to another” (88). As he accepts the postulate according to which we are currently living in an age of derrealisation in which the delineations of reality and fiction are not as clearly drawn as they once were, Westphal defends literature (and postmodern literature in particular) as the weapon of choice to study this perception of reality as unreal, or “derealized reality”, since the fictional is at its heart: “literature is perhaps the best option for reading this new world, by virtue of its very fictionality” (90).

As the world is derrealised, let us read it in fiction. If geocriticism acknowledges the impact of other types of texts on cities, most of the examples given by Westphal, as well as the later publications of geocritics, is orientated towards fiction writings, a genre which is, following Westphal's argument, *de facto* the best way to express the derrealisation of our time. Therefore, even if he repeatedly states that reality and fiction should not be so drastically separated, in the end the geocritics have, to my knowledge, only studied works who have been published as fictional. What I would suggest is that the fact that they have collectively ended up studying fiction over non-fiction indicates that, whatever they may say elsewhere, they still differentiate fiction from non-fiction, what is presented as fictional and what is presented as factual, probably to avoid falling in the “absolute relativism” (87) which many fear is lying at the heart of postmodern theory.

This collective choice of the geocritics to only study texts labelled fictional even when their whole theoretical background is based on admitting the porosity of reality and fiction echoes what we have seen in the first chapter on Edward Soja Thirding-as-Othering. Soja's concept, as I wrote, still involves a separation between the Self and the Other even when it hopes to create a utopian space in which the two shall merge. I argue that it is the same in Westphal: Basing his theory on the fact that real and fiction have an influence on each other, he ends up redrawing the line between the real and its representation: “According to some, fiction even take precedence over reality. But this is an aporia. The real absorbs all configurations of representation, even those that seem to encompass modifications of its structure, or, in other words, fictions. The real is always the terminus ad quem of representation.” What Westphal should have added is that representation is also always the terminus ad quem of the real.

The point I am trying to develop here, similar to what I've said on Soja, is that while breaking some barriers, reciprocally between centre/self and periphery/other in Soja, real and fiction in Westphal, these thinkers somehow end up reinforcing them. I don't mean to say that indeed fiction takes precedence over the real, simply that such idea of precedence, such opposition might be

absolutely unnecessary and is discordant with the call in both Soja and Westphal to stop classifying concepts in terms of hierarchy. There is an advocacy in both authors for unity in multiplicity, an idea we found in the great majority of theoretical texts today, and yet both of them do not respect its implications in their own writings (*see* Greenblatt's argument quoted above on what opposes Jameson and Lyotard). If that may sound as a harsh and gratuitous criticism of whatever has been written in the last decades, once again I don't discard any of these texts and what they brought to the history of ideas. My only wish is to highlight a paradox, a paradox which might solely arise from the difficulty, if not impossibility, to express both unity and diversity through language. A difficulty or impossibility which I believe, if it might not be overcome, at least does not block the way to the creation of knowledge. In other terms, I suggest not an absolute relativism which would borderline on nihilism when it comes to the creation of knowledge (if fiction is everything, how can we create any real knowledge?), but an approximative approach, perpetually approximate knowledge through approximations, following what Lefebvre wrote in the *Production of Space* and that I have already quoted above in the first chapter of this thesis: “Such a knowledge is conscious of its own approximativeness: it is at once certain and uncertain. It announces its own relativity at each step, undertaking (or at least seeking to undertake) self-criticism, yet never allowing itself to become dissipated in apologias for non-knowledge, absolute spontaneity or ‘pure’ violence” (Lefebvre 65).

When geocritics have taken fictional writings to capture the interaction between a real place and its fiction, I would instead take writings presented as non-fiction to demonstrate how such texts can be considered as good example of such an approximative approach as they are actively trying to avoid to take a side between centre and periphery, real and fiction, whether it be in their subject or in their form.

A city and its literature are inherently connected in the sense that each directly produces the other. If the last pages of this dissertation have been quite theoretical, a detour which I believe allowed us to give some context to my call to reconsider the process of publication in literature, I want now to come back to material production *per se* and begin the section of this chapter by one sententious sentence: A book and its impact cannot be produced materially without an industry supported by the city.

From publishing institutions, through printing shops, to places (libraries, bookstores, educational institutions) and agents (librarians, booksellers, professors) of circulation, a text needs a city to be produced and become part of the cannon of a given culture. Of course, a text can be produced by an individual in the countryside with a printer or a good pen; but if such book does not come, one way or the other, to the city it cannot become part of a given culture simply because it has not been

approved by cultural agents. Sure, such text can produce an impact among a group of friends for instance, and some would argue that a group of friend's culture is nonetheless a culture; yet if such hypothetical text is not bought by a library, discussed in a class or mentioned in an article it will eventually disappear from memory, and by extension from culture. Which means that even in the age of the internet, and at least so far, the city is still a magnet and a coffer for cultural products.

Similarly, cities or places which are not written *on* will disappear. Their ruins might be there but their existence in memories paradoxically cannot materialised as long as something as not been written on them. Take the Harappan civilisation and what was most likely its capital at one point, Mohenjo-daro. The city itself, its materiality, was in today's Pakistan since its creation, it never disappeared, the ruins obviously did not move. Yet, I would argue that such cities were recreated by their discoveries. Even if there might have been local legends about the city of Mohenjo-daro before the first excavations of the Archaeological Survey of India in the early 1920s, in terms of knowledge the city got to be *known* only after articles and reports had been written on it. Likewise, it is now part of South Asian cultural history, and by extension the history of mankind, because of this written production. In other terms, locals before the first excavations might have suspected that there was an antic city nearby, but this rumour only materialised, not only with the discovery per se, but with reports from the first expeditions.

Nowadays if all cities have been written *on*, some of them dominate the literary landscape, thanks less to their nature than to the body of texts which have been produced on them. In *Edge City*, a book in which he defends the decentralised conurbation of New Jersey against historical urban centre like New York, Chicago or Los Angeles, Joel Garreau writes, “New Jersey is a kind of California of the East Coast”, before listing how close the two conurbations of Los Angeles an New Jersey can be. However, since they are so similar, what differentiates the two? That question might sound absurd since, thanks to the extension of American culture, we all have an idea of what differentiates Los Angeles from New Jersey, an idea which comes from the representation of both places in cultural products. Again, I don't mean to abolish the reality of both places but only to highlight how, even when they are similar and offer similar opportunities, the Californian city has the upper-hand over New Jersey because its status has been established by an extensive body of works. Hence “New Jersey is a kind of California of the East Coast”, and the other way around would sound preposterous since California is a well-known element of collective imagination and the city of Los Angeles has become, thanks to texts like Soja's and others after him, the typical postmodern conurbation.

Therefore to this day the written word and cities work hand in hand at producing one another, and they've done so probably from the emergence of one or the other. As Mumford notes in the *City*

in History: “The invention of such forms as the written record, the library, the archive, the school, and the university is one of the earliest and most characteristic achievements of the city” (42). The written record logically thrives in the urban space since such space is inherently focused on accumulation, whether it be people, wealth, political power, and so written records. As a quote often attributed to Ralph Waldo Emerson would put it, “the city lives by remembering” and to do so it is only logical that it has been, from the beginning, a favourable environment for the recording and the preservation of such memories. Here too the written production and its preservation produces one another, a process, a transformation from the written to the record, which cannot be entirely objective since it involves a subject—another type of cultural agent.

Comparable to the publication of a given book by a publishing house, texts, including soft writings, become culturally and historically relevant, worth-remembering, and are consequently archived only through the conscious decision of an agent who deems them so. A passage in *Ghost Milk: Calling Time on the Grand Project*, one of Iain Sinclair's latest works, highlights this transformation from scrap paper to records. The author leaves the British Isles and London he has been so extensively recording in writings and films to visit the city of Austin where the Harry Ransom Center of the University of Texas has purchased his unpublished, personal production, or “what they term ‘archive’”:

> Manuscripts. Typescripts. Notebooks. Thin blue bundles tied with yellow twine. Correspondence. Forty years of scribble and grunt in eighty sacks and boxes: a still life writhing with invisible termites, micro-bugs, blisters on onion-skin paper. This material, stacked solid in a tin box in Whitechapel, was an insect ghetto, an unvisited Eden: until I became my own grand project and sold the memory-vault for the dollars to keep me afloat for another season. (loc. 5675)

This transformation from the personal, the soft writing, to the published and the archived is not random but performed by an agent and is by extension influenced by the cultural context of a given time. Therefore it is by essence a conscious selection but also, according to Mumford again, a screen which sets the individual further away from the direct experience of Nature: “Living *by* the record and *for* the record became one of the great stigmata of urban existence: indeed life as recorded—with all its temptations to overdramatization, illusory inflation and deliberate falsification—tended often to become more important than life as lived” (*City*, 118). As the city, the place of recording, also becomes the place of the dramatisation of the real, and so its falsification.

If the city is dramatisation, said dramatisation has known many avatars. The most obvious of this dramatisation would be fiction, but cities have also been recorded and thus produced through writing their own non-fiction texts, a tradition which can as well present good examples of

Mumford's “overdramatization, illusory inflation and deliberate falsification” and which ultimately ask the question of what is worth recording, archiving. For unlike its traditional counterpart, fiction, whose very purpose can sometimes be overdramatization, illusory inflation and deliberate falsification, non-fiction is understood as having a duty to establish the historical truth.

As far as Western capital cities are concerned, from the chroniclers of the 18th century who were bringing back from their expeditions in the underbelly of the urban beast dirty accounts of its immorality to the more socially-minded authors of the 19th century who wrote first and foremost to relieve the poor from its misery, non-fiction writings have formed an important part of the cities' production of themselves, of the production of their historical truth. It is still the case today and chroniclers and social workers have not disappeared from non-fiction production, just like historical truth. Yet I would argue that this tradition of describing the reality of the city has changed in recent years due to new conceptions brough by postmodern thought of the relationship between reality and representation, as we have seen above. By extension, the notion of historical truth, inherently central in non-fiction, and its connection with subjectivity has paved the way to a new form of non-fiction which mirrors these changes.

Our time is a time when the porosity of the two, reality and representation, is accepted. Again I would refrain myself from diving into the debate of whether such porosity between the two leads to blissful relativism or painful derealisation, if it should be embraced or stopped; instead I suggest to look how reality and representation, non-fiction and fiction mingle in a precise kind of contemporary cultural product, namely urban writings published as non-fiction, whether they are published under the label “report”, “document” or simply “non-fiction”. The contours of realms once clearly separated, fiction and non-fiction, the hard objectivity and the soft subjectivity, have been melting into one another, at their edges. We can see it in the popularisation of cultural forms like autofiction and mockumentaries, but also in the work of historian Hayden White, the fact and the fiction are no longer perceived as natural enemies, which, again, does not mean that the real and the imagined are abolished altogether; only that both are accepted as viable ways towards knowledge.

Inspired by the way we radically started casting doubt on language itself in the course of the 20th century, the move away from the dichotomy of the fact and the fiction can also be a move away from monolitic ideology. A major advocate for the acknowledgement of the fictionalization process in the recording and study of history, Hayden White described in *Tropics of Discourse* how radical criticism of language and the reconsideration of the role of subjectivity in recent thought is not nefarious to the practice of history in itself. On the contrary, according to White, acknowledging the unavoidable fictionalization of history in writings due to its passage through the prism of language

is a step towards historical truth, if it is done in a critical way.

> In my view, we experience the ‘fictionalization’ of history as an ‘explanation’ for the same reason that we experience great fiction as an illumination of a world that we inhabit along with the author. In both we recognize the forms by which consciousness both constitutes and colonizes the world it seeks to inhabit comfortably.
>
> Finally it may be observed that if historians were to recognize the fictive element in their narratives, this would not mean the degradation of historiography to the status of ideology or propaganda. In fact, this recognition would serve as a potent antidote to the tendency of historians to become captive of ideological preconceptions which they do not recognize as such but honor as the ‘correct’ perception of ‘the way things *really* are.’ By drawing historiography nearer to its origins in literary sensibility, we should be able to identify the ideological, because it is the fictive, element in our own discourse. (99)

In White's view, to accept fictionalisation in history would allow a certain empathy to emerge between the author and the reader, a recognition that a text presented as historically accurate is produced by human consciousness and the subjective dimension which goes with it. Once that fictional or subjective aspect is taken into account, including in a researcher's own production, the study of history becomes more objective. As he points out, one is generally willing to recognise the fictional, the not-so-factual in a text one ideologically disagrees with; yet one usually doesn't do the same for a text one agrees with, or for his own production. “So, too, if we recognized the literary or fictive element in every historical account, we would be able to move the teaching of historiography onto a higher level of self-consciousness that it currently occupies” (*Ibid.* 99).

White's conclusions touch on the practice of historiography but I think that they can also be applied to the other side of the coin. If he promotes the acknowledgement of the fictive element at the heart of any historical account, we should acknowledge the historical element at the heart of any fiction, including, as said above, in its material production (in our case publishing). This would, I believe, keep literary criticism away from the fetishisation of the text, what White, still in *Tropics of Discourse*, defines as one of the characteristic of Absurdist criticism: “For the absurdist critic, the notion of the text becomes an all-inclusive category of the interpretive enterprise; that or else the text is conceived to exist nowhere at all, to disappear in the flux of language, the play of signs” (263).

Instead of this emphasis on the un-real aspect of the text he attributes to this Absurdist criticism (a movement which is embodied according to White by the usual authors-turned-icons, for idolatry and iconoclasm alike, “Foucault, Barthes, Derrida”, *Ibid.* 262), I suggest that such separation between reality and fiction is, as illustrated by White's argument, irrelevant, not because the factual

and the fictional don't "exist" but because opposing the two is counter-productive. In other words, instead of accepting fiction or fact, the imagined and the real, as the ultimate dichotomy which allows us to grasp reality, as the centre of human experience and the source of knowledge, I believe that there is a fruitful way to reach truth in the *zone* between the two notions. Again, it does not mean that I discard dialectical thought and the notions of what is factual and what is fictional, just like, in an urban context, I don't reject the notions of periphery and centre—dialectics and such notions are tools that have proven themselves useful and still do.

Once that said, and in a similar fashion that what happened to urban studies as exposed in my first chapter, the melting of what is traditionally perceived as two opposite poles into a *zone* might be allowing us to reconsider what is contemporary experience of reality and its representation in literature without unnecessarily stiffening it with overused terms. It is most certainly an idealist approach, but following Mumford in *The Story of Utopias* I would say that it cannot be detrimental to criticism at large to come back to Utopian thought, especially when we have now reached a stage in the history of ideas in which we consider that such utopias are at the same time real and imagined, ideal and real. I would gladly admit that my knowledge of intellectual history is not wide enough to assert unequivocally that the current state or stage in which we are in terms of ideas had never been reached, only that the novelties brought by contemporary thought is a fertile ground for that non-binary utopian thought.

Such an approach had to find a favourable space to express itself and I would argue that it found it in what is an inherent *u-topia*—the non-places, abstract space, *zone* at the edge of cities, a mix of the urban and the pastoral but also a chosen ground for the mingling of fact and fiction as it acts as an uncharted territory which grew against the overly historical and signifying centres. The attraction to the outskirts, like to the margins in intellectual history, is obviously not a new phenomenon, yet what might be new is to what extent this territory has attracted the attention of many writers in recent decades, writers who perceived it as a new *terra incognita* to explore, a mirror of the conditions of postmodernity and thus a favourable terrain to experiment and try to break away from the traditional binary approach of centre and periphery, fact and fiction. This is patent in the way non-fiction writers have tackled and used this *zone*.

Before moving to our primary sources, which are part of what I coined earlier as non-fiction literary soft writings (or self-expressive text published as relevant to the literature of a given culture), it can be interesting I think to make a quick detour on other non-fiction writers who are not considered as belonging to literature but to another discipline, whether it be urban studies or sociology. Such semi-digression shall allow us to see that the way London-based non-fiction authors consider the relationship between fact and fiction has to be viewed in a wider context.

When it comes to contemporary space in sociology or urban studies—disciplines which are commonly following a more factual, grounded approach which gives priority to data over experience and interpretation, objectivity over subjectivity—, certain writers in recent decades tend to deviate from pure rationality by examining other factors which are supposedly less rational, such as the role of imagination. An approach which aims at complementing more data-oriented analysis instead of discarding it. It is for instance the method followed by Jean-François Augoyard in *Step by step*.

First published in France in 1979, this text is part of the important movement in sociology starting after the Second World War which aimed at studying ordinary life, the everyday, in an attempt to distance the humanities from the grand narratives, give a voice to the overlooked, focus on the low. Comparable to what Michel De Certeau will do one year later in the first volume of *The Practice of Everyday Life*, yet with less critical success, Augoyard presents his work as the study of the daily walking routines of the people inhabiting a housing project outside the medium-sized city of Grenoble, France. From the introduction Augoyard presents his study as an experimentation but also a way to move away from a rationalism embodied by Le Corbusier and the modernist vision of architecture. A vision which inspired French and international urban planning from the 1950s, including the housing project Augoyard decided to focus on. Hence, by choosing to write a book on the daily walks of a population living in *à la* Le Corbusier environment, Augoyard not only follow the wave of everyday writers but use the apparent meaninglessness of walking routines as a way to criticise more broadly modernist architecture and additionally the rigid rationalism of the human sciences:

> The present volume presents the concrete experiment we have undertaken. Because of this, however, the writing is inflected in two unusual ways. For, grasped in its lived quality, everyday life does not yield states of affairs, behaviors whose typological structure could be fixed in place. It gives us movements, *conducts*. The account we shall offer respects its evolutive or "fleeting" character. (...) Moreover, does not every statement about everyday life that would fail to enter into its concrete particularities and singularities risk setting it too quickly and rigidly in the real of the *represented* and, in this sense, also risk reduplicating the reductions currently imposed upon it via the production of planned space? (Augoyard 5)

Therefore to keep the "fleeting" aspect of the everyday routines (an image close to Jonathan Raban's "soft city"), Augoyard suggests to write in movements, keeping uncertainty in mind. While doing so he also draws a parallel with the modernist approach to planned space: As an alternative to the chronometric time of the urban planner who sees space as a mathematical abstraction, Augoyard

offers to examine “lived time” and personal narratives. For Augoyard's method is not only relying on an outside perspective where he would only note down the walks of the people he is taking as subject before interpreting them. Instead, his study is study injects a dose of subjectivity from the walkers themselves as it is mostly based on the self-representation they have of their own walks:

> The first interview was therefore always brief, since it aimed only at clarifying in common language the duty of self-observation that was to be accomplished. During the second interview, the inhabitant recounted his trips. A third interview seemed necessary when the inhabitants had developed a taste for going back over the unremarkable particularities of their existence and wanted to add to their initial narrative. (21)

Therefore, as a way to countering the cold rationalist approach, Augoyard's method focuses on personal retelling in an attempt to grasp the lived experience of space. Instead of solely including the mathematical data which would have only represented the individual daily trips as lines going from point A to point B without considering on each individual's point of view. As Augoyard gives more and more importance to imagination and self-representation which are expressed in the inhabitants small choices of route and the way they explain them, he put his study's emphasis on lived time, lived space, movement, over what he considers as the inherent rigidity of a rationalist approach. Moreover, the further he goes into valuing the subjectivity of his subject, the further his prose itself changes, indulging in more imagery or neologisms from the inhabitant's texts (for instance “ratcess”, 144). Without entirely rejecting sociological terminology and general method, Augoyard creates in his text pockets of meaning belonging more to poetic than rational discourse.

Augoyard's prose is so close to literary writing that his English translation done by David Ames Curtis could be included in a corpus on Translation Studies. Not only the translator has sometimes chosen to let the original French show (an honour other languages less often have, which might be, at least partially, consequence of the dominant, bilingual way Derrida's work was translated), but he has also written an afterword in which he strikingly discusses more Augoyard's prose than his theme:

> Just as I had laboriously retraced the steps of *Pas à pas* in translating the book, carefully attempting to set my own “wordprints” into each of the writer's own and thereby hoping to re-create the same gait, make the same impressions, achieve the same depth, disturbing neither their sense of flow nor their appearance and yet finding myself trudging over markedly different linguistic ground while attempting to do so, so did I proceed hesitantly, almost trippingly, over an imagined yet physically real builtspace I was now traversing unsteadily for the first time and yet had seen clearly in my mind's eye for several months. (195)

David Ames Curtis goes further into this sort of identification with the work he is translating by drawing a parallel between the act of translating and the choices made by the housing project's inhabitants. In my view this extended discourse from the translator of a work of sociology who would be sub-categorised as anthropology demonstrates that Augoyard's text is innovative in the place he gives to expression over data, to imagination over material reality, an importance he unequivocally asserts:

> Presented as one of our psychological faculties, the imagination looks like it is abiding in a space of its own, a sort of mental territory that is not to surpass certain limits and that is called upon during quite a specific set of activities: connecting, perceptions, preparing the genesis of concepts, being the compost of artistic and technical creation. It is conceded a single liberty: it is allowed to go at will into the seemingly incidental field of aesthetics. From this perspective, the imaginary would be the mere complement, the facile foil, of the real. Everything that the former would not accept would be thrown out as dross in the latter domain. Is not this reduction of a concrete power into a psychological faculty, this way of confining the irrational and the polysemous in the seedier parts of town, in the suspect “zone” of the city of knowledge, a strategic effect? (154)

This extended quotation brings back together many things we have been discussing so far in the course of this thesis, whether it be the articulation of centre and periphery in the city and on a conceptual level, the term “zone”, and more generally the call to find a middle-ground between the real and the imagined. What is also interesting in this quote and *Step by step* as a whole is that its English translation only occurred almost thirty years after its first publication which means that his conclusions and probably his method based on self-representation and the role of the imagined still seemed culturally relevant to his American publisher in 2007. As the translator's afterword indicates, more than Augoyard's demonstration and conclusions, what triggered the 2007 translation of a 1979 text has been equally his argument but also the form it takes. In other words what has made Augoyard's text worth-publishing almost forty years after it has been first printed might have been, to some extent at least, his literary approach and the emphasis he gives to the role of the imaginary, an approach and emphasis we found in most works on urban space.

The collection of essays *The Spaces of Postmodernity* edited by Michael J. Dear and Steven Flusty is enlightening in this aspect. Addressing the evolution of postmodern thought in human geography, it strikingly displays the major changes of the field. The first essays, written between 1965–1983 which the editors nickname “Pre-Postmodern Geographies, are texts highly technical and structuralist in essence, often illustrated by precise diagrams. A good example of that is the

opening essay by Peter Haggett entitled “Locational Analysis in Human Geography” (Dear and Flusty, 22-36) and illustrated with a rather cryptic diagram “A model for models” (29).

As Dear & Flusty's collection unfolds, we witness that the field of human geography itself moves gradually from the structuralist approach best exemplified by Haggett's diagram towards less rigid methods of analysis and writing styles in which the subjectivity of the authors is given more room. A good illustration of that gradual shift towards subjectivity as a viable way to discuss urban space in what is considered to be the postmodern era can be found in Fredric Jameson's influential essay.

Present in Dear & Flusty but cut down from thirty-three pages to seven, the essay “Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism”, was first published in the no. 146 of the New Left Review in 1984 and will later open and give its title to one of Jameson's collection of his writings on postmodernism. The motivation for this essay is introduced by Jameson as the desire to answer the question on whether postmodernism is simply a new style or a radical break, or as he put it: “does it imply any more fundamental change or break than the periodic style and fashion changes determined by an older high-modernist imperative of stylistic innovation?” (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 2). What Jameson concludes here and elsewhere is that postmodernism has to be understood as the cultural dominant logic of the times in which the essay was written, that acknowledging this dominance would allow to re-examine the notions of the “end of history” and the “end of art” by reintroducing the dialectic of class struggle against postmodern paradoxically monolithic heterogeneity:

> I have felt, however, that it was only in the light of some conception of a dominant cultural logic or hegemonic norm that genuine difference could be measured and assessed. I am very far from feeling that all cultural production today is “postmodern” in the broad sense I will be conferring on this term. The postmodern is, however, the force field in which very different kinds of cultural impulses—what Raymond Williams has usefully termed “residual” and “emergent” forms of cultural production—must make their way. If we do not achieve some general sense of cultural dominant, then we fall back into a view of present history as sheer heterogeneity, random difference, a coexistence of a host of distinct forces whose effectivity is undecidable. At any rate, this has been the political spirit in which the following analysis was devised: to project some conception of a new systematic cultural norm and its reproduction in order to reflect more adequately on the most effective forms of any radical cultural politics today. (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 6)

More than Jameson's argument *per se*, what is interesting to me in regards of my chapter's theme (the interaction of fiction and non-fiction, subjectivity and objectivity in urban writings) is how

Jameson supports his view: He retells a walk to the Westin Bonaventure hotel.

Jamson illustrates his demonstration with the Westin Bonaventure in Los Angeles since in his view this building is a perfect example of postmodern architecture set in the perfect example of a postmodern city. Built by "architect and developer John Portman" (39), the environment and history of the Bonaventure offers an opportunity to Jameson to describe the confusion created by the new logic of what he considers to be postmodern architecture, starting with the entrance(s):

> There are three entrances to the Bonaventure (...) None of these is anything like the old hotel marquee, or the monumental porte cochere with which the sumptuous buildings of yesteryear were wont to stage your passage from city street to the interior. The entryways of the Bonaventure are, as it were, lateral and rather backdoor affairs: the gardens in the back admit you to the sixth floor of the towers, and even there you must walk down one flight to find the elevator by which you gain access to the lobby. Meanwhile, what one is still tempted to think of as the front entry, on Figueroa, admits you, baggage and all, onto the second-story shopping balcony, from which you must take an escalator down to the main registration desk. (39)

To express the confusion triggered by the Bonaventure's architecture, Jameson uses a less formal tone and pace than in the rest of his essay, giving, in my view, a greater place in his argument to his own experience, his subjectivity. He indirectly defends this less rigid approach and description of the building by stating that postmodern architecture, and postmodernism in general, cannot be grasped in the usual way, that what he calls "postmodern hyperspace" transcends "the capacities of the human body to locate itself" (44). To support this argument Jameson concludes by quoting journalist Michael Herr's *Dispatches*, a document on the Vietnam War and praising the "extraordinary linguistic innovations" of the book as a way to grasp the feeling of confusion and constant mobility postmodernism is about (44), giving once more value to the input of self-expression and hinting as well that a critique of postmodernism has to adopt a new prose and a new method, away from the dry texture of structuralist demonstration, in which subjectivity has a role to play.

Jameson is obviously not the only one in the academia to use this technique of using a more informal and literary tones and elements to get his point through. The opening of Marc Augé's *Non-places* is another good illustration of that slow drift of the humanities towards a wider use of fictional elements and reconsideration of the notion of objectivity, since the book opens with a prologue in which a character with the generic name of Pierre Dupont crosses different kinds of non-places Augé will later discuss in the body of the work: immaterial transactions with credit cards, highways, parking lots, airports, duty-free shops, advertisement, and finally the interior of an

aircraft. What does this prologue add to Augé's argument, what does the reference to *Dispatches* and his personal visit to the Bonaventure add to Jameson's argument? Besides bringing the rhetorical power of an illustration, I would submit that this approach which consists in admitting that the fictional, the imaginary can tell us something about the real is both a creation and a reaction to postmodernity in Jameson and supermodernity in Augé. In other words, the use of fiction and subjectivity, ideas instead of solely hard facts, is a way, not only to distance 1980–90s academic writing from structuralism, but also to tackle what both authors perceive as an historical change towards more mobility and more volatility. Since the postmodernity/supermodernity/late-capitalism is conceived as the era of heterogeneity, of the hybrid (as opposed to monolinear, arrow-headed modernity), even its critics have to hybridise their arguments, have to make it more postmodern. To quote Raymond Williams once more: "Even to oppose and reject the city, men came to the city; there was no other ready way." Same apply to opposition and rejection of a given dominant cultural logic, to borrow Jameson's terminology.

If, as I tried to demonstrate, we can see some traces of this in Jameson and Augé, that movement is clear in Dear & Flusty's collection *The Spaces of Postmodernity*. Not only are the different parts of the book opened by extracts from fictional books, but following the section in which Jameson's essay is included, the texts themselves drift further and further from traditional academic style and in the meantime expand the scope of human geography to cover topics such as ecology and sexuality. Inspired by the idea they attribute to Donna Haraway that all knowledge is situated knowledge, that each expression "entails a particular perspective that is not necessarily incorrect, but must necessarily be partial and possessed of an internal consistency laden with blindspots" (Dear & Flusty 254), an idea summed up in the maxim "everyone speaks from somewhere", Dear & Flusty defend their editorial choice by the cultural context opened by postmodern thought, writing in the introduction to the second half of their collection:

> Which version of reality is the right one? Which ways of seeing and being in the world are correct? Which knowledge of the world is true? Within the framework of modernist thought, roughly speaking, the answer was relatively simple: there is an objective reality *out there*, and by comparing it against different subjective realities we can rationally determine whose reality comes closer to the truth. But is that objective reality *out there*, the one we take for the touchstone of our perceptions, so objecive and innocent as we have believed? From a postmodern perspective, the answer is a resounding "no." The world is something we only know through our own representations of it, which we transmit to ourselves and to others. (254)

As we have previously said, this primacy given to the representation of space over space itself can

be found in Lefebvre, Soja, and the geocritical school, but Dear & Flusty go further in this quote by calling into question the notion of an *out there*, an outside in which the truth of reality is waiting, an Other which is radically separated from the Self. Outside/Other, Centre/Self—these pairings are absolutely essential and the mind frames they create pervasive in the great majority of writings on space, and those on urban space in particular, even when authors are trying to subvert them as we have seen earlier with Soja and Westphal.

As academics writers published by a publishing house specialised in academic texts and primarily targetting an academic audience, Dear & Flusty, still in the introduction to the second half of *Spaces of Postmodernity*, give another avatar to the Outside-Inside metaphor by explicitly adding in the dichotomy objectivity and subjectivity, and doing so question these notions in academic research in what they take as the postmodern era:

> The key to understanding what is being attempted in this second fit is that reality is a plural world. It can only be approached in in multiple versions. This necessitates a drastic shift in the focus of research. Previously, academic writing concentrated upon constructing knowledge of the world as an *object*. However, this search for objective truth is being augmented, even eclipsed, by concern with how different human *subjects* understand and represent the truths of their worlds. This entails not only highlighting the broad problematic of reality-as-representation, but also a sharpened attention to the sensory and sensual modes through which such representations are experienced and imagined. (254)

Hence, according to Dear & Flusty, and like we have suggested, the value of the notions of objectivity and subjectivity in the pursuit of knowledge in the humanities have been modified by the dominance of postmodern thought, and incidentally recalls the main question underlying the postmodern controversy: Whether subjectivity augment or eclipse objectivity. Dear & Flusty clearly agree with the first.

It has to be kept in mind that such an approach, as said above, does not come out *ex nihilo* but is motivated by the postmodern context itself. Which one is creating the other, the context or its discourse, the culture or the cultural product—an unanswerable and tautological question on a "non-vital issue (like the distribution of central places)" *(Ibid.* 56*),* to paraphrase Richard Peet's article "The Development of Radical Geography", also in Dear & Flusty's collection. What is clear though is that after postmodern thought, a given material space cannot be grasped without the use of body experience, of "sensory and sensual modes", just like it cannot be fully comprehend without its representation, the imaginary attached to it. The last chapters on Los Angeles in Edward Soja's *Postmodern Geographies* are a good illustration for that.

Published in 1989 the book ends on “Taking Los Angeles Apart”, an essay described by its author as “a free-wheeling essay on Los Angeles” which is the “best introduction to postmodern geographies” (Soja, *Postmodern Geographies* 2). This essay has for epigraph a quote from the Borges' short story “The Aleph” and opens with a parallel between the city of Los Angeles and the fantastic place described by the Argentinian writer:

> Los Angeles, like Borges's Aleph, is exceedingly tough-to-track, peculiarly resistant to conventional description. It is difficult to grasp persuasively in a temporal narrative for it generates too many conflicting images, confounding historicization, always seeming to stretch laterally instead of unfolding sequentially. At the same time, its spatiality challenges orthodox analysis and interpretation, for it too seems limitless with “other spaces” to be informatively described. Looking at Los Angeles from the inside, introspectively, one tends to see only fragments and immediacies, fixed sites of myopic understanding impulsively generalized to represent the whole. To the more far-sighted outsider, the visible aggregate of the whole of Los Angeles churns so confusingly that it induces little more than illusionary stereotypes or self-serving caricatures—if its reality is ever seen at all. (222)

We find again the usual articulation of the far and near, outside and inside, fragmentation and monolith—Soja's essay demonstrates once more how certain tropes are repeatedly displayed, a dynamic best illustrated by the presence in Soja's article of a visit to the Westin Bonaventure hotel, a building previously transformed by Jameson's visit in a symbolic place.

Besides the recurring aspect of a fistful of references like stations of the cross in the field of postmodern human geography, Soja's text, closing a book which was following more of a rationalist line in previous chapters, is striking in the more literary tone in which it is written, uggests is a consequence of its object of study (Los Angeles) and its peculiar methodology. Under the aegis of Borges and the impossibility to provide a totalising description of “LA-leph”, Soja hands over his essay as being “a succession of fragmentary glimpses, a freed association of reflective and interpretive field notes which aim to construct a critical human geography of the Los Angeles urban region” (223). Facing the impossibility to seize the city of Los Angeles in its entirety like the narrator of Borges's story cannot seize the Aleph, Soja wants to at least recollect the different fragments of his experience and organise them, subjectively, in a certain shape. In his introduction to his book, Soja describes the article “Taking Los Angeles Apart” as follows:

> Every ambitious exercise in critical geographical description, in translating into words the encompassing and politicized spatiality of social life, provokes a similar linguistic despair. What one sees when one looks at geographies is stubbornly simultaneous, but

> language dictates a sequential succession, a linear flow of sentential statements bound by that most spatial of earthly constraints, the impossibility of two objects (or words) occupying the same precise place (as on a page). All that we can do is re-collect and creatively juxtapose, experimenting with assertions and insertions of the spatial against the prevailing grain of time. (2)

An argument similar to Jameson's quoting Michael Herr's *Dispatches*: If one wishes to seize in an imperfect yet satisfactory way contemporary urban realities one has to reconsider his discourse and by extension one's relation with language as a whole. “The impossibility of two objects (or words) occupying the same precise place (as on a page)” is obviously not a new impossibility, only emerging with or after postmodern thought. What is new and original though, as opposed to the modernist reaction to this impossibility, is how it is no longer denied but embraced.

Following that new reaction towards this impossibility of full representation through language, Soja tries to reconcile this ever-doubting postmodern thought, symbolised by deconstruction, and more assertive Marxism: “Deconstruction alone is not enough, however, no matter how effectively the critical silences are exposed. It must be accompanied by an at least tentative reconstruction grounded in the political and theoretical demands of the contemporary world and able to encompass all the scales of modern power” (74). Soja's *Postmodern Geographies* (like later *Thirdspace*) has a clear Marxist flavour, visible in its call for improving grass-roots political action on an international scale, and to reach its general goal (changing the social-political order through critical human geography) Soja knows that he has to perform a synthesis of the basic tenets of postmodern thought and Marxism. Facing what its author considers to be the impossibility to discuss the urban environment with modernist tools since the “criticial silences” surrounding language in modernism have been exposed, the argument in *Postmodern Geographies* gradually, one essay after the other, opens up to more subjectivity, a more flourish style, more imageries in its quest for the “other spaces”, a recurrent theme in Soja inspired by Foucault's article “Of Other Spaces”. We come back here to what we have seen in our first chapter, namely the emphasis on the margin and the other in Soja even when its theoretical basis is questioning the centre/periphery dichotomy, just like it is questioning the relation between knowledge and metaphor (*see* Derrida's *Margins of Philosophy*, especially the chapter “White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy”, 207-71).

Coming back to how the factual and fictional interact in Soja's texts and the foucaldian metaphor of “other space”, it is interesting to note that Foucault's famous article which introduced the successful concept of “heterotopia” finds its origins in a radio talk Foucault gave to the station “France Culture” in December 1966. The “*Des espaces autres*” lecture at the *Cercle d'études architecturales*,introducing in a more academic fashion Foucault's most familiar urban term, will

only happen few months later and as a follow-up to this first radio talk, as Michiel Dehaene and Lieven De Cauter explain in their collective book *Heterotopia and the City*:

> From 1960 to 1970 the circle [*d'études architecturales*] was directed by Jean Dubuisson and Ionel Schein, two important figure in French post-war architecture. It was Schein who invited Foucault to speak after hearing his address on "France Culture" of 7 December 1966 on heterotopias: "*Les Hétérotopies*". In this radio talk, part of a series on literature and utopia, Foucault adopts the tone of an old traveller telling children amusing stories about the marvellous places he has visited. The lecture for the Cercle d'études architecturales was written during a stay in Sidi-Bou-Saïd, Tunisia, where he had fled to escape the commotion stirred by the publication of *Les Mots et les choses.* It was a setting that perfectly complemented the light, lyrical tone of the radio talk. All lectures at the circle were noted down by a stenographer and the typed record distributed to the members of the circle. The rumour of heterotopia spread through these transcripts (...) The fact that it was based on a radio talk as well as the atmosphere of fantasy in it help to explain why both the concept and the text remained as if forgotten by Foucault till late in his life. (Dehaene 13)

Closing a loop opened in my first chapter, this anecdote which shows that one of the theoretical basis of postmodern geography first comes from an informal and fantasy radio talk about literature and utopia very similar in spirit to Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, is an illustration of the tight connection verging on necessity that contemporary writings on space have with subjectivity, self-expression, fiction. This anecdote also highlights how what was first more of a poetic term than a fully-formed concept ("heterotopia", especially in the radio talk but also in the later essay "*Des espaces autres*", in my opinion) has nonetheless survived and inspired numerous later works.

All this makes us reconsider how the way we perceive and live space is influenced by the metaphorical discourse we have on it and not only the absorption of factual data, perhaps especially since postmodern thought has made peace with the metaphor in philosophy and the quest for knowledge in general. In this context of openness towards the ambivalent and the subjective, a combination of fact and fiction appears to be the most viable way to experience and expand one's knowledge on the city, if an only if the blind spots, the "critical silences" created by such a combination are embraced and not denied. If this applies, as I hope I have demonstrated, in writings which are presented as academic (i.e. written by members of the academia and often published by university presses), it is especially true for the non-fiction texts on London we have selected as our primary corpus.

"Serial composition: the city is the subject, a fiction that anyone can lay claim to" (2), writes Iain Sinclair in "Skating on thin eyes", the opening chapter to *Lights Out of the Territory* (1997), the first of a long series of books written by Sinclair on London. "The city is the subject": If in this passage Sinclair is discussing graffiti artists and their relation to the city, this idea of the city as a collective and fictional composition that every inhabitant writes, but also the figure of the graffiti artist writing on the city itself in a clandestine way, can be applied to him and other writers keen to explore London's margins, like Self, Keiller, Papadimitriou and others. What's more this opening quote from Sinclair lays bare the issue of the subject/object dichotomy in the English language (among others) based on the polysemy of the term "subject", which can have at once an active and a passive meaning. Namely a subject, depending on the context of discourse, can be an agent acting on an object, or an object subjected to the action of an agent. Therefore, I would argue that this premise —"The city is the subject"—can be read as "the city is the agent" or "the city is the object", just like the terms "object of study" and "subject of study" have become—or perhaps have always been —interchangeable. This echoes what we have seen above on reality and representation and objectivity and subjectivity in urban studies, that is to say that the two are more closely intertwined, if not united, that what their traditional opposition suggests.

Not so different from writings such as Soja's article "Taking Los Angeles Apart" mentioned above, the originality of authors like Sinclair writing on London when compared to academic writers does not solely come from the social and cultural places from which they speak (namely the accepted-as-countercultural, underground, the ill-defined margin to a ill-defined centre) or their writing styles rooted in the publishing road taken by these texts. I would argue that the difference between academic writings and that kind of non-fiction is firstly based how these two sorts of texts engage with the real and imagined, the factual and the fictional in space in general, and the urban in particular. If academics might be partially refraining from radically attacking the real/imagined paradigm because of their role in the creation and passing of knowledge, these British authors of non-fiction, having a different role when it comes to knowledge, adopt a different approach in which fact and fiction are actively merging into one another.

Among this group of writers, it is the especially the case in Nick Papadimitriou's *Scarp*, and radically so. Papadimitriou has become over the years a somewhat legendary walker of London's Northern fringe and consequently previously appeared in works by Will Self (*Psychogeography* loc. 466) or Sinclair (*City of Disappearances* 612-9), two authors who were also involved in *The London Perambulator*, a documentary on Papadimitriou shot by John Rogers and presented in 2009. However famous amongst writer-walkers of the British capital, *Scarp*, published in 2012, is his first work, a work in which he sets himself to become one with "North Middlesex/South Hertfordshire

escarpment—or Scarp as I prefer to call it" (1), the territory he has been living in and surveying as a personal project for decades. To do so, to reach that state of unity with the Scarp territory, he relies, as a way to have full knowledge of this portion of territory, on walks:

> As I approached the stream at the bottom of the valley I could feel the breadth of knowledge I'd gained over the years of walking burst through the strictures placed on me by the daily requirements of living. It was as if the landscape itself was flooding into the front of my mind. I was in a state of ecstatic union with the Middlesex–Hertfordshire borderlands. (10)

What Papadimitriou presents as an immersion in one precise territory is not for the sole purpose to know its material topography but also to access this territory's "regional memory", the voices of both real and imagined inhabitants of Scarp, a choice which demarcates this book from the usual historically-minded non-fiction on London and its region since the imagined inhabitant of Scarp we find in Papadimitriou's text are not coming from a previously established fictional universe but are pure creations by the author. Instead of discussing historical or fictional figures, like Sinclair or Ackroyd often do, Papadimitriou is writing to "systematically 'feel out' the presence of my subject matter as it brushes against the consciousness" (11) even when that presence is composed of imagined features, like for instance characters in which Papadimitriou will reincarnate himself, eventually making his text standing as an original hybrid of autobiography, travel literature and short stories, and an illustration of how porous the border between a "subject matter" and a consciousness can be. Fantasising himself as becoming an "undiscovered hallucinogen" which would dissolve the "ego-boundaries so effectively that subject and object fuse" in that territory he wishes to fully know, he gives a sample of all the things he could be:

> I'm bonded solidly into the sun-heated architrave of a multi-story car park and then become the raw face of a shop assistant smoking a fag in the accommodation road behind Bowley's shoe shop 3 March 1997; I see through the eyes of a young girl serving tea at the Gondola café 8 May 2007, savour the pleasure of both parties enjoying a quick knee-trembler behind the London Bible College, 14 June 1965. Your story is one among many as you surge through from Ruislip by bus for work at the Regal Kebab and Fish Bar. It is 1995 and I'm back from Poland, drunk on Special Brews at 7 a.m. Cutting through from Watford to Oxhey and along river-parks to the ancillary margins of all this woogle-wagging yeah-yeah-yeah and wooh-wooh-wooh I probably passed you at a bus stop or hair salon. (82)

Such a way of writing can be evidently related to so-called New Age movements or drug consumption, two influences of which Papadimitriou does not hide the impact on his own

experience and writing, saying about the first: “You can take your concern for ‘spirituality’ and ‘appropriacy’ and shove it, mister! I'm on my way out; I'm on my way in” (83).

Besides labelling Papadimitriou's prose, we see that in it the difference between reality and fiction is actively questioned and experimented with more thoroughly than in the above-mentioned academic writings, but also that, as said before, the favoured space for reconsidering the separation between fact and fiction is an edgeland, a *zone*; the nickname itself, Scarp, if allegedly coming from “escarpment”, clearly carries the meaning of scrap, of a marginal space, a wasteland:

> Scarp is seldom commented upon by either topographers or psychogeographers, and seemingly possesses no cultural currency. Sliced by railways and motorways, topped by old roads running its length, repeatedly scarred in the name of civic utility, yet never acknowledged openly as possessing a coherent identity, Scarp nevertheless persists in the infrastructural unconscious of the northern reaches of the city. (3-4)

If Papadimitriou's text is solely based on the margin that is Scarp, not so far away from the symbolical centre of London yet also playing with the notions of fact and fiction, Iain Sinclair has in most of his works introduced some fictional elements. However he does so in a very different fashion if compared to Papadimitriou's approach since Sinclair prefers to seamlessly embedded fictional characters in what is presented as pure non-fiction; a way to stay true to what he considers to be the fictional and moving texture of London even while he is writing so extensively on its history and its essence. If Iain Sinclair's body of works on London is quite substantial, it shows no concern about finality, in the sense that his decades of writing and recording the city doesn't have the purpose to give a final representation of the city, its ultimate truth. Instead, Iain Sinclair's poetics is about continuity, spillage, “one project leaks incontinently—and immediately—into the next” (Sinclair, *London Overground* 26), mimicking the act of walking itself.

While Papadimitriou has taken as home territory his real-and-imagined Scarp, Sinclair's urban writing mostly orbits around the London borough of Hackney, a place where he lives and which features in most of his non-fiction and most prominently in *Hackney, That Rose-Red Empire*, a book published in 2009 and, unsurprisingly, centred on Sinclair's neighbourhood on which he writes: “It’s a habit I can’t break, the habit of Hackney: writing and walking, thirty years in one house. Thirty years of misreading the signs, making fictions” (*Hackney* 7). Two actions Sinclair and the other writers of my corpus perform together as they all record snippets along the way whether it be images, sounds or texts, writing and walking also mirror their urban poetics based on perpetual approximations, their constant re-reading of one territory, namely London.

As we have seen, notions such as fictions and approximations are essential to contemporary urban writings since today's city, whatever its size be, is perceived as too big to be fully

comprehend, a perception sustained by a now dominant thought which values subjectivity and ambiguity in the construction of knowledge. Sinclair's non-fiction production, mostly based on the territory of London, is an illustration of such an approach to the city since his texts display themselves as being first-person descriptions of the different places their author crosses during his walks, loosely weaving together in what he refers as a "narrative" the different layers he feels in a given place. Whether it be its history or rumours, the experiences of the narrator or of its inhabitants, its representation in art, but also more esoteric considerations, Sinclair's text aims at creating an open-ended tapestry of a given place. He is obviously not the only author trying to do so in London.

Sinclair is often compared, and rightfully so, to Peter Ackroyd, another British author whose work is particularly interested in the city of London. However, there is a difference between the two London authors in their approach of what is relevant enough to be part of their exposés on the city. Both Ackroyd and Sinclair have walked the Thames for a book in the last decade; Ackroyd for 2007 *Thames: Sacred River* went from source to mouth, while Sinclair for 2009 *Ghost Milk* (which, unlike *Thames*, is not only about the river) went from mouth to source. According to the latter, the difference between the two expeditions and the texts to which they led is in the treatment of "accidents and epiphanies" along the way, as he writes in the chapter "Against the grain" in *Ghost Milk*:

> Peter Ackroyd begins at source, the first trickle, Cotswold springs. He opens with a deluge of facts: length, comparison with other rivers, number of bridges, average flow, velocity of current. Then moves rapidly to 'river as metaphor'. So that the two tendencies, the empirical and the poetic, coexist: striking examples found to confirm flights of fancy. And all the time he is walking, from limestone causeway to salt marshes, but keeping the accidents and epiphanies of these private excursions out of his narrative. (loc. 2596)

I would submit that in Sinclair's poetics, empirical and poetic don't coexist but are considered as one; the "accidents and epiphanies", the narrator/author's perceptions and free associations, becoming a part of the *genius loci*. This is perhaps especially clear in *Hackney*, a non-fiction text on the eponymous London borough in which Sinclair's voice, for once, shares its textual space with the locals, inserting in italics long interviews he had with them. This approach, which is not reproduced in other books on London, whether before or after *Hackney*, gives the work a distinct historical and factual flavour since the italics sections are indeed first-hand information. Still following that non-fiction tradition of reporting first-hand experience, certain parts of the text uses codes belonging to journalistic investigations as they are centred on certain cases the narrator/author wishes to solve.

What happened to Hackney writer Roland Camberton? Who was Swanny, a doctor connected to writers William Burroughs and Alex Trocchi, but also to the Kray twins, and who was also the subject of Camberton last story?conomic Who is the Mole Man of Mortimer Road, another "half-legendary being" like Swanny (128)? If the book delivers answers, it delivers them in such a way that the reader never knows if he is reading fact or fiction; the two, like the traces leading from Camberton to Swanny to the Mole Man, spilling into one another, or as Sinclair writes: "That was the thing about the 1960s, it was just like Hackney: everything collided with everything else. Everybody met everybody. And the liars lived to sell the story" (128). Likewise, historical and fictional characters are melting into one another in *Hackney* and if Sinclair takes on the persona of the investigator, he also plays with that border between the factual and the fictional. In other terms, even when a good part of the book is made of interviews with actual persons, Sinclair sabotages the factuality that such an approach would bring to his text overall by injecting and continuously maintaining in his narrative on Hackney a sense of fiction.

To do so, he does not only keep weaving through free associations real persons with fictional characters (*see* the case of actor Eddie Constantine and his character Lemmy Caution, in London and in Godard's *Alphaville*, 351) but also introduces fictional characters as if they were real. Throughout Sinclair's production we find recurring character, whether it be in texts presented by the publisher as fiction or as non-fiction. Norton, the prisoner of London, is the most famous of them. Norton is the central character of *Slow Chocolate Autopsy*, a novel published in 1997 in which Norton is a time-traveller who cannot leave the perimeter of London even when he is no longer bound by time. The character of Norton will gain relative fame thanks to *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen: Century*, the third volume of the comic series written by Alan Moore and Kevin O'Neill and published in three books between 2009 and 2012. This popular comic series is known to merge different universes and characters from classics of British literature mostly. Hence, as the first two volumes are set in the Victorian era, the *League* borrow characters from 19th century fantasy and science-fiction landmarks like *Dracula* or *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde.* However, the third volume, the one known as *Century*, taking place in the 20th century introduces new characters from more recent texts, including Sinclair's Norton who has the same power than in *Slow Chocolate Autopsy* and whose design is clearly inspired by Sinclair himself, making the character of Norton, prisoner of London, an avatar of its first author. Moore, an old friend of the Hackney-based writer, plays on this identification of the two, writing in *Century*'s third part that Norton is under-arrest since his Hackney book—a direct reference to Sinclair's most recent work at the times.

Everything collides with everything else, to paraphrase the passage by Sinclair quoted above,

and mapping the gigantic network of all the connections between Sinclair's work and the underground (and "overground") scene of East London from the 60s onwards would be a great commitment, but also quite redundant since a good part of Sinclair's production itself might be doing nothing more than mapping and preserving these layers of London history. Therefore, instead of stopping at length on the presence of Sinclair and his characters in other people's work, let us come back to Norton in Sinclair's work.

The character reappears in a more confidential book, *Scales/Silenic Drift* which contains two stories, the first by sculptor and writer Brian Catling, the second by Sinclair. In "Silenic Drift" which retells walks by the narrator/author launched in order to find moonstones in London. An interest and quest triggered by a meeting with Norton: "After a poorly attended public reading in an out-of-hours launderette, earlier that week, I had been approached by a man called Norton, who claimed to have written a London novel" (Catling & Sinclair 2)—the London novel being most likely a reference to Norton's first appearance in *Slow Chocolate Autopsy.* If he has a central role in "Silenic Drift", the name or surname "Norton" frequently appears in Sinclair's fiction and non-fiction. This recurring aspect of the "Norton" makes it more look like a substance than a precise character, a substance which implies an obsession with London. The ways in which "Norton" is used in Sinclair's work, always oscillating between fact and fiction and transgressing the borders between published-as-fiction and published-as-non-fiction since it appears in both segments, can be consider as an illustration of Sinclair's relationship with the city but also with his own approach, somewhat presenting his London texts as written by an obsessive, possibly mad, fictional character. The same case could have been built around the character of Kaporal, which prominently features in *Hackney* as Sinclair's tip-giving side-kick in his ongoing investigation of the borough. As compared to Norton, the character of Kaporal, first introduced in the novel *Dining on Stones* (*see* Baker 172), might embody the more rational and political aspects of Sinclair's work, another avatar of the author's approach of the city.

Like these two characters who traverse fiction and non-fiction, Sinclair's texts on London perpetuate the idea that, unlike what Ackroyd's works may suggest, empirical and poetic, history and rumours, non-fiction and fiction have to be considered as one, that London *genius loci*, like other cities, should not be absolutely pinpointed but continuously hunted down, stalked. If Sinclair's work is mostly focusing on British writers, a selection of American authors are often present, ricocheting from one work to the next, among which is Thomas Pynchon. A novel writer whose books share an interest in the overlooked with Sinclair's, Pynchon is repeatedly mentioned in Sinclair, from 1997 and the opening pages of *Lights Out for the Territory* (5), to 2015 and the first chapter of *London Overground* (4). The year 1997 saw the publication of Pynchon's *Mason &*

Dixon, a novel written in the English of 18th century American settlers and whose main characters are the historical Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon, two British astronomers who were charged by the Crown to solve a boundary dispute between the provinces of Pennsylvania and Maryland in today's United States. To do so they surveyed the area and, starting from the East, drew a line between the two provinces following a meridian; a line and border which still bears their names today and became symbol of pure reason cutting through the unknown and establishing arbitrary borders. In Pynchon's novel, the two historical figures and the fragmentation of the American wilderness they performed also become an allegory of the tension between fact and fiction, with Pynchon, just like Sinclair in my opinion, favouring the latter: “For as long as its Distance from the Post Mark'd West remains unmeasur'd, nor is yet recorded as Fact, may it remain, a-shimmer, among the few final Pages of its Life as Fiction” (Pynchon 650). The open-ended, still fictional line becomes a metaphor for the act of writing in Pynchon, a metaphor which can also be applied to Sinclair's open-ended approach to the city of London in his non-fiction writing: Fictional elements in a non-fiction text as a way to maintain a portion of London's wilderness even when all the lines he is himself writing might eventually help the symbolic *terra incognita* that the city is become more recognisable, seizable.

This complex articulation between fact and fiction we find in certain British writers on London thus becomes a way to keep the city's mystery in the dark while paradoxically shedding some light on it. In Sinclair's work but also in others, this blending of the factual and the fictional can also be read in many other acceptable ways, such as a reaction to the hyper-clarity of the digital age (what Sinclair calls “the hyper-real industrial print”, *Hackney* 112) or a way to keep urban legends and local history alive in order to keep destructive real estate developers at bay (“the land hunger of Thatcherism recognized this absence of narrative as the primary trigger for regeneration” *Ghost Milk* loc. 2498). Nevertheless, I believe that ultimately such an approach to the representation of a city primarily illustrates how approximation and hybrid forms are now accepted as a viable path towards knowledge, all that thanks to the input of postmodern thought and/or our current reality (depending on how we answer the question: What came first, the representation or the reality?)

As I wished to demonstrate, whether it be in academic or general publications, text on the way we consider our cities have been gradually heading towards more subjectivity, more approximation, more physical experience (most of the texts we have seen in this chapter are based on walks), yet without betraying the will to establish knowledge, only suggesting a way to reach it which is not solely based on totalisation and binary oppositions.

We started this chapter with Baudelaire's poem “The Swan” and its often-quoted line “*La forme d'une ville change plus vite, hélas ! que le coeur d'un* mortel” (“the form a city takes, more quickly

shifts, alas, than does the mortal heart"), a line which comes across as a perfect illustration of the modernist nostalgia for the Paris of the past at the time of the French capital great modernisation, but which I would also read as the expression of powerlessness and pain experience by a mere human mind as it tries to catch fully an object (the city) which evolves too quickly to be comprehended in its totality. To conclude this second chapter, I would like to make a connection between Baudelaire's line and French writer Julien Gracq who used it as a title for his 1985 book which is also based on a walk, this time in the city of Nantes: *La forme d'une ville* ("the form a city takes").conomic

Like in Baudelaire's, Gracq's text main focus is the passage of time as he walks the streets of Nantes, a city where he spent some years of his childhood, mostly secluded in a boarding school. Yet, when Baudelaire's line was focusing and complaining on the impossibility of fixating the city, Gracq, more than a century later and in similar ways to the rest of contemporary London walker-writers previously mentioned, embraces this impossibility and the approximativeness it fatally creates:

> I do not want here to make a portrait of a city. I would only like to show—with all the clumsiness, inaccuracy and fiction such a retrospective look implies—how she shaped me, how she half encouraged, half-forced me to see the imaginary outside world to which I was introduced in my readings through the distorting prism she put between me and it, and how on my part, with the help of my seclusion, I distanced myself with her material realities and remodelled her according to the outlines of my personal dreams, giving her flesh and life based on the laws of my desire rather than the laws of objectivity. [24]

Following the idea behind the more personal method of city's examination advocated in this quote, it is noteworthy to mention that if Gracq opens his book with the reference to Baudelaire's line, he chooses to leave out the original's sense of intense nostalgia by substituting for the Baudelarian "Alas!" the neutral "as we know" ("*on le sait*", 771), used in a tongue-in-cheek way. A symbol of the acceptance of the impossibility to seize in its totality an object as big, diverse and changing as a city, but unlike in Baudelaire a positive acceptance which does not stop Gracq from giving his input, on the contrary since the very process of the subjective creation of a mental city is the central

24 "*Je ne cherche pas ici à faire le portrait d'une ville. Je voudrais seulement essayer de montrer — avec toute la part de gaucherie, d'inexactitude et de fiction que comporte un tel retour en arrière — comment elle m'a formé, c'est-à-dire en partie incité, en partie contraint à voir le monde imaginaire, auquel je m'éveillais par mes lectures, à travers le prisme déformant qu'elle interposait entre lui et moi, et comment de mon côté, plus libre que j'étais par ma réclusion, de prendre mes distances avec ses repères matériels, je l'ai remodelée selon le contour de mes rêveries intimes, je lui ai prêté chair et vie selon la loi du désir plutôt que selon celle de l'objectivité*" (Gracq 774).

pillar of the text.

Therefore, same as other authors we have discussed in the course of this chapter, Gracq embodies a more subjective yet adequate way to describe the urban environment in non-fiction, an approach which puts a certain emphasis on the mental realm and its relation with reality, yet without the first trumping the latter. In various degrees, each of these authors' texts are an attempt to change the perception we may have of our urban environment, when it is not calling for changing its materiality altogether. In this aspect, if someone like Gracq is mostly concerned in his urban writings with memory, aesthetics and the sensuous pleasure of experiencing the border, the edge (*lisière*) between the real and the imagined (*see* Gracq 792, 801), some of the contemporary London writers have a more explicitly political approach, criticising directly the political decisions and orientations of their times, whether it be Thatcherism or Blairism. If they express an interest for the society in which they are writing their non-fiction, because of their more personal than purely factual approach such interest is articulated in a different way than in academic texts aiming at pure objectivity or more radical political texts aiming at breaking new grounds, convincing and gathering people. This relation between these contemporary urban non-fiction writers based on London, the ones that have chosen to explore the city's outskirts by recording their walks, and the tension between their literary and political motivations are best illustrated by how they took for themselves and gave a fresh meaning to a term which synthesises various of their interests whether it be personal experience, imagination, political action or topography: Psychogeography.

Chapter 3: Psychogeography: Chronology and Roots of a Drifting Idea.

When we look at the history of ideas in the twentieth century, we can't help but notice the disproportion between the rather small "French sphere" and its impact on the humanities. The list of now household names is impressive in many disciplines: conceptual art with Duchamp, surrealism with Breton, existentialism with Sartre, postmodernism with Lyotard, Derrida and others included under the blanket term French Theory, etc. A good amount of the schools of thought still prominent today find their roots, at least symbolically, in French writings which are considered radical or ground-breaking. Even after so many decades, it is quite a challenge to read an academic article on literary theory without finding any reference to Barthes or Kristeva, as it is rather hard not to see Duchamp's name mentioned in popular media every time we discuss something resembling the avant-garde spirit of which he has become the symbol, when is figure is not directly summoned in works themselves (*see* Subodh Gupta's *Et Tu, Duchamp?* 2009)

Most, if not all, movements of ideas is subject to this heroic reduction of a complex dynamic into one single historical figure, and that figure in the humanities often happens to be coming from the French-speaking sphere. As we have previously seen with how Foucault's concept of "other spaces/heterotopia" is used by American postmodern human geography *(see* Soja's introductions of *Postmodern Geographies* and *Thirdspace*), it is true to this day that a handful of French-speaking authors are often taken as an authoritatively theoretical starting-point for many contemporary disciplines. This domination of the French-speaking production in the market of ideas has been made possible by various conditions, most of which are related to the cultural prestige France and its capital city have gained over centuries. I would argue that the cultural aura France enjoyed in the decades following the Second World War in the arts and humanities — an aura which have survived to this day but which will most likely slowly diminish thanks to the current fortunate tendency to invite more voices to join the cultural and academic stages —, is due in great part to that historical prestige gathered before 1945 which labelled Paris the capital of the 19th century and French the language of the transatlantic intellectual elite like it once was the *lingua franca* of the European aristocracy. After the Second World War, this surviving historical and cultural prestige turned both city and language into a magnet of everything cultural and avant-garde, creating in the process a virtuous circle between the notions of "culture" and "French".

Of course other variables have helped the perpetuation of this virtuous circle, including the geopolitical and economic context of the post-war decades, a period which was more stable and prosperous for France than for some of its European neighbours. Yet such a symbolical hegemony

in the arts and humanities cannot be fully explained without considering that cultural prestige which is, in my opinion, the main reason behind the great circulation and impact of texts coming from the French-speaking sphere; if geopolitical and economic reasons were paramount, cultural spheres sharing similar conditions than the French-speaking one would have been more successful in the international market of ideas, and we would currently be teaching as much British, East-German or Scandinavian Theory than French. This notion of an historically-built cultural prestige does not imply that the quality of the French production was better or worse than its competitors, but only that, like with any other commodity, the French language and brand being already known and considered prestigious, it fared better than products circulated under a lesser-known language and a less prestigious brand.

Besides the French household names which are now at the very centre of academia and cultural world alike, this state of affairs also made possible the preservation of texts and other cultural products from obscure groups and avant-gardes whose names or principles had sometimes an afterlife in another cultural context. This chapter will explore one of these avant-gardes, namely the Letterist International (LI); a movement which did not entirely make it to the academia, and by extension to the mainstream of the history of ideas, but whose key concepts have seen a renewal of interest in recent years outside its original French-speaking sphere. If we will also mention the concept of *dérive* (drift), we will primarily focus in this chapter on the concept and term of "psychogeography"—how it appeared in the early 1950s, how it evolved, and how it crossed the English Channel to reappear in the London of the 1990s.

Such a study will offer a good illustration of how certain concepts travel from one cultural context to another and how they get transformed in the process, new forms often less based, as François Cusset demonstrated about the French theory, on the original truths of their definitions than on the fertility of misunderstandings and the surprises of biased readings ("*Aussi se gardera-t-on de le juger à l'aune d'une 'vérité' des textes, préférant à cette notion suspecte la fécondité des quiproquos et les surprises de la lecture biaisée*", *French Theory* 15-6). Besides examining the life and afterlife of such a concept which is, as we will see, inherently and intentionally vague and ill-defined, focusing on the term "psychogeography" and how it evolved in time will also offer a view into the ways criticism on the urban environment changed over the years, from the playful radicalism of the letterists to the more literary and personal approach of contemporary London writers. Incidentally, this chapter will also discuss how the idea of a radical cultural revolution evolved from the 1950s to the 1990s and how groups sharing this ideal communicated with one another and organised themselves in Western Europe, with a special focus on the letterist and situationist movements to whom the notion of "psychogeography" is intimately connected.

The interwar period in Europe (including in the soon-to-be Soviet Union) witnessed the emergence of radical cultural movements which aimed not only at changing the standards of what should be considered beautiful, like previous cultural movements did, but also at directly questioning the notion of beauty and aesthetics, a reconsideration which soon led to a criticism of society at large and a more direct commentary on politics, both backed by significant changes in both. The artists of such avant-garde movements were promoting the idea that art and life can interact with one another, that they are not two realms hermetically shut to one another, and that, consequently, a new revolutionary way of representing the real in arts would lead to a new revolutionary way to perceive the real; a change in representation and perception which would help triggering a revolution, first cultural, then social and political. While such a social and political end to artistic expression is most explicit in the Russian avant-gardes due to the historical context of the October Revolution, I would safely argue all of the movements which are now considered to be examples of the European avant-garde at the time possessed at their cores this desire to change life, change social organisation through cultural representation.

In the French-speaking cultural sphere, and in its Parisian centre, the movement which proved itself the most resilient and gained the most success was Surrealism, a trans-disciplinary cultural movement whose imprint will be felt in the next avant-gardes which will fatally have to compared themselves to it. Whether they pick doctrinal orientations, artistic forms, or simply a fight (and more often the three at once), the cultural movements which will follow Surrealism in Paris will not have the luxury to ignore it, which is what will happen to Letterism. For, if the Surrealist movement peaked in the interwar years in terms of theoretical production and influential works, it was still dominating the French cultural context at the end of the Second World War and into the early 1950s, when Letterism appeared.

Theorised in the 1920s through two manifestoes respectively published in 1924 and 1929 and written by its leader André Breton, the Surrealist movement, like most of the avant-gardes, aimed at subverting the dominant, bourgeois thought by recycling Freud's discoveries on human psyche in the realm of literature. They believed that imagination shall prevail and be unleashed in order to bring the modern dogma of capitalist progress to its knees and revitalise at the same time art and society altogether. Supporting such a radicalism which transpired in the notions of absolute and the idea that there is a truth in one's own imagination, Breton writes in the first Surrealist manifesto: “To reduce the imagination to a state of slavery—even though it would mean the elimination of what is commonly called happiness—is to betray all sense of absolute justice within oneself” (Breton 4-5). Because of this inclination towards the political and the influence of Russian radical

movements, Surrealism was inherently influenced by Marxism and it is nothing but logical that most of its members eventually came in contact with the local Communist Party.

Attacking society on its artistic and political flanks, Surrealism, like other similar movements, reminds us that the very term "avant-garde" is originally taking from the military vocabulary, meaning a small group of men scouting before the rest of the army. This military etymology of the avant-gardes may have helped solidifying their approach as a confrontational one, or what in an essay on the Surrealists Alexandre Trudel describes as an "aesthetic of shock" (*see* Trudel). This idea of a shock, a direct confrontation with the enemy through its total rejection is one of the premise of those radical movements, functioning on a *tabula rasa* logic even when they absorb elements of previous movements. Such will be the relation of Letterism and Surrealism, oscillating between absorption and rejection.

Letterism was officially founded by Isidore Isou, a Romanian national who, according to the movement's origin story, reached Paris at the age of twenty at the end of the Second World War and created the movement on his first day in the French capital. The main premise of Letterism was that poetry, like cinema or painting, was obese, that there was too much in it, that over time it has only become an accumulation. In opposition to that, the movement proposed itself to make art in a rather restrictive way: poetry with only letters and onomatopoeia, cinema with sounds and black or white screens. Inspired by Dadaism and its founder Tristan Tzara, another thinker of Romanian origins who made his way to Western Europe and the Parisian magnet, Isidore Isou calls in the letterist manifesto for a new poetry based on such things as: words without meaning, sentences with hidden sense selected for their letters, and onomatopeias[25].

They were experimentally not far from Malevitch's suprematist paintings and the graphic-phonetic approach of Concrete Poetry. Like all these movements did in different ways, lettrism aimed at going beyond art, going back to the essence in a rather romantic gesture where the distance between experience and expression would be reduced and narrowing things down at a time where, in their view, things only seemed to be expanding. The aesthetic part of the original letterist movement is still alive nowadays, and still confidential. For unlike Surrealism, Dadaism, and other successful cultural movements, Letterism has always been, to this day, a confidential one which is only mentioned because of how it has influenced the more successful situationist movement founded by former letterists in 1957, including its leader and most famous figure Guy Debord (1931–1994) who spent in the movement what are considered to be his formative years. In other terms, Letterism has become worth-mentioning mostly retrospectively, due to the positive and more

25 "*LES MOTS SANS SENS/ LES PAROLES A SIGNIFICATION CACHÉE PRISES POUR LEURS LETTRES/ LES ONOMATOPÉES*" (Isou 18).

importantly enduring reception of the situationist movement and Debord's production from the 1960s onwards. If it was founded by Isidore Isou, Letterism doubtlessly survived first because it emerged in Paris at the centre of the much scrutinised French intellectual life; similar avant-gardes in other contexts may not have been that lucky. Second, because of its connection with Debord and the subsequent and more commented on Situationist International.

According to the edition of his complete works by Jean-Louis Rançon for Gallimard—published in 2006 and which associated with the simultaneous edition of Debord's private correspondence between 1999 and 2010 by Fayard demonstrates the durable interest the French cultural context has for his life and work—, Debord came in contact with the letterist movement during the Cannes Film Festival of 1951 where Isou's film *Traité de bave et d'éternité* (known in English under the title "Treaty of Venom and Eternity") was screened. The film won, according to Rançon's note, the "*Prix de la marge*" (Margin Prize), an unofficial prize given by Jean Cocteau who was instrumental in making that Cannes screening possible (Debord, *Oeuvres* 42). In an attempt to lead to a new kind of cinema which would be more creative than entertaining, Isou's film was based on the discrepancy between images and soundtrack, a kind of radical experimentation which echoes the widespread critical revisions of the different sign systems at the time. Debord, who was nineteen and living in Cannes at the time, also came to the same conclusion concerning language. As he wrote to his friend Hervé Falcou, "Language is of no use. Neither thought" ("*Le language ne sert à rien. La pensée non plus*", 39). He logically enjoyed the screening of Isou's film and subsequently joined the letterist movement. Ironically, during the next Cannes Film Festival in 1952, the letterist movement, consisting of only ten members, announced the death of French cinema in a poster and opposed the very principle of organising the film festival which had welcomed them a year before, which led, still according to Rançon's notes, to the arrest of around ten people (59).

Now is a good time to make a digression on the importance of avant-garde movement at the precise time when they first take shape, before such movements and new aesthetics are digested by media, academia, but also simply audience. For, as it was the case with Letterism, avant-gardes are by definition a minor group, a minor orientation which enjoy by definition a small audience and a small coverage. As I said above, when considered retrospectively, the impact of an avant-garde such as Letterism in the culture it wished to transform is difficult, if not impossible to gauge since most if not all the sources we can find on such events which were considered minor at the time come from the very people and organisations who have made the effort of keeping records of each event, member or text of a given avant-garde. Therefore, whether it be this incident in Cannes or the opposition to Charlie Chaplin which Debord will also led in 1952, such events and their impacts at the time is hard to measure since the documents we have on them often come from inherently

interested sources[26]. Both events and documents can surely be considered as significant or relevant to the scale of the avant-garde itself, yet if considered from a broad historical perspective, they are more or often than not absolutely inconsequential in the sense that they most likely didn't influence anyone outside of a given avant-garde own supporters.

This digression does not mean to imply that such "minor events" should be discarded as a waste of time, only that the history of ideas and the market on which it depends tend to organise cultural time in terms of major works, figures or events whose importance is inflated and which then become sanctified and reified, eventually overshadowing the rest of what was produced at the time. In our case, to keep in mind that the letterists were, to paraphrase Debord in the second script of his first movie *Hurlements en faveur de Sade*, "little slackers who comically considered themselves to be the future glories of schools' syllabus"[27] does not mean that we should reject this cultural movement as inconsequential but only that we should avoid retrospectively turning small groups and minor events into powerful and prominent cultural actors in the eye of their contemporaries. If Debord's work has been highly influential later, he is also known to have inflated in the course of his life the importance of the movements to which he was related, especially in the context of the May 1968 events in Paris (*see* Lefebvre, "Lefebvre on the Situationists: An Interview" 69-83).

conomic I will try to refrain from such glorification of the avant-garde as I believe that considering simultaneously both major and minor branches of the cultural tree is more interesting to outline their articulations with one another. Italian scholar Franco Moretti gives a beautiful version of this argument, as well as the tree image I borrow, in *Graphs, Maps, Trees*, a book where he suggests the use of tree diagrams to explain the divergences and convergences which results in the final, dominant form and origin story of a literary genre:

> But instead of reiterating the verdict of the market, abandoning extinct literature to the oblivion decreed by its initial readers, these trees take the lost 99 per cent of the archive and reintegrate it into the fabric of literary history, allowing us to finally 'see' it. It is the same issue raised in the first chapter—the one per cent of the canon, and the ninety-nine of forgotten literature—but viewed from a different angle: whereas graphs abolish all qualitative difference among their data, trees try to articulate that difference. (77)

Unlike Moretti's approach, we will not study the avant-gardes of post-war Europe statistically.

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26 Similarly the English translations of letterist and situationist texts are sometimes varying from the original French. Due to its complex process, the act of translation can inherently lead to distortion, which is why I decided to provide both original and English versions of passages quoted in this thesis, whenever possible, and especially when I am the one who performs the English translation.

27 "*Les petits fumistes étaient tous les futures gloires pour les programmes des lycées et collèges*" (Debord, *Oeuvres* 66).

Instead we will focus on how the branch “psychogeography” appeared, disappeared and reappeared in branches of different importances.

So, as we have said, whether it be the pamphlet “French Cinema is Done” (59) or, later, exhibitions in small galleries or texts with very limited circulation, neither of these events connected to the letterist movement can be considered as major on their own. I am only discussing them here because they help drawing the curve that Debord's early intellectual life followed and which will result in the conceptualisation of “psychogeography”. We have to keep in mind that Debord has become over the years an iconic figure in anti-capitalist radical thought, mostly thanks to his highly influential and timely *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967), whose publication in November concurred with the May 1968 events in France, revolutionary events first led by student circles in which Debord and other members of the Situationist International (SI) have been involved. The fact that Debord and “situationism”[28] have respectively become an iconic figure and movement for a section of the political and cultural spectrum implies that the texts which are produced on them are inclined to gloss the reality of their impact on the culture of their time. Whether they have changed the face of the cultural world of their time or not barely matters since the degree of importance in the realm of culture is a kind of measurement notably hard to pinpoint. Yet, if I would argue that historically-speaking both the letterist and situationist movements were minor movements with a small audience and a smaller group of followers, the views they have defended and the concepts they have created can be considered to be influential in the history of ideas by the very fact that they have survived this far.

To come back to the chronology of the letterist movement, an ideological split happened in 1952 when certain members, among which Debord, radicalised. They wanted the movement, which was primarily an aesthetic one, to adopt a more political tonality. This move from art concerns to more social and political ones is best illustrated by the changes undergone by the script of Debord's first movie, *Hurlements en faveur de Sade*. This first movie, like the rest of Debord's cinematic production, is based on the discrepancy between image and sound, whether the two seem unrelated like in the first version, or when one is simply gone like the image in the second version. However, if the two scripts published by Debord follow that discrepant approach, which was not unusual in Western European avant-garde cinema at this period, we can see in the changes of the film's script the evolution of Debord's complicated relationship to the letterist movement, and by extension the

28 The term “situationism” has been repeatedly rejected, and thus from the very start, by members of the Situationist International. When it appears under the pen of a SI member, the word is almost always put in inverted commas. The reason being the usual one: It was feared that such phrasing would eventually create a dogma (*see* Debord, *Correspondance vol. 1* 21).

reconsideration of the role of avant-garde art in political revolution.

The first version of the script of *Hurlements* was published in *Ion*, a one-shot letterist journal in April 1952. At this stage the film still contained images. It also included passages clearly inspired by Isou's view on poetry which put the emphasis on the letter and less on the meaning of words, as we have mentioned above. In such letterist passages, words are spelt out (Debord, *Oeuvres* 50) or reduced to sounds (57). The script also mentions letterist solos and chorus. As a preamble to the first version of that script, Debord also published in the journal *Ion* a text entitled "*Prolégomènes à tout cinéma futur*", or "Prolegomena to Any Future Cinema", a clear reference to Kant's *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*. Debord defends in this text an aesthetic of dislocation and annihilation. In the traditional at once tongue-in-cheek and sententious tone of avant-garde manifestos, a tone illustrated by the reference to Kant in the title), he claims that with *Hurlements* he went beyond discrepant cinema, and that by transcending it in putting meaningless images on meaningless sounds he even killed it altogether[29].

That first published script and the letter that accompanied its publication are also meaningful because Debord, who was only twenty-year-old and starting his intellectual life, introduces for the first time, even if roughly, key concepts of his later and most famous movement, so-called "situationism". After going through the French editions of Debord's complete work, the text and paratext of the first script of *Hurlements* are the first publication I found of Debord using the term "situation" in a way similar to how it will be later used in the years of the Situationist International. Debord's "*Prolégomènes*" ends on the declaration that future arts will be nothing else but a disruption of situations[30]. Similarly, in the script itself Debord states that a science of situations has to be made, a science which will borrow elements from psychology, statistics, urbanism and morality. He continues by saying that such elements should be organised towards one single and original goal: The conscious creation of situations[31].

The idea of disrupting and creating new situations by breaking away from any kind of conditioning strikingly mirrors how the Situationist International will used the term to base its revolutionary ideology later on. In a 1964 essay entitled "*Le Questionnaire*" and part of the project of an anthology of situationist writings by Debord himself, to the question "What Does the Term 'Situationist' Mean?", Debord gives a definition that is very close to the early one we find in the

29 "*Enfin, je parviens à la mort du cinéma discrépant par le* rapport de deux non-sens *(images et paroles parfaitement insignifiantes), rapport qui est un dépassement du cri*" (46).

30 "*Les arts futurs serons des bouleversements de situations, ou rien*" (46).

31 "*Une science des situations est à faire, qui empruntera des éléments à la psychologie, aux statistiques, à l'urbanisme et à la morale. Ces éléments devront concourir à un but absolument nouveau : une création consciente des situations*" (49).

first script of *Hurlements.* Even if it is logically better articulated in 1964, there is a clear continuity between his early and later texts. According to Debord, the term "situationist" defines an activity which aims at creating situations, not just acknowledge them, and this in every aspect of human life, giving individuals the possibility to shape his own situations and conditioning, with a clear emphasis on the praxis rather than on pure theory[32].

Hurlements en faveur de Sade and its paratext marked the start of Debord's intellectual career since, still according to the French edition of his complete work, these three texts are his first publications, but mostly because they are already introducing key ideas and terms that will be consistently and coherently used throughout his work, whether it be considerations on situations and how to go beyond our individual conditioning, as we have seen, or the paradoxical destruction of art through art, and especially cinema, the most spectacular art. To illustrate this compare the line about meaningless images on meaningless sounds we have quoted, dating back to 1952, with a passage from the 1978 film *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni*, a film more autobiographical than his previous ones. In this work Debord comments as the voiceover that it is a film in which he tells truths about images which are all meaningless and false, a film which despises the dust of images it is made of[33]. The Latin palindrome which gives the movie its title is translated by Debord himself as "*nous tournons en rond dans la nuit et nous sommes dévorés par le feu*" (we go around in circles in the night and are consumed by fire). The palindrome title and its meaning are extensions of Debord's argument since *In girum* itself has to be considered as a palindrome since it ends on "*A reprendre depuis le début*" (start over from the beginning).

For Debord, this conclusion had to be understood in three different ways. First, from the author to his audience, suggesting them to re-watch the movie. Second, an invitation to reconsider the life and work of the author. Third, a more general call to keep criticising, correcting and blaming[34]. On my side I would also consider the palindrome as an illustration of the consistency and

32 "Que veut dire le mot 'situationniste' ? — *Il définit une activité qui entend* faire *les situations, non les* reconnaître*, comme valeur explicative ou autre. Ceci à tous les niveaux de la pratique social, de l'histoire individuelle. Nous remplaçons la passivité existentielle par la construction des moments de la vie, le doute par l'affirmation ludique. Jusqu'à présent, les philosophes et les artistes n'ont fait qu'interpréter les situations ; il s'agit maintenant de les transformer. Puisque l'homme est le produit des situations qu'il traverse, il importe de créer des situations humaines. Puisque l'individu est défini par sa situation, il veut le pouvoir de créer des situations dignes de son désir*" (1057).

33 "*Voici par exemple un film où je ne dis que des vérités sur des images qui, toutes, sont insignifiantes ou fausses ; un film qui méprise cette poussière d'images qui le compose*" (1349).

34 "*'A REPRENDRE DEPUIS LE DÉBUT': le mot reprendre a ici plusieurs sens conjoints dont il faut garder le maximum. D'abord : à relire, ou revoir, depuis le début (évoquant ainsi la structure circulaire du titre-palindrome). Ensuite : à refaire (le film ou la vie de l'auteur). Ensuite : à critiquer, corriger, blâmer*" (1420).

uncompromising aspect of Debord's thought, which was already almost fully formed in 1952. But the title as well as closing line can also be considered as the essential dynamic an avant-garde movement or intellectual should adopt, a critical role even while facing meaninglessness, telling truths about false images in a gesture similar to the Beckettian logic found in the 1983 text "Worstward Ho": "Try again. Fail again. Fail better" (*Nohow On* 101).

Like Beckett who will try to approach silence in his latest works through the reduction of words and sentences, Debord changes radically the script of his first film *Hurlements en faveur de Sade.* The first script published in April 1952, who was including images, was not made into a movie. Only the second script of *Hurlements* made it to the screen and was first shown on 30th June 1952 at a Parisian ciné-club. Yet that projection was interrupted after few minutes by the audience and the managers of the ciné-club who reacted negatively (Debord, *Oeuvres* 73). If the second script has some similarities with the first one we have already discussed, it is in essence very different since instead of the images of the first script the only visual content offered by the film is a white screen when sounds can be heard and a black screen for moments of silence. At first, the duration of the silent black screen is relatively short (thirty seconds), before slowly increasing to three to five minutes and finally culminating at the end with a twenty-four minute long black screen which concludes the projection. When the first script had many letterist elements in it, the second script only contains a letterist solo performed by Gil J Volman, another letterist director. *Hurlements* was finally screened in its entirety on 13th October 1952 in another ciné-club presided by Jean Cocteau, the renowned writer and director who had already helped the letterist back in 1951 for the projection of Isou's film at the Cannes Festival.

When the second script is published in 1955 by *Les lèvres nues* (The Naked Lips), a journal created by Belgian surrealist Paul Nougé who opened it to the letterists for four issues, Debord defends the black and white screens and the domination of silence in his film (twenty minutes of dialogue for an hour of silence) as a way to avoid making it appealing even for the fringe of the cultural scene. Unsurprisingly, he specifically targets in his introduction to the second script *Les Temps modernes*, a journal founded by Jean-Paul Sartre in 1945 and supported in its first three years by Gallimard, then published from 1949 to 1965 by another major player in the publishing industry, Julliard. The editorial line of *Les Temps modernes*, a journal which was in the early 1950s relaying the evolution of existentialist theory and openly left-leaning on political topics, was politically and ideologically not so different from the tenets of the letterist movement. However, since the journal had become over years the standard-bearer of the left-wing, progressive discourse, to Debord and other members of uncompromising avant-gardes *Les Temps modernes* was considered to be not radical enough and incidentally reproducing the vanity of the cultural world (*see* Debord, *Oeuvres*

71).

What Debord considered to be this vanity of the cultural expression and the cultural world is a common denominator with other avant-gardes which were, as said above, all focused on the destruction or the transcendence of the traditional conception we had of art and beauty. Arts appear, expand then vanish[35], writes Debord in the final script of *Hurlements*, and they vanish because men are not satisfied with the official, traditional, accepted forms of expression and desire new ones which would go beyond them. The paradox at the root of such an argument is apparent since creating new forms of art to destroy the very concept of art and aesthetics would logically not lead to total annihilation. We tend to forget, especially while we discuss a figure as controversial and as iconic as Debord, that his texts were not lacking humour, and if he presented his revolutionary ideas in the most solemn prose, I would argue that such a sententious tone was also part of the persona he wished to create. I wouldn't go as far as saying that Debord is all about comedy, obviously. Nonetheless I believe that his professorial tone—most famously displayed in the list of thesis of the *Society of the Spectacle*, about whose origins Debord wrote, “In 1967, I wanted the Situationist International to have a theoretical work”[36]—was used in a partially playful way, and that when he was talking about the destruction of art or at least cinema as he did in the early 1950s he could see the paradox of doing this by creating new artistic and cinematographic forms. It does not mean that he didn't actually want to destroy cinema or art as a whole, only that he knew that the possibility of such a feat was slim and that the solemnity with which he was declaring the death of all things, arts and enemies alike, was constantly undercut by comical exaggeration, an exaggeration especially apparent in the years of the Letterist International.

In the introduction to the last section of Debord's complete works, Vincent Kaufman writes that at the end of his life, seeing that academics started paying attention to his work and its role in the May 1968 event, Debord pulled the rug out from under them by producing *Panégyrique*, his autobiography, but also critical editions of some of his works and direct corrections of press and academic articles in “*Cette mauvaise réputation*” (“This Bad Reputation”), published in 1993 one year before his death. If I entirely agree with Kaufman's view of Debord's behaviour towards his own success and how he wished to stay in full control of the public figure he had become, I think that Debord pulled the rug out from under possible commentators from day one by a very specific use of witticisms which makes it almost impossible if done in intellectual honesty to create a

35 “*Les arts commencent, s'élargissent et disparaissent, parce que des hommes insatisfaits dépassent le monde des expressions officielles, et les festivals de sa pauvreté*” (61).

36 “*En 1967, je voulais que l'International situationniste ait un livre de théorie*” in “*Préface à la 4ème édition italienne*” (Debord, *Oeuvres* 1463).

absolutely serious and perfectly pure revolutionary idol out of Debord entirely focused on the glorious tomorrow to come. We could consider, to support this argument, the choice for the title of an autobiography of the term “panegyric” and the definition which opens the text from the Littré dictionary which explains that unlike “eulogy” this term exclude blame or criticism[37]. But the best example of that potential auto-sabotage which echoes his conception of art and authorship is how he plainly states in a long and detailed passage in *Panégyrique* how his life was mostly orbiting around bottles of alcohol:

> After the circumstances that I have just recalled, it is indubitably the quickly acquired habit of drinking that has marked my entire life. (...) Two or three other passions, which I will talk about later, have almost continually taken up a lot of space in this life. But drinking has been the most constant and the most present. Among the small number of things that I have liked and known how to do well, what I have assuredly known how to do best is drinking. Even though I have read a lot, I have drunk even more. I have written much less than most writers; but I have drunk much more than most drinkers. (Debord, *Panegyric*, trans. James Brook[38])

What I called the tongue-in-cheek sententious style used by Debord is visible from his first texts onwards. If we take his early works I believe it is visible in the two scripts of *Hurlements*, with the reference to Kant's *Prolegomena* in the first version and the articles *détournés* (“hijacked”) from the French civil code in the second. If we keep with the parallel we have drawn between *Hurlements* and *In girum* as illustrations of two different moments of his intellectual life as the two films were made twenty-six years apart, we can see that what I consider to be Debord's authorial persona has not changed. His self-confidence is still intact just like his narcissism and megalomania (features with which he was at ease; *see* the first volume of the autobiographical text *Panégyrique*, and especially the first chapter, *Oeuvres* 1656-65). He proudly says in *In girum* that he never compromised with dominant ideas and existing powers[39], echoing what he was writing in the 1950s

37 “*Panégyrique dit plus qu'éloge. L'éloge contient sans doute la louange du personnage, mais n'exclut pas une certaine critique, un certain blâme. Le panégyrique ne comporte ni blâme ni critique*” (1656).

38 “*Après les circonstances que je viens de rappeler, ce qui a sans nul doute marqué ma vie entière, ce fut l'habitude de boire, acquise vite. (...) Deux ou trois passions, que je dirai, ont tenu à peu près continuellement une grande place dans cette vie. Mais celle-là a été la plus constante et la plus présente. Dans le petit nombre des choses qui m'ont plus, et que j'ai su bien faire, ce qu'assurément j'ai su faire le mieux, c'est boire. Quoique ayant beaucoup lu, j'ai bu davantage. J'ai écrit beaucoup moins que la plupart des gens qui écrivent ; mais j'ai bu beaucoup plus que la plupart des gens qui boivent*” (1668).

39 “*Tout d'abord, il est assez notoire que je n'ai nulle part fait de concessions aux idées dominantes de mon époque, ni à aucun des pouvoirs existants*” (1334).

about the cultural world and an influential journal like *Les Temps modernes*.

As for the place of humour in Debord's texts, it is interesting to note that if a film like *In girum* is as pompous as the rest of Debord's production (films in particular), it was advertised by a movie trailer which said:

> When I was about to create the world, I could see that one day will be made there something as revolting as Guy Debord's film *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni*, so much so that I preferred not to create the world.
>
> Signed: God[40]

Therefore the tension between humour and seriousness is like Debord's uncompromising and overly defiant approach, a permanent feature which has to be understood in the revolutionary spirit of these movements that considered themselves as the post-war avant-gardes and which had digested the notion of the end of history and a certain nihilism. It does not mean, I believe, that the letterist or situationist movements didn't truly believe in the possibility of a global revolution with which they would be satisfied, or on the contrary that Debord was a nihilist who wanted to make his life and work essentially a joke; it only means that the traditionally solemn revolutionary tone they were using was not undermined but underlaid with a comical layer, a layer which might be considered to be a sort of *détournement*, a hijacking, reappropriation of revolutionary discourse to avoid it to become reified. And also a reappropriation of Debord's own discourse by himself.

Another permanent feature, one related with this tongue-in-cheek seriousness, is that the philosophy and production of Debord, as well as the philosophy and production of the letterists, were oscillating between purely aesthetic concerns and a wider scope. To answer that demand of a more radical and social approach, Debord and some followers created the Letterist International, underlining in its name itself its kinship with Marxist theory and the ideal of a universal revolution.

Following the revolutionary pattern of replacing an old model by another, letterists were highly influenced, as mentioned above, by Surrealism and its prime idea that it was possible, as well as urgent, to redefine society through the redefinition of art—even if the surrealist redefinition of art was an opening, and the letterist one a destruction. Consequently most of the letterists absorbed at an early stage the surrealist theses (aesthetic of shock, revolution through art, the primacy of imagination and freedom). However, in the years during which the Letterist International was active, its members most violently reject French surrealism and its members (especially its leader, André Breton), on the basis that they all had become bourgeois, and therefore minions of the great lenitive enemy traditional arts and the idea of aesthetics were to them; a similar argument than the

40 "*Au moment de créer le monde, j'ai su que l'on y ferait un jour quelque chose d'aussi révoltant que le film de Guy Debord intitulé* In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni*, de sorte que j'ai préféré ne pas créer le monde*" (1422).

one opposed to *Les Temps modernes*. The Letterist International, even if it was sharing a lot of premises with French surrealism, built itself against it in the perpetual struggle of the avant-garde for cultural hegemony, for like Alexandre Trudel notes, the struggle for historical significance was merciless in the avant-gardes since being made outdated by another avant-garde was the worst thing that could happen to an avant-garde[41].

Logically the Letterist International, like any avant-garde is ideally programmed to, was being presented to be the last step and finally bring the ultimate, unsurpassable revolution, this time not only at an aesthetic level but also at a social one; something the surrealist movement had incidentally also tried to do. If this inclination towards more social issues will lead to the Situationist International, also spearheaded by Debord and officially founded in 1957, it's first and foremost the uncompromising radicalism and attacks that will trigger the split between Isou and Debord—the first mostly wished to focus on primarily aesthetic issues, while the second was enjoying public scandals and intellectual isolationism, rejecting almost everyone and everything in a no-quarter way of which he was already proud.

Isou finally dissociated himself from the more radical fringe of Letterism soon after the Letterist International was founded, in October 1952, when Debord and three other members of the LI protested against Charlie Chaplin's *Limelight* at the Ritz Hotel in Paris, in presence of Chaplin himself. To them Chaplin was the perfect example of an artist who was once relevant and representing the oppressed, but who was in 1952 too old to represent anything but his past and himself. In a comment on their protest, the members of the LI write that the most urgent thing to do for freedom is to destroy the idols, especially when they pretend to stand for it[42]. Isidore Isou, founder and theoretician of Letterism, was uncomfortable with such an attack and disavowed the newly-formed LI. Debord and other supporters of the LI theatrically rejected Isou in their turn, calling him a reactionary too old to keep up with the dynamism of the youth, which they were representing, unlike him (Isou was 27 at the time). It was the first of many separations in Debord's intellectual life, a recurring event that will reinforce his uncompromising legend and alienate a lot of people from the movements he led.

We are thus in October 1952 and the young Debord, after starting to mingle with avant-garde circles less than two years before, has left Cannes for Paris and is leading a small group of people under the banner of the Letterist International, a name inspired by Isidore Isou, a father they

41 "*La lutte pour la pertinence historique était sans merci car, comme on sait, il n'y a rien de pire pour une avant-garde que d'être dépassée par une autre avant-garde*" (Trudel 1)

42 "*Nous croyons que l'exercice le plus urgent de la liberté est la destruction des idoles, surtout quand elles se recommandent de la liberté*" (86).

symbolically killed as what could be considered to be the LI fundamental act. In a comment on that first separation, Debord repetitively explains the rejection of Isou by the metaphor of the old which has to give way to the young and new (*Oeuvres* 86).

The five years during which the Lettrist International will be active will indeed follow that youthful line by multiplying the attacks against the dominant figures of the cultural or political field, whether it be Le Corbusier or American imperialism in Central America, and always with a mixture of gratuitous provocation and all-in, tongue-in-cheek seriousness that we have seen in Debord. The manifesto of the LI, published in February 1953, is telling in that aspect, since in a few lines it sketches more than it draws a program of self-annihilation and anti-establishment which does not bother to justify itself:

> The letterist provocation always helps to pass the time. Revolutionary thought is nothing else. We keep making some racket in the limited beyond of literature, in the absence of anywhere better. It is naturally to manifest ourselves that we write manifestos. Offhandedness is a beautiful thing indeed. (...) To tell the truth, we are not satisfied by the human condition. We have sent Isou off because he believed that it was useful to leave a mark. Anything that helps maintaining something is helping the work of the police. For we know that all the ideas and behaviours that exist today are inadequate. (...) We stand up against the punishment of people who have understood that working should be avoided at all cost. We refuse all discussion. Human relations must be based on passion, if not on Terror.[43]

These extracts of the manifesto published as a pamphlet in February 1953 not only highlight the theatrical bitterness of the members towards Isidore Isou and the will to be a self-destructive movement that won't leave any historical mark, it also shows how difficult it is to classify the Letterist International since their manifesto, as they say, is only here to manifest itself, not to suggest an ideological or practical line to follow.

Debord will later sum up in the first volume of his autobiography *Panégyrique* the spirit of these first months in Paris, "between Autumn 1952 and Spring 1953", a period which includes the

43 "*La provocation lettriste sert toujours à passer le temps. La pensée révolutionnaire n'est pas ailleurs. Nous poursuivons notre petit tapage dans l'au-delà restreint de la littérature, et faute de mieux. C'est naturellement pour nous manifester que nous écrivons des manifestes. La désinvolture est une bien belle chose. (...) Pour tout dire, la condition humaine ne nous plaît pas. Nous avons congédié Isou qui croyait à l'utilité de laisser des traces. Tout ce qui maintient quelque chose contribue au travail de la police. (...) Nous nous élevons contre les peines infligées à des personnes qui ont pris conscience qu'il ne fallait absolument pas travailler. Nous refusons la discussion. Les rapports humains doivent avoir la passion pour fondement, sinon la Terreur*" (95). For more on the notion of "Terror" in Debord and the letterist and situationist movements, *see* Gabrial Ferreira Zacarias.

foundation of the Letterist International and the publication of its short manifesto. About this period during which, along with other letterists, he was patronising seedy bars of the Latin Quarter and developing his lifelong alcoholism "between the *rue du Four* and the *rue de Buci*, where our youth so completely lost itself, after downing some drinks, we could feel with certainty that we would never do something better than this"[44], Debord writes that at the time they were following one single principle, the idea that there couldn't be any more poetry or art, that they had to find something better[45].

This period of Debord's life and the production of the Letterist International are often disregarded because of that carelessness (and possible drunkenness of its members), that offhandedness which makes it look like some kind of nihilistic cultural movement, especially when compared with the more rigorous tonality of the successful period of the Situationist International in the 1960s. The five years of the LI were clearly chaotic, yet they deserve all our attention because it is at this period that Debord lived his formative years, years he will later look upon with nostalgy. The Latin Quarter of the first years of the LI is mentioned with bittersweetness in every autobiographical work by Debord, from his 1959 film *Sur le passage de quelques personnes à travers une assez courte unité de temps* to his autobiography *Panégyrique* (1989). But more than just careless years of his youth, that period of *dérive* and insouciance is also the time during which the movement's intellectual circle expanded outside of Paris and into other European countries. This expansion will bring major figures in Debord's life, starting with Danish sculptor Asger Jorn with whom he will later found the Situationist International, but also poet, urban thinker and clinical madman Ivan Chtcheglov whose production and legend will give a basis and a hero to the concept of "psychogeography".

One of the most significant addition to cultural history from the group was the bulletin *Potlatch*, which ran for twenty-nine issues published between 22nd June 1954 and 5th November 1957. The bulletin was the main tribune of the movement and disappeared in 1957 when the Letterist International evolved to become the Situationist International. The letterists were unsurprisingly publicly defiant towards the mass media, and *Potlatch*'s mode of distribution was logically subversive: It was sent for free to people who had shown interest for the LI, but also to addresses picked at random (Debord, *Oeuvres* 150). This innovative mode of diffusion was in accordance with

44 "*Entre la rue du Four et la rue de Buci, où notre jeunesse s'est si complètement perdue, en buvant quelques verres, on pouvait sentir avec certitude que nous ne ferions jamais rien de mieux*" (1668).

45 "*Le phénomène qui était cette fois absolument nouveau, et qui a naturellement laissé peu de traces, c'est que le seul principe admis par tous était que justement il ne pouvait plus y avoir de poésie ni d'art ; et que l'on devait trouver mieux*" (1666).

its name: In the Chinook Jargon, “potlatch” is “an opulent ceremonial feast at which possessions are given away or destroyed to display wealth or enhance prestige”[46]. Following its name, the bulletin has always been given, never sold, even to those who expressed the will to acquire an issue. The editorial line was presented by the editorial board at the opening of the first issue as follows:

> POTLATCH: You will receive it often. The Letterist International will use it to deal with weekly issues. Potlatch is the most committed publication in the world: We work towards the conscious and collective creation of a new civilisation.[47]

Besides the usual exaggeration and unapologetic tone, we can note that the part on commitment was probably thought as a provocative jab towards the existentialist movement and its advocacy of a literature connected to its society, a committed literature (*littérature d'engagement*). It is in this atmosphere of irreverence and in that same first issue of *Potlatch*, published on 22th June 1954, that the notion of “*psychogéographie*” is defined, even if vaguely.

The term “*psychogéographie*”, however, had already been used previously, in two texts. The first one, written in May 1954, was an answer to a question addressed to avant-garde movements by the Belgian surrealists to help them clarify and advertise their objectives: “Does thinking enlighten us and our actions with the same indifference than the sun; or, what is our hope and what is its value?”[48] The second mention of the term “*psychogéographie*” I could find is in a pamphlet by the LI distributed on 11th June 1954 to advertise the vernissage of an exhibition of artists related to the international. These two first appearances of the term are more programmatic than informative and broadly states the general orientation of the movement. If the letterist movement under Isidore Isou was solely focused on arts, the new Letterist International initiates in these two texts a move towards a more total revolution, putting the emphasis on what will later become the central notion of “situation”.

As stated in the first of these two texts, the letterists are now interested in the creation of games and the disruption of the everyday into new, surprising forms. Based on a pun with French “*jeu de société*” (“board game”), they declare that they wish to create a society built on game, since amusement and leisure, once an attribute of the nobility, has now to be given to all[49].conomic To

46 26 October 2016. <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/potlatch>

47 “*POTLATCH: Vous le recevrez souvent. L'International lettriste y traitera des problèmes de la semaine. Potlatch est la publication la plus engagée du monde : nous travaillons à l'établissement conscient et collectif d'une nouvelle civilisation*” (Le Brail 7).

48 “*La pensée nous éclaire-t-elle, et nos actes, avec la même indifférence que le soleil, ou quel est notre espoir et quelle est sa valeur ?*” (Debord, *Oeuvres* 120).

49 “*Une science des rapports et des ambiance s'élabore, que nous appelons* psychogéographie*. Elle rendra le jeu de société à son vrai sens : une société fondée sur le jeu. Rien n'est plus sérieux. Le divertissement est bien l'attribut de*

support this, the members of the Letterist International announce the development of a new science called "*psychogéographie*" which will condition the atmospheres and adventures of men[50]. The organisation of cities is mentioned, but the letterists are here mostly focused on changing the everyday, inject a sense of play into social reality to initiate a critique of it. If this first mention of the term is anecdotal in terms of definition, it is crucial to show how the LI has now its mind set on changing society as a whole, not just the arts. These first mentions of psychogeography also introduces key notions such as the idea of play and the emphasis on leisure and amusement, which are considered to be very serious matters. This tension between amusement and seriousness is illustrated by many maxims from Debord written in that period, like *"Le plus grand amusement est de rigueur*" (roughly, "The greatest amusement has to be observed with utmost rigour"), and perpetuates the festive spirit of the first two years of the LI.

In that context the term "*psychogéographie*" is nothing more than a scientific-looking term whose use gives the movement a certain seriousness and also, in its construction itself, highlights the will to question through play ingrained social rules, to map the influences on the collective unconscious of a society in order to be able to think outside the box, to create alternative forms of life. These two texts where psychogeography is introduced also show that it is at that time that the Letterist International really started considering the city as a place for experimentation, that changing the experience of this urban environment could open to a reconsideration of other social conditioning. This new orientation of the movement also transpires in the apparition in the letterists' vocabulary of another term characteristic of the movement, the word "*dérive*" ("drifting"), or walking aimlessly in a city while focusing on how this urban environment is affecting the walking subject. *Dérive* and psychogeography are tightly related, the first being considered as the practice of the latter. If these two short texts are the first occurrences of the use of "*psychogéographie*", it has to be noted that the LI was already practising the *dérive* at the end of 1953, before their publications, based on the ideas of Ivan Chtcheglov that the group had met and included earlier in that year (*Oeuvres* 78).

When the movement starts publishing its bulletin *Potlatch*, the first issue contains a text, more of an insert than a proper article, entitled "*Jeu psychogéographique de la semaine*" ("Psychogeographical Game of the Week"). Its anonymous author, who was probably someone else

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la royauté qu'il s'agit de donner à tous" (121).

50 "*Il semble pourtant que ces jeunes aient réussi le noyautage du groupe lettriste que nous avions connu. Eliminant la 'vieille garde' aux intentions limitées, ils ont élargi leur programme, jusqu'à préparer 'la construction de villes et le bouleversement de l'inconscient collectif'. Une nouvelle science, la 'psychogéographie', va d'après eux conditionner les ambiances et les aventures mêmes des hommes*" (Debord, *Oeuvres* 125).

than Debord since the edition of his complete works does not include this text, explains the game as follows:

> According to what you are looking for, select a country, a city with a population more or less dense, a street more or less bustling. Build a house. Furnish it. Make the best use of its decoration and surroundings. Select a season and a time. Gather the most capable people, along suitable discs and liquors. The lighting and conversation should obviously fit to the circumstances, just like the weather outside and your memories.
>
> If there is no mistake in your calculations, you shall be satisfied by the answer. (Send your results to the editorial board.)[51]

Like it was the case with the two first two texts where "*psychogéographie*" was mentioned, This article would not be of much help for someone who wants to define psychogeography in theoretical terms. Yet, we can already see some features of the movement that will survive, if not among letterists, at least in other avatars of the psychogeographical practice. The main idea here is that the practice of psychogeography is the report of the relation of a person to his/her environment. The general tone of the article is playful, nonsensical and clearly festive, showing that the term "*psychogéographie*" was indeed a important-looking word put on a very simple idea: express how context affects an individual. There is not even an attempt at theory: It is a game, that's all; a carelessness towards theory which matches the spirit of the Letterist International in its first years, a period which was, as we have seen, festive and lived in an offhand manner. Another thing we can notice from the first appearance of the term is the collective aspect of it, the fact that people should share their results, indicating the will to create a community of like-minded psychogeographers.

However, the most striking difference between this first text and what will later become the notion of "psychogeography" is that, if "*psychogéographie*" already means the report of one's subjective impressions affected by one's environment, it is suggested in this short text that it has to be practised indoors and not on the street. There is no question of walking or exploration, and the city is just a context, not a subject. In short, that first sketch of what "*psychogéographie*" is echoes more the hedonism and bohemian lifestyle of the group than its later preoccupations. If the term seems first to be used as an excuse to throw a party, it is nevertheless interesting to note that its

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51 "*En fonction de ce que vous cherchez, choisissez une contrée, une ville de peuplement plus ou moins dense, une rue plus ou moins animée. Construisez une maison. Meublez-la. Tirez le meilleur parti de sa décoration et de ses alentours. Choisissez la saison et l'heure. Réunissez les personnes les plus aptes, les disques et les alcools qui conviennent. L'éclairage et la conversation devront être évidemment de circonstance, comme le climat extérieur ou vos souvenirs. S'il n'y a pas eu d'erreur dans vos calculs, la réponse doit vous satisfaire. (Communiquer les résultats à la rédaction)*" (Le Brail 9).

dynamics in this early mention is inwards, focusing on the mental experiences of the player. "Psychogeography" is thus presented primarily as a way for self-introspection, where the geography of the term is the geography of the psyche, not so much the geography of the outside world.

The second issue of Potlatch (Le Brail 10) also contains an article on psychogeography entitled "*Exercice de la Psychogéographie*" ("Exercicing Psychogeography"). Once again, the concept is not explained at all and the article, signed by Debord, is a list of unrelated historical figures who share, in his view, a connection with psychogeography, with for instance the lines: "Ludwig II of Bavaria is psychogeographical in Royalty/ Jack the Ripper is probably psychogeographical in love"[52]. The two texts ("*Jeu*" and "*Exercise*") in the first two issues of *Potlatch* are hardly defining what is psychogeography, or only vaguely (the relation of one's psyche and practice to his/her location). Yet, it shows that the idea, whatever it might have been at this point (if it meant anything more than its name that is), was from the start part of the Letterist International's tools, and a central one at that as it features so prominently in the first two issues of their bulletin.

Published more than a year later in September 1955, the article *"Introduction à une critique de la géographie urbaine*" ("Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography") in *Les lèvres nues* is different from the two articles we have briefly discussed. As we have said above, the original letterist group led by Isou had split because some of its members thought it to be too focused on aesthetics and not enough on politics and social issues as a whole. If the LI had already distanced itself from this only artistic approach towards revolution, the style in which was written the 1954 short texts on "*psychogéographie*" was still playful and poetical, less concerned by clarifying the meaning of their discourse than by providing striking punchlines, opening new mental perspectives through phrasing, poetical phrasing which included the neologism "*psychogéographie*".

The writing style of the movement evolved between the two *Potlatch* articles and "Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography", the latter being more practical; more practical in the sense that it aims at defining a new mode of existence, not just claiming the need for new ways to think and act. Debord's discourse moves slightly towards theory. Consequently the "Introduction" adopts a more solemn tone and less poetical imagery, a style closer to the kind we find in political manifestos at the time and that the readers will meet again in the Debord's later production.

The "Introduction" opens Debord stating that, "Of all the affairs we participate in, with or without interest, the groping search for a new way of life is the only aspect still impassioning"[53]

52 *"Louis II de Bavière est psychogéographique dans la royauté./ Jack l'Éventreur est probablement psychogéographique dans l'amour*" (136).

53 "*De tant d'histoires auwquelles nous participons, avec ou sans intérêt, la recherche fragmentaire d'un nouveau mode de vie reste le seul côté passionnant*" (204).

(Debord, "Introduction"). This idea of a "new way of life" is not new, neither in the general avant-garde spirit, nor in the letterist movement. In the first issue of the journal *Potlatch*, the editorial board opened by stating that they are "working towards the conscious and collective installation of a new civilisation."[54] As mentioned above, such objective is clearly influenced by traditional revolutionary writings for which a given civilisation is in such a state of decay that it must be, not only reformed, but entirely overthrown. If the message is roughly the same, the prose is different: it is now clear that we are no longer playing, or at least not as much as before, as Debord's style becomes more measured and matter-of-fact. The shift from the first texts on "*psychogéographie*" to the "Introduction" announces Debord's rigour as displayed in his most famous work, *The Society of the Spectacle*, published in 1967 and often consider (especially by Debord himself) as a theoretical triggers for the events of May 1968 in France:

> The SI [for Situationist International] not only saw modern proletarian subversion coming; it *came along with it*. It did not resort to the icy extrapolation of scientific reasoning in order to announce it as some kind of extraneous phenomenon: rather it went out to encounter it. We did not put our ideas 'into everybody's minds' by the exercice of some outside influence or other, which is something that only the bourgeois or bureaucratic-totalitarian spectacle can do, albeit without lasting success. We gave voice to the ideas *that were necessarily already present* in these proletarian minds, and by so doing we helped to activate these ideas, as well as to make critical action more theoretically aware and more determined to make time its own. (Debord, *The Real Split in the International* 9)

The work from which this quotation is taken from has been first published in 1972, and later translated by John McHale in 2003. Comparing it to our article dating back to 1955, as well as to the two *Potlatch*'s articles, provides a good overview of the evolution of Debord's style and its growing interest over time in Marxism and politics, a growing interest best illustrated by the vocabulary used. "Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography" is still far from those later developments, yet we can already see that Debord tries to be clearer than he was in previous articles dealing with "*psychogéographie*": Seriousness and practicality are slowly encroaching the festive and careless logic the LI showed in its first years of existence. If early texts were supported by no clear theoretical pillars, the "Introduction" proposes itself to finally build a theoretical basis for the notion of "*psychogéographie*", but also trace back its history.

As in every good introduction, Debord gives out the origins of the word "*psychogéographie*": "The word psychogeography, suggested by an illiterate Kabyle as a general term for the phenomena

54 "*nous travaillons à l'établissement conscient et collectif d'une nouvelle civilisation*" (133).

a few of us were investigating around the summer of 1953, is not too inappropriate."[55] Even after research, it was still impossible to locate with certainty the "illiterate Kabyle", or texts from the 1953 experimentations for that matter, even if such experimentations are mentioned in the chronology of Debord's *Oeuvres*. As for the "illiterate Kabyle", it is possible that it refers to Hadj Mohammed Dahou (who also signed as Midhou Dahou certain texts from *Potlatch*). Dahou had joined the LI somewhere before February 1953 as he signed the letterist manifesto which opened the first issue of *Potlatch*. He will create the Algerian section of the LI in 1954. However it is odd that Debord did not explicitly give him paternity to the term "*psychogéographie*" if he was indeed the one to coin it as the two men seem to have kept good relations. The Kabyle, whoever he is, might be the author of the first *Potlatch* article, choosing anonymity for potential political reason, as Paris in the 1950s was a meeting point for Algerian activists in favour of the independence from colonial France (which does not exclude Dahou since he seemed to have gone in "semi-clandestinity" after May 1958 according to a letter from Debord to Alexander Trocchi[56]). The "illiterate Kabyle" might also be an invention, here to give a certain clandestine and proletarian flavour to psychogeography, an argument supported by a note by Alice Debord in her edition of her late husband's letters where she seems to indicate that Debord referred as "Arab" things and people that did not truly exist[57].

After giving the main objective (a "new way of life") and the origins of the term, the 1955 "Introduction" finally breathes some theoretical premises into the term "*psychogéographie*" by exposing its aim and scope:

> Geography, for example, deals with the determinant action of general natural forces, such as soil composition or climatic conditions, on the economic structures of a society, and thus on the corresponding conception that such a society can have of the world. *Psychogeography* could set for itself the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals. The adjective psychogeographical, retaining a rather pleasing vagueness, can thus be applied to the findings arrived at by this type of investigation, to their influence on human feelings, and even more generally to any situation or conduct

55 "*Le mot* psychogéographie*, proposé par un Kabyle illettré pour désigner l'ensemble des phénomènes dont nous étions quelques-uns à nous préoccuper à l'été de 1953, ne se justifie pas trop mal*" (204).

56 "*J'ai su récemment que Midhou était encore en bonne santé. Il est dans une semi-clandestinité. Avant les événements de mai j'avais pu lui faire parvenir sur sa demandes des papiers qui prouvaient – faussement – qu'il était un peintre connu, exposant en Italie, Belgique, Angleterre*" (Debord, *Correspondance vol. 1* 121).

57 "*On parlera souvent des 'Arabes de Guy Debord' devenus légendaires*" (34)

that seems to reflect the same spirit of discovery.[58] (Debord, “Introduction”)

Psychogeography is thus the study of how a location and its organisation (mainly the city through urban planning) is influencing the human psyche. From the early inwards definition it now goes outwards, concerned with the materiality of urban space. That definition in the “Introduction” also institutes the idea of exploration and subsequent discovery, an idea which will be central in the British reading of the concept. Psychogeography is presented here as a scientific method, created in regard to another discipline (geography) and aiming at producing “findings” through “investigation”. The idea of a game that we have seen in the first two *Potlatch*'s articles is put in the background: seriousness is taking over, just like the social and political aspect of the original letterist movement took over the aesthetic one.

Debord carries on by delimiting what psychogeography should dismantle: utilitarian urban planning set in place to control the masses and promote the car, a privilege and symbol of the capitalist domination according Debord, considerations which mirror Mumford's view as seen in our first chapter and expressed roughly at the same time in the *City in History* (1961). To support this idea, he gives the classic example of the urban renewal of Paris into wide and straight avenues designed by Haussmann in the mid 19th-century to facilitate crowd control after the 1848 revolution, an argument which in its turn mirrors Baudelaire's poem in our second chapter. Still in the “Introduction”, Debord writes about Haussmann's planning that, “from any standpoint other than that of police control, Haussmann's Paris is a city built by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.”[59]

What is of interest as we keep the first definition of psychogeography in mind, is that the focus is here directly set on the city. A psychogeography of the wilderness seems excluded: the object of study is urban planning and its influence on the human mind, and by extension society. Second, there is the idea that the parts designed by Haussmann signifies nothing, in the sense that the meaning of a space cannot be only supported by the will to control the crowd, indicating both that a

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58 “*La géographie, par exemple, rend compte de l'action déterminante de forces naturelles générales, comme la composition des sols ou les régimes climatiques, sur les formation économiques d'une société et, par là, sur la conception qu'elle peut se faire du monde. La* psychogéographie *se proposerait l'étude des lois exactes et des effets précis du milieu géographique, consciemment aménagé ou non, agissant directement sur le comportement affectif des individus. L'adjectif* psychogéographique*, conservant un assez plaisant vague, peut donc s'appliquer aux données établies par ce genre d'investigations, aux résultats de leur influence sur les sentiments humaisn, et même plus généralement à toute situation ou toute conduite qui paraissent relever du même esprit de découverte*” (Debord, *Oeuvres* 204).

59 “*Mais de tout point de vue autre que policier, le Paris d'Haussmann est une ville bâtie par un idiot, pleine de bruit et de fureur, qui ne signifie rien*” (205)

city must be built in the way that creates meaning, or in a way that respects its essence, whatever that essence might be. On the contrary, to Debord and other psychogeographers, a street signifies something when it allows free association, when the way it was planned allow the subject to be affected by it, unlike Haussmann's style of planning which, for Debord, creates an affectless environment, a neutral space devoid of the idea of passion they defend as the needed basis for human relations (*see* above the quote from the LI manifesto). By extension, if Debord is not clear, we can suggest based on what he says next, that Haussmann's planning signifies nothing *socially*, that because it is a pure construct built for what are considered to be coercive purposes by its critics, the typical Haussmannian boulevard does not participate in the creation or extension of the social fabric of a given space, it does not favour the emergence of a community based on the circulation of ideas and the communication of one's subjectivity, rather choosing to give prominence to the circulation of private cars.

As many radical statements Debord made, and if the style in which he is writing is clearer than previously, it is still rather vague. If this vagueness is partially due to the format of the texts published by the LI which are mainly pamphlets and other short pieces, it has to be noted that Debord embraces this vagueness, like in the quotation above “The adjective psychogeographical, retaining a rather pleasing vagueness”. Similarly, he is somehow inconsistent when he is discussing urban planning as a way of influencing people on a psychogeographical level. As he is stating that “a future urbanism will also apply itself to no less utilitarian projects that will give the greatest consideration to psychogeographical possibilities”[60], he is simultaneously warning his readers against such utilitarian constructions and recuperating utilitarianism for his movement, calling for a new urbanism which will construct such conditioning atmospheres, but this time following psychogeographical principles. Whether a city is fully planned following a “Haussmannian” or a psychogeographical ideal, such urbanism will still be utilitarian in the sense that the experience of it would still be conditioned by its material environment. It may sound like common sense but it displays a move from the utopian spirit of Chchteglov's “Formulary” (which we will discussing below) to a product-based logic: The city doesn't have to be felt differently or changed following a game with ever-evolving rules, it has to be constructed anew based on psychogeographical principles. Keeping in mind the military root of the word “avant-garde”, Debord is seeing the city as a battleground for whose control two armies are fighting, using the same tools but to different purposes. He is not directly criticising the very notion of power and domination as others will do later. He is only saying that psychogeographical constructions can be used to support his

60 “*Il n'est pas interdit de penser qu'un urbanisme à venir s'appliquera à des constructions, également utilitaires, tenant le plus large compte des possibilités psychogéographiques*” (205).

revolutionary ideas, not that it is potentially dangerous and coercive by nature. In that aspect, it is not surprising that Debord is also famous to have designed a complex board game called *Le Jeu de la guerre* ("The Game of War"; *see* Oeuvres 1317-25).

Once that said, psychogeography still carries a certain playfulness in the "Introduction". Debord defines as a goal for its practice to "*faire de la vie un jeu intégral passionant*" ("turn the whole of life into an exciting game"). This constant back-and-forth between utter and/or displayed seriousness and playful sabotage can be misleading, but it is probably at the heart of what the Letterist International, and later the Situationist International, has to offer in terms of subversion. Similarly, to define further psychogeography, a concept that has to be actualised in practice, he speaks in rather vague and poetical terms:

> The sudden change of ambiance in a street within the space of a few meters; the evident division of a city into zones of distinct psychic atmospheres; the path of least resistance which is automatically followed in aimless strolls (and which has no relation to the physical contour of the ground); the appealing or repelling character of certain places—all this seems to be neglected. In any case it is never envisaged as depending on causes that can be uncovered by careful analysis turned to account. People are quite aware that some neighborhoods are sad and others pleasant. But they generally simply assume elegant streets cause a feeling of satisfaction and that poor street are depressing, and let it go at that. (...) The research that we are thus led to undertake on the arrangement of the elements of the urban setting, in close relation with the sensations they provoke, entails bold hypotheses that must be constantly corrected in the light of experience, by critique and self-critique.[61]

That passage is rather clear and delimit the issue and some bits of the required method: critique and self-critique. Yet, how to practice it methodically still remains unclear. He provides some suggestions, such as visiting a place following a map of another place, or displacing certain known

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61 "*Le brusque changement d'ambiance dans une rue, à quelques mètres près ; la division patente d'une ville en zones de climats psychiques tranchés ; la ligne de plus forte pente – sans rapport avec la dénivellation – que doivent suivre les promenades qui n'ont pas de but ; le caractère prenant ou repoussant de certains lieux ; tout cela semble être négligé. En tout cas, n'est jamais envisagé comme dépendant de causes que l'on peut mettre au jour par une analyse approfondie, et dont on peut tirer parti. Les gens savent bien qu'il y a des quartiers tristes, et d'autres agréables. Mais ils se persuadent généralement que les rues élégantes causent un sentiment de satisfaction et que les rues pauvres sont déprimantes, presque sans plus de nuances. (...) Les recherches que l'on est ainsi appelé à mener sur la disposition des éléments du cadre urbaniste, en liaison étroite avec le sensations qu'ils provoquent, ne vont pas sans passer par des hypothèses hardies qu'il convient de corriger constamment à la lumière de l'expérience, par la critique et l'autocritique*" (207).

elements from one site to another in order to disrupt everyday life's routine. Always paradoxical and harshly radical, Debord describes “this sort of game” as “obviously only a mediocre beginning in comparison to the complete construction of architecture and urbanism that will someday be within the power of everyone.”[62]

To summarise what we have seen so far, Debord seems to present psychogeography has a personal tool, an intimate practice, even if it is enclosed in a community from the start (remember the “Send your results to the editorial board” in the first *Potlatch* article), as it aims at not only change the perceptions of its agent, but also society as a whole. Yet, as if torn between traditional Marxism and something closer to fragmented and individualised Post-Marxism, Debord suggests to start with individuals while in the meantime rejecting the usefulness of doing so by stating that “there is nothing to be expected until the masses in action awaken to the conditions that are imposed on them in all domains of life, and to the practical means of changing them.”[63] Debord aims at finding a *praxis* for psychogeography but somehow cannot manage to propose a proper *modus operandi*. Instead, in the middle of what looks like a more pragmatic article than previous ones on the matter, he considers as a perfect example of psychogeographical sabotage a rather extravagant proposition from Marcel Mariën, the editor of *Les Lèvres nues*, the journal in which the “Introduction” is published:

> For example, in the preceding issue of this journal Marcel Mariën proposed that when global resources have ceased to be squandered on the irrational enterprises that are imposed on us today, all the equestrian statues of all the cities of the world be assembled in a single desert. This would offer to the passersby — the future belongs to them — the spectacle of an artificial cavalry charge which could even be dedicated to the memory of the greatest massacrers of history, from Tamerlane to Ridgway. It would also respond to one of the main demands of the present generation: educative value.[64]

This passage has a strong avant-garde, unrealistic aspect which clashes with the article's general

62 “*Cette espèce de jeu n'est évidemment qu'un médiocre début en regard d'une construction complète de l'architectire et de l'urbanisme, construction dont le pouvoir sera quelque jour donné à tous*” (208).

63 “*De fait il n'y a rien à attendre que de la prise de conscience, par des masses agissantes, des conditions de vie qui leur sont faites dans tous les domaines, et des moyens pratiques de les changer*” (209).

64 “*Ainsi Mariën, dans le précédent numéro de cette revue, proposait de reassembler en désordre, quand les ressources mondiales auront cessé d'être gaspillées dans les entreprises irrationnelles que l'on nous impose aujourd'hui, toute les statues équestres de toutes les villes dans une seule plaine désertique. Ce qui offrirait aux passants – l'avenir leur appartient – le spectacle d'une charge synthétique de cavalerie que l'on pourrait même dédier au souvenir des plus grands massacreurs de l'histoire, de Tamerlan à Ridgway. On voit resurgir ici une des principales exigences de cette génération: la valeur éducative*” (209).

tone. It is a good example of how confusing Debord is and, by extension, how vague the concept and, to a higher extent, the practice of psychogeography are. By reading the short texts he published in various reviews, including the articles on psychogeography, we cannot locate him, we cannot state once and for all if what he is saying is second-degree, partly second-degree, or entirely serious —or all the three at the same time. It is this plasticity and tension which might have allowed a re-appropriation and thus survival of his writings, person and concepts, including "psychogeography".

As we have seen, this notion has from the start been inhabiting a "pleasing vagueness", oscillating between the festive and self-introspection of the first texts in which it was mentioned, to a revolutionary way to change the outside world. An oscillation, a tension between pure provocation, game and seriousness that, I believe, we find throughout Debord's writings. While trying to break free from the conditions set by urban planning, Debord and the LI then SI also called for new conditions, this time based on the feelings, on a psychogeographical approach, without considering that such a logic would also lead to a new form of conditioning, a paradox in advocating creative chaos through total control we already discussed in our first chapter with Mumford praising Ebenezer's model of the garden city. A paradox which is created by the tension between the avant-garde root of Debord's work clashing with the call for direct action and effective social change expressed by the revolutionary groups of the time. In his work *Suburbia*, Bruce Bégout examines this apparent paradox in Debord's consideration on urban planning and how the results of psychogeographical investigations ought to be actualised:

> Sometimes Debord opposes to functionalist and servile conditioning a *creative* and *free* conditioning based on engaging and passionate situations ("the next architecture has to condition everything"); sometimes on the contrary he distances himself with this deterministic logic and tries to conceptualise another relation between individuals and places.[65]

Bégout contrasts the conditioning in the first part of this quote with the idea of influence that he takes from Ivan Chtcheglov, a close friend of Debord who he met in 1953 as I mentioned above.

Chtcheglov (also known under the pseudonym of Gilles Ivain) represents in contrast to Debord a more mystical approach to the urban environment. A secret and marginal figure of the Letterist International he is mostly known for the "*Formulaire pour un urbanisme nouveau*" ("Formulary for a New Urbanism"). It is only recently, in 2006, that the French publishing house Allia produced an

65 "*Parfois Debord oppose ainsi au conditionnement fonctionnaliste et servile le conditionnement* créateur *et* libre *des situations passionantes ("la nouvelle architecture doit tout conditionner"); parfois, au contraire, il sort de cette logique déteriniste et se hasarde à penser un autre rapport des individus et des lieux*" (Bégout, *Suburbia* 89).

edition of his work, alongside an autobiography, both texts being presented by Jean-Marie Apostolidès and Boris Donné. If these recent publications show that there is an interest for Chtcheglov today, his most famous work is still his “Formulary”, a short text written in 1953 and taken by the newly-founded LI as a basis for his thought on urbanism. The LI gone, the SI will later publish an abstract of it in the first issue of its review, logically named *L'Internationale situationniste*, in 1958. It is in the 2006 French edition of his texts, *Écrits trouvés*, that we find for the first time the unabridged version of the “*Formulaire*”. The passages in English quoted below are from a translation by Ken Knabb of this complete version.

Chtcheglov opens his text by declaring that “We are bored in the city, there is no longer any Temple of the Sun”. He claims that the dominant trend of urbanism at the time, following an architecture and urban planning *à la* Le Corbusier, had ruined the excitement and awe the city is supposed to create in its inhabitant and spectator. In order to thwart this dynamic, Chtcheglov mixes a surrealist approach to the city with a call for not just describing the city's mysteries but actively creating an environment which would stimulate new desires and new dreams in individuals thanks to an original approach opposed to Le Corbusier's modernist architecture.

Written in 1953 at a time when the LI is still highly influenced by its past as part of the letterist movement, an artistic avant-garde, Chtcheglov's “Formulary” is deliberately fanciful and outrageous, suggesting for instance the creation of whole cities based on different emotions:

> Bizarre Quarter—Happy Quarter (specially reserved for habitation)—Noble and Tragic Quarter (for good children)—Historical Quarter (museums, schools)—Useful Quarter (hospital, tool shops)—Sinister Quarter, etc. And an *Astrolarium* which would group plant species in accordance with the relations they manifest with the stellar rhythm, a planetary garden comparable to that which the astronomer Thomas wants to establish at Laaer Berg in Vienna. Indispensable for giving the inhabitants a consciousness of the cosmic. Perhaps also a Death Quarter, not for dying in but so as to have somewhere to live in peace, and I think here of Mexico and of a principle of cruelty in innocence that appeals more to me every day.[66] (Chtcheglov, “Formulary”)

Chtcheglov in the tradition of the avant-garde manifesto, as we explained above, does not aim at

66 “*Quartier Bizarre — Quartier Heureux, plus particulièrement réservé à l'habitation — Quartier Noble et Tragique (pour les enfants sages) — Quartier Historique (musées, écoles) — Quartier Utile (hôpital, magasins d'outillage) — Quartier Sinistre, etc… Et un Astrolaire qui grouperait les espèces végétales selon les relations qu'elles attestent avec le rythme stellaire, jardin planétaire comparable à celui que l'astronome Thomas se propose de faire établir à Vienne au lieu dit Laaer Berg. Indispensable pour donner aux habitants une conscience du cosmique. Peut-être aussi un Quartier de la Mort, non pour y mourir mais pour y vivre en paix, et ici je pense au Mexique et à un principe de cruauté dans l'innocence qui me devient chaque jour plus cher*” (Chtcheglov, “*Formulaire*”).

providing practical solutions, he rather means to open perspectives to move away from usual modes of thinking. The "Formulary" is Chtcheglov only text mentioned in most historical accounts of the letterist and situationist movements as it was the one which introduced the notion of "*dérive*" and the first to draw the attention of the letterists towards the urban (*see* for instance McDonough 233).

As in Bégout (*Suburbia* 86-90) or Coverley *(Psychogeography* 83-5)*,* Chtcheglov is also presented often as the more dreamy and mystical counterpart to the more pragmatic, political and, at the end of the day, serious Debord. If such an opposition makes sense, it often forgets, as we have tried to demonstrate in this chapter, that a close reading of Debord's work indicates that if he was a radical thinker, his writings always contain a certain leeway for self-criticism and fantasy. As said above, instead of presenting Chtcheglov as the anti-thesis of Debord, I would rather defend the idea that Debord was navigating between theatrical seriousness and offhandedness, leaning more towards pragmatism as the years passed. In his discourse, his views became more and more down-to-earth, more and more concerned by political and effective change, moving further away from the aesthetic concerns of the original letterist movement. This gradual move will eventually transform him into something of a public figure of the radical Left in the years and decades following France May 1968 events, thanks to the many editions of the *Society of the Spectacle* and his personal involvement in the events. As his work slowly moved towards pragmatism, Chtcheglov embodied for Debord these careless first months of the LI during which its members were drinking and drifting in Paris Latin Quarter.

As I previously said, this period is according to Debord himself the origins of both the letterist and the situationist internationals, and extended between Autumn 1952 and Spring 1953 if we trust Debord in *Panégyrique (Oeuvres*, 1668) or took place during three or four months in the years 1953–1954 if we trust the less reliable Chtcheglov (*Ecrits retrouvés*, 28). Regardless of its actual duration, this unique or multiple bohemian period was described as months of *dérive* by the former and the latter alike, and even as he himself move towards pragmatism in his writings, Debord will always have a kind word for this part of his past. Perhaps imbued with a certain nostalgia, Chtcheglov will be turned in Debord's retrospective works on that period into the messianic figure of these days now gone, like in this passage from the script of the film *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni* (1978) where he gives a portrait of Chtcheglov:

> But how can I forget the man that I see everywhere in the greatest period o3–f our adventures; the man who, back in these uncertain days, opened a new road and walked it so fast, choosing who will join him; for nobody was as good as him, in this year? It seemed that by only looking at the city and life he was transforming them. He discovered in a year new topics of action for a century; the depths and secrets of

urban4– space was his conquest.[67]

In a similar fashion, Chtcheglov's "Formulary" is praised by Debord as a key text which triggered the interest for urban space in the LI, interest which will leaked to the SI. Illustrating this, Debord writes in a letter dated April 1963 to Chtcheglov who was committed to a mental institution at the time:

> The "Formulary" is indeed a very dense document, almost Heraclitean, it is still relevant after almost ten years. It is starting to get a readership only now, since the SI has prepared them for it. People are starting to understand what was only understandable back then to two or three of us, maybe because what has happened since allows today to follow certain perspectives further than what we had understood ourselves at the time.[68]

The adjective "Heraclitean" has to be understood, I believe, as ever-changing, evolving in time, same but different like the river of time in the most famous allegory from Heraclitus. In that sense the views on urban environment by Debord and the groups he led follows the same pattern: the purpose is the same but the manner is different. The LI in its early years was more interested into redefining the urban experience by turning to poetical modes of exploration (drifting, the personal, inwards aspect of the primitive "*psychogéographie*") to create a new perception of the city. The LI of the later years, roughly starting with the "Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography" (1955), then the SI to a higher degree, were also interested in redefining the urban experience but this time by building new cities altogether, concretely build them, not just calling for their construction in a utopian way. To that end, the discourse on space past the 1955 "Introduction" will be centred on "Unitary Urbanism", a term coined by Dutch painter Constant Nieuwenhuys and describing a new kind of architecture and urban planning which aimed at constructing an environment favourable to the emergence of new situations (*see "Constant et la voie de l'urbanisme unitaire*"; Debord, *Oeuvres* 445-51, 990-2; or, letters to Constant [Nieuwenhuys] in *Correspondance vol 1*).

In the course of his intellectual life, Debord has been known for burning bridges with a lot of

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67 "*Mais puis-je oublier celui que je vois partout dans le plus grand moment de nos aventures ; celui qui, en ces jours incertains, ouvrit une route nouvelle et y avança si vite, choisissant ceux qui viendraient ; car personne d'autre le valait, cette année-là ? On eût dit qu'en regardant seulement la ville et la vie, il les changeait. Il découvrit en un an des sujets de revendications pour un siècle ; les profondeurs et les mystères de l'espace urbain furent sa conquête*" (Debord, *Oeuvres* 1376-77).

68 "*Le 'Formulaire' est effectivement un document très condensé, quasiment héraclitéen, il n'a pas vieilli depuis dix ans bientôt. Il commence seulement à trouver ses lecteurs, dans la mesure où l'I.S. les a formés. On commence à comprendre ce qui n'était alors compréhensible que pour deux ou trois de nous, peut-être parce que le développement des choses permet à présent de suivre certaines perspectives plus loin que nous ne les comprenions nous-mêmes à ce moment*" (Debord, *Correspondances vol. 2* 219).

friends on the principle that they were not radical enough, following a hard-line logic that can be summarised by the sentence that closed the "Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography" back in 1955: "The primary moral deficiency is leniency, in all its forms."[69] Therefore along the way and as the most active member and *de facto* leader of both the Letterist and the Situationist Internationals, he will evict from the two movements persons he, alongside other members, now longer agree with. Such exclusions are often considered by detractors as example of a certain authoritarianism of Debord over the movements he was heading, similar to the one of Breton over French Surrealism, a claim made for instance by Henri Lefebvre in an interview given in 1997 to the review *October*:

> There were two or three Belgians, two or three Dutch, like Constant. But they were all expelled immediately. Guy Debord followed André Breton's example. People were expelled. I was never part of the group. I could have been, but I was careful, since I knew Guy Debord's character and his manner, and the way he had of imitating André Breton, by expelling everyone in order to get a pure and hard little core. (quoted in McDonough 275)

What is less often discussed than Debord's authoritarianism is the fact that he kept good contact with some people he expelled and that, when the SI started becoming widely known after the May 1968 events, he dissolved it and practically disappeared from the public sphere. Nevertheless, it is evident that Debord was leading the two internationals with an iron fist, an authoritarianism and paranoia he didn't deny but defend, for instance in a letter to Branko Vucicovic, a follower of the SI's activities based in Prague:

> We are not an institutional *power* in society, and therefore our "exclusions" are only expressions of our own freedom to distinguish ourselves from the confusion surrounding us or among ourselves, which is much more similar to the existing institutional power in society, and enjoys every benefit of it. We never denied anyone the right to express his views or do what he wants (…) We simply refuse to be *mixed with it ourselves* against our own beliefs and tastes.[70]

conomic If this argument against confusion explained his view on exclusions within the internationals, he still often dramatically distanced himself from some people with whom he used to

69 "*La première déficience morale reste l'indulgence, sous toutes ses formes*" (209).

70 "*Nous ne sommes pas un* pouvoir *dans la société, et ainsi nos 'exclusions' ne signifient que notre propre liberté de nous distinguer du confusionnisme autour de nous ou même parmi nous, lequel est beaucoup plus près de ce pouvoir social existant, et en a tous les avantages. Nous n'avons jamais voulu empecher qui que ce soit d'exprimer ses idées ou de faire ce qu'il veut (...) Nous refusons seulement* d'y être mêlés nous-mêmes *contre nos convictions et nos goûts*" (699).

join hands, never indulging in a kind word for most of them after their exclusions (Isou in 1952, Ralph Rumney in 1958, Raoul Vaneigem in 1970, among others). Harsh with the members of the movements he was part of, and insulting or provoking people who were not and had never been accepted as member, Debord was particularly kind to two men have orbited around the two internationals when they were not actively part of it, and this throughout his life: Asger Jorn and Ivan Chtcheglov that we have just discussed above.

Jorn was a Danish painter that Debord met in Paris in 1954. In 1957 he will become a founding member of the Situtationist International, which he will nevertheless leave in 1961, yet while keeping good relations with Debord. Similarly, Chtcheglov was never a central member of the Letterist International, or the Situationist International, writing for them only a fistful of texts. Moreover, both were more involved in artistic pursuits than strictly political ones. I think that both Chtcheglov and Jorn ended up embodying for Debord the artistic roots, the avant-garde tradition of the two internationals. Although their views and approaches were different he never rejected them as they were not part of the “pure and hard little core” of which he felt he was in charge, only satellites and personal friends. As he gradually moves towards a more directly revolutionary approach, claming to aim at doing nothing less than changing the world, Debord's affection for Jorn and Chtcheglov has been constant. They are among the few persons whose photographs appear in the second volume of Debord's autobiography *Panégyrique* (1708; 1717-9) and illustrate the nostalgia for what Debord considered to be the simpler times of the early 1950s, when the Letterist International was essentially a group of friends interested in changing society in a poetical way. His personal relationship with Chtcheglov is particularly telling in that way as can be considered as an image of the fluctuation of Debord's ideas between the poetical madness of avant-garde movement and a desire for a more practical form of activism.

The lecture of these two recent books on Chtcheglov highlights that his personal relationship with Debord has been tumultuous due to Chtcheglov's mental instability, instability which however was added to a deep disagreement on how to proceed. The two men broke ties a first time in 1955 when Chtcheglov didn't agree with the political turn Debord's production, and by extension his movements, took. In a 1954 text Chtcheglov explains the break-up in these terms:

> Guy [Debord] gave to the typists a sentence which had a catastrophic effect on [Chtcheglov]. 'What matters to us is the act of taking power.” Gilles Ivain [Chtcheglov's pseudonym], who had never thought about taking power, had no doubt about Guy's madness. (…) Exasperated by Debord's radical Left aggressivity, Gilles had brought to the exhibition his latest collage praising the japanese military police in the last war, in an attempt to call for anything else. To escape this quagmire, the only solution was to

break up.[71]

A second, more definitive rupture will happen in 1965, this time purely due to Chtcheglov's mental condition. Between the two dates (1955 and 1965), Debord will relentlessly try to reconcile with Chtcheglov who slowly slipped into madness. When Debord launched the Situationist International in 1958, he contacted his old friend and paid tribute to the “Formulary”. Chtcheglov refused flatly any connection with Debord and his new movement in a letter to one of his friends where he rejects the “Formulary” and the ideas defended by Debord as “foolishness of youth” (“*bêtises de jeunesse*” *in* Apostolidès & Donné 85). Chtcheglov will seek medical help for his mental condition a year later. Besides his contempt for Debord and what he represents as expressed in the 1958 letter, while he is institutionalised Debord and his wife Michèle Bernstein will be one of his few contacts with the outside world, and the more constant. In a letter written in 1963 to Chtcheglov, Debord promised that they will meet up soon and celebrate the tenth anniversary of the first *dérive* of 1953, underlining how that period during which nothing has been really written is important for Debord as a founding myth of his intellectual life. Debord's efforts to stay in touch with Chtcheglov also undermines the narrative of Debord as a entirely practical figure. This correspondance between Chtcheglov and Debord shows that even if Debord became more practical and political in his views, including the ones on urbanism, he was still “in touch” with the poetical spirit and madness of the early years of his intellectual life.

Therefore, if we come back to the evolution of the concept of “*psychogéographie*”, we can outline two orientations which cohabit in the term based on what opposes Chtcheglov and Debord. The first one is a strictly poetical one embodied by Chtcheglov and his 1953 “Formulary”, a first tendency which symbolises the first years of the Letterist International and whose manifestos are, as said above, only here to manifest themselves, not to bring forth practical solutions but to offer a global critique in a festive way. Hence the psychogeographical idea transpiring in Chtcheglov's influential text and in the first years of the LI is more focused on the “psycho-” part of the term. It notably conveys this idea by using a flamboyant style and literary and mystical elements, with references to Victor Hugo and Alexandre Dumas, but also Greek mythology with Ariadne and the Minotaur's labyrinth. As displayed in the “Formulary”, and even if the term does not appear, the approach of the notion of “*psychogéographie*” by the LI in its early years is akin to a form of

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71 “*Guy avait donné aux typographes une phrase qui lui fit un effet catastrophique : “Ce qui nous importe, c'est la prise du pouvoir.” Gilles Ivain, qui n'avait jamais songé à prendre le pouvoir, ne douta pas de la folie de Guy. (...) Exaspéré par l'agressivité d'extrême gauche de Guy, Gilles avait apporté son dernier collage, à l'éloge de la police militaire japonaise de la dernière guerre, comme un appel à n'importe quoi d'autre. Pour ce sortir de cet engrenage, il n'y avait que la rupture*” (Apostolidès & Donné, *Ivan Chtcheglove: Profil perdu* 70).

poetical utopia, similar to the kind of discourse we find in Rem Koolhaas' articles, and especially "Junkspace". Programmatically less practical than visionary, this first tendency aims at creating new poetical images as a way to thwart what Chtcheglov wrote his formulary against: the overwhelming boredom supported by artificial lighting, air conditioning and Le Corbusier-style architecture.

> A Le Corbusier model is the only image that arouses in me the idea of immediate suicide. He is destroying the last remnants of joy. And of love, passion, freedom. (…) Darkness and obscurity are banished by artificial lighting, and the seasons by air conditioning. Night and summer are losing their charm and dawn is disappearing. The urban population think they have escaped from cosmic reality, but there is no corresponding expansion of their dream life. The reason is clear: dreams spring from reality and are realized in it.[72] (Chtcheglov, "Formulary")

Alongside this visionary logic comprised in the term "*psychogéographie*" and embodied by Chtcheglov, another, more practical one will emerge, more concerned with "-geography", once the Letterist International has been replaced by the Situationist International in 1957. Founded by the programmatic "*Rapport sur la construction des situations*" ("Report on the Construction of Situations"), the tone adopted by Debord in the years of the SI will favour military expressions, using the traditional vocabulary of class struggle and talking about battlegrounds and the bourgeois enemy:

> It is also linked to the recognition of the fact that a battle of leisure is taking place before our eyes, a battle whose importance in the class struggle has not been sufficiently analyzed. So far, the ruling class has succeeded in using the leisure the revolutionary proletariat wrested from it by developing a vast industrial sector of leisure activities that is an incomparable instrument for stupefying the proletariat with by-products of mystifying ideology and bourgeois tastes.[73] (Debord "Report")

The difference in terms of style between the two periods is striking, and this change will also apply to the notion of "*psychogéographie*" which will be described as a tool or a weapon in this battle, not just a festive and utopian way of experiencing and criticising the urban environment but a more methodical approach to the city. Still in what can be considered to be the manifesto of the situationist movement, the "Report", and with a definition borrowed from the 1955 "Introduction to

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73 "*C'est également lié à la reconnaissance du fait que se livre sous nos yeux une bataille des loisirs, dont l'importance dans la lutte des classes n'a pas été suffisamment analysée. À ce jour, la classe dominante réussit à se servir des loisirs que le prolétariat révolutionnaire lui a arrachés, en développant un vaste secteur industriel des loisirs qui est un incomparable instrument d'abrutissement du prolétariat par des sous-produits de l'idéologie mystificatrice et des goûts de la bourgeoisie*" (Debord, *Oeuvres* 324).

a Critique of Urban Geography":

> Psychogeographical research, "the study of the exact laws and specific effects of geographical environments, whether consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals," thus takes on a double meaning: active observation of present-day urban agglomerations and development of hypotheses on the structure of a situationist city. The progress of psychogeography depends to a great extent on the statistical extension of its methods of observation, but above all on experimentation by means of concrete interventions in urbanism. Before this stage is attained we cannot be certain of the objective truth of our initial psychogeographical findings. But even if those findings should turn out to be false, they would still be false solutions to what is nevertheless a real problem[74]. (Debord, "Report)

If we see that Debord has not entirely moved away from a certain love for provocation and carelessness with this last sentence, the use of "*psychogéographie*" has clearly changed and unlike in Chtcheglov and its visionary approach, the concept has now to result in a practice which would lead to "concrete interventions in urbanism". Not opposite or contradictory to the visionary and mystical approach, here is the second tendency contained in the term "*psychogéographie*" as developed by Debord: A practical one, a method which will create data, data which will in its turn help reshaping space. During his whole intellectual life Debord put the accent on the necessity of a practice to give flesh, actuality to concepts, and he didn't display much love for theory. For instance, in "Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography", he "détourned" venomously André Breton's famous maxim, "The imaginary is that which tends to become real", to "That which tends to remain unreal is empty babble", empty babble on which are based, according to him, "various farcical literary revolution"[75] *(see* Debord "Introduction"). This call for concrete works based on psychogeography will only intensify with the SI. However, despite rejecting such "literary

74 "*La recherche psychogéographique, 'étude des lois exactes et des effets précis du milieu géographique, consciemment aménagé ou non, agissant directement sur le comportement affectif des individus', prend donc ainsi son double sens d'observation active des agglomérations urbaines d'aujourd'hui, et d'établissement des hypothèses sur la structure d'une ville situationniste. Le progrès de la psychogéographie dépend assez largement de l'extension statistique de ses méthodes d'observation, mais principalement de l'expérimentation par des interventions concrètes dans l'urbanisme. Jusqu'à ce stade on ne peut être assuré de la vérité objective des premières données psychogéographiques. Mais quand bien même ces données seraient fausses, elles seraient assurément les fausses solutions d'un vrai problème*" (Debord, *Oeuvres* 323-4).

75 "'*L'imaginaire est ce qui tend à devenir réel', a pu écrire un auteur dont, en raison de son inconduite notoire sur le plan de l'esprit, j'ai depuis oublié le nom. Une telle affirmation, par ce qu'elle a d'involontairement restrictif, peut servir de pierre de touche, et faire justice de quelques parodies de révolution littéraire : ce qui tend à rester irréel, c'est le bavardage*" (209).

revolution" and calling for a more practical application of "*psychogéographie*", psychogeographical works in the years of both the Letterist and the Situationist Internationals are but few, and especially works coming from the kind of methodological investigation Debord was calling for in the 1957 "Report". Instead, ironically if we consider the more political turn taken by Debord and the movements he led, all psychogeographical works produced by the LI and SI will be of a primarily aesthetic or poetical nature, and amount to a single collective exhibition of members of the LI. A collective exhibition of visual works but no texts, and even less buildings or cities.

In association with Danish painter Asger Jorn, Debord created five psychogeographical lithographies representing a fragmented map of Paris. Those maps were showcased in Brussels in February 1957 in this collective exhibition by what was still the LI called *"Première exposition de psychogéographie*" ("First Exhibition of Psychogeography"). They would later be compiled under the title "*Guide Psychogéographique de Paris*". These five lithographies were maps of a fragmented Paris based on the different atmospheres felt by the psychogeographers. With the help of thick or thin arrows passing from one fragment, one area to another, they wished to show the main axes followed by someone who is practising a *dérive* ("drift"), to display clearly on a map what were the different units and favoured paths created by urban planning in the French capital. This idea of invisible nodes in the city, of an invisible grid that somehow imperceptibly guide by its influence the passer-by will become later a central part of the mythology of the psychogeographical British revival by merging with local interest for ley lines.

Those five works are the only form of psychogeographical practice Debord and other situationists left us. In 1959, he wrote an article that stayed unpublished until the French edition of his complete works entitled: "*Écologie, psychogéographie et transformation du milieu urbain*" ("Ecology, psychogeography and transformation of human milieu"; Debord, *Oeuvres* 457-62). This article happened after the dissolution of the Letterist International and the concomitant founding of the Situationist International in July 1957. Being thus labelled as "situationist", this article appears to be more practical and less poetical than the early letterist texts on "*psychogéographie*" we have been discussing above. In this article, "*psychogéographie*" is intimately connected to the experience of the *dérive*, which is defined in "Théorie de la dérive", in *Les Lèvres nues* n°9, November 1956, as: "*une technique du passage hâtif à travers des ambiances variées*." ("a technique of quick passage through diverse ambiances"; 251). According to Debord in 1959, "*psychogéographie*" is an aspect of the life of someone practising the *dérive*:

> The reality of psychogeography itself, its connection with practical truth, is more uncertain [than the reality of the *dérive*]. It is one of the points of view on reality (on the new realities of life in urban civilisation, more precisely). Yet, we are no longer in the

> era of interpretative points of view. Can psychogeography shape itself into a scientific discipline? Or most realistically into an objective method of observing-transforming the urban environment? Until psychogeography is outshone by an experimental attitude more complex—more adapted—, we have to work with the formulation of this hypothesis which has a major role to play in the dialectic between environment and behaviour.[76]

If it was not too clear in "Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography", here psychogeography is described as an example of this tension in the situationist theory between playfulness and seriousness, an imperfect tool which should give way to concrete urban transformations while staying a part of the "*jeu-sérieux situationiste*" ("situationist game-seriousness", 457), an aspect of the "*comportement ludique-constructif*" ("playful-constructive behaviour", 251). That articulation through hyphenation of playfulness and seriousness mirrors perfectly the two tendencies at the heart of the concept of "*psychogéographie*" we previously outlined. The playful "psycho-*geography*" is the one suggested in Chtcheglov's poetical "Formulary" and inspired by the festive early years of the LI. The serious "*psycho*-geography" is the one that Debord tried to root in a practice, a strict method, in order to fight and reclaim territory from what he perceived as the bourgeoisie. The two tendencies containes in "*psychogéographie*" does not have to be opposed as they ultimately share the same goal, namely transforming the city and go beyond the functionalism of modern architecture. However, it is interesting to note that the serious "*psychogéographie*" supported by Debord failed to produce anything concrete, while the playful "*psychogéographie*" did influence later appropriations of the term, as we will see in the British context.

After this 1959 article which clearly called for transforming "*psychogéographie*" into a properconomic "scientific discipline", Debord did not write on psychogeography, or only obliquely and chronologically at the end of his life, when he produced essays to help reconstitute the history of the movements to which he belonged. The most striking illustration of the lack of interest for this concept as the years passed is that psychogeography is not mentioned in his *magnus opus*, *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967). What's more, a passage from the short movie *Critique de la séparation* (1961) sounds like a renunciation of catching the spirit of a city through personal

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76 "*La réalité de la psychogéographie elle-même, sa correspondance avec la vérité pratique, est plus incertaine. C'est un des points de vue de la réalité (précisément des réalités nouvelles de la vie dans la civilisation urbaine). Mais nous avons passé l'époque des points de vue interprétatifs. La psychogéographie peut-elle se constituer en discipline scientifique ? Ou plus vraisemblablement en méthode objective d'observation-transformation du milieu urbain ? Jusqu'à ce que la psychogéographie soit dépassée par une attitude expérimentale plus complexe – mieux adaptée –, nous devons compter avec la formulation de cette hypothèse qui tient une place nécessaire dans la dialectique décor-comportement*" (458).

experience, and hence anunciates the rejection of the idea of psychogeography: "The sectors of a city are, to a certain extent, readable. But the meaning they had for us, on a personal level, is non-transmissible, like all the clandestinity of private life, on which we can only get derisory documents."[77]

Failing to produce anything besides five lithographies and short texts (*see* for instance "*Essai de description psychogéographique des Halles*" by Abdelhafid Khatib; Debord, *Oeuvres* 984) even when he wanted it to become a revolutionary method that would help create new kinds of cities, psychogeography disappeared completely from his writings and the list of ideas developed by the situationist movement. Aware of that failure, Debord will claim, defiantly of course, in an introduction for late Asger Jorn's *Jardin d'Albisola* book (1974), written shortly after the dissolution of the SI in 1972 and entitled "*De l'architecture sauvage*" ("Of wild architecture"): "As we know the situationists, to start with, wanted nothing less than building cities, an environment which would match the unlimited deployment of new passions. Naturally, it was not so easy; so much so that we found ourselves required to do much more."[78]

If the fast-fuse idea of psychogeography was not theoretically developed further by Debord after the 1959 article (which itself remained unpublished until the edition of Debord's *Oeuvres* in 2006), it was brought back to life in recent years, not so much in France than in England. Interestingly, the relationship between psychogeography and the United Kingdom (and more precisely the city of London) is much older than the 1990s revival. If Paris was the psychogeographical city by default (since it was home to the members of the LI), the second city which was considered as a territory fit to be explored following psychogeographical principles was London. However, much like explorations of Paris didn't result in the sum of works Debord was calling for, the relationship between psychogeography and the capital of the United Kingdom was, in the 1950s, a series of missed opportunity. The first mention of a link between London and the psychogeography of the Letterist International is an article in the 23rd issue of the journal *Potlatch*, dated 13th October 1955, in which the LI stands against the destruction of the Chinese quarter of London, arguing that it would be "inconvenient that this Chinese quarter of London should be destroyed before we have the opportunity to visit it and carry out certain psychogeographical experiments we are at present

77 "*Les secteurs d'une ville sont, à un certain niveau, lisibles. Mais le sens qu'ils ont eu pour nous, personnellement, est intransmissible, comme toute cette clandestinité de la vie privée, sur laquelle on ne possède jamais que des documents dérisoires*" (546).

78 "*On sait que les situationnistes, pour commencer, voulaient au moins construire des villes, l'environnement qui conviendrait au déploiement illimité de passions nouvelles. Mais naturellement ce n'était pas facile ; de sorte que nous nous sommes trouvés obligés de faire beaucoup plus*" (Debord, *Oeuvres* 1193).

undertaking" (Le Bail 122).

Another element which indicates an early connection between London and psychogeography in the years of the LI is a text entitled *"Annonce d'un congrès provisoire pour la fragmentation psychogéographique de l'agglomération londonienne*" ("Advertisement for an Ephemeral Congress on the Psychogeographical Fragmentation of the London Urban Area"). This ad, the edition of Debord's complete works tells us, was probably written in December 1956 and had also been translated into English but was never published. It calls for the organisation of a one-month seminar in London, a seminar whose purpose would be to divide the city based on the atmospheres of its different areas then subvert these atmospheres to bring an element of uncertainty in the everyday social and emotional organisation of the city[79], following the spirit of disruption dear to avant-gardes and radical political movements alike. The month for that congress was supposed to be August 1957, but the date was postponed to April 1958, and eventually the project was abandoned.

If a psychogeographical investigation of London never happened, at some point in 1957, most probably during the Brussels "First Exhibition of Psychogeography" in February of that year, the London Psychogeographical Association (LPA) was created. In July 1957 it is absorbed into the Situationist International as one of his founding organisations, alongside the Letterist International and the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus. The LPA was apparently single-handedly established by British painter Ralph Rumney, and his only member was Rumney himself. The relationship of Rumney with Debord and the story of that first incarnation of the LPA is a perfect illustration of how psychogeography did not manage to produce anything palpable in the 1950s, and provides another example of that series of missed opportunities between psychogeography and London.

As leader and only official member of the London Psychogeographical Association (*Comité psychogéographique de Londres* in French), Rumney was effectively at the head of the only purely psychogeographical group at the time. The British addition to the newly-founded Situationist International was primarily considered to be of psychogeographical nature, as indicated in a letter written by Debord in August 1957, one month after the foundation of the SI, in which he shares is concerned about the segmentation of activities and interests within the movement based on nationality, with Italian members solely focused on architecture or British ones solely focused on

79 "*Son utilité résidera principalement dans l'étude des effets, sur un grand centre urbain moderne, d'une série rapide et soutenue de chocs, calculés pour introduire, pendant une période limitée à un mois, un élément d'incertitude dans l'organisation sociale et affective normale de la ville. Nous reconnaissons qu'une agglomération urbaine de l'ampleur de Londres ne représente rien psychogéographiquement. Il importe tout d'abord de la diviser en plusieurs zones nettements définies*" (274).

psychogeography[80]. Probably realising that psychogeography had so far not been as revolutionary in its practice as he was starting to want it to be, and since he was entering a new, more serious phase with the creation of the Situationist International, Debord asked Rumney to provide a psychogeographical review of the city of Venice. As Debord writes in a letter dated 18th November 1957 which lists the new European members of the SI to Mohammed Dahou, Rumney was living in Venice with his wife, Pegeen Guggenheim, one of the daughters of art collector Peggy Guggenheim, who had opened her museum in the Italian city five years before[81]. The project seemed to be on its way for Debord since he also lists a work entitled *Psychogeographical Venice* soon to be published in the 29th and last issue of *Potlatch* which was also circulated in November 1957.

The promised psychogeographical investigation never came from Rumney. In a letter dated 13th March 1958, addressed to Rumney and cosigned by Debord and Asger Jorn, the mood and tone has clearly become terser:

> Dear Ralph,
> We realise all of a sudden that we didn't get news from you for quite some time now, that you are still to produce any real work for us, and that, notwithstanding, you don't hesitate to claim your affiliation with the Situationist International when discussing your "pacified" exhibition in Milan.[82]

The two authors of the letter (Jorn and Debord) then threaten to cut Rumney from the SI if he doesn't provide the promised text before the end of March 1958. Rumney didn't respect this deadline, argued that his personal life was getting in the way of his work and was unsurprisingly dismissed by Debord in April of the same year, as stated in a letter to Italian painter Giuseppe Pinot Gallizio[83].

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80 "*Evidemment nous voulons une détermination précise des* domaines*, mais nous sommes opposés à une spécialisation individuelle. Il faut donc,* a fortiori*, prendre garde de ne pas tomber dans une sorte de spécialisation par nationalité (les Anglais s'occupant de psychogéographie, les Italiens d'architecture..., etc.) qui serait très peu commode, et pourrait en plus paraître ridicule*" (Debord, *Correspondance vol. 1* 21).

81 "*Un seul Anglais sûr, jusqu'à présent, les autres étant encore à un stade de sympathie très confuse. Encore le nôtre n'est-il plus à Londres. Cet hiver il opère à Venise dont il fait l'étude psychogéographique complète ; en outre il vit avec la fille de Peggy Guggenheim : Pegeen, que tu as dû connaître*" (Debord, *Correspondance vol. 1* 35).

82 "*Cher Ralph. Nous nous avisons soudain que nous n'avons pas de nouvelles de toi depuis assez longtemps ; que tu n'as encore fait aucun réel travail avec nous ; et que, cependant, tu n'hésites pas à faire mention de ta collaboration avec l'International situationniste à propos de ton exposition 'apaisée' de Milan*" (*Ibid.* 71).

83 "*Ralph Rumney a répondu gentiment que ses travaux ménagers, et ses ennuis avec Pegeen, l'empêchaient de collaborer effectivement avec nous mais qu'il espérait que, peut-être, plus tard, cela irait mieux. Par conséquent Rumney n'a plus rien de commun avec les situationnistes, et nous le notifierons officiellement dans notre revue*"

The London Psychogeographical Association thus faded out without producing anything, in the great psychogeographical tradition of the 1950s. A concept without much works to attest of its practice, a concept first created in the festive and careless years of the LI as a poetical reconsideration of urban environment, psychogeography did not survive the serious and more practical turn of the Situationist International. It entirely disappeared from the SI's production, symbolically replaced in Debord's works by *Le Jeu de la guerre*, a board game simulating the organisation of battles between two rival teams. As we have said above, the Letterist International wished to bring leisure to everybody and considered society has a board game whose rules had to be changed. *Le Jeu de la guerre*, Debord's pet project starting from the 1970s but already mentioned in a short text written in 1956 (*Oeuvres* 284) illustrates how the playfulness and avant-garde spirit of Debord's early life evolved along the way to a less poetical, more practical and organised attack on society, a military approach which was therefore not new in the two internationals but which gained importance.

Despite these initial failures of the concept and the negligence of Ralph Rumney, both psychogeography and the London Psychogeographical Association have been rediscovered and eventually reappeared in recent decades. In 1992 the LPA emerged again through short texts written by a fistful of British authors among which Fabian Tompsett, Stewart Home and Tom Vague were the most active (Coverley 129). That new avatar of the LPA, subtitles “East London Section”, produced a series of pamphlets and newsletters. Some scans of these texts can be found in the online database of Mayday Rooms[84], a London-based archive whose homepage describes as “an active repository, resource and safe haven for social movements, experimental and marginal cultures and their histories”. (For the written content of these pamphlets, *see* “London Psychogeographical Association (1992)” in the bibliography at the end of this thesis.)

Even if they surely came to know psychogeography through the more famous Situationist International, the spirit and tone of the new LPA was closer to the texts produced in the early years of the Letterist International than to the texts produced by the Situationist International, more poetical than practical. These pamphlets and newsletters from the most recent incarnation of the LPA revived the general pranksterism that characterised the Letterist International of the period during which the movement published the bulletin *Potlatch*, what Coverley calls the “the tone of straight-faced irony” of the early years of Debord's intellectual life (Coverley 129). To announce the return of the association, the 1992 LPA declared, “After thirty five glorious years of non-existence, the London Psychogeographical Association is well and truly back”, a revival which the author(s)

(*Ibid.* 80)

84 31 October 2016. <http://maydayrooms.org/archives/the-london-psychogeographical-association/>

explained was due to “the increasing decay in British culture, and indeed of the British ruling elite”, which made the revival “an historical inevitability”. Immodest turns of phrase which reminds us of the first years of the LI, when it was still strongly following the tradition of general defiance of historical avant-gardes.

Following this idea, one of the most important difference with the Letterist International is that the 1992 LPA doesn't seem to relate much to Debord but rather to the avant-garde and artistic aspect of Letterism. Far from Debord's interest in political revolution and strategical ways to transform society perceived as a battleground more acutely expressed after the founding of the SI in 1957, the 1992 LPA displayed a great inclination towards esotericism and more generally anything which sounds cryptic and secret, with a special interest for alignments of buildings according to ley lines. Even if clearly progressive in spirit rather than conservative, like any avant-garde, the 1992 LPA had no explicit political pretension, which can be considered as some kind of “regression” for the concept of psychogeography as conceived by Debord. Starting as a provocation or a poetical game and then failing to produce much besides becoming serious and political, the concept reappeared in London as its first avatar, a poetical game, and a provocation. That trajectory of Debord's concept goes along the relation between Marxism and most avant-gardes in Western Europe: From artistic revolution, to universal revolution, to artistic disbelief in revolution. Or, from the individual, to the universal, and back to the individual—a movement of renunciation of the political revolution that, alongside Fredric Jameson, I connect to Post-Marxism (*see* Jameson, *Postmodernism* 61).

We have to keep in mind that, even as an oscillating *jeu-sérieux*, Debord's idea of psychogeography was fuelled by the hope of a sea change in society, and was therefore increasingly considered to be a potential political tool as the years passed. Literature as an aesthetic form had nothing to do with it, since aesthetics as a whole had to be destroyed. The psychogeographical British revival, to which the authors of our primary corpus are associated, has on the contrary mostly taken a literary forms, influenced by local authors which gave symbolical roots to the migration of the concept of psychogeography, namely through William Blake and Thomas De Quincey who are considered in many works by British authors to be the precursors of that literary psychogeography (*see* the chronology of Coverley's *Psychogeography*). Debord discarded after some point subjective experience and expression on the city as not leading to the construction of a new environment while British authors embrace this personal input through literature.

More focused on aesthetics, the British revival is clearly more influenced by the programmatic-cum-poetic essay “Formulary for a New Urbanism” by Ivan Chtcheglov. Interestingly, Chtcheglov's style is much closer to Sinclair's historical approach than Debord's is:

> All cities are geological; you cannot take three steps without encountering ghosts

> bearing all the prestige of their legends. We move within a *closed* landscape whose landmarks constantly draw us toward the past. Certain *shifting* angles, certain *receding* perspectives, allow us to glimpse original conceptions of space, but this vision remains fragmentary. It must be sought in the magical locales of fairy tales and surrealist writings: castles, endless walls, little forgotten bars, mammoth caverns, casino mirrors.

A description of the city as a multi-layered "closed landscape" filled with ghosts and legends which can be favourably compared to a passage in Sinclair's lecture on the London of William Blake where he opposes the past organisation of the city to what he considered to be a destructive urbanism unfolding in London today:

> So the whole map of energy was different. And acoustically it was different too, each of these churches made particular noises, bells were rung competitively. And the smells would also have located you, the meat, the dung, the sweat. The crafts associated with certain streets and courts. That's gone. We don't have that way of reading things anymore. The pushing through of the railways, the cutting of canals, the construction of virtual cities, all of this affects and remakes the topography of London. But you can get back. Time comes in layers, it's plural, where place is singular. You can get back to De Quincey. You can go back to Blake. You can go back to Blake meditating on The Pilgrim's Progress. (Sinclair, *Blake's London* loc. 362)

Chtcheglov and Sinclair's styles share different features, namely flash images and a certain sense of urgency. It has to be noted however that Chtcheglov and other letterists didn't give the past any value and called for its destruction, which is not the case for Sinclair and other British authors that can be labelled as psychogeographers (Self, Papadimitriou, Keiller, Wright). They collectively think that "landmarks constantly draw us toward the past", but in a positive way. Sinclair's work is (literally) criss-crossed by the metaphor of an untangible energy is the city, particulary expressed through ley lines—invisible lines of power that we can find in the substrata of London's structure. In *London Orbital*, the walk he performs then reports around London M25 in the months preceding the year 2000 is described as "a way of winding the clock back" (Sinclair, *London Orbital* 69). His whole poetic is turned towards the past, unveiling the remaining connections it still has with the present and how it influences it.

As a British author with a taste for the margins and the past layers of the London fabric, Sinclair's way of writing the city has but little connection with the original conceptualisation of psychogeography and its evolution in the 1950s. It is because the original meaning of the term "psychogeography" has been modified by passing through the 1992 LPA that Sinclair and other authors can now easily fit the category "psychogeography" since they share with it a certain

mystical, or at least mental approach to urban mysteries, especially a keen interest for the influence a city can have on an individual, especially based on its past. In the introduction to *London: City of Disappearances*, a collection of texts from different authors on London, Sinclair writes: “Heritage replaces the memories which should be passed on, anecdotally, affectionately, from generation to generation, by word of mouth.” (2) By opposing the notion of constructed and institutionally enforced national heritage with the passing of memories “by word of mouth”, Sinclair suggests that the “spirit of London” is multiple and has to be considered as such.

This call for local stories, legends, passed on “anecdotally, affectionately” alongside the dominant narrative of a place mirrors the tension at the heart of the centre-periphery dichotomy and the importance given to fiction, “soft writings”, subjectivity in the description of today's urban reality we respectively discussed in the first and second chapter of this thesis. But more importantly to this chapter, it gives a new definition to the term “psychogeography”, a definition in which the “psyche” influenced by geography is not the mind of an individual but the spirit of a place, a geographical soul which endures thanks to historical buildings and figures.

Debord and the letterists then situationists put the root of the influence a city has on its inhabitants on modern urban planning, which had been subverted then controlled. The British revival puts it partially on modern architecture too, this time symbolised by the Thatcher years and not Haussmann, but also to the idea of consecutive layers which have been settled throughout the history of a given place. This metaphor of a city's energy and spirit built over time is supported by the idea of ley lines, these supposed lines of force that orientate a city's energy the same way chakras are supposed to work in the human body. Sinclair's most famous theory has to do with the alignment of the churches built by architect Nicholas Hawksmoor in London. According to this theory whose case was first made in 1975 *Lud Heat*, the unusual design of the churches and their location in London indicate occult practices and a connection with paganism. The fact that Hawksmoor was a freemason helped building the metaphor of a secret, wilder London, whose geography has a psyche of its own. This theory will later reappeared in Peter Ackroyd's novel *Hawksmoor* (1985) and Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell's graphic novel *From Hell* (1989), two popular works that have had widespread audience. Ackroyd and Moore, probably at a higher degree due to their fame, participated in the diffusion of that new version of what would become psychogeography on the other side of the Channel. The two of them, if they did not trigger the British revival, are without a doubt its most totemic figures and other writings that claim to be psychogeographical—such as British Sam Miller's *Delhi* or the graphic novel *The Barn Owl's Wondrous Capers* by Indian author Sarnath Banerjee—take them as references.

However, neither Sinclair, Ackroyd nor Moore notably used the term “psychogeography” in their

works, so how did the connection was established between this transparent yet vague word and this conception of a city's energy, spirit which is influenced by its past? This connection is due to the dissemination of ideas related to the situationists in marginal circles. In that aspect, Sinclair is truly a bridge between the underground of the 1992 LPA and the contemporary evolutions of the term "psychogeography" in the 21st century. Sinclair has been living in Hackney, East London, for decades and has ceaselessly been frequenting countercultural circles and individuals who were involved in the 1992 LPA, most notably Stewart Home who appears repeatedly in *Hackney*. On such marginal circles, the figure of Home and their connection with situationist ideas, Sinclair writes: "Situationism would be back, customized by Stewart Home, rebranded as 'Psychogeography' (…) Situationismlite migrated to shops in Hoxton: handmade artists' books, re-mappings, found objects. Impresarios of punk plotted their Xeroxed hustles and scams." (Sinclair, *Hackney* 115). A quote which illustrates how "situationism" and the term "psychogeography" interacted and hybridised in the UK with other countercultural currents like the punk movement, assuring their survival; a survival which might have less to do with theoretical definitions of both terms ("situationism" and "psychogeography") in the 1950s than with the aura of the SI in revolutionary circles and the readability, transparency and plasticity of the words themselves. Similarly, at the start of Will Self's *Psychogeography*, a collection of articles on urban space, the author talks about his "particular brand of psychogeography" (loc. 87). In a way Debord and the two internationals did not create a rigid dogma but did create "brands"—terms which can be understood by a given community and reappropriated to associate itself with a certain genealogy.

Interestingly for this chapter and the idea of a dissemination of situationist theory, a passage in his book *Hackney* reveals that he already knew about Debord's movement back in 1969 (*Hackney* 156), therefore before the widespread circulation of their ideas or any published English translation of Debord's most famous work *The Society of the Spectacle* (according to its website the British library has a copy of an English translation of the *Society* but dating from 1970, and published in Detroit, USA). Debord and the two internationals he led had some contacts in England, as we have seen, but the ties were far from being close and did not result in any significative collaboration. Without even considering the impact of Ralph Rumney, whose role was anecdotal (which is here not a bad thing—as we have seen he is mentioned in the first text of the 1992 LPA), this early knowledge of the situationist movement in London alternative groups most probably came from the aura the SI got from its involvement in the May 1968 events. However, if we consider that the reception of the French movements in London was more artistic, literary and cultural than political, I also think that this early crossing can also be safely related to the figure of Alexander Trocchi.

A Scottish writer, Trocchi moved to Paris at the turn of the 1950s to found the literary magazine

Merlin which will be published between 1952 and 1954. The magazine will retrospectively gain fame by publishing authors who will become figureheads of the counterculture, like Henry Miller, Samuel Beckett and Pablo Neruda, but also Jean-Paul Sartre. In 1955, Trocchi quit *Merlin* and joined the Letterist International as a distant, unofficial British member, to borrow the expression of Alice Debord (born Becker-Ho) in her edition of her late husband letters (*Correspondance vol. 1* 19). Trocchi was also one of the few English-speaking native of the LI and SI, and therefore was asked by Debord to provide many translations into English of situationist texts, as shown in various letters (*see Correspondance vol. 2* 227). Since I couldn't find texts translated by Trocchi my guess is that he must have followed Ralph Rumney's path of inaction. As his letters and some articles published in *Potlatch* reveal, Debord will be following Trocchi's tumultuous life in the 1950s, gave him his support on various occasions (*Correspondance vol. 1* 29-30; Le Brail 124), but also asked him for money in 1963 (*Correspondance vol. 2* 228), which indicates that the two men had good relations with one another. Eventually Trocchi was officially excluded from the Situationist International in October 1964 due to the orientation of his work towards the cultural and the launch of his own magazine-poster *Moving Times.*

At the time, the SI had already moved towards an approach closer to direct action, which would eventually lead to their role in the student then social revolts of May 1968 in Paris. Trocchi, on the other hand, was back in London following a line towards universal revolution based on cultural and artistical changes, akin to the one traditionally linked to the European avant-gardes. As it is quoted in David Ashford *London Underground*, Trocchi thought that revolution could only be reached by personal understanding, personal change in perception, instead of by a frontal attack on the so-called "system". He explained his view on how to effectively perform change in a 1958 article entitled "Invisible Insurrection of a Million Minds" as follows:

> It is rather a question of perceiving clearly and without prejudice what are the forces that are at work in the world and out of whose interaction tomorrow *must* come to be; and then, calmly, without indignation, by a kind of mental ju-jitstu that is ours by virtue of intelligence, of modifying, correcting, polluting, deflecting, corrupting, eroding, outflanking … inspiring what we might call *the invisible insurrection*. (quoted in Ashford 145).

This oblique approach towards change, an approach more focused on small changes in the everyday life, creating smaller situations, was considered by Debord to go against the new orientation of the SI. When, following this line, Trocchi will create the *Project Sigma* which focused on revolution through arts, Debord will announce that this new form of action by Trocchi was not in line with the SI. In 1966 he will explain that the SI could "not involve itself in such a loose cultural venture"

even if it "fully approved certain aspects" of it (*Ibid*. 146).

To be fair, and unlike what Ashford implies by opposing the two[85], it has to be noted that the rupture between Trocchi and Debord in 1964 was mutual and friendly. First of all, Ashford, quoting the translation by Ken Knabb of the 10th issue of the bulletin *L'International situationniste* (edited by Debord and signed by other members of the SI), writes that the SI considered Trocchi's *Project Sigma* to be a "loose" cultural venture. I would argue that this is a mistranslation as the original French refers to it as "*une entreprise de recherche culturelle si ouverte*" (*see* "Internationale Situationniste 10"). The adjective "*ouvert(e)*" ("open") is rather neutral and I wouldn't gauge it as being as harsh as English "loose", implying instead that Trocchi's "cultural venture" was simply too broad, too open for the SI. Moreover, the SI wished all the best to Trocchi's venture and as it is shown in the "dismissal" letter from Debord to Trocchi dated 14th October 1964, Debord hoped for future collaboration with Trocchi (*Correspondance vol. 2* 299-300). In a letter posted on 17th November 1964 Debord renewed his friendship towards Trocchi despite the fact that their approaches had changed, Trocchi being too interested in form and art for Debord and other situationists[86].

Although Debord didn't violently dismiss Trocchi and seemed to have hope to maintain their friendship, the rejection of what was considered to be a "cultural venture" interested in formalism is another illustration of the evolution of the Letterist then Situationist internationals, passing from an artistic avant-garde to a political movement which distanced itself from that early orientation, based on ever-radicalising principles and opposing symbolically the "Invisible Insurrection of a Million Minds" to the belief of the possibility of *le Grand soir*, a sudden and global uprising. In the context of the city, Trocchi through his *Project Sigma* placarded posters in the London Tube as a way to create new situations, to disrupt on a smaller scale the everyday, while Debord and the SI was calling for creating situationist cities based on unitarian urbanism, an urbanism which would create new atmospheres which would themselves help bring a change of mind in the majority:

> Our perspectives of action on the environment ultimately lead us to the notion of unitary urbanism. Unitary urbanism is defined first of all as the use of all arts and techniques as means contributing to the composition of a unified milieu. Such an interrelated ensemble must be envisaged as incomparably more far-reaching than the old

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85 "Debord was unable to stomach an organisation like *Project Sigma*, from whichconomic 'No one is excluded'" (Ashford, *London Underground* 146).

86 "*Pour l'ensemble du mouvement situationniste nous voulons réduire au strict minimum le jeu de la discipline formelle parce que* maintenant nous avons assez avancé dans les vrais problèmes pour nous autoriser cette liberté" (Debord, *Correspondance vol. 2* 309-10).

> domination of architecture over the traditional arts, or than the present sporadic application to anarchic urbanism of specialized technology or of scientific investigations such as ecology. Unitary urbanism must, for example, determine the acoustic environment as well as the distribution of different varieties of food and drink. It must include both the creation of new forms and the détournement of previous forms of architecture, urbanism, poetry and cinema. Integral art, which has been talked about so much, can be realized only at the level of urbanism[87]. (Debord "Report")

Trocchi wanted to insert new lines in the city text, Debord and other members of the SI (especially Dutch painter Constant Nieuwenhuys) wanted to rewrite everything according to a new language. This difference in terms of approach is what brought the two apart, even when they shared a common goal: The creation of new situations in the urban environment.

If the situationists never reached a level of influence where they could have built a situationist city, arguably not even trying to give form to the utopian idea of unitary urbanism, Trocchi's approach to the city survived in the United Kingdom and eventually, I believe, shaped how the term psychogeography will be understood by British authors of the 1990s. As Tom McDonough notes in his anthology of the Situationist International, both the concepts of "unitary urbanism" and "psychogeography", in the ways the Situationist International understood them, conveyed a desire for rational control over ever greater domains of life (McDonough xii). They were consequently thought as a tool for the SI to create new situations and should have therefore resulted in practical results. On the other hand, the more artistic and poetical approach of Chtcheglov or Trocchi endured and influenced British counterculture and the later revival of the notion of "psychogeography", which is notably more successful in terms of cultural influence than "*psychogéographie*" was. The main difference between the two might be their view on the notions of "rational" and "objectivity", two notions which have today lost ground to "fictional" and "subjectivity" when it comes to rendering urban space, as we have demonstrated in our second chapter.

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87 "*Nos perspectives d'action sur le décor aboutissent, dans leur dernier développement, à la conception d'un urbanisme unitaire. L'urbanisme unitaire se définit premièrement par l'emploi de l'ensemble des arts et des techniques, comme moyens concourant à une composition intégrale du milieu. Il faut envisager cet ensemble comme infiniment plus étendu que l'ancien régime de l'architecture sur les arts traditionnels, ou que l'actuelle application occasionnelle à l'urbanisme anarchique de techniques spécialisées, ou d'investigations scientifiques comme l'écologie. L'urbanisme unitaire devra dominer aussi bien, par exemple, le milieu sonore que la distribution des différentes variétés de boisson ou de nourriture. Il devra embrasser la création de formes nouvelles et le détournement des formes connues de l'architecture et de l'urbanisme – également le détournement de la poésie ou du cinéma anciens. L'art intégral, dont on a tant parlé, ne pouvait se réaliser qu'au niveau de l'urbanisme*" (Debord 322-3)

Coming back to different prisms and totemic figures the brand "psychogeography" went through in the UK: Trocchi appears in many of Sinclair's works, from *Lights Out for the Territory* (95, 158) to the more recent *Hackney* (129) and *London Overground* (35). Ivan Chtcheglov also had an unexpected afterlife in the counterculture across the Channel: his slogan "The hacienda must be built" written in the confidential "Formulary for a New Urbanism" surprisingly inspired the name of one of the temple of British counterculture in the 1980s, the Madchester-era club the Haçienda. This denotes that the avant-garde artistic spirit whose influence Debord tried to reduce in the transition between the Letterist International and the Situationist International survived and reappeared in the UK in an alliance, or an alloy, with other marginal currents which reappropriate for themselves ideas and terms which gained from the aura and prestige their source had gained. In the " Report on the Construction of Situations" of 1957 founding the SI, Debord and other signatories rejected the avant-garde spirit of the Letterist International because it was considered to be ineffective, understand producing nothing concrete at a time when they were calling for building cities, constructing situations. Ironically this ineffective, idealistic, poetical approach to the city embodied by Chtcheglov's "Formulary" and on which is based the new meaning of "psychogeography" as recuperated by British authors has effectively produced more works than the practical approach, and potentially more social change.

"Psychogeography could be adapted to forge a franchise", declared Iain Sinclair in an interview quoted in Baker (20), and it indeed did, as it became the title of Will Self's column in *The Independent* since 2003 (columns compiled in 2007) and, still semantically drifting from early definitions which were already vague, is now synonym with urban writings from a personal perspective. Needless to say that Debord would certainly not have been too happy with this recuperation of the term. Yet, he would have been forced to admit that this new definition and literary practice participate in the current mindframe on urban space in Western Europe (if not elsewhere) which now favours a decentralised perception of the city, a defence of characteristic and historical neighbourhoods, a subversion of affectless modern urbanism and a constant disruption of the everyday. As quoted above, Debord wrote in 1972 that because the situationists had not managed to build whole cities they had been required to do much more. I would consider this "much more" to be the lasting influence the LI then SI had on urban theory.

To conclude, the idea behind psychogeography underwent various transformations and unexpected evolutions. From Debord to Sinclair, the clock has turned. Debord was waiting for the great revolution to happen, he was looking forward and left art behind, believing that psychogeography, among other tools, could be a turn in the war against bourgeois culture and way

of life. As we have seen, Debord's relation to psychogeography went from enthusiasm to rejection, or as Coverley puts it:

> Psychogeography is merely one tool amongst many and one whose role was to become more oblique, as situationism moved away from the subversive practices of its unacknowledged forebears and towards the revolutionary politics with which it has since become associated. (Coverley 83)

Having nothing much to do with literature, if we take Debord's interpretation of his own concept, the basic definition of psychogeography as "the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals" has been taken over by a sizeable part of the British literary world. Psychogeography has become nowadays, even if still related to Debord due to a certain prestige sticking to his name, part of the British cultural background like it never was in France. The name and original idea might have been French, but today the idea and the practice are British, so much so that Merlin Coverley's *Psychogeography*, as we have said above, connects the concept of psychogeography to Defoe, Stevenson and other classic British writers, the "unacknowledged forebears" of "psychogeography", in an interesting exercise of re-appropriation. Acting as a boomerang, the brand "psychogeography" crossed the Channel again and got back its accent and mute "e" when Coverley's work was translated into French in 2011. According to the online catalogue of the *Bibliothèque nationale de France* (BNF), the French national library which receives a copy of each published book, all the books with "*psychogéographie*" in their titles were published from 2005 onwards, indicating that the term had to wait the British revival to be rediscovered in its original context.

"*Psychogeography* could set for itself the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals." The vagueness of this original definition of the concept by Debord in the "Introduction to a Critique of New Urbanism" (1955) gave the opportunity for the British authors of the 1990s to take over its meaning by evicting the political and revolutionary flavour Debord wanted it to have. They defined the term as the study of the influence the organisation of a city has on individuals, but with the addendum, and on itself in history, injecting both a spiritual dimension to the city based on its history and inhabitants. If the second definition goes further than the first by implying that the city is somehow its own inhabitant (an idea which we find in many books that present themselves as autobiography of London, most notably Ackroyd's simply put *London: An Autobiography*) it is because the brand "psychogeography" is malleable enough to be shaped to fit this new description as the word in itself is understandable by anybody familiar enough with the Greek roots of scientific

terms. Therefore, paradoxically helped by a vague definition, a transparent name but also, as explained in this chapter's introduction, the cultural prestige of French movements at the time which helped Debord and the May 1968 events reach fame in Western Europe, the idea of psychogeography left the French cultural territory to meet success on the other side of the Channel, under a less radical and practical disguise, mixing with local marginal movements and following the spirit of the time which is less inclined towards universal revolution and anything unitary (including urbanism) than towards individual change and plurality.

The story of the concept of psychogeography also outlines the evolution of avant-garde movements in Western Europe and through them, as I would argue, the evolution of dominant modes of thought, from the line to the network. Debord and the two international movements he led were radical, a radicality—a "rootedness" if we think about the Latin etymology *"radix*", "root"—which had to wait to blossom into something less rough, less hard-core, into various branches of the psychogeographical *Stammbaum*, each diluting, *compromising* the meaning of the root-idea, and yet keeping in their genomes some of its essence, allowing it to survive in the process. The evolution of the concept of psychogeography is in that way organic, as it is based, like most evolutions, on random encounters, adaptations and strange revivals. From the artistic avant-garde to failed political radicalism to literary and mystical realms to fashionable brand, "psychogeography", just like its practitioners, *a dérivé* ("drifted"), following potential ley lines in the megalopolis of the history of ideas.

Chapter 4: Flâneur and Stalker: From the urban type to the embodied writer.

The use of the term "psychogeography" to define urban writing is, as we have seen, only recent and still has to share the literary space of the city with a more successful and older notion: the flâneur. If "psychogeography" has been increasingly used in recent years thanks to the recuperation of the term in the London of the 1990s, the figure of the flâneur gained importance in 19th century France and did not lost it to this day. If the word itself dates as far back as 1585 (according to the *Trésor de la langue française informatisé*), it got its current meaning in the Paris of the mid-19th century when journalists used it to define what they considered to be a new urban type: a walker experiencing the post-Revolution, industrial and increasingly bourgeois and commercial Parisian inner-city. The flâneur as described in the mid-19th century is essentially a man who strolls aimlessly and idly at the centre of the city simply because he can, both witness and embodiment of the major evolutions his urban and social environment is undergoing at the time. Originally presented as a comical figure used in satirical papers, a new type of character of the open-air *commedia dell'arte* representation which took the modern street of the French capital as its stage, the notion of flâneur will take ground in the collective consciousness and, by passing through a series of different prisms, will become a cultural symbol and an household term to describe the experience of walking in a city.

This chapter will explore how the flâneur figure is nowadays being challenged by a new form of urban exploration and a new term, the "stalker". From its origins to Baudelaire and Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project*, we will first see how the 19th century caricature was turned into an important cultural notion thanks to a succession of recuperation which, like it was the case for "psychogeography" as we have demonstrated, take some and leave some of the original meaning to create a new archetype which will then, once that transformation completed, helped building a wide range of texts concerned with urbanity and walking. I shall use this introduction to notify my reader that in the following we will use a very strict definition of the term "flâneur". Since it has become a cultural archetype, probably thanks to Benjamin's influence on Cultural Studies and his monumental posthumous *Arcades Project*, the flâneur has been used in various contexts, including Women's Studies (*see* Trasforini; Nuvolati 38-41) and Queer Studies (*see* Chisholm), being even sometimes unrelated to the street or the city but in connection instead with social media and internet. If the flâneur has been re-appropriated in various studies using different angles, it has always been used to discuss the relationship between a public space and an individual moving through it. As we wish to study the sources and the evolution of the term, we will solely discuss the flâneur as an individual

moving through the city. As we are interested in studying the dominant understanding of a notion, here the "flâneur", we will not look into marginal rereadings. Our thesis is about the survivals of ideas and terms through time, and here this idea and term have been produced historically and socially by male writers for a male audience in a male-dominated context. Therefore all the texts we have selected and which discuss the flâneur have been written by men and talk about men. For convenience, I will use the pronoun "he" when I refer to the flâneur, not only to avoid the neutral "it" which would have rung wrong when talking about a person, but also because the masculine is used in French for flâneur, character and type, and finally because I believe it is important to use the masculine to transcribe the cultural context in which the notion and term have passed on and survived. As this thesis is concerned with literature, the flâneur will be concerned with literature. He will be a writer or a character defined in literature, and the documents he produced or by which he is produced, published texts. As this thesis is interested with non-fiction, we will mostly examine texts which present themselves as a part of this tradition, even though we will occasionally mention or quote from texts belonging to fiction as some writers, among which Balzac and Dickens, have navigated between these two poles of literature.

As we wish to write a chapter retracing the main evolutions of the flâneur, we will not dwell in this chapter on all the many masks the flâneur has taken in recent decades. Instead of an inventory, I will focus our study on the mainstream, the general understanding of the term from its source to the delta it has created today. From that delta, I will take one branch, namely how British writers have appropriated it and created a new model. Doing so, I will not only show how the notion made its way from the modernist city to present day's London but also how it is now rejected by a group of British writers which has replaced it by something else. In other words, while focussing on the "flâneur", this chapter will discuss how the practice and description of walking then writing the city has changed from idle strolling at the centre of modern Paris to purposeful "stalking" on the outskirts of London, a development motivated by the change of the urban environment of the Western European capitals but also by the evolution of our dominant modes of thought.

The term "flâneur" is accepted by the *Trésor de la langue française informatisé* (TLFI) and scholars alike (Nuvolati 1) to be taking its etymological root from the Old Norse verbe "*flana*", meaning "walking, rushing impetuously", a verb which will then pass to Norman and finally arrive to French in the first half of the 1800s as "*flâner*"—an act still relevant to the act of walking but which lost the idea of rushing in the course of its semantic drift. As we can see from examples picked up by the TLFI from Honoré de Balzac's work, the verb "*flâner*" is used in the 1830s to describe someone moving slowly and aimlessly in an environment, an act at the intersection of

musing, wasting time and wandering. (For convenience and because it is the very subject of this chapter, I will create and italicise the English verb "to flâner" in the personal translations from French you will find below so that my reader can easily locate the term without double-checking the French original.) The verb will unsurprisingly give way to a substantive, the "flâneur", a term we often connect to Balzac (rightfully so as we will see below) or to physiologies, a genre which presents itself as a study of new social mores and characters, a genre to which Walter Benjamin refers to in his *Arcades Project* as "panoramic literature".

Before discussing Balzac, the physiologies and Benjamin which are not exactly unknown figures or untreated genre, I would like to make a quick detour to shed some needed light on a work which has been surprisingly overlooked over the years even if it is one of the first mention of the flâneur in literature: Anaïs Bazin's *L'époque sans nom* (The Period without a Name). Subtitled *Esquisses de Paris (1830–1833)* (Sketches of Paris) and published in Paris in 1833, Bazin's text is rooted in the tumultuous times shortly after the 1830 revolution, a revolution which finally ended absolutism once and for all in France and changed in the process the French political regime into a short-lived parliamentary monarchy. This new type of monarchy in French history, called the July Monarchy thanks to the summer month during which the 1830 revolution started, was more liberal than the previous one and will eventually lead to the Second Republic in 1848. This is during the July Monarchy that the bourgeoisie will really thrive, a consequence of the industrial revolution and a more liberal regime which puts the sovereignty more on the people than on the king. Most famously, the official title for the king will no longer be "King of France" but "King of the French", a way to remind the sovereign that there is a people behind the king who now gets his power not from above but from below. These considerations about the king are relevant here because it has to do with public space. The July Monarchy symbolically turns the country of France into the property of the people and not the king, who becomes solely its supervisor. As a mirror to this new mindset which allow by extension the Parisian street to become a truly public space, Bazin's chapter on the flâneur, which comes at the end of the second volume of his work, starts with a reference to aconomic saying which had currency at the time: "*Ceci est à moi comme Paris est au roi*" (Bazin *Vol.2* —"It belongs to me like Paris belongs to the king"; Bazin *Vol.2* 295-6).

Against the idea that Paris and its streets belong to a king, Bazin argues that Paris belongs to those who enjoy its moving spectacle, its pavements and roads, its shops, monuments and other pleasures (296), which excludes the king who cannot fully enjoy the spectacle of the street (297). Working through elimination once the monarch is put aside as true sovereign of the French capital, Bazin rules out other contenders like the trader, the policeman, the foreigner, the tourist or the street kid, judging their case before rejecting their claim as new ruler of the pavements. Finally, he comes

to the conclusion that, “The only and authentic sovereign of Paris, I will name it for you: It is the flâneur.”[88] Then, as it will often be the case in works on the flâneur later on, the forgotten French author makes a difference between the usurpers of the title of “flâneur”, namely politicians and bourgeois who are merely doing nothing. In a reference to the time of publication which come only three years after an uprising during which a royal family got its title stolen by another, Bazin humorously associates royalty or aristocracy to flânerie, an association which will also endure in later works by Lacroix or Huart:

> Usurpation, under the name of progress, is hunting down all legitimacies like forgery, under the name of improvement, endlessly attacks patents of new inventions. The social dignity of the flâneur has not been more preserved from invaders than royal heredity […] Everyone wants, especially today, to put on the airs of this high position.[89]

If the bourgeois is idle, the flâneur is also defined by his idleness; yet Bazin marks a clear and rather arbitrary difference between the bourgeois and the flâneur, a gap which will always be hard to come to terms with for writers and critics alike. Whether it be in the physiologies, in Benjamin's *Arcades Project* or in commentaries on the London revival of the 1990s, the flâneur's position between bourgeoisie and the street and its archetypal common man has always been problematic. The solution to solve this issue and decide this social judgement is for some writers to say that if the flâneur is idle by essence, his eye however is active, his experience of the street is an act in itself. Bazin's trick to escape that paradox is to say that if the bourgeois, understand the traders and the politicans, can enjoy leisure and idleness and therefore stroll around Paris, they don't have the “*science*” (299), the knowledge to make this experience meaningful.

I would argue that this question of the problematic point of view of the flâneur comes from the time of its appearance in literature and the deep social transformations such era has seen. Before the French Revolution and still before the mid-19th century and the industrial revolution, the city street was barely shared by all kinds of social classes in the sense that even if a coach transporting a noble could cross a poor family or a small trader, there was such an absence of social mobility that the very idea of social classes was almost absent from the debate of ideas. The cities of the industrial revolution and the political change towards the elected rule of the bourgeois over the imposed rule of the noble are two sides of a same coin and these conditions have paved the way for the

88 “*Le seul, le véritable souverain de Paris, je vous le nommerai : c'est le flâneur*” (Bazin, *L'époque sans nom Vol. 2* 298).

89 “*L'usurpation, sous le nom de progrès, est à la piste de toutes les légitimités comme la contrefaçon, sous celui de perfectionnement , vient sans cesse harceler les brevets d'invention. La dignité sociale du flâneur n'a pas été plus à l'abri des envahisseurs que l'hérédité royale […] Chacun veut, aujourd'hui surtout, se donner les airs de cette haute position (299).*

consideration of social issues. The urban working-class appears and the urban middle-class becomes stronger, offering a fertile grounds for notions such as socialism, Marxism, materialism and more generally the idea of an equalitarian society. In that sense it is interesting to note that Marx and Engels, who were coming from families of traders and mostly survived on inheritances and unearned incomes, had both to go through cities, and most famously Paris and even more so London. In other terms, the environment of the European metropolises of the advent of the industrial revolution and liberal democracy allowed the emergence of a truly public space, a popular press and an actual social mobility from which one could deduce the possibility of a more equalitarian society. By extension, with this equalitarian vision came people who could criticise their own social background but also people who could navigate between different classes.

The fact that the flâneur is neither a bourgeois nor a worker, that he evolves in another paradigm which can't completely be encapsulated into the two categories "idleness" or "business", *otium* or *neg-otium*, makes him a medium between both but also a traitor to both, similar in that sense to the type of the artist or the intellectual whose positions are also considered to be problematic. If the artist and intellectual are often suspiciously looked at it is because one always wishes to place them in a social spectrum stretching from "idleness" and "business", a spectrum whose terms are based on an idea of productivity and utility which does not always fit with artistic and intellectual ambitions. Similar to these two types, the flâneur in the 19th century is also described as stuck and restrained in a time and environment entirely focused on social issues even though his practice is more often than not unconcerned with social change or, on the contrary, conservatism. However, I would argue that this is because his time was all about the possibility of social change and the emergence of public space and social mobility in the shape of the metropolitan street and practices that the flâneur was allowed to break through in the history of ideas as a type. In other words, the social conditions which are presenting him as a traitor between aristocracy and common people (the *badaud*, the *chaland*) are the same conditions that permitted his existence. If, to paraphrase Margaret Thatcher, the claim that there is no such thing as society can be debated, I suggest that there is no society aiming at equality without flâneurs. In other terms that an equalitarian society in spirit will create a public space, whether it be the street or some other environment, where conflicts between different classes can be expressed, where they can cohabit and social mobility be displayed, a public space which will in turn create flâneurs. Which one precedes the other, the flâneur or the public space, is a question akin to the one having to do with the chicken and the egg.

"I have depicted the Parisian bourgeois. Now, I want to show you the flâneur, and then I will rest"[90], wrote Bazin after listing all the usurpers, leading to a description of what makes a true

90 "*Je vous ai dépeint le bourgeois de Paris. Je veux vous montrer le flâneur, et je me reposerai*" (300).

flâneur. As I just said, the flâneur for Bazin is neither outside nor inside but in both, a touch of aristocracy or bourgeoisie for the luxury of a cosy interior and a touch of the common man for the enjoyment of the street, "for the best way to taste in tranquillity the pleasures of the outside is to never be persecuted by the fear of turning back home"[91]. Bazin makes a difference between the aristocratic side of the flâneur and the common man: the flâneur and the *badaud* are for him two species that should not be confused (303). However, the very fact that these two can be confused highlights the problematic position of the flâneur, neither aristocratic nor common, the true middle-class as it stands in the middle of the two heroic one, the knights of the past and the working-class heroes of 19th century socialism. Since he occupies a middle ground in the newly apparent social hierarchy, the flâneur has to carefully walk the streets and must stay informed if he plans to peacefully do so:

> Because it is only the attribute of a man entirely unconcerned by his well-being to venture on the streets, in a time like ours, without knowing beforehand in which state is the public spirit, to which distance we are from the riot, which physiognomy it is convenient to take on, which manners one has to adopt to walk by freely through different public sentiments; and also which neighbourhood it is good to avoid, and which company one has to stay away from in order to not be dragged in some trouble.[92]

Bazin's text is truly a seminal work because most, if not all, of the features of the flâneur are already present in it. In terms of social position, the flâneur is torn between the high and the low; in terms of environment for his walks, he has a preference for the boulevards where commodities, people and modernity are displayed (307); in terms of cities, he is strongly tied to Paris (308); in terms of age, he is not too young ("The youth run. To *flâner* demands maturity and mellowed senses"[93]); and finally in terms of whom he can be compared to in literature, he is not very different from the Western detective, a character which will appear and gain currency (311-2).

Bazin has no problem praising the flâneur's approach to urban space, its capacity to be part of two worlds, the high and the low, spectator and actor. However, like it will be the case in other descriptions or physiologies of and about the flâneur in the 19th century in France or in England, the

91 "*Car le meilleur moyen de goûter avec calme les plaisirs du dehors, c'est de ne jamais être poursuivi par la crainte de rentrer*" (302).

92 "*Car il n'appartient qu'à l'homme tout à fait insouciant du bien-être de s'aventurer dans la rue, par un temps comme le nôtre, sans savoir auparavant en quel état est l'esprit public, à quelle distance on est de l'émeute, quelle physionomie il convient de prendre, quel maintien il faut adopter pour passer tranquillement son chemin à travers les opinions; quel quartier encore il est bon d'éviter, et de quelles rencontres on doit se tenir à l'écart pour ne pas être enveloppé dans une mauvaise affaire*" (302-3).

93 "*La jeunesse court ; flâner demande un âge mûr et des sens rassis*" (306).

writer does not present himself as a flâneur. *L'époque sans nom* ends on this chapter on the flâneur I have been extensively quoted from, but the rest of the 600-something pages are made of essays on different events which happened between 1830 and 1833, whether it be an epidemic or the 1830 revolution. The place of the flâneur in the text comes at the end, with that last chapter, and Bazin himself never consider himself a flâneur. Bazin writes towards the end of his work that his primary source of information was a flâneur, differentiating his work as a writer from the flâneur's experience. The flâneur is therefore in his text not a narrator but an informer, not a direct experience but a mediated one:

> As you can imagine I don't want you to follow the flâneur on all of his walks. It would mean start our book over, and I'm happy enough to have already done it once. It is from him, in fact, that I have received most of the documents with which I have composed these sketches. While miserable, shut in, seated at my desk I was writing based on the notes and memories he had left me everything you have just read, him, satisfied, free, joyful, unburden by writing and publishing, was visiting on my behalf every corner of the city.[94]

If one contemporary reader could be surprised by such a distance with the flâneur while it is quite likely that Bazin did not need outside help to gather notes and memories since he has probably done it himself, such posture is far from uncommon in French writers of the 18th and 19th century. Showcasing his humility in the introduction of one's work, especially when it contains in some way or the other personal opinion, was almost a prerequisite for publication. Bazin does not depart with this tradition as he presents his work in the preface as “frivolous” and not worth of his readers, showing scruples to present it to the public (*see* preface,conomic *L'époque sans nom Vol. 1* I–VI). Such position as a writer was not only a way to display the highly acclaimed value of humility but also, more prosaically, to avoid trials. However it is interesting to note that flâneur and author are presented to be two different persons in the mid-19th century, a situation which will change later but which will endure in all the physiologies, as we are about to see.

If in Bazin's forgotten text the flâneur is a positive figure, respected for his knowledge of the street and his neutrality, such judgement on the urban type will be diluted in the caricature approach of periodical articles and physiologies. However, in *L'époque sans nom*, a book which stands alone

94 “*Vous pensez bien que je ne veux pas vous faire accompagner le flâneur dans toutes ses promenades. Ce serait recommencer notre livre, et j'ai bien assez de l'avoir fait une fois. C'est de lui, en effet, que j'ai reçu la plupart des documents avec lesquels j'ai composé ces esquisses. Pendant que, malheureux, enfermé, assis devant un bureau, je rédigeais, sur ses notes et sur les souvenirs qu'il m'avait laissés, tout ce que vous venez de lire ; lui, content, libre, joyeux, sans souci d'écrire et de publier, il allait pour moi dans tous les recoins de la ville*” (314).

in how positively he depicts him at that time, the flâneur is not only the new king of Paris but also a moral guide. Neither aristocrat nor vagabond (Bazin *L'époque sans nom Vol. 2* 301), Bazin's flâneur is praised for his moral qualities, his humanity. In other terms, without the irony of other texts in the 1830s or 1840s, Bazin's flâneur is a paragon of virtue:

> As you can imagine after such long experience of the outside life, [the flâneur] has acquired a quite thorough knowledge of what we call mores, vast and endless text that we have reduced to its most narrow application. If he had been a gossip peddler, he would have had many to tell. But he is discreet, tolerant, human. If he makes some observations, it is for himself, to keep alive and inform his own resolution to stay a gentleman […] If sometimes he deviates from his path to witness something in a way that some could call discourteous, it is only to confirm for himself, through a new experience, that things are still going the way they were before the revolution, before the restoration, as far back as his memories can go.[95]

Such a positive description on the moral grounds is relatively uncommon in the texts on the flâneur and makes Bazin's text particularly important as it offers an interesting counterpoint to the rather sarcastic descriptions that the periodical authors give of the figure of the flâneur. The fact that Bazin is absent of all the critical books on the flâneur I could put my hands on shows Walter Benjamin's clout on the subject and how his *Arcades Project* as orientated this small field of studies. Indeed, Benjamin does not mention Bazin once in his unfinished opus on Paris in the 1800s, which is surprising considering that Bazin's work must have had been archived already at the *Bibliothèque nationale française* (BNF) when the German writer started his huge research, a research which otherwise quotes most known 19th century and early 20th century French authors interested in urbanism. Did he overlook the book because, Anaïs being usually a female name and Bazin being a pseudonym (the real name of the author is Anaïs de Raucou), the text was badly referenced in the archive and therefore virtually lost? Was the text ignored because, if Benjamin considers the whole of the 19th century, he mostly focuses on years during and after the Second Empire (1852 onwards)? Because the passage on the flâneur was towards the end of the book? It is today impossible to know

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95 "*Vous pensez bien qu'après un long exercice de la vie extérieure, il n'est pas sans avoir acquis une connaissance assez profonde de ce qu'on appelle les moeurs, texte vaste, infini, que nous avons réduit à son application la plus étroite. S'il était colporteur de scandale, il en aurait beaucoup à vous raconter. Mais il est discret, tolérant, humain. S'il fait quelques observations, c'est pour son propre compte, pour se maintenir à meilleur escient dans la résolution qu'il a prise de rester garçon. S'il se détourne quelquefois de sa route avec une curiosité qu'on pourrait croire incivile, c'est uniquement pour s'assurer qu'il ne s'est pas trompé, pour se convaincre, par une nouvelle épreuve, que les choses vont toujours comme il les a vues aller avant la révolution, avant la restauration, aussi loin que ses souvenirs peuvent remonter*" (310).

why the encounter between Benjamin and Bazin's text never happen. What this missed opportunity shows however is the impact of Benjamin's study since after him, even if the figure flâneur gets more currency and many critical books are written, if not directly on the flâneur, at least on the problem of describing urban experience in arts, nobody to my knowledge will ever mention Anaïs Bazin. Writing about Bazin in this chapter is not only an occasion to dig up his grave and put him in the light, even though the book would deserve it since Bazin is one of the first as far as my research goes to really dwell on the figure of the flâneur in *L'époque sans nom*, in 1833. Writing about this author is firstly a way to show that nobody really created the flâneur in literature: He was already around, walking the street. The character entered literature but it is not literature which brought him into the world. Bazin and later authors described a type which they could see on the new modern street and in the newly liberal environment. The fact that the features I have listed above (problematic social position, love for the modern boulevards, metropolitan walker, not too young) are found, even if differently treated, in most if not all the texts on the flâneur published in the 19th century shows that the flâneur was a true product of his time.

If Bazin was presenting a very praiseworthy flâneur, the figure was not always treated kindly as the term became popular in France first and foremost through the theatrical genre of the vaudeville, a popular form of comedy based on characters. Before the publication of Bazin's book in 1833, most of the mentions of the term “flâneur” available in the archive of the *Bibliothèque nationale* are in play titles; the rest of the sources is made of personal letters or anonymous pamphlets. It is Balzac and other periodical writers which will develop and popularise the type of the flâneur in literature. This will be done mostly in novels, newspapers articles and physiologies (complete text or collection of essays on social types) and will stem from the flâneur's humorous angle the term gained from popular theatre. The environment of the European metropolis allowed a sort of symbiosis between periodicals and traditional literary publications, whether it be fiction or non-fiction. Authors were working for newspapers and periodicals which were sometimes doubling as publishing houses to edit previously serialised novels or collection of articles. In England, this was the case for Dickens' early work, among others, and in France the totemic figure for such symbiosis between cheap, periodical publications and literature is undoubtedly Balzac. Unlike Bazin, Honoré de Balzac did not disappear from the landscape of literature and enjoyed many republications since his first, a success which allow us to retrace what happened to the flâneur in his writings and by extension how the mainstream sense of the term was created. Balzac being a central figure of the French literary landscape, the way he uses the “flâneur” will inform his contemporaries and writers who will follow and therefore to study how he treated the term is a viable way to understand if not how it appeared (who can tell when a word comes to life?), at least how it consolidated in the

French language and culture.

The term “flâneur” is already used by Balzac in his first and second book, *La Physiologie du mariage* (which will discuss more below) and the novella *La maison du chat-qui-pelote,* respectively published in 1829 and 1830. The word appears in *La Physiologie* without any form of introduction or explanation (63, 324), and it also does so in the novella (5, 8), indicating that, as said above, flâneur” was already a known term by 1829 thanks to the vaudeville genre. If the flâneur was already present in his work when he started it, it is only in the 1837 novel *César Birotteau* that Balzac gives the term and concept some flesh by delivering to his reader his own reading of the notion. While talking about his novel's title character, he writes: “Saddened by unsuccessful experiences, he *flânered* one day along the boulevards on his way back from dinner, for the parisian flâneur is as often a desperate man than an idler.”[96] Elsewhere in the text, and this time in a line from another character (Claparon), complaining that he is overworked: “I no longer find time neither to love nor to *flâner*, I'm losing my interest for business, an interest which requires a wise measure of idleness to be rekindled. You no longer see me on the boulevards busy doing nothing.”[97]

These two passages from Balzac are interesting in themselves in how they articulate *otium* and *neg-otium* as dependent to each other. We see in the quote above another example of the ambiguous position of the flâneur and the act of wandering, important for business even though such idle activity is its natural opposite. If these passages from Balzac put again the problematic situation of the flâneur torn apart between the bourgeoisie and the common people, they are also noteworthy because of their author. As it might need to be asserted once more, Balzac's life and work can be taken as a perfect illustration of the sea change the publishing world had undergone in the first half of the 19th century, and more precisely in the 1830s for the French context. To the combined effects of industrial revolution, colonial trade and political liberalism, the European capital cities changed from citadel to megalopolis and watched their populations grew at an increasing and unprecedented pace. More than the crude numbers of this demographical turn, the powers of the aristocracy and the church was now clearly and seriously attacked by the trading bourgeoisie. If this was not a new phenomenon, I would argue in regard to my research that this rise of the bourgeoisie to prominence in the early 19th century is what created a favourable environment in which the flâneur as both a

96 “*Désolé de quelques expériences infructueuses, il flânait un jour le long des boulevards en revenant dîner, car le flâneur parisien est aussi souvent un homme au désespoir qu'un oisif*” (Balzac, *Histoire de la grandeur et de la décadence de César Birotteau* 27).

97 “*Je ne trouve plus le temps d'aimer ni de flâner, je perds le sentiment des affaires qui pour reprendre son vif veut une oisiveté savamment calculée. On ne me voit plus sur les boulevards occupé à ne rien faire*” (195).

social and literary figure could appear. Indeed, the first half of the 19th century marked the victory of the bourgeoisie in both England and France, the two countries we are concerned with here. The two capitals London and Paris became financial and trading centres, and because of their workforce need the clerks and other types of urban dwellers akin to the petty bourgeois started dominating the newly public street. As noted by Curvadìc Garcia (31), if the metaphor of the city as a book gained momentum in that period, we can also say that besides getting control of the public street, the now socially dominating bourgeoisie created an urban readership. Helped by the technological innovation of the printing press, the circulation of newspapers was increased and the novel, published *en feuilleton* (serialised) became a popular genre. In France, Balzac embodies this rise of the novel's popularity thanks to its circulation in newspapers: He was in close contact with press groups and published some of his early novels as serials, even if partially. The history of the publication of *César Birotteau* is interesting in that aspect since, if it was not serialised, the first edition of the novel was gifted to people who agreed to make a three-month or six-month subscription to two periodicals, respectively *Le Figaro* or *L'Estafette* (Balzac, *Comédie humaine vol. 6* 1130).

Unlike *L'Estafette*, *Le Figaro* has survived to this day. However, when the paper was sponsoring Balzac's publications it was still a satirical bulletin published irregularly and not a national daily as it is today. Matching the general tone of its sponsor, the novel *César Birotteau* is slightly satirical in spirit, a fact evident if we read a short presentation of the novel preceding its publication:

> There is in Paris a man that everybody sees but nobody knows, a man who never dies, an eternal type, a vulgar face; you have already met him; you have laughed at him; you have mockingly admired his features, turned into a stereotype for conversation; he reappears in every caricature. There this man is a grocer; here a rentier; elsewhere a bourgeois; over there, greeneries; everywhere Parisian; but nowhere we picture him with vices; nobody refuses him the stupidity of virtue.[98]

If we compare this quote with the last one I gave from Bazin's chapter of the flâneur, we see that the consideration on the virtue of that yet unnamed but well-known social type is widely different in Balzac. The flâneur in Bazin was "discreet, tolerant, human". Here, the character described by Balzac only has in terms of morals the "stupidity of virtue". Even if the author does not nominally

98 "*Il existe à Paris, un homme que tout le monde voit et que personne ne connaît, un homme qui ne meurt jamais, un type éternel, une face vulgaire; vous l'avez rencontrée; vous vous en êtes moqué; vous en admirez railleusement les traits, elle est stéréotypée pour le discours; elle reparaît dans toutes les caricatures. Là cet homme est un épicier, ici rentier; plus loin bourgeois; plus haut, végétation; partout parisien; mais nulle part on ne lui prête de vices; personne ne lui refuse la bêtise de la vertu*" (Balzac, *Comédie humain vol. 6* 1120).

target the flâneur but rather the common Parisian man, we can see that the tone of respect we find in Bazin is absent in Balzac. On the contrary, the tone of the presentation is willingly sarcastic and comical, mirroring the satirical nature of its sponsors. We find in this description of the *Cesar Birotteau*'s theme the taste for the classification of men into different types based on caricatures, a taste which will be at the root of the genre of the physiologies.

An urban and Parisian writer, Balzac did not only sell stories to the increasingly circulating papers but also helped shape and give flesh to these new archetypes of the city dweller. The vast majority of his production, including all of his novels and articles, were compiled from 1842 onwards under the title *La Comédie humaine* ("The Human Comedy"). In the preface to the first and incomplete edition of the *Comédie*, Balzac refers to the *Histoire naturelle* (Natural History) of Buffon published in the second half of the 18th century as a major inspiration. A prominent French naturalist, Buffon presents his work as an encyclopedia of everything Nature has to offer and includes famous lists and illustration of known animal species. Drawing a connection between how nature and society are similar in the way they operate, Balzac announces in his preface the purpose of his *Comédie* as follows:

> For does not society modify Man, according to the conditions in which he lives and acts, into men as manifold as the species in Zoology? The differences between a soldier, an artisan, a man of business, a lawyer, an idler, a student, a statesman, a merchant, a sailor, a poet, a beggar, a priest, are as great, though not so easy to define, as those between the wolf, the lion, the ass, the crow, the shark, the seal, the sheep, etc. Thus social species have always existed, and will always exist, just as there are zoological species. If Buffon could produce a magnificent work by attempting to represent in a book the whole realm of zoology, was there not room for a work of the same kind on society?[99] (*The Human Comedy*)

If he pays his debt to Buffon's work, he also highlights the fact that by writing the more than hundred texts forming the *Comédie* Balzac had at heart to depict the habits and everyday behaviours of his contemporaries and doing so to create examples of the vicious and the virtuous for the instruction of the masses. Rooted in this moralist approach and using the metaphor of the writer as a

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99 "*La Société ne fait-elle pas de l'homme, suivant les milieux où son action se déploie, autant d'hommes différents qu'il y a de variétés en zoologie? Les différences entre un soldat, un ouvrier, un administrateur, un avocat, un oisif, un savant, un homme d'État, un commerçant, un marin, un poète, un pauvre, un prêtre, sont, quoique plus difficiles à saisir, aussi considérables que celles qui distinguent le loup, l'âne, le corbeau, le requin, le veau marin, la brebis, etc. Il a donc existé, il existera donc de tout temps des Espèces Sociales comme il y a des Espèces Zoologiques. Si Buffon a fait un magnifique ouvrage en essayant de représenter dans un livre l'ensemble de la zoologie, n'y avait-il pas une oeuvre de ce genre à faire pour la Société?*" (Balzac, *La Comédie humaine vol. 1* 8)

painter he develops his view on what a writer ought to be: “By adhering to the strict lines of a reproduction a writer might be a more or less faithful, and more or less successful, painter of types of humanity, a narrator of the dramas of private life, an archaeologist of social furniture, a cataloguer of professions, a registrar of good and evil”[100] (*The Human Comedy*).

As we start to see, the “flâneur” therefore appeared in a context in which there was a desire for the classification of social species, and by extension of urban archetypes, based on the new practises opened by a modernising Paris. Balzac and other popular writers at the time (understand popular in both senses here—writing for the masses and successful) take advantage of this desire to create types of men recognisable by its readership based on moral values and distinguishable caricatural features. What is interesting is to consider that the popular novels of the time, sometimes published in serials and often supported by newspapers, were targetting as their readership the petty bourgeoisie and common man they were depicting. If Balzac expresses his admiration for the work of Walter Scott which he presents as another inspiration for the *Comédie*, there is a major difference in terms of subject. Praising the way Scott conveys the spirit of a past era and turns into myths historical figures to make them exemplary, Balzac suggests to apply this technique to the time he and his reader live in. Cutting the distance between the history of the past and the present experience found in Scott's historical novels, Balzac therefore provides to his contemporaries a description of themselves in real-time.

The themes of Balzac's novels and the way they were published and read is a perfect illustration of the city-as-book metaphor as it doubles it. The city had to be read and understood using the “social species” and “stereotypes” the urban reader could find in novels and, in return, the novel (the new dominant literary genre) had to be read and understood in an introspective way by the urban reader who will recognise the types he/she sees in the street on a daily basis. By giving to his *Comédie* the subtitle “*Études de moeurs*” (“Studies of Mores”), Balzac wants to represent the current mores of the majority of the French population to the majority of the French population itself, turning its environment, and the city of Paris in particular, into a sort of touristic attraction, a spectacle for its own inhabitants.

This sociological and self-reflecting approach we see in Balzac culminates around the same time in the encyclopedia *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes* (“The French Painted by Themselves”) published between 1840 and 1842 and edited by Léon Curmer. Following the basic ideas Balzac will expose in his 1842 preface to the *Comédie*, *Les Français* wishes to offer its readers an

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100“*S'en tenant à cette reproduction rigoureuse, un écrivain pouvais devenir un peintre plus ou moins fidèle, plus ou moins heureux, patient ou courageux des types humains, le conteur des drams de la vie intime, l'archéologue du mobilier social, le nomenclateur des professions, l'enregistreur du bien et du mal*” (11).

archetypical description of different French types, from the law student to the prisoner, with at least an illustration for each. The style in which the book was written, as well as the images, fits into the satirical tradition. Such an approach was obviously not entirely new since, for instance, Louis-Sébastien Mercier had published between 1782 and 1788 a similar work, *Le Tableau de Paris* ("The Paris Painting"), which aimed at producing a complete picture of the city, with a special interest for his dark underbelly. We find the painting metaphor and a focus on the French capital in both works, however the political context and readership were not the same than fifty years later since Mercier had to publish his book anonymously as it was indirectly attacking the Ancien Régime. Also the two works differ in terms of tones, as Mercier's *Tableau* does not have at heart to present caricatures, illustrations of moral examples or a strict list or terminology of different "social species". In that sense, Mercier's work is more part of the tradition of social critic proper to the Lumières while Curmer's anthology is closer to the satirical and moralist tradition . Indeed, *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes* is subtitled "*Encyclopédie morale du XIXe siècle*" ("Moral Encyclopedia of the 19th Century") and refers in an introduction written by its editor Léon Curmer to another French author of the past, namely La Bruyère and his *Caractères* ("Characters"), published in 1688, hence prior to the Lumières movement, which also displayed its moralist views in its subtitle: *Les Moeurs de ce siècle* ("The Mores of this century"). The premise used by Curmer to legitimatise a new encyclopedia is that the country described by La Bruyère has changed so much in a century and a half that such a moral study has to be updated as well as its range extended from the low to the powerful in order to provide an accurate depiction for the instruction of the coming generations:

> we will display ourselves to them not only in painted and sculpted busts, but from head to toe and as ridiculously as we can make ourselves. In this magic lantern, where we review each other ourselves, nothing shall be omitted, not even to light the lantern; in other words, nothing will be missing to this exhaustive work which takes as its object the study of contemporary mores, and whose programme was suggested by La Bruyère himself, the master of us all, and others.[101]

Close in spirit to views presented above in the paratext of both *César* and *La Comédie*, it is not a surprise to find four texts written by Balzac in Curmer's anthology. He was charged by the editor to deliver the articles on the grocer, the rentier (two types which already appeared in the short

101"*nous nous montrerons à eux non pas seulement peints en buste, mais des pieds à la tête et aussi ridicules que nous pourrons nous faire. Dans cette lanterne magique, où nous nous passons en revue les uns et les autres, rien ne sera oublié, pas même d'allumer la lanterne; en un mot, rien ne manquera à cette œuvre complète, qui a pour objet l'étude des moeurs contemporaines, et dont La Bruyère lui-même, notre maître à tous et à bien d'autres, nous a en quelque sorte dicté le programme*" (Curmer, *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes vol. 1* 22).

presentation for *César* quoted above), the *femme comme il faut* ("respectable woman") and the notary. Among these modern types, but in an essay produced not by Balzac but by Auguste de Lacroix, we find the flâneur.

Lacroix does not give a clear definition of what the flâneur is. Instead, he draws a portrait, a sketch of the new urban type, in accordance with the spirit of the anthology's title and the recurrent metaphor of the writer as a painter. An illustrative approach which is highlighted in the number of actual illustrations (at least one per chapter and type) and underlines the impact of journalistic practices on the anthology. Each text is therefore supported by one illustration or more, arguably included in the book not as a way to introduce a figure the reader already knows but to give each type a set of distinctive features which will help its classification with other types, in the manner of a natural history. Interestingly it has to be noted that after the 19th century, the French word "*type*" will mean both a type, a sort, a kind, like its English equivalent, but also a generic man. We find the same semantic change and double meaning in Italian, Portuguese and Spanish with the word "*tipo*". I would argue that this extension of the meaning of the word "*type*" to describe a man stems from the scientific approach and the will to classify people in social species we find in Curmer's encyclopedia. Once that said, it does not mean that Curmer's and the authors who participated to the anthology believed in any way that each man can be defined by a distinctive type; only that the methodology and humoristic tone of the different essays, as well as the illustrations, help creating a caricature which can be collectively identified for each of the types they describe. Again, the purpose of Curmer's encyclopedia, unlike Buffon's *Histoire Naturelle*, was not to show the largely unknown but to give a name and features to well-known figures. Both Curmer and Buffon perform a sort of taxonomy, but the first does it not so much to create knowledge than to set types which can be recognised and used collectively in a community.

As for the definition of the flâneur by Lacroix *per* se, he starts his essay or sketch by stating that the major feature of the flâneur according to him is that he is French, and even more precisely Parisian. If the context of publication (in Paris, for Parisians) as well as the traditional arrogance towards the rest of the country from people established in the capital city partially explain the tight connection made by Lacroix, his insistence to describe the flâneur as a national and Parisian type is noteworthy:

> Do you know a symbol more fitting to its idea, a word more exclusively French to express an utterly French incarnation? The flâneur! (…) The flâneur is, without a doubt, born and living in a vast city, assuredly Paris. Indeed, there is nothing but a great city which can be used as the theatre of his constant explorations, and no other than the most light-hearted and spiritual people on Earth could have produced that species of

unknowing philosophers, who seem to be instinctively able to catch everything at a glance and analyse it in passing.[102]

Lacroix's grandiloquence has to be linked with the satirical tradition, but the fact that he puts the emphasis on France and Paris shows that the figure of the flâneur was from the start logically associated with the context of the French capital, which serves as both the flâneur's domain but also the publishing center for texts concerned with the flâneur. Like we already seen in Bazin, Paris is presented as a territory over which Lacroix's flâneur is ruling like an aristocrat, by right of conquest and right of birth (Curmer, *Les Français vol. 2* 155). Another similitude with Bazin is that this aristocratic, noble aspect Lacroix sees in the flâneur is spelled out in the opposition the author draws with the *badaud*, the generic, nameless onlooker which is depicted as a commoner to the flâneur royalty (153), a "small number of privileged men of leisure and wits who study the human heart in nature itself, and society in the great book of the world always opened under their eyes."[103]However, when Bazin was ascribing to the flâneur a sort of new aristocracy, a new social legitimacy based on the historical change brought by the July Monarchy, Curmer's vision of the aristocracy is more conservative and flâneurs and traditional aristocrats are given as one and the same.

Aristocratic in nature, his definition of the flâneurs as "unknowing philosophers" represents the most part of the argument he develops in his portrait. The flâneur as a high observer of human nature and society is assimilated according to Lacroix to the social class of the artist, and more widely to all geniuses in history. The idleness displayed by the flâneur is to him the mark of all great discoveries in arts, sciences and literature as it is a trigger for serendipity, and he therefore defends that apparent laziness of the flâneur as an accumulation of experiences which can produce epiphanies in all the fields of knowledge. However, if Lacroix describes the flâneur as an artist, true to the moralist flavour and purpose of the encyclopedia the artist here has to be understood as a naturalist artist who, by observing people on the streets gets an intimate knowledge of the human heart, an expression repeatedly used by the author alongside terms such as mores and passion. For

102"*Connaissez-vous un signe plus approprié à son idée, un mot plus exclusivement français pour exprimer une personnification toute française ? Le flâneur ! (...) Le flâneur est, sans contredit, originaire et habitant d'une vaste cité, de Paris assurément. Il n'y a qu'une grande ville, en effet, qui puisse servir de théâtre à ses explorations incessantes, et il n'y a que le peuple le plus léger et le plus spirituel au monde qui ait pu produire cette espèce de philosophes* sans le savoir*, qui semblent exercer d'instinct la faculté de tout saisir d'un coup d'oeil et d'analyser en passant*" (Curmer, *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes vol. 2* 151).

103"*Nous ne reconnaissons pour flâneurs que ce petit nombre privilégié d'hommes et de loisirs et d'esprit qui étudient le cœur humain sur la nature même, et la société dans ce grand livre du monde toujours ouvert sous leurs yeux*" (153).

Lacroix, a littérateur is so because he is intrinsically a flâneur: "Can you imagine a littérateur, that is to say a man whose work is to paint first and foremost the mores and passions, who would not be animated by a strong penchant for observing, comparing, analysing, seeing with his own eyes, catching, as we say, nature in the act?"[104]

We can see from this definition of the flâneur's features by Lacroix several things we will come upon in other works on this urban type, namely the idleness and the connection with a so-called artistic nature. More importantly though, and as Lacroix summarises it towards the end of his short exposé, the flâneur is depicted as an eye set on the street, an active observer even when he looks passive whose observation is of the most elevated and useful kind because of his ability to accumulate experiences and synthesise them into telling paintings of both human nature and society: "Now, as we have said, what is the flâneur if not the observer in action, the observer in his most elevated and eminently useful expression?"[105] Throughout this article, the city is barely mentioned; it is the media, not the subject, of Lacroix's flâneur, solely an interface to experience and dissect the human heart and the social organisation it creates, the "great book", the "theatre" of the street being a sort of museum, a *cabinet de curiosités* for the flâneur to extend his knowledge. The city is a mean, not an end, for his experimentations. In a nod to his reader, Lacroix closes his article by stating that both the writer and the readers of his text are part of the fellowship of flâneur*s*, a kind of secret aristocracy fighting against the mediocrity of the *badaud*, the common man, in the same kind of romantic revolt traditionally expressed by artists, and as we have seen previously through our study of the Situationist movement, avant-garde members:

> Let us leave to the blind the sad privilege to slander on light, to the deaf to deny musical harmony, to the stupid what they don't understand. Who among us will not feel in his heart some secret fondness for such a good, easy-going, harmless and joyful being we call flâneur? Who among us, after examining his conscience, will declare himself free enough from the sin of flânerie to cast the first stone at the flâneur? Who are you, after all, you who are reading these lines? And who am I, I who is writing them? A flâneur.[106]

104"*Comprendriez-vous un littérateur, c'est-à-dire un homme faisant métier de peindre principalement les mœurs et les passions, qui ne serait pas vivement sollicité par un secret penchant à observer, à comparer, à analyser, à voir par ses yeux, à surprendre, comme on dit, la nature sur le fait ?*" (158).

105"*Or, comme nous l'avons dit, qu'est-ce que le flâneur, sinon l'observateur en action, l'observateur dans son expression la plus élévée et la plus éminemment utile ?*" (161)

106"*Laissons aux aveugles le triste privilège de médire de la lumière, aux sourds de nier l'harmonie, aux sots ce qu'ils ne comprennent pas. Qui de nous ne sentira pas dans son coeur quelque secrète sympathie pour cet être si bon, si facile, si inoffensif et si gai qu'on appelle le flâneur ? Qui de nous, en interrogeant sa conscience, osera se proclamer assez pur du péché de flânerie pour jeter au flâneur la première pierre ? Qui êtes-vous, enfin, vous qui*

As we can see in the examples from Balzac, Lacroix and the anthology of types through which the figure was first defined, the construction of the flâneur is unsurprisingly influenced by its cultural context. More than its tight connection to France and Paris, the emergence of the term and type "flâneur" in the mid-19th century is brought forth by the painting-writing metaphor and based on a moralist and naturalistic approach to human society whose different segments had to be sketched out, illustrated, recognisable in order to be made into a list of different types. If Lacroix rejects the tenets of phrenology in his text as scientific hallucinations and poetical alchemy for romantic imaginations[107], the anthology, as well as Balzac's input on *César* and the *Comédie*, bears the mark of an essentialist approach akin to the basis of phrenology. Even if phrenology and satire cannot be rightfully compared since the first aims at demonstrating while the latter aims at entertaining, their approach, both scientific in spirit, are nonetheless similar in the sense that they are based on the connection between physical and moral attributes, a connection which is also clearly made in another work on the flâneur published around the same time: *La Physiologie du flâneur* (1841) by Louis Adrien Huart.

The term "physiology" was in fashion at the time to define a single-issue study displaying a certain scientific flavour but through a pleasant and relatively accessible style (as compared to specialist jargon). The term was for instance used by the omnipresent and highly influential Balzac for one of his many "*études de moeurs*" ("studies of mores") on marital life, *La Physiologie du mariage*, first published in 1829 and later compiled in the *Comédie*. Balzac's *Physiologie* was itself inspired by Brillat-Savarin's *Physiologie du goût* (1825), a treaty on taste and cuisine for which Balzac will write a preface to its second edition. If Brillat-Savarin's *Physiologie* was in accordance to its scientific title examining a biological attribute—one of our senses, le "*goût*" ("taste")—, in Balzac then in Huart, the term "physiology" drifts to be applied to more social than natural attributes. This drift was already at play in Brillat-Savarin's *magnus opus* as it is concerned with the historical evolution of the social practices surrounding food, and provides another example of how biology, literature and what will later be called social sciences met in the French context in the early to mid-19th century to create, in coordination with new publishing practices and readership, easily accessible, often satirical in nature and easy-to-read moral studies based on scientific pretence and aiming at the education but mostly amusement of its reader.

Louis Adrien Huart's *Physiologie du flâneur* is part of this tradition for which Walter Benjamin coined the expression "panoramic literature" as he understood, in a context in which painting representation and the city have replaced direct experience of the natural countryside, panoramas as

lisez ces lignes ? Et qui suis-je, moi qui les écris ? Un flâneur." (162).

107 "*Hallucinations de la science, alchimie poétique à l'usage des imaginations romanesques*" (154).

"scenes of a perfect imitation of nature" (Benjamin, *Arcades Project* 5). In that sense Huart wishes to give a panoramic view to its reader, a portrait of this new urban type in the same way Curmer's *Les Français* will do a year later. Like the encyclopedia and its flâneur article written by Lacroix, Huart's book contains illustrations and is clearly caricatural in spirit. It also shares with the book edited by Curmer a naturalist approach to society inspired, as we have mentioned, by Buffon's work, as Huart also opens his text by jokingly getting involved in the eternal debate on the difference between mankind and the animal kingdom (doing so he borrows the title of another influential natural history at the time, Cuvier's *Règne animal*). According to Huart, the superiority of men over animals is demonstrated by only one thing:

> Man is superior to every other animal only because he knows how to *flâner* (…) indeed! What makes Man the king of creation is that he knows how to waste his time and youth in every climate and in every season possible. Examine the mores and habits of every animal that you know and you will contemplate the pertinence of this remark. Once they've had their food, the monkey gambols, the dog runs left and right, the bear walks round and round, the ox ruminates, and this applies to every creature which grace to some extent or another the face of the Earth. But only Man, after his dinner, buys a cigar, that he accepts to pay four coins even if it is bad, then go *flâner*.[108]

Huart's *Physiologie* was part of a series of books by Huart himself with the same title but on different urban types (the student, the doctor, the policeman), types that we also find in Curmer's collection. If Huart's text shares many features with Lacroix's article in *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes*, similarities that we can notice in the passage we have just quoted, it is however different as it derives from the figure of the flâneur a variety of urban types living on and from the pavement. Unlike in Lacroix, Huart's flâneur is not solely described as an artist or a member of a tasteful aristocracy but can also be found in different social classes, from the expatriated nobleman to the ragman, which he calls the proletarian flâneur (Huart 46-52), but also the soldier, a "military flâneur" (60-7), or the street urchin (68). Therefore, due to the length of the book and true to the humorous tone of his *Physiologie* series, Huart applies the term "flâneur" liberally to different kinds of people whose occupation is to be part of and be visible in the public space. Nonetheless, if in

108"*L'homme s'élève au-dessus de tous les autres animaux uniquement parce qu'il sait flâner. (...) oui! ce qui fait de l'homme le roi de la création, c'est qu'il sait perdre son temps et sa jeunesse par tous les climats et toutes les saisons possibles. Étudiez plutôt les moeurs et les habitudes de tous les animaux de votre connaissance, et vous admirerez la justesse de cette remarque. — Après qu'ils ont pris leur nourriture : le singe gambade, — le chien court à droite et à gauche, — l'ours tourne sur lui-même, — le boeuf rumine, — et ainsi de toutes les autres créatures qui embellissent plus ou moins la surface de la terre. Mais l'homme seul, après son dîner, achète un cigare, qu'il consent à payer quatre sous parce qu'il est mauvais, — puis il va flâner*" (Huart, *La Physiologie du flâneur* 7).

Huart the majority of Parisians can be considered as practitioners of the flânerie, his definition of what makes the true flâneur is still similar to Lacroix's around the same time. In other terms, if Huart gives the attribute of the flâneur to different social types, he builds a hierarchy on the other hand between the good and the bad flâneur, the perfect and the imperfect. Again, in the top of Huart's pyramid of values, the perfect flâneur is primarily Parisian, has a poetic or artistic nature and is the gatherer of the different experiences the public street can provide, whether it be sounds or scenes. In both Lacroix and Huart's texts, the flâneur is first and foremost reduced to its status of outside observer. Yet, the difference between the two works lie in the fact that when Lacroix is mostly defending the flâneur as the last of the noblemen (as opposed to the mediocre and common *badaud*), Huart's description of the urban walker dwells more on certain features and themes that will come back in later works on flânerie, including our primary corpus of British writers: The multi-layered experience of the city street by an individual.

The street as a social environment is central to Huart's exposé, and to him the flâneur has to pay attention to colloquial language and the visuals the 19th century Parisian street has to offer, whether it be posters or graffiti, two modes of expression whose texts leaks into Huart's prose like they will later into the writings produced by British writers affiliated to psychogeography (*see* for instance Sinclair *Lights Out* 10-11; Wright loc. 655). We also see in Huart's description that his flâneur is the witness of the changes undergone by the urban environment in that period. The text contains for instance many mentions of the omnibus (40), or horse bus, a form of transportation similar to today's bus system and whose name itself illustrates the democratisation of public space at the time ("omnibus" is Latin for "for all", a term which will later be reduced to "bus", which doesn't mean anything in itself.) Still in relation to the pavement and the evolution of urban public space, Huart's flâneur is in contact with streets freshly covered in tarmac (38). Where Bazin and Lacroix were more interested in the flâneur as a social type, symbol of a social change, Huart brings the figure to the street and describes it as receptive to his environment. In Huart, the flâneur really discovers the street and the many changes the public urban space is undergoing at the time. If he is still described and dissected by an outside author, if he is still an object of study, the flâneur in Huart slowly gains the status of subject as the different experiences of the street he has to go through are put forward. The notion of "flâneur" therefore becomes more interested with the reactions of an individual to his urban environment and less with his problematic social status and his idleness at a busy time, issues which are central, even if in different ways, in texts by Bazin, Lacroix and the satirical tradition. In other words, as we can see with Huart, over the years the flâneur becomes more than just a social type and becomes a medium for describing one's individual experience of the city.

A symbol of that new interest the city's transformation, the flâneur in Huart is also the witness of

the emergence of a new form of shopping hub, the *passage*, a covered street or courtyard which prefigured today's malls. This new urban feature will be studied in depth and taken as an illustration of the change modernity brought in European capital cities, and especially Paris, by Benjamin in his *Arcades Project*, the term "arcades" being the chosen translation for French "*passage*". Like what Benjamin will do a century later, Huart connects intimately the flâneur to the arcades while turning him into an aesthete who relishes their displays of novel commodities:

> Without the arcades the flâneur would be miserable; but without the flâneur the arcades would not exist. (…) O Passage des Panoramas! O Passage de l'Opéra! If gratitude was not an illusion, we could read on your pediments: To the flâneur*s* the passages are grateful![109]

If both Benjamin and Huart give a certain importance to the arcades, they also share a melancholic and nostalgic tone when they discuss how public space has changed even though their two texts were produced almost a century apart as Huart's *Physiologie* was published in 1841 and as the writing of the *Arcades Project* was started in 1927, in collaboration with a newspaper, and was left unfinished due to Benjamin's suicide. A Sign of this underlying melancholy, Huart for instance laments on the loss of the free parades ("there are days of great melancholy when the word 'free' looks especially sweet to the miserable flâneur"[110]), but also the destruction brought by what we would call today regeneration if positive, gentrification if negative, and that Huart refers to as embellishment of public space, disrupting the social fabric of the street:

> And then, under the excuse of embellishment, we cut down the trees which have survived all the revolutions to replace them with some kind of broom sticks topped by a green sentry box. (…) Also we have turned over all the little terraces where every night the tradesmen of the rue Saint-Denis, retired shopkeepers, looking like sumptuous national guards, or wearing other similar disguises, and surrounded their spouses and young kids drank their beer and gave in to the charms of street music, a spectacle capable of brightening up an observing and virtuous spirit. Under the excuse of embellishment, what have we left to the flâneur?[111]

109"*Sans les passages, le flaneur serait malheureux ; mais sans le flaneur les passages n'existeraient pas. (...) O passage des Panoramas, passage de l'Opéra, si la reconnaissance n'était pas une chimère, on lirait sur votre fronton : — Aux flaneurs les Passages reconnaissants !*" (Huart 97).

110"*il est des jours de profonde mélancolie où ce mot gratis sourit particulièrement au flaneur malheureux*" (98).

111"*Puis on a, sous prétexte d'embellissements, abattu les arbres qui avaient résisté à toutes les révolutions pour leur substituer des sortes de manches à balais revêtus d'une guérite verte. (...) enfin on a renversé toutes ces petites terrasses, où, chaque soir, les marchands de la rue Saint-Denis, les négociants retirés, sous l'aspect de magnifique gardes nationaux, ou sous tout autre déguisement analogue, entourés de leurs épouses et de leurs jeunes moutards,*

This melancholy for the old shape of the city and the memories of the past is ubiquitous in most urban writings today. Such feeling of loss was expressed in Lacroix's article not so much about urban space but social status, the flâneur being first and foremost a social type interested in society, its vices and virtues, and only secondly an individual experiencing the street and emotionally connected to urban transformations. On the contrary in that passage quoted from Huart, which clashes with the light-hearted tone of the rest of the book, the flâneur is depicted not only as a moralist absorbed by its study of the human heart or a new social type, but also as the mourner of the city's past, a conservationist of what was its former shape. As quoted above from Baudelaire's poem "*Le Cygne*", "the form a city takes more quickly shifts, alas, than does the mortal heart" (Baudelaire, *Flowers* 175), and with Huart the flâneur moves from his plain study of the mortal heart's vices and virtues as displayed on the streets of modern Paris to the shifts in the form of the city.

As we have seen with Balzac, Lacroix and Huart, the flâneur in its first appearances in the late 1830s-early 1840s was presented as a new social type whose main traits were a proud and somehow active idleness and observation skills (Curmer 161). His favoured environment and perhaps the only space he belonged to was the streets of central Paris, and more precisely the boulevards and the arcades, two new urban forms which were made for displaying new commodities, facilitating walking and enhancing commerce. If Balzac and Lacroix clearly picture him as a moralist and another avatar of the writer or the artist, using the street for studying the human heart, Huart's *Physiologie* adds to the flâneur figure the responsibility not only to examine the passers-by but also write on and remember, register the past form of the city. This sense of loss and irremediable changes in urban space and the naturally tragic relation to time its dwellers have will be expressed more emphatically in Baudelaire's poems and essays, giving the originally joyful, comical and careless man walking the streets of Paris a more dramatic aspect.

Following the 19th century tradition in which the act of painting and the act of writing are considered to be similar in nature, as we have seen in all the references to sketches, *tableau* and painting in the texts we have come across so far in this chapter, Baudelaire published in 1863 "The Painter of Modern Life", a series of essays on illustrator Constantin Guys, a rather forgotten artist considered to be by Baudelaire the "painter of modern life" of the title. As it was the case with Balzac's *Comédie*, Baudelaire's essays now included in "The Painter of Modern Life" are first published in the periodical *Le Figaro* before being compiled in the posthumous *L'art romantique* in 1869, a collection of texts on arts and literature written by the poet. Even if Guys is central to

consommaient leur bière et s'abandonnaient aux charmes de la musique ambulante, spectacle bien capable d'égayer un esprit observateur et vertueux. Sous prétexte d'embellissements, qu'a-t-on laissé au flaneur ?" (99).

Baudelaire's *Painter*, the poet also notably presents a reflection on the double aspect of beauty, a definition of another urban figure close to the flâneur (the dandy) but also, and this is what will interest us, his view on how an artist has to represent its times, and by extension some thought on how to describe and write the public space, and by extension what can be the role of the street observer, and by extension the role of the flâneur more interested in urban space than in morals.

If today the flâneur is easily linked to Baudelaire and especially to "The Painter of Modern Life", it has to be noted than these essays does not directly mention it. Yes, Baudelaire discusses many themes that have intersected with the flâneur, as we have seen above, whether it be moralists, illustrators and the changes brought by modern times, but if we based our analysis on a close reading of the *Painter*, we see that it would be too easy to consider the flâneur and the "painter of modern life" as one and the same. First, because if Baudelaire uses the term, he does so by suggesting others: "Observer, philosopher, flâneur—call him what you will"[112] (Baudelaire, *Painter* 4). Second, because Constantin Guys, the illustrator lauded by Baudelaire, is described as more than a flâneur since he isconomic a more active character than the urban type discussed by Lacroix or Huart whose primary attribute is idleness:

> And so away he goes, hurrying, searching. But searching for what? Be very sure that this man, such as I have depicted him—this solitary gifted with an active imagination, ceaselessly journeying across t*he great human desert*—has an aim loftier than that of the mere flâneur, an aim more general, something other than the fugitive pleasure of circumstance. He is looking for that quality which you must allow me to call "modernity"; for I know no better word to express the idea I have in mind.[113] (12)

Therefore, if Baudelaire considers early in his text that illustrator Constantin Guys can be labelled a flâneur, he emphasises the fact that his observations and the artistic production that comes from them transcend the purposeless nature of the flâneur's reverie. To Baudelaire, the flâneur is still inactive, idle, following the root of the figure from the physiologies, while Guys is depicted as a passionate and relentless artist. He can be considered a flâneur because he takes the materials for his drawings from walking the streets of Paris, but what really differentiates him according to Baudelaire is that his gaze is not a passive one, he doesn't analyse *en passant* like Lacroix's flâneur, but throws himself in the crowd as if it were "an immense reservoir of electrical energy" (9) and

112"*Observateur, flâneur, philosophe, appelez-le comme vous voudrez*" (Baudelaire, *Peintre* 6).

113"*Ainsi il va, il court, il cherche. Que cherche-t-il? A coup sûr, cet homme, tel que je l'ai dépeint, ce solitaire doué d'une imagination active, toujours voyageant à travers* le grand désert d'hommes*, a un but plus élevé que celui d'un pur flâneur, un but plus général, autre que le plaisir fugitif de la circonstance. Il cherche ce quelque chose qu'on nous permettra d'appeler la* modernité*; car il ne se présente pas de meilleur mot pour exprimer l'idée en question*" (10).

scrutinises the spectacle of the street with an "eagle eye" (11), hunting for the scene which will inspire him. More active than passive, Baudelaire describes the street observer as a hunter who finds his preys in the crowd but is also part of it. Inspired by Edgar Allan Poe's *The Man of the Crowd* which he had translated into French, in Baudelaire's view Guys and other artists who extract the substance of their art from their experience of the public street are at once in and out of the crowd:

> The crowd is his element, as the air is that of birds and water of fishes. His passion and his profession are to become one flesh with the crowd. For the perfect flâneur, for the passionate spectator, it is an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement, in the midst of the fugitive and the infinite. To be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the centre of the world, and yet to remain hidden from the world—such are a few of the slightest pleasures of those independent, passionate, impartial natures which the tongue can but clumsily define.[114] (9)

The perfect flâneur becomes a passionate observer, and by highlighting the importance of that "passion" on his activity, Baudelaire moves the figure further from the complacent and essentially bourgeois description we found in Balzac, Lacroix and Huart. The flâneur is moving in and out of the crowd like he was moving between aristocracy and the common people in Bazin, except that now the dichotomy is no longer based on social grounds but incarnates itself in the tension between individuality and the mass, the singular senses and mind of the observer and the collective and nameless body of the crowd. If such alienation of the individual in the crowd will be important in Baudelaire's poetry, it is not the case in the essay we are interested with as of now. The crowd in the *Painter* is the natural hunting ground for the "perfect flâneur", a territory he surveys happily and actively. Following the same idea, we can note that Baudelaire repeatedly compares Guys with animals but also children, both sharing a facility for amazement at the discovery of new things ("It is by this deep and joyful curiosity that we may explain the fixed and animally ecstatic gaze of a child confronted with something new, whatever it be"[115] 8). More active, wild and innocent the

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114 "*La foule est son domaine, comme l'air est celui de l'oiseau, comme l'eau celui du poisson. Sa passion et sa profession, c'est* d'épouser la foule. *Pour le parfait flâneur, pour l'observateur passionné, c'est une immense jouissance que d'élire domicile dans le nombre, dans l'ondoyant, dans le mouvement, dans le fugitif et l'infini. Etre hors de chez soi, et pourtant se sentir partout chez soi; voir le monde, être au centre du monde et rester caché au monde, tels sont quelques-uns des moindres plaisirs de ces esprits indépendants, passionnés, impartieux, que la langue ne peut que maladroitement définir*" (Baudelaire, *Peintre* 9).

115 "*C'est à cette curiosité profonde et joyeuse qu'il faut attribuer l'oeil fixe et animalement extatique des enfants devant le nouveau, quel qu'il soit*" (8).

"painter of modern life" is in Baudelaire the artist who manages to grasp the beauty of the everyday to turn it to absolute beauty, a middleman between the ephemeral, fugitive and therefore essentially temporal aesthetic notions displayed in the street (fashion, events) and higher, eternal, allegedly objective ones. It might be useful to note that if Constantin Guys is described as "the painter of modern life" by Baudelaire, the notion of "modernity" in this text written back in 1863 has more to do with "contemporaneity" than with "modernism", as we understand it today. What Baudelaire calls "modernity", what he praises Guys for catching, is the beauty of what was at that time the everyday, and relate that new beauty which was expressed in original forms to an ideal of beauty in an attempt "to distil the eternal from the transitory"[116].

To conclude that discussion on Baudelaire's text, the "painter of modern life" is a flâneur in the sense that he is inspired by the street, but his experience of it is presented as different from the rather comical and primarily social flâneur we have seen earlier in satirical texts because he is more active, passionate, wild and ecstatic in his interaction with the urban environment and not so much passive, complacent, "civilised" (understand noble, aristocratic) and calm. Indeed, the figure of the "painter of modern life" is modern, but only because he enjoys fully the new beauty of the era in which he evolves. The "modern life" he paints is the everyday, the transitory of its time, the *zeitgeist*, as opposed to the ideal beauty from ancient times:

> It is doubtless an excellent thing to study the old masters in order to learn how to paint; but it can be no more than a waste of labour if your aim is to understand the special nature of present-day beauty. (…) In short, for any "modernity" to be worthy of one day taking its place as "antiquity", it is necessary for the mysterious beauty which human life accidentally puts into it to be distilled from it.[117] (13-4)

Note that this idea of distillation comes up again, indicating that the modern street offers a rough experience that the perceptions and art of the painter has to sublimate, refine in order to extract beauty out of it. This is the function of the painter in Baudelaire's essay: Find beauty in the multitude of street scenes, transform chaos into cosmos.

Even though "flâneur" and "painter of modern life" are differentiated in Baudelaire's argument, the reception of the text will somehow coalesce the two terms. Let's keep in mind that if the boundaries of the flâneur are always vague, Baudelaire underlines that his "painter of modern life"

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116 "*de tirer l'éternel du transitoire*" (10).

117 "*Il est sans doute excellent de d'étudier les anciens maîtres pour apprendre à peindre, mais cela ne peut être qu'un exercice superflu si votre but est de comprendre le caractère de la beauté présente. (…) En un mot, pour que toute* modernité *soit digne de devenir antiquité, il faut que la beauté mystérieuse que la vie humaine y met involontairement en ait été extraite*" (11).

is different from a “mere flâneur” whose pleasure is derived only from circumstance *(see above* fn108). Hence, if we can still feel a disdain for the “mere flâneur” in Baudelaire, a disdain that we repeatedly find in satirical studies on the said social type, “the painter of modern life” is different from that “mere flâneur” but he is a flâneur nonetheless! With this essay, Baudelaire puts into place a hierarchy of the flâneur: the passive and traditional one who welcomes the random beauty of the street and the active one who hunts and extracts that beauty. It is through that transformation, that new active passivity, that the flâneur, originally a caricature of what was perceived as a new kind of urban inhabitant, a term and type whose circulation depended on the success of the press, became through the reception of Baudelaire's text a cultural trope related to modernity and even more closely to urban space.

Today this connection between the term “flâneur” and modernity is a commonplace. It is for instance used in works by scholars like Italian Giampaolo Nuvolati in *Interpretazione dei luoghi* (xi) or Costa Rican Dorde Cuvardìc Garcìa in his exhaustive study of the flâneur figure, *El* flâneur *en las prácticas culturales, el costumbrismo y el modernismo* (88). In a British context, the influence of Baudelaire's text on the reception of the concept of flâneur is best illustrated in Chris Jenks' article “Watching Your Step: The History and Practice of the flâneur” from the collection *Visual Culture* edited by Jenks himself. Preceding a quote from “The Painter of Modern Life”, Jenks defends his article on the flâneur in London with a reference to Baudelaire:

> In this chapter, given my interests in examining urban space, I seek to reconstitute the analytic force of the flâneur. The flâneur is the metaphoric figure originally brought into being by Baudelaire, as the spectator and depicter of modern life, most specifically in relation to contemporary art and the sights of the city. (146)

If, as we have seen, Jenks differentiates Baudelaire's “modernity” from how we use the term today by underlining that it has to be taken as a synonym for “contemporary” in its context of origin, the most interesting part of this passage is that Jenks, supported by a quote from “The Painter of Modern Life”, presents Baudelaire as the father of the figure and the article as the “original depiction” of the flâneur (146). The previous paragraphs have proven that the figure of the flâneur was anterior to Baudelaire's article. However Jenks' claim is not far from the truth since the poet's text was indeed instrumental into transforming the caricature of idleness into a “metaphoric/methodological” figure for the study of urban space (146). The flâneur before Baudelaire was seen from the outside, a disembodied social type. Thanks to Baudelaire's standing, the figure was given flesh and became a metaphor that any individual can take over. Once that said, tightly connecting the popularisation of the metaphor of the “flâneur” solely to Baudelaire overshadows the “midwife” of such a rebirth in the field of cultural studies: Walter Benjamin whose

role was essential in the circulation of the term.

From 1927 onwards, Benjamin focused a substantial part of his prolific study on the city of Paris in the 19th century with a special interest for Baudelaire's poetry, the development of trade and the democratisation of commodities—and by extension the figure of the flâneur. In this period which preceded his death in 1940, Benjamin amassed a vast amount of notes on modernising Paris, notes which will be posthumously made into the *Arcades Project*, an unfinished work whose publication aimed at giving a shape to Benjamin's investigation on the French capital. The first edition of *Das Passagen-Werk* was published in 1982 in its original German. It was followed in 1989 by a complete French version who translates the German title (*Das Passagen-Werk* becomes *Le Livre des passages*) and adds a subtitle: "*Paris, capitale du XIXe siècle*". This addition to the original title comes from two exposés written by Benjamin in 1935 and 1939 in order to attract sponsors (Benjamin, *Arcades Project* x), two exposés which have been published by themselves in French in recent years. *The Arcades Project*, The English edition of *Das Passagen-Werk,* will finally be published in 1999 at Harvard University and offer the possibility for the text to get a worldwide circulation in academic and intellectual circles.

In terms of form, the two 1935 and 1939 exposés we have just mentioned are the only texts in the bulk of the whole *Arcades Project* considered to have been completed by the author, a status which explains their independent publications in French. The rest of the text is made of fragments from Benjamin's readings (notes, quotes and illustrations gathered over more than a decade), an incomplete form due to the author's premature death and best expressed by a quote from the book itself: "The fundamentally unfinishable collection of things worth knowing, whose utility depends on chance, has its prototype in study" (802). Unfinished and fragmentary, the *Arcades Project* was supposed to be the ultimate cultural investigation on modernising Paris and what that modernisation meant for society and culture, and so by extension the arts. This overwhelming project which Benjamin refered to as the "*Passagenarbeit*, or just the *Passagen*" if we believe his translators (x), was rooted, as its title suggests, in the Parisian arcade, or *passage*. One of the new features of urban life introduced by the Haussmannian makeover of the French capital, the arcade is used by Benjamin as a stepping stone to unfold his reflection on the many changes the industrial and liberal nineteenth century has brought to European metropolises. In relation with the environment of the arcade, Benjamin's argument will also rely on the figure of the flâneur, a figure which is for the German critic the arcade's natural inhabitant. To build his reflection on the flâneur and the connection between the apparition of that new social type and the new urban feature of the arcade, Benjamin will find support in Baudelaire's poetry and essays. As said above, the figure of the flâneur would have kept on solely being synonym with the bourgeois archetype it was in the

newspapers that first coined its term and character without the reception and posthumous influence of Baudelaire's work and life which transformed the flâneur into a cultural trope, a transformation which was amplified by Benjamin's own reading of the French poet.

Baudelaire was an author Benjamin was very intimate with since, besides having translated him in his youth (Benjamin, *Writer of Modern Life* 2), he also produced essays on Baudelaire while he was working on what would become the *Arcades Project*. These essays on Baudelaire, which also appear as fragments in the great magma of the *Arcades Project* (958), have been compiled and published in 2006 on their own under the title *The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire*. Needless to say that the title for this 2006 first edition is a direct reference to Baudelaire's article “The Painter of Modern Life” we have discussed above. This reference shows how influential and recognisable the title of the small essay by the French poet is for the 2006 book's potential audience, understand academic and intellectual circles. It has to be noted that there is no trace of such a title in Benjamin's notes. What's more, the epithet “writer of modern life” is not used by Benjamin in the *Arcades Project*, whether it be about Baudelaire or someone else. The fact that in 2006 the Belknap Press of Harvard University and the editor Michael W. Jennings have chosen this title for their publication shows the interconnectivity of the reception of Baudelaire's and Benjamin's works.

Baudelaire had written an essay on another artist, illustrator Constantin Guys, and titled it “The Painter of Modern Life”. In the original historical context of publication, “modern life” or “modernity” was understood by Baudelaire as “contemporary”, as he declared about what Guys is pursuing as an artist:

> He is looking for that quality which you must allow me to call “modernity”; for I know of no better word to express the idea I have in mind. 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.[118] (Baudelaire, *Painter* 12)

As it is evident in this passage, the concept of “modernity” was ill-defined and not self-explanatory when Baudelaire wrote his essay and needless to say that it had no relation with what we now call modernity or modernism. “Modernity” at the time Baudelaire wrote *The Painter* was a term which was not encompassing a period and its specificities but which was used to describe what was happening then, not as historically and culturally significant facts but as merely temporal ones. In other terms, “modern life” was simply the present. Yet, this expression drifted from Baudelaire's

118 “Il cherche ce quelque chose qu'on nous permettra d'appeler la *modernité*: car il ne se présente pas de meilleur mot pour exprimer l'idée en question. Il s'agit, pour lui, de dégager de la mode ce qu'elle peut contenir de poétique dans l'historique, de tirer l'éternel du transitoire” (Baudelaire, *Peintre* 10).

essay to the publication of Benjamin's, ultimately presenting Baudelaire as the “Writer of Modern Life”, a title in which the meaning of the expression has changed even though the expression itself has not. In the 2006 publication the “modern life” is not the present, the contemporary; it is instead modernity and modernism, both concepts which have been constructed on Baudelaire's work and, to a lesser extent, life by many literary critics and above all by Benjamin himself.

The treatment of the qualification “of modern life” is a good example of how certain keywords or expressions used by influential authors in a different context can become landmarks, easily recognisable and self-explanatory trigger words. The understanding of what “modern life” is for Baudelaire is quite different from Benjamin's own understanding, a statement which is obvious enough but which nevertheless tends to be forgotten while discussing complex and ever-moving notions such as artistic currents or dominant modes of thought. The “modern life” for both author,conomic Baudelaire and Benjamin, was set at the same historical time but it does not stop the perception of such time to change between the two authors as Baudelaire experienced it first-hand and instantly while Benjamin experienced it through documents and therefore vicariously. Benjamin rightfully puts “modernity” in Baudelaire back to its context by profusely referring to “The Painter of Modern Life” and the fact that it is an essay on beauty in art. However, according to Benjamin, “modernity” in Baudelaire can only be understood if one considers his whole work, and in a passage of his “Exposé of 1939” on Baudelaire's poetry he writes that the “linchpin of [Baudelaire's] entire theory of art is ‘modern beauty,’ and for him the proof of modernity seems to be this: it is marked with the fatality of being one day antiquity, and it reveals this to whoever witnesses its birth.” This reading of modernity might be present in Baudelaire's poetry; at least such argument is open for debate. Yet, as far as the essay “The Painter of Modern Life” is concerned, Baudelaire says something widely different on the relation between beauty, modernity and antiquity. First note that if Benjamin structures a part of his 1939 exposé on the relation between the items of this trinity, the word “antiquity” only appears once in Baudelaire. Second, that the considerations on beauty, antiquity and modernity in Baudelaire's essay is less dark than in Benjamin and the hierarchy less strict between the beauty of antiquity and the beauty of modernity, strangely “marked with the fatality of being one day antiquity” in Benjamin. We can see the difference in tone in the quote already given below (fn 112) where modern beauty is the present day beauty and becoming the equal of antiquity is not a curse like in Benjamin but a boon: “In short, for any ‘modernity’ to be worthy of one day taking its place as ‘antiquity’, it is necessary for the mysterious beauty which human life accidentally puts into it to be distilled from it” (Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life* 13-4).

As we can see with the difference of interpretations on the notion of “modernity” in the cultural

context of 19th century France between Baudelaire and Benjamin even though the latter's commentary is tacitly supposed to explain Baudelaire's view, the unquestioned repetition of such trigger words as “modern life” or “modernity” in different times, texts and contexts bring a sense of continuity which overshadows the roots and successive transformations of the concepts they signify. What's more, the influence of a given commentator can eclipse or at least orientate future readings of an original text. If this problem is at the source of the epistemological blockade literary studies encounter as opposed to hard sciences which are based on other forms of demonstration, it is always important to keep in mind that an exegesis of a text and the interpretation of the concepts it contains are always related one way or the other to the author himself and what he wants to convey. In other terms, there cannot be complete subjectivity in the field of literary studies or in cultural studies for that matter. Once that said, it doesn't mean that a given exegesis or commentary is inherently wrong since it is not completely subjective, but it does mean that we need to look critically at commentaries and constantly consider it with regards to the original text it builds its legitimacy on. In the case of Baudelaire and Benjamin, as the commentary provided by Benjamin has orientated the readings of many readers after him on notions such as “modernity” or “flâneur” in Baudelaire (orientations which, again, are not bad in themselves), it is interesting to go back to the now eclipsed source to see how Benjamin's own commentary, and how commentary on Benjamin's commentary, have influenced the reception of Baudelaire's essay on the modern city and how distant they can be from what Baudelaire actually published. This method is the one we already used in our study on the word “psychogeography” in the previous chapter. Now, we will indirectly discuss “modernity” and “modern life”, and by extension the term and figure we are interested with in the course of this chapter: The flâneur.

Modernity, Baudelaire and the Parisian arcades are intrinsically connected in Benjamin's argument, an argument which is as cultural as it is economic. Irremediably, this trinity of a time, an author and a place, along with the mix of culture and economics of Benjamin's demonstration, summon the Parisian flâneur. Since Benjamin writes about a time which has seen the apparition of the flâneur, about an author which has discussed (even if indirectly) its importance for that time, and finally about a place (Paris) of which the flâneur is considered to be king, it is no surprise to see that Benjamin has dedicated a chapter on the flâneur in one of his essays on Baudelaire (Benjamin, *The Writer* 66-96). In preparation for this chapter on the flâneur, Benjamin tells us that the figure of the poet in Baudelaire is similar to the prostitute or the “man of letters” (that we called littérateur above)—they all have to be on the street to sell, they go to the marketplace as a flâneur, “ostensibly to look around, but in truth to find a buyer” (40). From professionals earning their bread from the street (their “marketplace” to borrow his terminology), Benjamin moves seamlessly to the flâneur.

In a way the flâneur which was defined as idleness personified becomes in Benjamin's essay a commodity, mixing *oisivité* (idleness) with *négoce* (trade—and etymologically the negation of *oisivité*). This reorientation of the flâneur in a Marxist context is pervasive throughout Benjamin's texts on modernising Paris, whether they have been published in the *Arcades Project* or in *The Writer of Modern Life*. Still on this chapter on the flâneur, and while discussing the flourishing genre of the physiologies and its early versions, Benjamin writes:

> It was indeed the most obvious thing to give people a friendly picture of one another. Thus, the physiologies helped fashion the phantasmagoria of Parisian life in their own way. But their method could not get them very far. People knew one another as debtors and creditors, salesmen and customers, employers and employees, and above all as competitors. In the long run, it seemed quite unlikely that they could be made to believe their associates were harmless oddballs. (Benjamin, *Writer* 70)

In what was a satirical, seemingly harmless genre which answered to a growing demand, Benjamin sees primarily class struggle. On a similar note, in the *Arcades Project* we found, “Insofar as the flâneur presents himself in the marketplace, his flânerie reflects the fluctuations of commodities” (367). In the Paris of the 19th century depicted by Benjamin, everything is part of Marx's cash nexus, economy and trade are the deepest causes of the emergence of the arcades, and so the *physiologie* genre, and so the flâneur. Before being a social type, like “a flâneur”, an individual is primarily classified according to his/her place in the cash nexus in Benjamin's view. Benjamin continues by saying that the genre of the physiologies peaked with Balzac and others, as we have discussed above, and that such success was the expression of an anxiety of the urban dweller which stemmed from the difficulties of surviving in a now hostile environment. The physiologies were therefore a sort of guide to recognise the different species, to familiarise oneself with the different groups and generally to put the multitude in order:

> Delvau, Baudelaire's friend and the most interesting among the minor masters of the feuilleton, claimed that he could divide the Parisian public according to its various strata as easily as a geologist distinguishes the layers in rocks. If that sort of things could be done, then life in the big city was surely not as disquieting as it probably seemed to people. [...] The more alien a big city becomes, the more knowledge of human nature—so it was thought—one needs to operate in it. In actuality, the intensified struggle for survival led an individual to make an imperious proclamation of his interests. When it is a matter of evaluating a person's behavior, intimate familiarity with these interests will often be much more useful than familiarity with his character. (71)

The picture painted by Benjamin of 19th century Paris is therefore a rather negative one compared to

what we see in Bazin, the physiologies or even Baudelaire's *Painter of Modern Life*. The “big city” for Benjamin is the space of predilection for the expression of class struggle but also the “struggle for survival”. According to Benjamin, the genre of the physiologies which aimed at appeasing the fear of the newly alienated urban dwellers was then “outmoded” by a literature “concerned with the disquieting and threatening aspects of urban life” (71), understand the detective novel. All this demonstration from Benjamin indicates that he considers the metropolis to be the place for alienation, the place for an anxiety which cannot be calmed because intrinsically the urban dweller, and with him the flâneur, are individuals in the crowd, neither inside nor outside, both observed and observant.

We have seen that in Baudelaire's *Painter* the notions of crowd goes hand in hand with the idea of the flâneur. The crowd is to the flâneur a territory to explore without danger, a exciting place to enjoy like “an immense reservoir of electrical energy” (9), a positive depiction of the crowd which was not explicit in Lacroix or Huart. The early flâneur of the physiologies was a spectator but not really part of the crowd. As we have said, Lacroix or Bazin even highlights the flâneur's superiority over the other passers-by, or *badaud*, a rather derogatory term. Inspired by Baudelaire, who was himself inspired by Poe's short story “The Man of the Crowd”, Benjamin takes for himself the ambivalent relation between the flâneur and the crowd, yet applies to it a rather dark layer: The crowd is no longer the place for experience but the place of alienation, the embodiment of the flâneur's impossible status between passivity and activity, both observant and observed. He describes the flâneur as evolving in an in-between, inside and outside the crowd but also caught in the cash nexus as well as motivated and alienated by commodity consumption:

> The crowd is the veil through which the familiar city beckons to the flâneur as phantasmagoria—now a landscape, now a room. Both become elements of the department store, which makes use of flânerie itself to sell goods. The department store is the last promenade for the flâneur. (40)

Benjamin's presentation of the flâneur as an eternal outsider stuck in a phantasmagoria and the commodification of the world clashes with what Baudelaire wrote in “The Painter of Modern Life”. The flâneur in Baudelaire has an air of aristocracy, and this aristocracy is not criticised as being unfair or artificial. The Baudelairian flâneur considers himself to be the high society looking at the low, the high society of the artist understood romantically who can extract beauty from the mud. This perspective give to the Baudelairian flâneur mirrors the poet's own position in the French society. Starting in a wealthy bourgeois family to being in debt and adopting a Bohemian life in Paris and elsewhere, Baudelaire's life and his praise of the flâneur through Guys is the best example of that movement from aristocracy to democracy. While describing some of Constantin Guys'

illustrations, Baudelaire discusses female beauty and just like he had written that the beauty of the antiquity can be found in modernity, the beauty and nobility can be found in prostitutes (34-5); in other words that the beauty of modernity can be extracted from many women, from "whatever social station they may belong."

A former aristocrat in Baudelaire or *nouveau-riche* bourgeois in the physiologies, the flâneur falls to the level of the pavement and walks the streets instead of whizzing through them in a carriage, and he does not do it as one burdens by a curse or a deterioration of one's status, the flâneur walks because he likes it, takes the omnibus because he likes the crowd. The physiologies were slightly sneering at the figure of the flâneur because of the requisites of the satirical tone they had to embrace and Baudelaire's view on the street are sometimes mixed with horror, but both set of texts see the flâneur's observatory approach as positive and highlights the pleasure one can derive from such activity, without even mentioning other things like knowledge and beauty.

Observation of street scene is good—This is unmistakably the key idea of "The Painter of Modern Life". Yet, when Benjamin reads Baudelaire's essay, he reads in it isolation and alienation. When Baudelaire was describing the "immense joy" of the perfect flâneur and allegorist "to be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home, to see the world, to be at the centre of the world, and yet to remain hidden from the world" (*Painter* 9), the tone used by Benjamin in reference to this passage is strikingly different. Introducing his argument based on Baudelaire's lyrical poetry on Paris, he writes:

> This poetry is no hymn to the homeland; rather, the gaze of the allegorist, as it falls on the city, is the gaze of the alienated man. It is the gaze of the flâneur, whose way of life still conceals behind a mitigating nimbus the coming desolation of the big-city dweller. The flâneur still stands on the threshold—of the metropolis as of the middle class. Neither has him in its power yet. In neither is he at home. He seeks refuge in the crowd. (*Writer of Modern Life* 40)

Similar elements are present in both passages but the tone employed is vastly different. In both it is question of inside and outside, seeing/gazing and hiding, but when Baudelaire considers it to be pleasurable and a possible source of art, if not the only acceptable source of "modern", contemporary beauty, Benjamin talks about the "gaze of the alienated man" and the "coming desolation" for the city dweller, a theme that is not at all present in "The Painter of Modern Life". The difference between the original and the commentary, between the *Painter* and the *Writer* are salient and can be explained by the simple fact that Benjamin talks from a position in which he considers himself to be examing Baudelaire's modernity a posteriori, once it has unravelled in all its cruelty. Written in May 1935 and the summer and fall of 1938 and both unpublished during

Benjamin's lifetime, the two essays that form the best part of the *Writer of Modern Life* were produced during the strongest years of European fascism, years during which Benjamin was in exile in Paris. Considering the context they have been written in, one understands how the positive, hopeful tone of Baudelaire's *Painter* has been drastically watered down. Praising Guys allegorist approach, Baudelaire was indirectly praising his poetical approach which took modern Paris as a lyrical subject. Similarly, depicting Baudelaire and the flâneur has a sort of messianic figure announcing the apocalypse and infused in melancholy, Benjamin indirectly depicts himself in the last years of his life.

One could argue that Benjamin was writing that passage in reference to Baudelaire's poetry and not the *Painter*, that the feeling of alienation he ascribes to the flâneur comes from reading Baudelaire's verse poems. I would answer to that argument by putting the emphasis again on the similarities between the two texts which are meaningful (most notably the notion of "being at home"), but also by reminding a fact that is often omitted in commentaries on Baudelaire following Benjamin: Baudelaire never used the terms "*flâneur*", "*flâner*" and "*flânerie*" in his poetry, only in his essays and articles. This absence of the flâneur from Baudelaire's poetry, whether it be in verse or prose, cannot be explained by a lack of knowledge of the term: He first used it in *La Fanfarlo*, a short story published in 1847 and in some articles published while he was writing his poetical work. The explanation probably has to do with the question of genres and the hermetical limits of poetry and critique. The terms, the concept itself as we have seen above, came from the periodicals and were created to reach and shape identification with the new, widening urban readership. It is therefore not much of a surprise to find Baudelaire using them only when he writes essays, texts which all aimed at being published in periodicals like the ones we have been considering and which were gathered under the title "The Painter of Modern Life".

The flâneur when used by Baudelaire is always a positive figure, close to the harmless idle one described in the physiologies. What Benjamin's reading of Baudelaire brings to the concept is the curse of modernity, a notion we only find in his poetical work. We have to keep in mind that Baudelaire was not an enemy of modernity, as we have seen in from quoted passages taken from "The Painter of Modern Life". To him, modernity was not an historical period but simply the opposite of the old tradition; modernity was the living contemporary. On the other hand, as he builds *The Arcades Project*, his monumental study on Paris in the 19th century, study which will use Baudelaire's work as well as the emergence of the physiologies as a pillar, Benjamin will treat modernity, the "modern time" of the titles, as an historical period. Hence the rise of both the physiology genre and the flâneur are in Benjamin both symptoms of the "coming desolation" that modernity will bring, both agents and consequences of the "phantasmagoria of the marketplace" in

19th century Europe. In his introduction to the 1939 exposé which opens now the editions of the *Arcades Project*, Benjamin writes:

> Our investigation proposes to show how, as a consequence of this reyifing representation of civilizations, the new forms of behavior and the new economically and technologically based creations that we owe to the nineteenth century enter the universe of the phantasmagoria. […] They are manifest as phantasmagorias. Thus appear the arcades—first entry in the field of iron construction; thus appear the world exhibitions, whose link to the entertainment industry is significant. Also included in this order of phenomena is the experience of the flâneur, who abandons himself to the phantasmagorias of the marketplace. Corresponding to these phantasmagorias of the market, where people appear only as types, are the phantasmagorias of the interior, which are constituted by man's imperious need to leave an imprint of his private individual existence on the rooms he inhabits. (*Arcades* 14)

For Benjamin, the flâneur synthesises modernity and what he considers to be its centre: the ever-present marketplace and the phantasmagoric reality it creates. The flâneur is the “scout of the marketplace” (21), both explorer of the urban crowd and its agent, the cartographer and consumer of its novelties. These novelties brought in the French capital by the 19th century are both commodities and persons. As said above, industrialisation came with an influx of new urban denizens who then adopt the products of the new modes of production: “The man flatters himself that, on seeing a passerby swept along by the crowd, he has accurately classified him, seen straight through to the innermost recesses of his soul—all on the basis of his external appearance. Physiologies of the time abound in evidence of this singular conception” (21). Therefore the physiologies mirror the flâneur in the sense that it represents him but is also a written version of what he does according to Benjamin: Creating a panorama of the population, listing characters, classifying the street has one would a museum. The flâneur for Benjamin is the ultimate windowshopper, admiring, analysing and absorbing commodities and persons on display on the public boulevards. Both subject and object, this new perspective brought by the flâneur and the public, multiple and ever-changing environment of the modern city combined, this “gaze” of the flâneur, is what brings the phantasmagoria of modernity, “the gaze of the alienated man”. The flâneur himself is considered to be the cause and consequence of modernity in Benjamin's unfinished project. A reading that moves away from Baudelaire's own.

As we have mentioned and has we need to remember, the gaze in Baudelaire's *Painter* was the creative gaze of the artist Constantin Guys, a heroic gaze. As an illustrator, Guys' eye is praised and the fact that he extracts types from the street becomes an epic gesture, an uplifting one, not an

alienation:

> So now, at a time when others are asleep, Monsieur G. is bending over his table, darting on to a sheet of paper the same glance that a moment ago he was directing towards external things, skirmishing with his pencils, his pen, his brush, splashing his glass of water up to the ceiling, wiping his pen on his shirt, in a ferment of violent activity, as though afraid that the image might escape him, cantankerous though alone, elbowing himself on. And the external world is reborn upon his paper, natural and more than natural, beautiful and more than beautiful, strange and endowed with an impulsive life like the soul of its creator.[119] (Baudelaire, *Painter* 12)

Baudelaire and Benjamin's diagnostics on urban modernity both see the novelty that the logic of the physiologies constitutes. However, it has to be noted that the term “phantasmagoria”, dear to Benjamin, is also used by Baudelaire, but not in a pejorative way. For Baudelaire, in order to make the artistic creation “natural and more than natural, beautiful and more than beautiful”, the flâneur embodied by the illustrator Constantin Guys has to extract the phantasmagoria from nature, from reality. In short, art and beauty comes from the representation of the phantasmagoria in nature. Directly following the passage quoted above, Baudelaire writes: “The phantasmagoria has been distilled from nature. All the raw materials with which the memory has loaded itself are put in order, ranged and harmonized, and undergo that forced idealization, which is the result of a childlike perceptiveness—that is to say, a perceptiveness acute and magical by reason of its innocence!”[120] (12).

Baudelaire has a positive view of the phantasmagoria, and by extension the flâneur, while Benjamin sees the figure and its urban environment under the negative light of illusion and alienation. A notion of alienation which was not present in Baudelaire and yet appears in Benjamin's essay on the poet and what's more survives in the editorial paratext on the text, a new reading which influences indirectly later commentaries on "The Painter of Modern Life" based on Benjamin's own. This is evident when we read the introduction to the *Writer of Modern Life*. In this editorial text

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119 “*Maintenant, à l'heure où les autres dorment, celui-ci est penché sur sa table, dardant sur une feuille de papier le même regard qu'il attachait tout à l'heure sur les choses, s'escrimant avec son crayon, sa plume, son pinceau, faisant jaillir l'eau du verre au plafond, essuyant sa plume sur sa chemise, pressé, violent, actif, comme s'il craignait que les images ne lui échappent, querelleur quoique seul, et se bousculant lui-même. Et les choses renaissent sur le papier, naturelles et plus que naturelles, belles et plus que belles, singulières et douées d'une vie enthousiaste comme l'âme de l'auteur*” (Baudelaire, *Peintre* 9).

120 “*La fantasmagorie a été extraite de la nature. Tous les matériaux dont la mémoire s'est encombrée se classent, se rangent, s'harmonisent et subissent cette idéalisation forcée qui est le résultat d'une perception* enfantine*, c'est-à-dire d'une perception aiguë, magique à force d'ingénuité!*” (*Ibid.*)

opening the collection of Benjamin's essays on Baudelaire written in the 1930s, Michael W. Jennings lists the similarities, the common themes between Baudelaire's and Benjamin's essays based on quotations from Baudelaire's text. Among these direct references to Baudelaire's text we find:

> the loss of status of the modern artist—the descent from a state of genius to one of “convalescence”; the importance of such seemingly marginal figures as the dandy and the flâneur; the isolation and alienation of the modern individual in the urban crowd, where ‘the spectator is a prince who everywhere rejoices in his incognito’; and even the sounding of the theme of phantasmagoria. (Benjamin, *Writer* 24)

Besides arguments that are mostly based on what I would call “trigger words” in a reference to how advertisement work, like the notion of a loss of status of the modern artist which have nothing to do with Baudelaire's argument but is an easily recognisable marker of Benjamin's theory, Jennings' list reproduces the negativity expressed by Benjamin. The artist as being in a state of “convalescence” can indeed be found in Baudelaire's text, but it is there something positive which does not carry any notions of weakness and powerlessness. Based on the character in Poe's story “The Man of the Crowd” who is a convalescent who starts the story behind a café window, gazing at a crowd, the convalescent artist is described by Baudelaire himself as follows: “The convalescent, like the child, is possessed in the highest degree of the faculty of keenly interesting himself in things, be they apparently of the most trivial. […] The child sees everything in a state of newness; he is always *drunk*. Nothing more resembles what we call inspiration than the delight with which a child absorbs form and colour”[121] (Baudelaire, *Painter* 8).

Therefore in Baudelaire the artist as a convalescent, the artist as a child is not seen as opposed to the genius of the tradition and is not at all a state foreign to inspiration. Moreover, Jennings eludes the rest of Baudelaire's argument when the French author explicitly links the convalescent gaze of the child to the artistic genius:

> But genius is nothing more nor less than *childhood recovered* at will—a childhood now equipped for self-expression with manhood's capacities and a power of analysis which enables it to order the mass of raw material which it has involuntarily accumulated. It is by this deep and joyful curiosity that we may explain the fixed and animally ecstatic gaze of a child confronted with something new, whatever it be, whether a face or a

121 “*Le convalescent jouit au plus haut dégré, comme l'enfant, de la faculté de s'intéresser vivement aux choses, mêmes les plus triviales en apparance. […] L'enfant voit tout en* nouveauté *; il est toujours ivre. Rien ne ressemble plus à ce qu'on appelle l'inspiration, que la joie avec laquelle l'enfant absorbe la forme et la couleur*” (Baudelaire, *Peintre* 8),

> landscape, gilding, colours, shimmering stuffs, or the magic of physical beauty assisted by the cosmetic art.[122] (*Ibid*.)

Why then, when Baudelaire defends completely the genius and the inspiration of the convalescent and childlike artist, Jennings understands the “loss of status of the modern artist”?. The commentary made by Jennings based on Benjamin is biased because of that novelty of modernity at the time of Baudelaire, that “something new” italicised in the original French, which is obviously no longer new when Jennings writes his introduction in 2006. What we see with Jennings' introduction is how the historical distance is wrongfully eclipsed and how our reading of a text can be thoroughly shaped by previous commentaries made by prestigious critical authors. In other words, after Benjamin's critical work on modern Paris and Baudelaire the reading of both for contemporary cultural critics fatally forgets that “modernity” when it appeared was obviously not considered as negatively as it often is today. Hence the flâneur, the archetype of the modern urban man in both Baudelaire and Benjamin wears different masks in both, depending on their vision of modernity, whether it is rather positive or negative, whether it is perceived immediately or retrospectively. Highlighting these discrepancies between the original and its commentary is not a way to undermine Benjamin's and Jenning's reading, it is only a way to bring them back to their original context of production. With Benjamin, the figure of the flâneur will change because the cultural context has changed and some of its new attributes have to be taken into consideration keeping this in mind. Like Jennings says in his conclusion to his introduction, “Walter Benjamin's essays on Charles Baudelaire and his era are perhaps the most profound and troubling representation we have of the capitalist modernity of the early twentieth century” (Benjamin, *Writer* 25); in other words Benjamin's critical work is more significant if taken as a document on its context of redaction (the first half of the twentieth century) rather than on the emergence of European modernity at the time of its birth (the middle of the 19th century).

Alienation and isolation were absolutely absent from Baudelaire's considerations on the flâneur. But this is not the only difference between Baudelaire and Benjamin when it comes to the flâneur. In “The Painter of Modern Life”, his characteristic idleness was pure aesthetic pleasure, passively absorbing the scenes seen from the street. As opposed to this passivity, in Benjamin's *Arcades Project* the idle flâneur is repeatedly connected to the hunter. It is notably the case in the notes

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122 “*Mais le génie n'est que l'*enfance retrouvée *à volonté, l'enfance douée maintenant, pour s'exprimer, d'organes virils et de l'esprit analytique qui lui permet d'ordonner la somme de matériaux involontairement amassée. C'est à cette curiosité profonde et joyeuse qu'il faut attribuer l'oeil fixe et animalement extatique des enfants devant le* nouveau*, quel qu'il soit, visage ou paysage, lumière, dorure, couleurs, étoffes chatoyantes, enchantement de la beauté embellie par la toilette*” (Baudelaire, *Peintre* 8).

bundled together in a chapter on the flâneur (*Arcades* 416-55), chapter in which he links the figure to the hunter and by extension to the emergence and rise of the detective story. The modern detective story appears in literature at the time of the flâneur and the modern city thanks to some of Poe's short stories, stories that Baudelaire translated into French. Benjamin writes on that new urban genre created by the conditions of modernity, a genre which to him is related to the flâneur:

> Preformed in the figure of the flâneur is that of the detective. The flâneur required a social legitimation of his habitus. It suited him very well to see his indolence presented as a plausible front, behind which, in reality, hides the riveted attention of an observer who will not let the unsuspecting malefactor out of his sight. (*Arcades* 442)

The idle gaze becomes “riveted attention” and the pure aesthetic pleasure turns into a detective investigation. Detective and flâneur are considered to be similar figures, both walking the street in search of something. In Benjamin's argument, the modern city has to be perceived like the wilderness described in James Fenimore Cooper's novel *The Last of the Mohicans*, a work Benjamin often refers to in the notes for his unfinished *Arcades Project.* To the German cultural critic, the flâneur does something similar to Cooper's hunters, analysing the details and hunting for clues, traces, meaningful marks. In the notes dedicated to idleness, Benjamin deepens this metaphor:

> The experiences <*Erfahrungen*> of one who attends to a trace result only very remotely from any work activity, or are cut off from such a procedure altogether. (Not for nothing do we speak of "fortune hunting.") They have no sequence and no system. They are a product of chance, and have about them the essential interminability that distinguishes the preferred obligations of the idler. The fundamentally unfinishable collection of things worth knowing, whose utility depends on chance, has its prototype in study. (*Arcades* 801-2)

Therefore the flâneur thanks to Benjamin's commentary gains a sense of activity which he certainly didn't have in the first natural histories based on the new urban character. An idler, a paragon of the Latin notion of *otium* (which gave “oisivity”, free time), the early flânerie was considered unproductive in an economic way, and therefore solely performed by “man of leasure”. Benjamin on the other hand sets the flânerie in an economic context, and doing so injects in the figure a part of *neg-otium*—commerce but also a social and political role which goes beyond individuality. Connecting the figure of the flâneur to the hunter or the student, he also gives a certain sense of urgency, necessity, need to the flâneur which goes from being aimless in the way he looks at the world to having clear targets.

The idea of a flâneur who is no longer really one since he has now a purpose, a flâneur that has

moved from social bourgeoisie and aristocracy to the symbolical position of need of the marginals' community, a flâneur that also now wants to question what he perceives to be the alienation brought by modernity, is crucial if one wants to understand the urban, first-person texts written about London in the recent decades. That shift is also crucial if one reads first-person texts about Paris in the interwar period. These texts, which present themselves as personal accounts of walks in the French capital, echo Benjamin's concerns. This is not surprising since they were roughly written at the time and from the same Marxist perspective, or at least from the same starting point that modernity as failed and that there is something else to come. If the tones of the first descriptions of the flâneur was light and joyful like the electric lights of the boulevards, stuck between a useless First World War and the next waiting at the corner, Parisian writers depict the capital city in dark tones just like Benjamin does, and always under the light of memory. Before talking about members of the Surrealist movement, I would like to consider *Le Piéton de Paris* (the Paris Pedestrian), a non-fiction, first-person account of walks in Paris by Léon-Paul Fargue published in 1939.

In Fargue, like in Benjamin or the rest of the texts we will see in the paragraphs below, Paris is the place of memory and nostalgia, a nostalgia which gives a certain lyricism and personal flavour to the book. Note that in the mid-19th century physiologies, melancholy and nostalgia were not accepted as attributes of the flâneur. On the contrary, the flâneur was relishing in the novelty of modern commodities, the first one being the open, public city itself. What's more striking if we continue comparing the flâneur of the physiologies to the ones we find in interbellum texts is that the first was not expressing himself in the newspapers or in the physiologies which were trying to pinpoint that new urban type—the definition of the flâneur was always based on second-hand accounts, on the perception of an outside eye. The flâneur was taken as a character which had to be classified, etched out, illustrated. In contrast to that approach, in the Paris of the 1930s, writers put their walks on paper in the form of first-person accounts—the flâneur gets a voice, and this voice has melancholic undertones.

Léon-Paul Fargue is one of these writers who put their Parisian walks on paper and gave a comparatively rather dark picture of the city. After describing in the introduction his personal conception of art, a conception which makes *Le piéton* a work interested with "the secret geographies" and "the shadows, the sorrows, the premonitions, the muffled steps, the grieves laying in wait under the doors, the watchful smells awaiting, on one leg, the passage of the ghosts"[123], he concludes the account of his walks as follows, in a chapter titled *"Fantômes*" (ghosts):

123 "*Moi, je me suis laissé appeler par les géographies secrètes, par les matières singulières, aussi par les ombres, les chagrins, les prémonitions, les pas étouffés, les douleurs qui guettent sous les portes, les odeurs attentives et qui attendent, sur une patte, le passage des fantômes*" (Fargue 14).

> I am at the end of my sentimental and picturesque journey in a Paris which no longer exists, a Paris whose continuity only reaches us now in the form of memories growing each day paler, or of heartbreaking news: the death of a very dear friend, the end of a once magnificent family, the demolition of some house which had been chosen as meeting point by a good society.[124]

The Paris of Fargue is an historical Paris now populated with ghosts and that painful experience of a lost time reminds us of the lyrical poetry of Baudelaire in the *Flowers of Evil*, a book in which, as it is always useful to keep in mind, the term “flâneur” is never used. If Baudelaire has written about the then only social figure and gave it an artistic twist, it is the commentary that Benjamin will later make on "The Painter of Modern Life", *The Flowers* and Baudelaire himself which will turn the urban walker and by extension the flâneur into a mirror of Baudelaire's persona in his poetry, a melancholic and nostalgic character which looks at the city as a disappearing space, the past giving way to an ominous present. In his study on the flâneur (137), Curvadìc Garcia notes that shift towards the past in urban writing and by extension the emergence of an expressive, lyrical writer-walker by quoting a passage of Benjamin's *Arcades Project*:

> For the flâneur, a transformation takes place with respect to the streets: It leads him through a vanished time. He strolls down the street; for him, every street is precipitous. It leads downward—if not to the mythical Mothers, then into a past that can be all the more profound because it is not his own, it is not private. Nevertheless, it always remains the past of a youth. But why that of the life he has lived? The ground over which he goes, the asphalt, is hollow. His steps awaken a surprising resonance; the gaslight that streams down on the paving stones throws an equivocal light on this double ground. (*Arcades Project* 879-80)

This vision of the city as the place of the past, the pavement as a double ground on which private and public history resonates was not present in the early descriptions of the flâneur in the newspapers and physiologies. In other terms, the flâneur becomes an embodiment of melancholy and passing time through the prisms of Benjamin's commentary on Baudelaire. Baudelaire's poetry is undeniably lyrical and there is a sense of loss in some urban poems, like in “The Swan” we quoted in the second chapter of this thesis, but this nostalgia was not connected by Baudelaire himself to the flâneur. As extensively said above, the flâneur in Baudelaire's *Painter* looks towards

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124 “*Me voici au terme de mon voyage sentimental et pittoresque dans un Paris qui n'est plus, dans un Paris dont les prolongements ne nous parviennent déjà plus que sous formes de souvenirs chaque jour plus pâles, ou de nouvelles déchirantes : la mort d'un ami très cher, la fin d'une famille naguère encore brillante, la démolition de quelque maison qui fut jadis choisie pour y tenir assemblée de bon ton*” (Ibid., 232).

the future, not the past, it goes up the boulevards, not down the memory lane like some French interwar writers.

Such nostalgic vision of a fading city, memories going "paler" and old buildings getting erased, is shared between Fargue and other authors of the interwar period, such as Philipe Soupault in *Les Dernières nuits de Paris* (1928), a semi-autobiographical novel in the manner of Breton's famous *Nadja* (1929). Once that said, if Fargue's retelling of his walks is a way to paint a very dark Paris on the threshold of the next war, Soupault's book also possesses a sense of loss but balances it with a certain optimism. The text is centred on the narrator's relation with Georgette, a prostitute assimilated to night-time Paris who comes and goes and that the narrator follows: "In the streets that in the past she had walked following her own unusual method, I could distinguish the phosphorescent traces of her passage, that I naturally called memories"[125]. As we have seen above with Benjamin's focus on the flâneur as a hunter following clues, Soupault's narrator tracks the traces of the city. Similar to the way a private eye would look for a lost person, the text oscillates between the energetic fire of Georgette and the changed and changing landscape of Paris, threatened by the suburbs and losing its past magic: "Like Earth, Paris was cooling and becoming only an idea. For how many more years could it keep this power of illusion, for how many more years could it remain the master of time?"[126] As we can see in Fargue and Soupault, writers of the interbellum years have a certain apocalyptic vision of the French capital, slowly disappearing and changing its identity.

Another example of that kind of entropic literary description of Paris by a wanderer is *Le Paysan de Paris* (1926) by Louis Aragon, again a book in the shape of a first-person account of walks in Paris. A prominent member of the early core of the French Surrealists, Aragon gives us a narrator who sings the beauty of a marginal Paris under the threat of the builders' pickaxe ("*la pioche levée*", a recurring expression in the text; *see* 152, 205), a pickaxe ready to destroy the buildings and other remnants of the city's past. It is interesting to note that Aragon's work dedicates a lot of pages to the *passage de l'opéra*, an arcade which has been destroyed in 1925, shortly before the publication of *Le Paysan*, in order to extend the boulevard Haussmann. A work about the loss of urban dark corners, the city's margins and their "cursed professions" ("*professions maudites*", 152) of which prostitution is the epitome, *Le Paysan de Paris* gives picture of what the *passage de l'opéra* was to Aragon, a description widely different from Benjamin's own in the *Arcades Project*. As he is

125 "*Dans les rues que jadis elle parcourait avec cette méthode étonnante, je distinguais les traces phosphorescentes de son passage, que bien entendu je nommais souvenirs*" (Soupault, *Les Dernières nuits de Paris* 127).

126 "*Comme la Terre, Paris se refroidissait et devenait simplement une idée. Pour combien d'années encore garderait-elle cette puissance d'illusion, pour combien d'années demeurerait-elle maîtresse du temp?*" (Ibid., 119)

studying the arcades at a time when they are no longer a novelty but had already turned into a relic of the past, the Parisian *passages* in Aragon are the exact opposite of the bright and commodities-driven space described by Benjamin—a discrepancy which again highlights the absolute necessity for the cultural critic to put commentaries back into their original context. It would be easier after Benjamin to see the arcades as solely a creation of 19th century capitalism, but one can only do so by forgetting that like any other urban space, some arcades also became ruins, sometimes quickly so, and already while the *Arcades Project* was written. In other words, a cultural creation such as a type of space like the Parisian *passage* or today's mall have more than one life, depending on the time a commentary is made. If the passages in Benjamin's *Arcades Project* are all about commercial use, display, alienation, in Aragon's text, the *passage de l'opéra* is on the contrary where the social fabric of the city is woven in fraternity (157), where mysterious doors open the imagination to a world of possibilities (152), where the ephemeral and the transient is worshipped (154).

That emphasis put by Aragon on the transient, the temporary, the passing is accentuated by a semantic connection he creates between *passage* and “passing”. The arcades, the *passages*, become thanks to its etymological root in French the place of the passing (*le passager*) but also of the past (*le passé*) and the prostitute's trick (*la passe*), all the transitory concepts merging in a cult of the instant, a search for epiphanic moments in the temporal and spatial layers of the city. That quest for the passing, for the fleeting, the already-past, is in Aragon a way to salvage what is about to be destroyed. It is also a way to preserve, through poetic language, imagination and myth-building what didn't make it to the future:

> New myths are born with each of our steps. Where mankind has lived starts the legend, where it lives. I only wish to occupy my thoughts with these overlooked transformations. Each day is modified the modern sentiment of existence. It is a science of life which only belongs to those who are not experiencing it. It is a living science which engenders itself and becomes suicide.[127]

Aragon's text already plays with the porous border between fact and fiction and in that sense can be connected to what we have seen in the second chapter of this work—the real and imagined are combined in an attempt to capture the ever-transforming and by extension ever-disappearing urban space. Aragon's non-fiction is therefore alike to the works of Sinclair, Papadimitriou, Keiller and others in the sense that it aims not at fixating a final picture which would act as the real, a standard

127 “*Des mythes nouveaux naissent sous chacun de nos pas. Là où l'homme a vécu commence la légende, là où il vit. Je ne veux plus occuper ma pensée que de ces transformations méprisées. Chaque jour se modifie le sentiment moderne de l'existence. C'est une science de la vie qui n'appartient qu'à ceux qui n'en ont point l'expérience. C'est une science vivante qui s'engendre et se fait suicide*” (Aragon 149).

to go back to, but instead turns the city into a patchwork of apparitions and disappearances, a living science whose study is exciting by the very fact that it constantly slips away from the grasp of the examiner, engendering and cancelling itself endlessly. Therefore the non-fiction approach of Aragon and other Surrealists is not an admission of failure but on the contrary a method adapted to the nature of the modern city itself. A bridge between the flâneur of the physiologies and the London writers of the 1990s, the French Surrealists walking the streets of Paris are sharing many features with the later critics of modern urban space, whether it be a widely-shared antipathy for the destruction of the past, a passion for the marginal and the overlooked against the mainstream and the enforced (Aragon 160), or even a certain disdain for the car and the fast travel it creates (229-30).

Continuing our chronologically backward walk from Benjamin to the flâneur of the nineteenth century, such features shared by Surrealists and London writers already appear in a text which is considered to be one of the main inspiration for the Surrealist movement: Guillaume Apollinaire's *Le Flâneur des deux rives*, published in 1918 shortly before the poet's own passing. Haunted by the First World War whose consequences will eventually take his life, Apollinaire produces a text in which he compiles the changes witnessed by some parts of Paris during the war. With an omnipresent nostalgia and a certain languor, the author remembers the people who used to inhabit the streets and squares and who have now passed away, sometimes killed in action (Apollinaire 11). The content and title of Apollinaire's text is the perfect example of what happened to the term "flâneur", a term which was first crafted to describe a new urban type different from the authors' own, a name given by an outsider to a new species, and which has beenconomic slowly and consciously appropriated by writers who produced first-person account of their experience of the city. From the sarcastic descriptions of the mid-19th century physiologies and periodicals to Apollinaire's 1918 text, the "flâneur" has been incarnated and became the term of choice for people (mostly men) interested in expressing their experience of the changing city.

The narrator in *Le Flâneur des deux rives*, logically but not formally identified to Apollinaire himself, is obviously one of them and embraces the idleness of the social type, adding to these inactive reveries an active story-making through the people he meets, the bits he catches and the past he remembers or imagines. The "flâneur" who was first defined as an idle bourgeois watching the dazzling spectacle of the modern city becomes with time and through the first-person, non-fiction accounts of Apollinaire, Fargue, Soupault and Aragon among others the appointed reader of the urban text, but also its writer. "I'm visiting as seldom as possible the great libraries. I prefer walking down the quays, this exquisite public library"[128], writes Apollinaire in *Le Flâneur*, claiming

128 "*Je vais le plus rarement possible dans les grandes bibliothèques. J'aime mieux me promener sur les quais, cette*

that the public street is a text in itself whose spectacle is as instructive as a book from the greatest libraries. If the flâneur is a reader or a witness, a characteristic which had been given to him from the time of the physiologies, the first-person accounts also turn him into a writer since, as he walks, he gathers and transcribes not only his own memories but also the effective writings of the city such as graffiti (7), or the peculiar sounds one can hear on the street, like the Christmas carols (49-57).

Therefore over the years being a flâneur has become the perfect position to record the city, to read it but also indirectly to write it and participate in its collective construction over time. As noted by Curvadic about Dickens (153), the early descriptions of new urban types in fiction or articles belonging to the physiologies or *costumbrismo* at large was tainted with phrenology and used repeatedly the synecdoche as a mean to generalise, classify, pinpoint characters and through them changes undergone by the urban space. The lyrical writer-walker which sometimes called themselves flâneur but always produced first-person account of their relationship with a given city shun away from generalisation, instead praising the odd, the marginal, the extraordinary, the personal, whether in the form of their writing itself, similar to a personal diary, or in the themes and places explored. In that aspect, Aragon, still in *Le Paysan*, wrote in a fantastically polysemic passage: “I'm not losing myself, I'm dominating myself. Certain oddity more than the essence always catches the eye in a landscape. My point of view has a nice discover.”[129] The theme of the discovery, the personal discovery based on one's fatally imperfect point of view is the exact opposite to the scientific and classifying approach of the physiologies. Curvadic again rightfully summarises that the first form of the flâneur's gaze, coming not from flâneurs themselves but from writers describing the new urban type, disappeared when it became aware of the contradiction between its fixity and the changing nature of its object of study (158). The flâneur and its gaze as described in the newspapers of the 19th century or by Baudelaire in his programmatic *Painter of Modern Life* were always going hand in hand with illustrations since their function was to catch a fleeting moment, fixate a street scene. With the emergence of photography, the flâneur's gaze and its diagrams became obsolete as a purely descriptive approach. Since a machine could fixate a street scene better than any description, since it could offer a perfect illustration for the purpose of providing a classification of different types of characters, outfits, social behaviours, the flâneur's gaze turned more inwards, became more personal and increasingly focused on the temporality of the city, its perpetual transformations.

A majority of cities are living on their ruins, their past and such a time-influence approach brings

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délicieuse bibliothèque publique” (Apollinaire 75).

129 “*Je ne m'égare pas, je me domine. Toujours quelque absurdité plus que l'essentiel retient l'œil dans un paysage. Mon point de vue a un beau découvert*” (Aragon 294).

urban ghosts and metamorphosis to light. A sense of nostalgia, an interest for what had to pass and what had become was already there in the 19th century articles introducing the flâneur, but that nostalgia was pushed in the background since, because of the format, the voice of the articles' author was not so much lyrical, personal or intimate than descriptive. The Surrealists' artistic relationship to the French capital was informed by the technology of the time and the democratisation of photography: Just like their reclaimed the camera to produce experimental pictures which took the new artistic medium away from pure description, they reclaimed the urban walk and consequent description to turn it into pure poetical expression. Their descriptions of the city therefore became imaginative ones and more interested in the changes of the city than its novelties. The whole purpose of such writings was different from the early articles about the flâneur: When these articles wanted to describe the city, the first-person accounts wanted to become the changing city, put on paper or on film not what their eyes and bodies caught but how they treated, digested these information extracted from the urban space. This is that approach that will endure on the other side of the English Channel in the ethos of the British writers of the 1990s in London. An ethos that will be augmented by the local tradition and new imports, among which the Situationists' psychogeography, but also a widely different practice of urban exploration and an apparent change of focus of what is worth being written about in the city. All these transformations will change the "loitering flâneur" into what Iain Sinclair calls "stalker" in his seminal non-fiction work on London, *Lights Out for the Territory*. Before coming to Sinclair's notion of the "stalker" and its relation to the French flâneur, let's quickly explore how the latter reached Albion.

If Huart's physiology on the flâneur was published in Paris in 1841, introducing this new urban character, London readers had to wait until the year 1848 to have in their hands a book discussing it. Albert Smith's *Natural History of the Idler Upon Town* is an equivalent of Huart's physiology as the two books share their themes, tones, general structure and mode of production, and it is almost certain that Smith had read a copy of Huart's work or that they have at least both been influenced by a common and unknown source, the similarities being simply too numerous to be only coincidental. What we can keep from a reading of Smith's *Natural history of the Idler* (one of his many natural histories on different social types, just like Huart wrote different physiologies) is that the word flâneur was known in London in 1848 since we can read in the first pages of the text a direct and unexplained reference to the term, written in italics which shows that it was still a fresh and French import ("loitering *flâneurs*" 6). The authorial position of Smith is similar to Huart's and other writers interesting in describing social types at the time in the sense that Smith presents himself as an outside spectator studying the flâneurs, not a flâneur himself. Spying on the spies, he defends his methodology by quoting Robert Burns and warns the "loitering *flâneurs*" that "a chield's amang you

takin notes"; understand that he will pursue the flâneurs in the streets or indoors for the sake of his research.

When it comes to the street and the possible experiences one can derive from it, Smith is also no different from Huart, Balzac or Baudelaire's in the *Painter*. He writes of the modern London streets, using the majestic plural, that it offers to writers a fresh object for their art:

> Despairing, at length, to elaborate any new subjects at home, we will rush out into those never-ending miscellanies of original and striking scenes, which cost nothing to study, and never tire by their monotony—the streets of London.
>
> We adore the streets. We know there are thousands of our fellow-men who regard them merely as the spaces included by two boundary lines of bricks and mortar for the purposes of transition from one spot to another. But we look upon them as cheap exhibitions—*al fresco* national galleries of the most interesting kind, furnishing every varying pictures of character or incident. And in this feeling we will loiter on the pavements of their noisy and bustling thoroughfares, and strive to draw our likenesses from the every-day life and every-day people we may there encounter. (5)

This long quote is a good summary of how the modern street of a European metropolis was perceived by the authors of physiologies, or what Smith's publisher called "social zoologies". We found again the emphasis put on the street which is no longer seen as a shameful, low environment unfit for artistic consideration but on the contrary the new stage, or the new "national galleries", where mankind and beauty are on display. We found also the interest for the everyday people and scenes and the perpetual discoveries and aesthetic experiences one can find there. In general we also see a fascination for the real, the local customs, a fascination akin to the preoccupations of the *costumbrismo* of the Spanish-speaking world, a movement interested in depicting social customs and characters, a term which has strangely enough not been translated into other languages even when such movement appeared roughly at the same time in a number of 19th century metropolises, whether it be in the New World, in old European capitals like Paris and London as seen above, or in colonial metropolises like Calcutta (*see* Kaliprasanna Sinha's *The Observant Owl*).

In the English-speaking world, if not zoologies or natural histories, the term "sketches" is recurrent when one tries to describe this movement historically between romanticism and realism with a keen interest for the modern urban space. That's for instance how *The Observant Owl* is presented by Partha Chatterjee in his introduction to the 2008 translation by Swarup Roy. In this introduction and elsewhere, the recurring term "vignette" is also used and demonstrates yet again the concerns for the picturesque and the descriptive in such literary texts. It goes without saying that the survival of the term "sketch" might be explained by its use by the quintessential London author,

or even British author, of the 19th century, Charles Dickens, who published *Sketches by Boz* in 1836, therefore preceding Huart and Smith. *Sketches by Boz* is a collection of articles written between 1834 and 1836 for London newspapers. The subtitle of the first edition of the book is "Illustrative of Every-day Life and Every-day People", the exact expression used by Smith in the long quote above-mentioned. An early example which will influence the later texts, like we can see with Smith, the *Sketches* already contains all the features of the physiologies, or typological genre: small articles often first published in urban newspapers made of the descriptions of social mores and characters and completed illustrative drawings. It has to be noted however that Dickens' articles do not focus so much on characters but on scenes, places or events, with a preference for alcohol shops, bars and holidays. When writers like Huart in France or Smith in England will focus on one urban type, Dickens in his *Sketches* written in his youth still inscribes himself to the tradition of the *tableaux*, depicting a scene in the manner of a painter and not solely a social type in the manner of a botanist or zoologist. Nonetheless, whether it be for scenes or characters, urban writings in the London and Paris of the mid-19th century are pierced through and through by the idea of the picturesque and the appropriate notions of sketches, vignettes, *tableaux* or *esquisses*, depending which side of the English channel you are on.

Similarly, in regard to Smith's text which was probably produced less because of the necessity of writing it than because of a publisher's order, it is interesting to note that if he makes a reference to Dickens in his preliminary chapter to his work by his use of the expression "Every-day life and every-day people", the term he is using for what is essentially an equivalent of Huart's flâneur, the "idler", is also the title of a collection of short essays by Samuel Johnson published between 1758 and 1760 in a London weekly. Johnson's collection has little to do with urban space and his idler is more a thinker than a walker, in the Latin tradition where *otium,* or idleness, is opposed to *negotium*, or business: "Every man is, or hopes to be, an *Idler.* Even those who seem to differ most from us are hastening to encrease our Fraternity; as peace is the end of war, so to be idle is the ultimate purpose of the busy" (Johnson 2). The fact that Smith decided to take Johnson's term instead of directly using Huart's flâneur in the title even if he uses it in the body of his text show that he wished to make his text part of a recognisable and noble tradition. Thanks to Smith, we see how the construction of a literary tradition is often based on totemic authors (here Johnson and Dickens), inspired by foreign texts and ideas (Huart and the flâneur) and produced by specific market conditions (the demand for physiologies and the London periodical publishing industry).

As they were both capitals of major industrial economies, colonial empires and expanding cultures as well as home to an active publishing industry and a growing readership, the European cities of London and Paris and their relationship with the flâneur are very similar: What has been

said about Paris above can be said about London, and therefore what has been said about Huart can be applied to Smith's *Natural History of the Idler Upon Town*. If it is not worthwhile to repeat the same conclusions based on almost identical two books, it is nonetheless interesting to note that the tradition of the flâneur and the idler, and by extension the tradition of walking and writing about the city, take their roots in different authors or works depending on the city. Their different roots somehow mirror how today's London version of the urban walker differ from its French counterpart.

As we have seen above, the tradition of the flâneur in Paris is still tightly connected to Baudelaire and Benjamin, both being in their turns tightly connected to each other, as we can see by opening any book on both themes, Paris and flâneur (*see* Nuvolati 1; Solnit 197-200; Coverley's *The Art of Wandering* 154). When it comes to London, the totemic figures of the writer-as-a-walker are De Quincey, Blake or Dickens, authors of fiction and non-fiction with a romantic and mystical touch for the first two, and a more social flavour for the remaining one. If De Quincey and Dickens are oft-quoted in essays on London in literature and the authorial perspective of the flâneur, the first because of the walks in his autobiographical *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, the latter for his urban fictions and sketches, William Blake is omnipresent in London texts especially from the group of authors who follow Iain Sinclair's new approach to urban exploration in literature and flânerie. Sinclair himself has written extensively about Blake. Whether it be a sentence used as an inspiration for his book on Hackney ("Tho' obscured, this is the form of the Angelic land", Sinclair *Hackney* 13) or an essay on Blake and his relation to space (*see* Sinclair *Blake's London*), Sinclair's work is inhabited by the shadow of Blake's own.

This difference of patronage between the two cities is relative since Baudelaire and Blake's works have obviously crossed the Channel and fertilised minds and thoughts on urban space beyond their national borders. Nevertheless, the importance of Blake in London writings from the 1990s tells us something of the more mystical approach that British writers have of their metropolis. We have seen in our chapter on psychogeography how the concept lost its original, even though only theoretical, social edge and yet kept its more lyrical and spiritual aspect when it was revitalised in London in the last decade of the 20th century. Debord had conceived psychogeography as a mean to change the city and society in a very direct way, map the city to rebuild it. If this was the admitted purpose for the creation of the term and appropriate method, this theoretical approach has never been made into practice since the only time Debord and other members of the Situationist International really practised the *dérive* and therefore psychogeography was during drunken nights between Autumn 1952 and Spring 1953 (Debord *Oeuvres* 1668). However ineffective, it is worth-noting that the revival of psychogeography in the 1990s somehow takes its inspiration from such

theory and mix it with the traditionally romantic elements of the imaginary city, the hidden kingdom. As Greil Marcus sums it up for us in a quote we find in Solnit's *Wanderlust*:

> "The point", writes Greil Marcus, who has studied Situationism, " was to encounter the unknown in the face of experience. So you can walk up the street without thinking, letting your mind drift, letting your legs, with their internal memory, carry you up and down and around turns, attending to a map of your own thoughts, the physical town replaced by an imaginary city." (212)

This idea of the imaginary city was not present in Debord's texts or in any other from the Situationist International. The idea of a utopian city which was allegedly motivating the Situationists was not a concealed city but the city to come. That notion of the imaginary city does not really come from Debord but rather shows the influence of Blake's and the Surrealists' mysticism and oneirism in the rereading of the concept of psychogeography and urban exploration in literature as a whole.

It is with this London revival that the flâneur takes on another mask. If in the past the urban walker was synonymous with idleness, pleasure, comfort and randomness in the choice of his walks, the new flâneur in the London of the nineties is more active, in pain and on point. Instead of drifting aimlessly and leisurely like the proverbial flâneur of the physiologies, the persona of the walker in the works of Iain Sinclair and other British writers has a plan of action, a modus operandi, and his walks are not strolls but closer to expeditions. In that sense, it brings together many threads that we have discussed in the course of this chapter and adds it to the fabric of the term "flâneur".

Firstly, it takes from the original flâneur the concern for the public space, the street and the mode of exploration: the walk. Secondly, he is active, hunting like Benjamin's metaphor of the flâneur as a detective hunting for clues, traces. Thirdly, he gives the character a voice, an incarnation he didn't have in the early descriptions of the flâneur, and also a function of recording the changing city; in that aspect the flâneur in the London of the 1990s is related to the Surrealists and their sources as seen in their first-person accounts of their Parisian walks. Finally, the new form of the flâneur as written by London authors is infused with a certain mysticism coming from Blake and a psychological reading of Debord's concept of psychogeography. This very schematic list of characteristics is obviously unsatisfactory but it might help us highlighting how the flâneur of 19th century Paris became a new type of walker, a new type of writer for London authors under the name, popularised by Iain Sinclair in the West, of "stalker".

In this term, we find the antithesis of the traditional flâneur and yet its current, most active avatar. As we will see, the stalker stalks—he knows where he is going, he has a plan, he will not deviate from it, he follows an obsession, he is pushed outside on the street. What's more, and unlike

what was the case in the physiologies, here it is the walker who talks for himself without the mediation of an outside source. Unlike in Bazin's *l'Epoque sans nom*, the author does not present himself as the recipient of documents and memories previously gathered by a nameless flâneur— The author is the flâneur, the writer is the walker. In that sense, Sinclair's approach is close to the Surrealists' own, since they both directly share their point of view and, what's more, they often sprinkle pictures they of their co-walking friends have taken. It is the case in Breton's *Nadja* like it is the case in Sinclair's *Silenic Drift* or *Lights Out for the Territory* (LOFTT). The latter is the work where the notion of "stalker" is the most directly theorised, and therefore it is a text worth stopping on.

Lights Out for the Territory, published in 1997, is the first of many non-fiction books by Sinclair on London. Titled after the last sentence of Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* where the Territory is the wilderness of the Indian Territory, Sinclair's text consists of nine walks which end in nine essays on different parts of London. It is in the second essay, "The Dog and the Dish" that Sinclair first mentions the stalker as he walks with photograph Marc Atkins and joins a funeral march:

> The concept of "strolling", aimless urban wandering, the *flâneur*, had been superceded. We had moved into the age of the stalker; journeys made with intent – sharp-eyed and unsponsored. The stalker was our role model: purposed hiking, not dawdling, not browsing. No time for the savouring of reflections in shop windows, admiration for Art Nouveau ironwork, attractive matchboxes rescued from the gutter. This was walking with a thesis. With a prey […] The stalker is a stroller who sweats, a stroller who knows where he is going, but not why or how. (75)

Interestingly, the term "stalker", also selected thanks to its association with Tarkovsky's film from 1979 *Stalker*, will not be used again to describe this kind of new flâneur in Sinclair's non-fiction or fiction. Whether it be in later major works such as *London Orbital* or *Ghost Milk*, the term stalker will not reappear in Sinclair's texts while it will survive and be discussed in critical texts on Sinclair and his work (*see* Baker 19 and Vallorani 19). If there is a theory behind the term, and if that theory has been laid down by Sinclair, it is nonetheless essential to stop and think about that absence within Sinclair's work even though the term is increasingly disseminated in critical texts. To me, this absence and yet survival shows that if the term was maybe not considered important in itself for Sinclair to write more about, it clearly struck a chord for cultural critics and is therefore relevant and useful if one wants to define the new forms taken by the literary flâneur in recent years. In a nutshell, if the term "stalker" is not recurrent in Sinclair's texts, the term is useful to synthesise the fresh vision on urban exploration for a literary purpose, a vision shared with other authorsconomic

and sporadically theorised by Sinclair himself.

Still in *LOFTT*, but this time in the first essay entitled “Skating on Thin Eyes”, Sinclair's exposes his vision of what should be the born-again flâneur, a reincarnation of the 19th century figure adapted to the context of a contemporary Western capital city like London. His definition is similar in essence to what I quoted above about the stalker and that we find later on in his book, however he put in that first chapter more emphasis on the balance between fact and fiction such walker should aim at reaching. For those unfamiliar with Sinclair's non-fiction, it is important to know that like most chapters written by Sinclair in *LOFTT* or elsewhere, “Skating on Thin Eyes” has an underlying theme which somehow secretly connects all its different parts, which gives a cohesion to the walk. The theme of this chapter is graffiti, a popular expression that Sinclair considers to be the manifestation of the fact that the city is a “serial composition”, “the subject, a fiction that anyone can lay claim to. ‘We are all artists,’ they used to cry in the Sixties. Now, for the price of an aerosol, it's true. Pick your view and sign it. Sign events that have not yet happened” (2). Similar to the direct expression of graffiti, walking and taking photographs are also ways of putting one's mark on the city, of adding to its multiple layers: “Fragments of London are perceived as Polaroid epiphanies; signed and abandoned. The tag is the record of a fleeting instant of inspiration” (2-3). Instead of describing the city or calmly experiencing it for himself like the flâneur described in the physiologies, here walking is a collective and furious exercise of re-appropriation inspired by sources that we have previously mapped like Surrealism, Blake and the psychological and poetic absorption of psychogeography:

> Walking is the best way to explore and exploit the city; the changes, shifts, breaks in the cloud helmet, movement of light on water. Drifting purposefully is the recommended mode, tramping asphalted earthy in alert reverie, allowing the fiction of an underlying pattern to reveal itself. To the no-bullshit materialist this sounds suspiciously like *fin-de-siècle* decadence, a poetic of entropy – but the born-again *flâneur* is a stubborn creature, less interested in texture and fabric, eavesdropping on philosophical conversation pieces, than in noticing *everything*. (4)

Then follows a list of small details to notice, to look for, to reveal, “alignments of telephone kiosks, maps made from moss on the slopes of Victorian sepulchres, collections of prostitute's cards”, and many more, masses of residues, catalogue of traces which form a city and its many different possible fictions and facts. In Sinclair's, walking is less a way of discovering the city than finding answers or making sense of the city, even though that “sense” will be fatefully and hopefully incomplete: “Walking, moving across a retreating townscape, stitches it all together: the illicit cocktail of bodily exhaustion and a raging carbon monoxide high” (4). Again, we find the metaphor

of the fabric, but here I think the metaphor has to be understood loosely: Like in a piece of cloth, the city's many threads are stitched together but keep being distinct. The many threads, traces, layers of a city are made one but can be unwoven, detached, isolated and then woven back, related and added to another whole. Based on this fabric metaphor, the tableau of the city, the fact of the city is perpetually redone, fabricated, by the walk, the eye and the writing of an author.

The "born-again flâneur" is therefore no longer an indolent creature, passive spectator of the city's shows, but a hunter, actively searching for his signs and their meaning, their underlying order, a hunter which then transform the product of his hunt into the city itself. That idea of an underlying order in the city created by different energies, different stories, is at the heart of Sinclair's work on London. We find in it many pages on magical alignments, most famously the alignment of architect Nicholas Hawksmoor's Churches, but also on magnetic fields, ley lines and the spirit of urban legends or figures of the past. Sinclair's description of London is one of an hallucinatory London made of lines of power, triangulations or "mystical geometries" (*Hackney* 13), a vocabulary of hidden influence which is also deeply set into his prose itself. Sinclair's style is one of revelations through associations; revelations which are not inherently messianic, epiphanies which are not religious, but which however are used as a way to fight back the threat of boredom and alienation of life in the contemporary city, which are used as a way to reach a certain transcendence. "Geography has been twisted by a Lewis Carroll logic", he writes in *London Orbital*, "if somewhere is featured on a sign, it no longer exists. If it isn't, it does" *(London Orbital* 341). Opposite to the flâneur who was supposed to enjoy what was on offer—the bright commodities of the new shops, the people displaying their best clothes and manners, the real street scenes—, Sinclair's born-again flâneur, or stalker, is a hunter for lost signs and realities impossible to prove, fictional facts and factual fictions who must organise the mass of London and who can do so through his own will. When the early description of the flâneur were presenting an object of study, without a voice, without a body, just a pure illustration, the movement spearheaded by Sinclair transforms the flâneur in a sort of demiurge of the city, constantly shaped by it, constantly shaping it, public (the Greek root *demos*) and godlike.

Such associative, revelatory and active approach is shared by Nick Papadimitriou, another city explorer we chronologically first find in a collection of texts on London edited by Sinclair (*London: City of disappearances*) or in interviews and walks with Will Self before he finally published a book of his own in 2012, *Scarp*. In this book, Papadimitriou, after walking the same patch of territory in the northern suburbs of London for twenty years (10), gives it a name (Scarp) and writes an eponymous book about his exploration of that terra incognita cut in half by the M25 and tucked between the countryside and the capital. In "A note on parameters" in the introduction, a small passage which serves as an explanation of his method, Papadimitriou develops his modus operandi:

> I undertook something like thirty walks during the summer of 2011 in preparation for this book. The walks varied between three and twelve miles and served to sharpen my focus on the subject covered here. I wanted to understand the overall structure of Scarp, the transition between its components parts, where and how it begins. As I trudged across fields, through hostile-seeming suburbs and beneath A roads I came to understand that in some respects Scarp was a fiction. (11)

Two things to note here, in reference to what we have already said above on the difference between flâneur and stalker. First, that the stalker has at heart to piece together different parts, to make sense in a holistic way. When the flâneur was constantly referring to sketches, vignettes, illustrations—in other words, a random sample of a bigger whole—, the stalkers aim at encompassing everything at once, associate all the elements, make sense of the multitude, come to terms with the many layers contained in one space, even if such work can never be completed. The sketches, vignettes and other illustrations were in essence a way to limit; in Papadimitriou or Sinclair, the exhaustion of everything is paradoxically a way to prove its openness and therefore the impossibility of its completion.

At a lower level but still using this omnipresent fabric metaphor, we can find this idea of total incompleteness in the prologue of Will Self's *Psychogeography* where the author explains his seminal journey on foot from two airports, (Heathrow to JFK international airport, New York), as an attempt to bring together, sew together, his own disjointed identity (his mother is American, his father is English): "I hoped to suture up one of the wounds in my own, divided psyche: to sew together my American and English flesh, my mother's and my father's body bags, sundered by marriage, rived by death" (loc. 133). Also, besides his own personal agenda, his walk is also a way to inscribe his disjunction into a bigger picture, namely the trauma of the 9/11 attack. The walk in Self is both personal and global, a way of fighting back on both fronts through the slow process of walking:

> Could my own, slow advance, needle-limbs piercing and repiercing the fabric of reality, sew up this singularity, this tear in the space-time continuum through which medievalism had prolapsed? Legs slowing down... a trick-turning ape balancing the globe... slower and slower, then halting it altogether – a long fermata: serpentine, hairy arms bat at biplanes – before reversing it. (loc. 152)

Like the flâneur announced by Benjamin as an alienated man, the writers of this group aim at sewing up, associating, not in order to complete but instead in order to find new combinations, to fix but not to fixate. When the actual 19th century flâneur was also feeling a sense of nostalgia and loss, the relation to time is far stronger in these born-again flâneurs because the urban environment

they explore is not new but fully known, and yet they feel the need to rediscover it because it has become meaningless to them. The use they have of the term psychogeography is not, as intended by Debord, a way to rebuild cities but instead a way to harmonise their own minds with the present ones.

This sea change in how one perceives urban space may come from the fact that the city the original flâneur explored was a new spectacle which he had not at heart to deconstruct, to understand deeply. The urban denizens were new, the commodities were new, the whole notion of public space was new. The flâneur's approach was one of pure enjoyment, and that's why we find so many references to childhood in early descriptions of the flâneur. The stalker's one, on the other hand, is a defiant one, one which tries to understand what happened in their relation to the city. In that sense, the two European capitals London and Paris were localised in the 19th century, they were singular centres. With globalisation, the cities have somehow given way to the City, an abstract notion which makes it possible, like in Self's walk, to go from London airport to New York airport without feeling a deep change in the environment. “If I was assaulting a tyranny it was one of distance, and of a form of transportation that decentres and destabilises us, making all of us that can afford it subjects of a ribbon empire that encircles the globe. This is a papery and insubstantial realm, like a sanitary strip wrapped around a toilet bowl”, Self writes, again in his prologue (loc. 160). We find a similar argument in Papadimitriou for which this new form of exploration, the exploration of the known, is a way to realise that “the world that confronts us through our immediate surroundings is alive and intrinsically valuable in ways not amenable to instrumental reason or economic reductionism” (Papadimitriou 11). The flâneur was discovering out of leisure, the stalker is rediscovering out of necessity—the necessity to come back to the ground to oppose what they consider to be the “insubstantial realm” of globalisation.

According to them, the act of walking is not given a space in this new world and yet it is at the heart of this globalised centres (namely London, the only city to my knowledge which semantically turned its historical city into a nod for financial flux and therefore a symbol of insubstantial globalisation, or what I called the *zone* at the end of the first chapter of this thesis) that they wish to find a way, a path, to fight it, or at least offer an alternative to it. Will Self again:

> The first time I walked to Heathrow Airport, I reached the road tunnel that plunges beneath the runways and into the terminal complex, only to find the following sign: “No pedestrian access. Go back to the Renaissance.” This was, of course, a hotel on the Bath Road from where you are required to take a shuttle bus. (loc. 160)

This passage not only shows the anachronism of walking in the *zone*, here the highways leading to Heathrow, but also that combinatorial aspect the born-again flâneurs find in the city text, the

pleasure of rediscovery and association.

Primarily a flat, new urban type constructed to answer the demand of a new space and a new market, the flâneur has gained over the years the status of cultural symbol, a status that solidified thanks to successive appropriations. Nowadays, the term "flâneur" has led the way towards a new type of urban exploration which, based on the new spatial context of the post-war, Western metropolis, offers the tools to fight or at least find an alternative to the alienation and the standardisation felt by some urban denizens. Influenced by many different sources, this new way of walking the streets appears to be a new mode of poetical expression, critical engagement and by extension social commitment at a time when space has considerably shrunk and time is supposed to be dead. The evolutive story from the flâneur to the stalker also shows us how the very concept of city has evolved in the western world, from pure discovery in the 19th century to the need to rediscover it in the last decades. Because the space of cities like London and Paris have changed, the practises had to adapt. By extension, because what we have called the *zone* throughout this thesis has appeared in reality but also in theory, a space both within and without and an idea both fictional and factual, the way we walk and write our urban space had to adapt.

As said above, the creation of the flâneur was a way to put a term at the vagueness brought forth by the emergence of a new space (the industrial city), the flâneur was one element in the new urban classification. If that was the case with the flâneur, the born-again flâneur, the stalker, would rather be a way to come to terms with the city. Understand here in the expression "come to terms" not the idea of absolute end but only of finality, in other words the capacity to make a final product out of the mass of the city, then starting again, endlessly and happily. The flâneur was a spectator, an observer, bearing the function and name of periodicals (*The Spectator*, *the Observer*) he was a creature of paper, of film. The possibility opened by the stalker or the born-again flâneur as theorised in their writings but mostly in their practises by writers like Iain Sinclair, Nick Papadimitriou, Will Self or Patrick Keiller breaks away from that passivity and enables to act and react to the new, impersonal space of the city. Even if in minority, such literature may point towards a way for the act of walking and writing to be effective in our day and age, effective as in causing effects on an emotional, intellectual but also political and social levels.

In an article on Balzac entitled "*Balzac et le flâneur*", Pierre Loubier acutely writes that the gaze of the flâneur is like the travelling of a camera. The Parisian boulevard acts as a rail and the flâneur goes up "along a whole series of signs" (*"le long d'un ensemble de signes*"). Following this metaphor, exploring the *zone* on the verge of the city and following special patterns like the stalkers do might be a way to break away from this general objectification or commodification the flâneur

was supposed to relish in and could able us to get back in touch with bits of a reality that seems to have been distancing itself from us, that, to paraphrase Self quoted above, seems to have lost part of its substance.

Chapter 5: The Stalkers: Walking between Limitlessness and Constraint.

As we have demonstrated in the last chapter, the term and figure of the “flâneur” have undergone many changes since the time of their appearances in the 1830s. These changes have been caused by a modification of the shape of the city and a modification of the status of the writer. The flâneur himself was first described as a flat character walking the new stage of the industrial and therefore modern European city. With time, and with a logical familiarity developing between the urban denizen and his now modern environment, the term “flâneur” was seized by writers and critics of the interwar period to discuss and used as a mean to describe their intimate relation to the city and its changes. From a new object who needed to be sketched, the flâneur became a subject who had an insider's perspective on, a personal experience of the evolution of a given urban environment. As this urban environment evolved, so did the flâneur in his practices, and if he started his literary career walking the great and dazzling avenues of industrial capitals such as Paris or London and not its poorest parts, following what he considered to be total randomness, he now explores the margins of the city's brightest and noblest areas, and his love for randomness has faded.

This new type of flâneur who walks around the city and maps unfamiliar spots of the urban territory (what we call the *zone*), has been named the “stalker” following a term used by British writer Iain Sinclair as we have seen in the last pages of the chapter above. This term of “stalker” which will also make our own comes directly from the sci-fi novel *Roadside Picnic* written by Soviet authors Arkady and Boris Strugatsky and published in 1971 in the USSR. In this novel the term “*Сталкер*” (English word “stalker” transcribed in Cyrillic) appears to define a person who goes into an area called the “*Зона*” (or “zone” transcribed in Cyrillic) as a guide. In the original novel, the “zones” are new places created by an interaction with an extraterrestrial power. In the zones, the laws of physics are bended and one can find artefacts left by the evasive visitors since, in the universe of the novel, nobody knows how the visitors came, how they went away or even how the zones were created. Needless to say that the reason why the interaction is also not revealed. The title *Roadside Picnic* comes from a comparison drawn by one of the character between a human picnic and the creation of a zone, highlighting this general ignorance about the zones, their creators and their reasons to be:

> Picture a forest, a country road, a meadow. A car drives off the country road into the meadow, a group of young people get out of the car carrying bottles, baskets of food, transistor radios, and cameras. They light fires, pitch tents, turn on the music. In the morning they leave. The animals, birds, and insects that watched in horror through the

> long night creep out from their hiding places. And what do they see? Gas and oil spilled on the grass. Old spark plugs and old filters strewn around. Rags, burnt-out bulbs, and a monkey wrench left behind. Oil slicks on the pond. And of course, the usual mess—apple cores, candy wrappers, charred remains of the campfire, cans, bottles, somebody’s handkerchief, somebody’s penknife, torn newspapers, coins, faded flowers picked in another meadow. (Strugatsky 88)

Therefore in the novel, a stalker is someone who goes into one of the dangerous, perpetually changing and unmapped zones to retrieve something. In that sense, it is no surprise that the term has been applied to the new form of flâneurism embodied by Sinclair and others, with these new flâneurs visiting the unexplored urban margins to retrieve its memories, its meaning and its beauty.

The novel written by the Strugatsky brothers was adapted by acclaimed Soviet director Andrei Tarkovsky in 1979 under the title *Сталкер* (*Stalker* in the english transcription). The idea of a picnic is scrapped from the movie title which seems to indicate that what's central to the movie's point is the character of the stalker himself. The tone of Tarkovsky's film is more directly philosophical and can quite transparently be read as a moral tale with clearly cut characters since the stalker is followed by two characters, an ambitious professor and a writer in search of his lost inspiration; two characters respectively standing for scientific and artistic pursuits. In the movie, the sole purpose of the people who dare going inside the zone is to find the Room where one can get his or her wishes granted. That idea of a wish-granting artefact is already present and important in the original novel. However, in Tarkovsky's work, the Room becomes the symbol of the possibility of happiness and the way the three characters react to it towards the end of the movie change the message of the movie in comparison to the book: Unlike in the novel where the central character wishes peace on all, no character in the movie will enter the Room and fulfil his dreams. If the conclusion of book and movie are different, the zone is depicted in the same way. Not entirely a natural environment, it shows traces of human constructions, whether it be building or other man-made elements. Now ruins overwhelmed by nature, this environment is similar to the one explored by Sinclair and other contemporary stalkers at the different margins of a city like London. Whether these margins are actually set on the periphery or in cracks within the city centre, the areas explored by the writers we will discuss below always have a trace of humanity in them, and the way they explore it, struggling through mud and bad weather, experiencing pain, also remind us of the aching body of Tarkovsky's characters.

Another thing which helps assimilating the Russian *Сталкер* to the British stalker is that sense of urgency; an urgency that one can feel through the physical labour described at length in texts from

the London's stalkers, a bodily pain that is entirely foreign to the traditional flâneur. In Tarkovsky's movie like in Sinclair's works, stalking is like an impulse, an addiction but also a risk and an illegal activity. We understand it from the start of the movie when the three main characters have to sneak inside the Zone without being noticed, or even later when the stalker explains that his activity is like a calling. In Sinclair's and others, the stalker is a “stroller who sweats, a stroller who knows where he is going, but not why or how” (*Lights Out* 75), and the body of the walker is ever present as well as the relative illegality of certain itineraries symbolised in the Welshman's works by the omnipresence of perimeter and other blue fence used by real estate developers and other economic or political powers to privatise a space. On these similarities between the original Russian *Сталкер* and the more recent British one, it is interesting to note that if Russian “*Зона*” and English “zone” share the same Latin root and are commonly used in both languages before the Strugatsky brothers' novel, the Russian term “ *Сталкер*” used in both novel and movie is borrowed from English. What's even more interesting is that this term has since then be used in Russian, especially to describe the become synonym in Russian with the exploration of the industrial ruins and other city margins, an activity which are also practising the British writers we will be studying.

All the stalkers explore a site between the man-made and the natural, all the stalkers go there with a purpose and an urgency, all the stalkers suffer physically from these trips. In that aspect, the stalker is widely different from the traditional flâneur not only because he is a subject and not an object (remember that if the Surrealists have given a voice to the flâneur through first-person accounts, originally the flâneur is mute and seen from an outside perspective), but primarily because he explores a terrain that the original flâneur was avoiding. He also does it in a way unknown to the flâneur, rejecting the his beloved randomness to follow an urge and most of the time a preset itinerary. The flânerie was defined by Edmond Jaloux as, “to leave without being forced in any way, and to follow your inspiration as if the mere fact of turning right or turning left already constituted an essentially poetic act” (quoted in Benjamin *Arcades Project* 436). We can see how this definition is being followed and yet subverted by the stalker as represented by Sinclair. The lack of necessity, the lack of “being forced” of anything, becomes an irrational rush to go out and decipher the city; inspiration becomes sheer will; and total randomness in the exploration of the city becomes semi-conscious or fully-conscious decisions.

In terms of the environment explored by the stalker in contrast to the mid 19th century flâneur, his favoured field of experimentation is neither the historical centres nor the proverbial (non-)places of postmodernity (malls, airports) but mostly the spaces left aside, the uncharted ones, in which he re-injects historical meaning, social memories and beauty by collecting and connecting the signs one can find or invent in such territories. Moreover, reintroducing the act of walking through the body,

as well as the “non-materiality” of a given space, its historical and imaginary dimensions, the stalker comes across as a romantic figure of resistance, battling with time and trying to retrieve things before they disappear or to invoke and materialise spirits which are by essence invisible.

Because of all these differences between the 19th century figure of the flâneur and the 1990s figure of the stalker, we will use the latter as an umbrella term which covers different authors whose approach and practise of Western urban space are nonetheless related. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the term flâneur ended meaning a wide array of things and yet a restrictive definition of the term can be found: Someone who strolls at random in a city streets. As opposed to this definition, we will use the term “stalker” based on the following definition derived from the passage quoted above in Sinclair's *Lights Out for the Territory* (75): Someone who walks with intent in a city's margins. Just like the flâneur has been connected to Baudelaire, rather against his will since the term is not used in his poetry or in the majority of his non-fiction works but only in the essay the “Painter of Modern Life” which itself has little to do with walking, I claim the term stalker and attach it to writers such as Iain Sinclair, Will Self, Nick Papadimitriou and others because I believe that the way they write and walk the city can be usefully synthesises by this term.

I also think that this new type of exploration says something different than the traditional flânerie and has to be distinguished from it since, unlike it, it is rooted in what we have seen in the first three chapters of this work, namely and respectively the central yet vague *zone* in contemporary considerations on space and knowledge, the plurality of reality and the fictional aspect of a given space, and the fruitful failures of the revolutionary avant-gardes of the post-war period. To put it differently while keepint the same categories, the stalker has to be differentiated from the flâneur because the reality of urban space, dominant modes of thought and considerations on the quality of personal or social progress have drastically changed since the apparition of the flâneur.

Consequently, the last chapter of this thesis will be focused on the new ways offered by the stalker to explore present-day urban environments and how these new ways show a will to root, reconnect the activity of walking and writing to a certain kind of personal, social and political utility which is nevertheless more evasive than traditional radicalism, but maybe more effective.

The flâneur appeared when modern cities appeared. There was a need to define what was the experience of the modern city. The emergence of the flâneur and the flânerie did not come *ex nihilo* but were motivated by spatial and social conditions, namely the industrial development of Western European capital cities and the sharp rise of the number of urban denizens. Likewise, the emergence of a new type of urban exploration, that I connect with the figure of the stalker which therefore becomes an embodiment of this shift, is motivated by spatial and social conditions, namely the post-industrial aspect of Western European capital cities and the boredom and felt alienation of its

inhabitants.

However, if the stalker is a consequence of the new dominant urban organisation, it also suggests solutions to go beyond this organisation's limitations. This is these fresh solutions offered by the stalker in his approach of urban space that we will discuss at length throughout this chapter with a special interest for the way they walk, for the reason why the arbitrary aspect of their expeditions is important in regard to the usually random drifts of the original flâneur and for their complex relation to disappearance and revelation.

As we have just hinted, one of the most striking differences between the practice of the flâneur and the practice of the stalker is to be found in the way they prepare their walk. The flâneur is essentially letting his feet follow chance, and this from the origins of the figure. In this regard, we find for instance in the second volume of Anaïs Bazin's *L'époque sans nom* (1833) a relevant description of the flâneurs.

We are in March 1832, and the Asiatic Cholera Pandemic just reached Paris. Coming all the way from India through Afghanistan, Iran, Russia and finally Great Britain, the pandemic creates a climate of distrust in the French capital since people cannot understand how it could have crossed the Channel despite the efforts of the government to contain it. A feeling of conspiracy appears and people start suspecting politicians to have allowed the disease to calm revolutionary sentiment; or other, more innocuous figures, like Bazin writes:

> [The people] was wandering in the streets, suspicious and sombre, looking everywhere for the silhouette of the poisoner, spying on the eyes and movements of those who did not look sure enough of where they were headed, those who did not look resolute enough in the way they walked. Then woe betide! woe betide the ones who would keep a nonchalant, dreamy, indecisive gait. The city's most harmless inhabitant, the flâneur had become suspect.[130]

Nonchalant, dreamy and indecisive, the flâneur in Bazin is the "most harmless" Parisian since he has no purpose or hidden agenda besides going where his feet, acting as if on their own, take him. In that aspect, in that lack of necessity and that harmlessness, the flâneur is opposed to the *vagabond*, or vagrant, who is walking the streets by necessity, looking for "a job, some fire, a

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130 "*il rôdait soupçonneux et sombre le long des rues, cherchant partout une figure d'empoisonneur, épiant les regards et les mouvements de ceux qui ne lui paraissaient pas assez sûrs de leur chemin, assez résolus dans leur marche. Malheur alors, malheur à qui conserverait l'habitude d'une allure nonchalante, rêveuse, indécise. L'habitant le plus inoffensif de la cité, le flâneur était devenu suspect*" (262).

kitchen, a seat, a lamp, some fresh air, some exercise"[131]. Unlike the vagrant that is suspicious by nature in a sedentary society, the flâneur has a comfortable home to his name and when he decides to go out he is only troubled by whether he should take a right or take a left once he has passed his doorstep, a decision he fully leaves to chance:

> First of all, the thing he really ignores, is whether he should follow the pavement on the right or on the left from his house. And such state of uncertainty must have some appeal; he seems to make it last with great pleasure, as if he was waiting from chance or from the first object to catch his eye to indicate him the most auspicious direction.[132]

We find a similar description of the flâneur in the first pages of Huart's *Physiologie du flâneur* (1841) when the author compares the walking figure with a monkey: "They equally look like they are thinking about nothing—like they are not worried, occupied by anything. They both go right or left without any reason, without any purpose, and retrace their steps without more motives"[133] (9). Following the same idea, we can see above in the quote from Edmond Jaloux, itself extracted from Benjamin's *Arcades Project* (436) and given in the introduction to this chapter, that for the flâneur, "the mere fact of turning right or turning left already constituted an essentially poetic act". The only necessity he follows, the only thing that triggers and motivates his walk is his inspiration and a certain sense of serendipity. He has nothing planned in advance and only goes out to discover things at random. In other words, which direction the flâneur takes is of utmost importance since it is his decision and his decision only, which fills him with pleasure, as we have seen in Bazin's quote: The uncertainty of turning right or left, the open choice, is thrilling because it symbolises his freedom from other necessities, the privilege and luxury of being forced by nothing else than oneself.

Staying with Bazin's original description of what constitutes a flâneur's walk, let us now come back to the opposition the author makes between the vagrant and the flâneur, between the needy and the "needless", or wealthy. In the same chapter, and before describing the interior decoration and commodities one can find in a flâneur's house, Bazin highlights that going out for the "needless" is far from being the same than for the needy in the sense that the motivation of the rich is based on pleasure and not necessity, as we have just mentioned. A pleasure which is increased by the fact that the flâneur knows that his interior, his home, will stay a shelter where he can retreat to:

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131 "*Mais il cherche de l'occupation, du feu, une cuisine, un siège, une lampe, de l'air, de l'exercice, voilà tout*" (Bazin 301).

132 "*D'abord, ce qu'il sait le moins, c'est s'il doit suivre le trottoir à droite ou à gauche de sa maison. Et il faut bien qu'il y ait du charme dans cette incertitude; car il me semble se complaire à la faire durer, comme s'il attendait du hasard, du premier objet qui va l'attirer, une direction de bon augure*" (306)

133 "*Ils ont également l'air de ne penser à rien, — de ne s'inquiéter, de ne s'occuper de rien. Ils vont tous deux à droite ou à gauche sans raison, sans but, et reviennent sur leurs pas sans plus de motifs"* (9).

> In his abode, he gathered all the means of comfort. For the best way to enjoy with peace the pleasures of the outside is to never be harassed by the fear of going back home; one cannot properly go out when one is forced out by cold, by hunger, by lack of space, by any feeling of privation and suffering. That's why he possesses all the necessary to please his eye, to keep his body happy, to occupy his mind.[134]

We can see here the articulation of the inside and the outside from the bourgeois perspective of the flâneur. Since he has everything he needs at home, going out is primarily a way of entertaining himself. The idea of leisure here is key, a leisure in which is rooted the inherent randomness of the flâneur's walks. Walking becomes for the original flâneur a way to shop in the city, waiting for the products of the side-walks to display themselves in front of him before he can choose which one to elect, which one to follow. An eye more than a body or a mind, the flâneur picks and gauges at will the different elements offered by the streets, a selection which seems to him infinite. Just like the flâneur rarely visits the places of production and mostly relish in the end product, the flâneur has chosen to ignore the structures supporting in the background the spectacle of the street. In that sense, it is understood that for him his inspiration is the only guide of his walks.

This apply at least when the modern city and its stage-like organisation appeared in the mid-19th century. As we have said in the previous chapter, we have to constantly keep in mind that the relationship the flâneur of the mid-19th has with the then modern, industrial metropolis is intrinsically different from the view of the flâneur of the interwar period, as we have seen in details with Baudelaire's essay *The Painter of Modern Life* and the subsequent commentary from Benjamin or the works of the French Surrealists. For the original first flâneur, the modern city was new and full of promises while the metropolis of the first half of the 20th century is decaying and on the verge to be obliterated by the forces of the future. The original flâneur was not critical of the city's organisation because he ignored it entirely, or at least was presented as ignoring it entirely: always keep in mind that the original flâneur was never talking for himself. On the other hand, the flâneur as described by Benjamin or found in the writings of the Surrealists visualises the power structures at work behind the city's organisation and consequently wishes to overcome them.

This difference is interesting especially when one considers that the sociological profiles of the flâneurs have not deeply changed over the span of almost two centuries. Whether in the mid-19th or

134 "*Dans son logis, il a réuni tout ce qui compose le confortable. Car le meilleur moyen de goûter avec calme les plaisirs du dehors, c'est de ne jamais être poursuivi par la crainte de rentrer ; et ce n'est pas sortir de chez soi que d'en être chassé par le froid, par la faim, par le manque d'espace, par un sentiment quelconque de privation et de souffrance. Il a donc tout ce qu'il lui faut pour réjouir sa vue, pour tenir son corps à l'aise, pour occuper son esprit*" (302).

in the first half of the 20th century, or even today, the flâneur is still a wealthy individual who has for him the leisure to walk around town. Neither Baudelaire, nor Benjamin, nor the Surrealists, nor even Debord or Sinclair were or are motivated by hunger or necessity, or alternatively by the will to overcome their underprivileged social status through the use of public space. Yet, if the social position of the flâneur or most stalkers are similar, their relation to the organisation of their contemporary urban environment greatly differs because their historical contexts differs, which impact the way they explore their cities.

For the flâneur, the street was a display window, the boulevard a stage, the street a sort of immersive theatre, and he was considering the causes behind this spectacle, whether it be industrialisation, colonisation or urbanisation, at best as a boon, at worst as a non-issue. In short, the society of the flâneur was not problematic to him. By consequence, the street only appeared to him as a space on which the observer that he was could move his gaze and body freely and according to his own will and inspiration. The original flâneur was not concerned about urbanism and how the modern version of it, soon symbolised by the Haussmannian model in Paris, was structuring the spectacle of the street, how it could actually be guiding his precious gaze he thought to be fully controlling. Similarly, the original flâneur was not presented as being bothered by the potential weight of the subconscious or any other form of constraint on his paramount inspiration.

If the act of choosing to turn right or left was a poetical act, to paraphrase Edmond Jaloux's definition, it is because the flâneur ignored the factors causing the street spectacle and influencing his walks. In the mid-19th century, urban development seems to be unmotivated in the sense that the early flâneur is not concerned by what motivates these major changes. For the original flâneur, the city develops somehow naturally and his man-made beauty is often compares to the wonders of nature, as we find in Baudelaire quoting Constantin Guys, the "perfect flâneur", waking up and watching the city outside his window:

> "What a peremptory order! what a bugle-blast of life! Already several hours of light—everywhere—lost by my sleep! How many *illuminated* things might I have seen and have missed seeing!" So out he goes and watches the river of life flow past him in all its splendour and majesty. He marvels at the eternal beauty and the amazing harmony of life in the capital cities, a harmony so providentially maintained amid the turmoil of human freedom. He gazes upon the landscapes of the great city—landscapes of stone, caressed by the mist and buffeted by the sun. He delights in fine carriages and proud horses, the dazzling smartness of the grooms, the expertness of the footmen, the sinuous gait of the women, the beauty of the children, happy to be alive and nicely dressed—in a

word he delights in universal life.[135] (*Painter* 10-1)

In the original flâneur's mind, “The landscapes of the great city” are therefore dominated by a peremptory order that comes from an unknown source, and harmony reigns in the city to which is recurrently attached the idea of light, as in the light from a projector, highlighting the beauty of the city's organisation. In relation to that, note that the English translator of that passage has chosen “life” to translate “*lumière*” (light) in the sentence “a bugle-blast of life” (“*une fanfare de lumière*” in the original).

As opposed to the original flâneur's trust towards the organisation of the city, the following flâneurs or urban critics will, like Benjamin, demonstrate that the shape of a city is strictly organised by urbanism and motivated by political or economic reasons. Since the light of the city now appeared to be guided by coercive powers, writers at the start of the 20th century in Paris or London moved in search of the dark corners of the city. In an interview with Catherine de Geel for French radio *France Culture*, Italian designer Andrea Branzi confirms that a modern house in architecture and interior design is a house without dark corners (Branzi, *Transmission #1* 26), just like the mind of the original flâneur is without darkness, purely trusting the city to be manifesting itself spontaneously. In contrast to that, the whole point of French Surrealists or British symbolist authors (*see* Freeman "‘That Untravell'd World’: Symbolist London” in *Conceiving the City* 149-205) was to find (or invent) then explore the dark corners which survived the organisation of the modern city, an organisation that was put into place to destroy these potential shelters or pockets of chaos. By extension of this logic where the organising power has to be understood and not just ignored or trusted, the Surrealists will also try to subvert their own habits through automatic writing, exposing their subconscious while doing so.

Questioning how a city is organised and how this organisation can be subverted led the way to the experimentations of Debord and the Letterists, a group closely related to the Surrealists at the time of its creation, and then the Situationists. However, if all these French avant-gardes (the Surrealists and Letterists/Situationists) had an interest for walking, they performed it differently.conomic These differences in the way they walked exemplify their varying relation with

135 “*Quel ordre impérieux ! quelle fanfare de lumière ! Depuis plusieurs heures déjà, de la lumière partout ! de la lumière perdue par mon sommeil ! Que de choses éclairées j’aurais pu voir et que je n’ai pas vues ! » Et il part ! et il regarde couler le fleuve de la vitalité, si majestueux et si brillant. Il admire l’éternelle beauté et l’étonnante harmonie de la vie dans les capitales, harmonie si providentiellement maintenue dans le tumulte de la liberté humaine. Il contemple les paysages de la grande ville, paysages de pierre caressés par la brume ou frappés par les soufflets du soleil. Il jouit des beaux équipages, des fiers chevaux, de la propreté éclatante des grooms, de la dextérité des valets, de la démarche des femmes onduleuses, des beaux enfants, heureux de vivre et d’être bien habillés ; en un mot, de la vie universelle.*” (Baudelaire, “*Peintre*” 9)

chance and inspiration, as noted by Vincent Kauffman in his article "Angels of Purity" one can found in the collection of essays edited by McDonough about Debord and the Situationist International:

> In the history of the French avant-garde, walking is decidedly a must. But with the situationists, the subjective impressionism of a Breton, who strolled only to know and (above all) to show who he was, and the *flâneries* of an Aragon, who explored Parisian *passages* with a voyeur's eye, give way to promenades whose goal is to attain an impersonal objectivity of impression through the regulated use of chance. (Trans. John Goodman; in McDonough, *Guy Debord and the Situationist International* 300-1)

Thus, the situationist *dérive*, or "drift", which actually starts at the period of the Letterists, has to be differentiated from the surrealist flânerie in the sense that the latter is concerned with "impersonal objectivity" while the former is only and proudly focused on the self. For the Surrealists, the walker becomes an object registering the diverse effects the city has on him, effects which are no longer considered to be natural or random like in the original flâneur but which contain an hidden meaning and are triggered by a secret cause. Like Debord writes in a 1955 article, "Events belong to chance only as long as we ignore the general laws of their category"[136], implying that everything in the organisation of the city, or even of society at large, has a cause, a motive. However, if the street had indeed a meaning, if it is motivated by some hidden forces, the knowledge of these forces for the Surrealists can primarily benefit the self. Like any artistic avant-garde of the interwar period, Surrealism is in essence universal and promoted a global revolution, a complete change of life. However, the path to this global revolution goes through the self for Surrealists, a self-centered approach Debord will take his distance with.

An extension of the suspicion the Surrealists had of the notion of habits, drifting as presented by Debord in Letterist years (1952–57) then with the creation of the Situationist International is presented as a tool to comprehend the forces in play and then eventually reshape the organisation of the city, this time collectively. For the Letterists and even more so for the Situationists, the self is also suspicious because it is influenced by social, political and economic forces. That is why they defend the idea of an "impersonal objectivity", as Vincent Kauffman rightfully noticed in the passage I have just quoted. As we have seen in our third chapter dedicated to Debord and the apparition of the notion of "psychogeography", such theory on urban space and how to change it for the better using this "impersonal objectivity" will never reach effectual praxis. However, this failure will in its turn influence the term "psychogeography" and its revival as I would argue that this

136 "*Les événements n'appartiennent au hasard que tant que l'on ne connaît pas les lois générales de leur catégorie.*" (Debord, *Oeuvres* 189)

failure to attain “impersonal objectivity” explains why a writer like Iain Sinclair and other authors that I would label as “stalkers” are using literary non-fiction to express their view on the city. Neither fact nor fiction, literary non-fiction is also neither personal not impersonal, neither subjective nor objective, and allows to oscillate between the revolution of the self advocated by a group like the Surrealists and the revolution of the many advocated by a group like the Situationists.

If Kauffman talks of “impersonal objectivity” to fight subjectivity in the Situationists' theoretical basis, I would also retain from his quote the idea of the “regulated use of chance”. As said above, the flâneur was thinking he was choosing whether to turn right or left. The passage to a new century and the apparition in the Western societies of a more transparent and mass urbanism, a more liberal political landscape, as well as new questionings on the nature of the human society and mind and the dominion one could have on it, offered a fertile ground for a fresh examination of the notion of fate, free will and, by extension, chance. The act of turning right or left was no longer a sudden desire coming from the great void but instead something potentially motivated by an all-encompassing economic or political system, a system which was mirrored in the kind of urban environment it was creating (like in Benjamin). Besides this deep and new acknowledgement of social classes and individual freedom from the end of the 18th century onward, besides these sea changes in how one looked at society and economy, changes which will give us the discipline of sociology, Communism or even early decolonisation (think United States, Haiti), the mind was not spared either and gradually it was put under investigation. Spiritism and the use of different products to expand one's experience were part of that new, or at least newly scientific, quest of transcendence of the human mind in Western societies, a quest which culminated towards the end of the 19th century with the discovery that a man's mind was in fact a deceitful, partially subconscious consciousness.

From society to economy to the mind itself, everything became suspicious in the course of the 19th century, including the city. We see this suspicion towards the city and its organisation in Mumford who writes harsh words about the megalopolis he sees in 1964:

> By a thousand cunning attachments and controls, visible and subliminal, the workers in an expanding economy are tied to a consumption mechanism: they are assured of a livelihood provided they devour without undue selectivity all that is offered by the machine—and demand nothing that is not produced by the machine. The whole organization of the metropolitan community is designed to kill spontaneity and self-direction. You stop on the red light and go on the green. You see what you are supposed to see, think what you are supposed to think : your personal contributions, like your income and security taxes, are deductible at source. *(The City in History* 621)

To fight against this machine and these problems springing from the "surfeit and satiety" "in the countries of the West, and particularly the United States" (620) created by the abundance of the new economic organisation, Mumford recommends to come back to a certain form of selection. Since everything is out to get you, one has to be as cautious like Descartes when he tries to figure out what in his reality is created by the "*malin génie*" ("evil, malicious genius", a figure which does not deserve the negative qualificative of "demon" which is sometimes used) and what is genuine. In a passage that could be related to Debord's search of an impersonal objectivity, Mumford writes:

> To choose, to select, to discriminate, to exercise prudence or continence or forethought, to carry self-control to the point of abstinence, to have standards other than those of the market, and to set limits other than those of immediate consumption—these are impious heresies that would challenge the whole megalopolitan myth and deflate its economy. In such a "free" society Henry Thoreau must rank as a greater public enemy than Karl Marx. *(Ibid.* 621-2*)*

These two quotes show the disgust Mumford has for the city of his time but also offer an alternative to the traditional *flânerie*, a practise which is perceived after the Surrealists and the Situationists as a form of submission to the powers of urbanism, and through them to the social and economic order. In Mumford's view, chance and randomness are tools used by this dominant order to keep the people peaceful and compliant, and like it was highlighted by Benjamin, the flâneur is therefore the promoter of the dominant order. The fall of the figure of the flâneur once the political, economic and historical structures behind the organisation of a city are laid bare has a direct impact on how future walkers will judge the flâneur favoured mode of walking: Chance or randomness.

It survives partially with André Breton, the *de facto* leader, who used the expression "*hasard objectif*" ("objective chance") to talk about coincidences and fortuitous meetings which have nonetheless a cause, even if a hidden one. The notion dear to the original flâneurs finally falls in the Situationists' language, when randomness becomes predictability ("*prévisible*"), as in the article "*Introduction à une critique de la géographie urbaine*", one of the first texts where the concept of psychogeography is presented (Debord, *Oeuvres* 204).

To avoid the predictable, an idea held in contempt by Debord and the Letterists then Situationists who support the idea of a permanent game, a constant instability, one has to be fully aware of the effects the urban environment can have in order to subvert them or remodel them for this permanent game. To do so, to discover the lines of forces and the "effects of psychogeographic nature" of a given space ("*effets de nature psychogéographique*", *Ibid.* 251), Debord describes the act of *dérive*, or drifting, as a way to reveal that what we used to believe to be random is actually motivated, willed, constructed. In "*Théorie de la dérive*", a 1956 article in which he defines the notion of

dérive and through it develops the idea of psychogeography, Debord writes:

> One or several persons engaging in drifting, for a short or long period of time, abandon the reasons to move and act they usually follow, the relations, the works and the leisures they consider theirs, in order to go with the appeals of the terrain and the encounters that go with them. The share of chance is here less decisive than what we think: from the point of view of drifting, cities possess a psychogeographic relief, made of constant currents, fixed points, and whirlwinds that make the access to, or the exit from, certain areas particularly arduous.[137]

If the original flâneur was renouncing a certain form of bourgeoisie centred on business, if he was preferring *otium* to *neg*-otium, leisure to work, the new form of the flâneur promoted by Debord that will eventually become the stalker in London renounces something else. On paper, and as noted by Kauffman, the urban walker inspired by the Situationists renounced his ego to try to reach a certain "impersonal objectivity". More importantly and by extension, it renounced the belief that his wandering is based on randomness. The urban walker following Debord's principles understands that the way he interacts with space is highly influenced by who he is, his social status and personal history which will attract him to places he feels he belongs to. The "appeals of the terrain", its "*sollicitations*" that would potentially be experienced by anyone can only be gauged objectively if one gets rid of his habits, habits which are primarily rooted in social status and personal history.

As we see in the use of literary non-fiction, this impossible target of an impersonal objectivity will be swiftly abandon in texts written by British authors starting from the 1990s. On the contrary, subjectivity will be put to the fore through the use of a very incarnated voice, a memory-filled personal view and also a body that is physically struggling through the past, the feelings but also simply the concrete reality of the city. Whether it be in the works of Sinclair, Papadimitriou, Self or Keiller, the stalker is trying to be objective but knows that he can't entirely be. It is one of his many positive failures. We will discuss this further in the pages below.

As of now, let's focus on another renunciation based on Debord's considerations: The renunciation of complete passivity. The original flâneur was the epitome of passivity, only feeding his eye on the streets without acting on it. As Bazin writes in *L'époque sans nom*, the flâneur reads

137 "*Une ou plusieurs personnes se livrant à la dérive renoncent, pour une durée plus ou moins longue, aux raisons de se déplacer et d'agir qu'elles se connaissent généralement, aux relations, aux travaux et aux loisirs qui leur sont propres, pour se laisser aller aux sollicitations du terrain et des rencontres qui y correspondent. La part de l'aléatoire est ici moins déterminante qu'on ne croit : du point de vue de la dérive, il existe un relief psychogéographique des villes, avec des courants constants, des points fixes, et des tourbillons qui rendent l'accès ou la sortie de certaines zones fort malaisés.*" (Debord, *Oeuvres* 251)

the papers to avoid revolution or social unrest (303). His walk has to be undisturbed and he can't be bothered by political or social action (320). Neither a supporter or a reactionary, the flâneur presented by Bazin is the pure zeitgeist as he doesn't meddle with the concrete aspect of reality, only watch it unfold. As we can see in Debord or other avant-gardes and artistic movements after the rise of sociology and naturalism in literature, the artist or the writer can no longer be isolated and have to take part to the great political battle. In other words, to be useful to society, writings need to have an effect. Hence drifting in Debord has a social undertone in the sense that the passivity of walking as an impersonal object is coupled with a social approach: Following the lines of influence in a city to highlight social separations. Again in the article "*Théorie de la dérive*", Debord attaches to the "*laisser-aller*" of drifting what he considers to be a practical counterweight in order to avoid making of drifting what he would deem an entirely useless act:

> But drifting, in its unity, is made at the same time of this *laisser-aller* and its necessary contradiction: the mastery of psychogeographic variations through their knowledge and the calculation of their possibilities. About that last aspect, the elements highlighted by ecology[138] [...] are usefully supporting psychogeographic thinking.
>
> The ecological analysis of the absolute or relative nature of the cuts in the urban fabric, the role of the microclimates, the elementary units entirely distinct from the administrative quarters, and first and foremost the dominant action of the pulling centres, must be used and completed by the psychogeographic method. The objective passionate terrain for the drifting to unfold must be defined at the same time according to its own determinism and according to its connections with social morphology.[139]

The French term *"laisser-aller*" as to be understood as a parent of the loanword "laissez-faire" in English. "*Laisser-aller*" roughly means "being influenced without doing anything against them", or simply "letting things flow". Literally, "*laisser-aller*" means "to let (oneself) go", which is a perfect

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138 Note that this notion of "ecology" here as to be understood in regard to the sociological works of Ernest W. Burgess in the United States and Paul-Henry Chombart de Lauwe in Paris, two sociologists, the first inspiring the latter, who were considering the city as an ecological system.

139 "*Mais la dérive, dans son unité, comprend à la fois ce laisser-aller et sa contradiction nécessaire : la domination des variations psychogéographiques par la connaissance et le calcul de leurs possibilités. Sous ce dernier aspect, les données mises en évidence par l'écologie [...] ne laissent pas de soutenir utilement la pensée psychogéographique. L'analyse écologique du caractère absolu ou relatif des coupures du tissu urbain, du rôle des microclimats, des unités élémentaires entièrement distinctes des quartiers administratifs, et surtout de l'action dominante de centres d'attraction, doit être utilisée et complétée par la méthode psychogéographique. Le terrain passionnel objectif où se meut la dérive doit être défini en même temps selon son propre déterminisme et selon ses rapports avec la morphologie sociale.*" (Debord, *Oeuvres* 251).

definition of the original passivity of the flâneur, an utter passivity Debord wants to counterbalance with a more concrete approach, comparing the dérive and the "psychogeographic method" with his idea of science of space. As we have said in our chapter dedicated to psychogeography, when this article is written in 1956 Debord has already left behind his past, more poetic approach to society and is now more motivated by direct action. Hence the addition of the practical "necessary contradiction" of the *laisser-aller* of drifting while a few years ago he would have praised the idea of an endless game.

Besides this movement towards direct action other the years, what we can keep from Debord's theory of drifting is how one has to break away from habits and the reign of apparent randomness to understand the mechanisms at play in the social and emotional organisation of a city. Whether it is Mumford or Debord, critics of consumer society in the West from the 1950s' onwards see apparent randomness as suspect. For instance, the "state of constant choice" is what characterises the consumer according to Zygmunt Bauman in *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor* (1998). In this work, as the late Polish thinker is comparing what he would call "solid modernity" (embodied in the quote below by the panoptical institutions) with "liquid modernity", Bauman develops his view on the role of choice in consumerism:conomic

> The kind of drill in which the panoptical institutions excelled is hardly suitable for the training of consumers. Those institutions were good at training people in routine, monotonous behaviour, and reached that effect through the limitation or complete elimination of choice; but it is precisely the absence of routine and the state of constant choice that are the virtues (indeed, the 'role prerequisites') of a consumer. (24)

Later in the same work he also adds that, "to embrace the modality of the consumer means first and foremost falling in love with choice" (30), in other words that what is at the centre of the ethos of consumerism is choice.

As a reaction to what they consider to be a fake or paradoxically reduced randomness based on the only apparent unlimited choice offered to the consumer, some of the critics of today's dominant belief system call for a reduction, a deceleration in all fields, a return to a form of constraint. To fight against the "surfeit and satiety" of Mumford's vision which produce an everyday reality where people's lives "are constantly in peril, their wealth is tasteless and ephemeral, their leisure is sensationally monotonous, and their pathetic felicity is tainted by constant, well-justified anticipations of violence and sudden death" (Mumford, *The City in History* 622), continence, abstinence and self-constraint are presented as solutions. A similar position is taken by Debord in a 1957 small article left unpublished and entitled "On chance" ("*Sur le hasard*"). In this article, he describes randomness or chance ("*hasard*") as being essentially conservative in the sense that it

does not create the possibility of novelty since randomness, under the guise of endlessness, is actually deceitfully limited:

> In known conditions, the role of chance is conservative. Thus, games of chance don't leave a space for any novelty. Likewise, cards-using fortune-tellers play with the very little number of chances one can go through in one's personal life. They often "predict" events, because an individual, average life has *such a poor content* that they fit in the classic variations of their predictions.[140]

Debord continues and states that in order to subvert these limitations of chance one has to organise "new conditions of chance" or a "new field for chance" ("*nouvelles conditions du hasard*" and "*nouveau champ du hasard*", *ibid.* 296) which will allow the creations of new situations, and therefore new possibilities and novelties. In other words, and quite paradoxically if we imagine chance to be an endless, open system, Debord calls for a reorganisation, a rigidity of chance as the only way to create new paths, and therefore real randomness.

Pre-determination and randomness now walk hand-in-hand in Debord's small demonstration, and the personal is discarded to leave space to the collective. Still in the article "On Chance", he develops this fresh view and opposes it to the Surrealists, his favourite target: "A man never desires chance in itself. He desires more; and expects from chance to meet what he desires. It is a passive and reactionary situation (the surrealist mystification) if it is not corrected by an invention of concrete conditions determining the movement of desirable chances."[141] Chance has to be corrected by "concrete conditions" which would determine its very movement, a notion that is for sure going against the surrealist principles of "objective chance" ("*hasard objectif*"). Remember that the "objective chance" of the Surrealists, and primarily André Breton, was the perception or decoding through apparent chance of an underlying necessity. In a 1935 article titled "Surrealist Situation of the Object" in which Breton discusses his recent works, the author of the Surrealist Manifestoes describes it as, "that sort of chance that displays to man, in a way that is still mysterious, a necessity that escapes him, even though he experiences it as a vital necessity" (Breton 268). Again this view which they consider to be passivity, Debord or Mumford call for action by setting in place

140 "*Dans des conditions connues, le rôle du hasard est conservateur. Ainsi, les jeux de hasard ne laissent place à aucune nouveauté. De même, les tireuses de cartes jouent sur le très petit nombre de hasards qui peuvent se manifester dans la vie personnelle. Elles "prévoient" souvent les événements, dans la mesure où une vie individuelle moyenne est d'une* si grande pauvreté *que les quelques variantes classiques de leurs prédictions*." (Debord, *Oeuvres* 296)

141 "*L'homme ne désire jamais le hasard en tant que tel. Il désire plus ; et attend du hasard la rencontre de ce qu'il désire. C'est une situation passive et réactionnaire (la mystification surréaliste) si elle n'est pas corrigée par une invention de conditions concrètes déterminant le mouvement de hasards désirables*." (*Ibid.* 296)

limitations.

Since these questions of chance and arbitrary are complex when it comes to walking and the original and new psychogeography, the psychogeography of the Situationists and the psychogeography of London authors, it might be good to put the emphasis on the fact that the Situationists' rejection of chance could not have come after the Surrealists' peculiar take of it. The Surrealists were seeing chance not as a pure inspiration but as something manifesting itself on the outside world or an object coming from within the subject. Therefore, for the Surrealists chance was already not entirely a question of randomness but was part of a network of causalities. The Surrealists were walking to catch these manifestations of their inner desires, decoding and following clues of what their subconscious wanted to tell them. They were taking a right or a left looking for something, following cues they believed they were themselves the source of.

On the other hand, the Situationists, through drifting, went one step further by focusing on what was steering them, but this time they were considering that the cues determining their walks had to be undestood as parts of a bigger social and political organisation—an organisation or system that should be subverted by the very knowledge of these cues and the creation of new ones. In Debord, there is no question of subconscious—everything is directly motivated, and if one wants to change things, he also has to take direct action. If the differences with a more personal, poetic, less concrete approach stemming from Surrealism is less clear in the early years of Debord's writings (the Letterist years), a period during which the concrete effectiveness of poetry or cinema seem to be enough for his revolutionary inspiration, this will change in the years leading to 1957 and the creation of the Situationist International.

This key difference between Surrealists and Situationists is interestingly put by Chris Jenks in his essay "Watching your Steps" in *Visual Culture*, a collection of essays he himself edited in 1995, at the time of the revival of the notion of "psychogeography" in London:

> A psycho-geography, then, derives from the subsequent "mapping" of an unrouted route which, like primitive cartography, reveals not so much randomness and chance as spatial intentionality. It uncovers compulsive currents within the city along with unprescribed boundaries of exclusion and unconstructed gateways of opportunity. The city begins, without fantasy or exaggeration, to take on the characteristics of a map of the mind. The legend of such a mental map highlights projections and repressions in the form of "go" and "no-go" space. (Jenks 154)

Jenks based his analysis on Debord's article "*Théorie de la dérive*" from which I have also quoted some passages. The article is clear in how the notion of "psychogeography" was received on the other side of the Channel and how the two approaches—the Surrealists' and the Situationists'—

are intrinsically mixed. If they are close, they differ in their relation to the dark corners of the human mind and the possibility of a beyond, of a metaphysical or even a subconscious. The expressions of “map of the mind”, or “mental map”, or any choice of words indicating a connection between “psychogeography” and the human mind have never been used by Debord. When the term “subconscious” is used, as in the previously unpublished 1959 article “Ecology, Psychogeography and the Transformation of the Human Milieu” (“*Ecologie, psychogéographie et transformation du milieu humain*”, in *Oeuvres*, 457-62), it is to describe a collective subconscious. The “subconscious realities which appear in urbanism itself” (460) are I believe not the manifestation of the observer's subconscious like in Surrealists' text but a specific feeling experienced in a given space coming from subterranean or unsaid principles of urbanism. The “subconscious realities” are the subliminal effects of space intentionality.

How can someone who has coined the term psychogeography never considered highly the concept of subconscious? As it might be necessary to remind my reader, the term “psychogeography” when it is used by Debord had absolutely no connection to psychology or psychoanalysis. There is no subconscious in the psychogeography of Situationists. The “psycho-” half of the term comes from what an individual feels, experiences, when he moves into a given space (*see* Debord, “Introduction”). If one omits that it was probably at first an activity derived from the abuse of alcohol, psychogeography is originally a potential science and a method and is always presented as such by Debord, from the first times in which the term is written by him to the last. As we found in *Oeuvres*, “A science of the relations and the ambiances is being developed, that we call *psychogeography*”[142]; or “A new science, ‘psychogeography’, is according to them going to condition the very ambiances and adventures of men”[143].

If psychogeography becomes synonym with “a map of the mind” in Jenks that's because the “objective impersonality” of Debord's approach has failed and British writers will come back to pure subjectivity in the way they explore the city, something closer to the Surrealists' approach. However, the associations they will draw during their walks are not considered to be manifestations of a “vital necessity”, as in Breton, or even a necessary way to understand one's subconscious. Also, their relation to chance is closer to what Debord was calling for in his article “On Chance” when he advocates the “ invention of concrete conditions determining the movement of desirable chances” (*Oeuvres* 296).

142 “*Une science des rapports et des ambiances s'élabore, que nous appelons* psychogéographie.” (Debord, *Oeuvres* 121)

143 “*Une nouvelle science, la ‘psychogéographie’, va d'après eux conditionner les ambiances et les aventures mêmes des hommes*.” (*Ibid.* 125)

The original flâneurs, the Surrealists and the drifting Letterists then Situationists were turning right or left following some kind of cue. For the original, oblivious flâneurs the cues were a mark of their inspiration and whim. For the Surrealists, they were manifestations of their subconscious. For the Situationists, they were proofs of the urbanists' work that needed to be consciously caught and mapped to eventually create new ones. On the other hand, the stalker does not necessarily follow a cue. His walks are not determined by his whim, a wish to uncover his subconscious or follow the energies of the city to eventually subvert them. Instead, the stalker maps beforehand the walk he is about to start, therefore creating “new conditions of chance”. He is at the crossroad between the three categories (original flâneur, Surrealist and Situationist walker) because if he does decide to go out and create “new conditions of chance”, these conditions are not permanent and collective ones but, only fatefully temporary and personal. The revolution of the stalker is not a collective one, because collective revolutions have failed. The revolution of the stalker is from the start a failure, an acceptance that things have to be temporary and personal. A failure which nonetheless contains the hope that this tiny expression of one's will that the stalker performs when he chooses to not take a right or a left based on what he feels but based on what he has drawn on his map opens new possibilities for the modification of life.

Like Mumford, writers like Sinclair, Self or Papadimitriou think that abstinence and constraint can be beneficial to the walker and the writer if he wants to truly discover something during his walks. As Daniel Levin Becker puts it in his fantastic *Many Subtle Channels,* a rich account of the OuLiPo, a French literary movement practising constrained writing, stalkers walk the city following a pre-devised plan because they want to prove the hypothesis that “the most arbitrary structural mandates can be the most creatively liberating” (6). Like the authors of the OuLiPo (*Ouvroir de littérature potentiel*, or “Workshop of Potential Literature) do with writing, walking with a constraint seem to enable the stalkers to renew their vision of the city by forcing themselves to explore areas they would have otherwise never visited.

All the authors to which I will attach the label of “stalker” explore the city following a certain *modus operandi*, a constraint that forces them not to choose to turn right or left but only to follow a pre-planned map and derive their work from what they get from this fixed itinerary.

If one has to find a symbolical root to this practise, a point of origin that then inspired others, the most obvious option is the first chapter of Iain Sinclair's *Lights Out for the Territory*, “Skating on Thin eyes: The First Walk”. In this piece, the Welsh author sets his mind on registering all the graffiti and other marginal writings that can be found on a selection of London streets. To do so, to give himself an itinerary, he decides to draw a letter on the map of London and to crudely follow it, as he explains in the opening lines the chapter:

> The notion was to cut a crude V into the sprawl of the city, to vandalise dormant energies by an act of ambulant signmaking. To walk out from Hackney to Greenwich Hill, and back along the River Lea to Chingford Mount, recording and retrieving the messages on walls, lampposts, doorjambs: the spites and spasms of an increasingly deranged populace. (1)

As it is often the case in his writings, the subject of the chapter is mirrored in the walk—as Sinclair plans on retrieving marginal urban writings scattered around his chosen path, he himself draws some sign on the city, a kind of writing, that letter V that he compares to a "botched rune", which if interpreted could offer an "alternative reading" of the city, "a subterranean, preconscious text capable of divination and prophecy. A sorcerer's grimoire that would function as a curse or a blessing" (*LOFTT* 1). By inscribing this V on the map he awaits for an "underlying pattern to reveal itself" (2).

The text, and the wide majority of Sinclair's books, are based on this idea of secret alignments that lead the way to new readings, to new discoveries, even when these alignments are made by the author himself through his choice to draw a random letter on the map of East London. Even if the style used by Sinclair reminds us of esoteric or conspirational texts with their cut-up associations that seem to become logical by the very virtue of two words put side by side, I believe that his works should not be read as mere wanderings or ramblings but more as an illustration of the power of association. Like drawing a V on the map and following it roughly, writing what one sees on the way and developing, speculating, creating meaning around it is Sinclair's way to express his individual power, to be active and free even when he follows a pre-set itinerary. The recurrent talk on runes and other magical inscriptions appear as a way to liberate oneself from urban alienation and the fake endlessness of choice. By "signmaking", whether it be on a map or on his notebooks about what he walks through, Sinclair accepts that he has no direct impact on the city, even if by doing so he does.

The poetics of stalkers are always oscillating between these, usefulness and uselessness, centre and periphery, the concrete and the imaginary, and these tensions are never solved and dealt with but on the contrary fuelled by their writing which itself oscillates between history and urban legend, the ordered city and the post-industrial forests. Therefore, it is not a surprise to notice that the references to schizophrenia and madmen are plenty in Sinclair and other stalkers, especially if we keep in mind that these writers, and especially Sinclair, are from a generation that was deeply inspired by the writing of Scottish psychiatrist and counter-cultural figure of the Sixties Ronald David Laing, mostly known as R.D. Laing.

Laing appears consistently in Sinclair's works, from *Ghost Milk* ("I remember R.D. Laing, in

July 1967, sitting at the back of the Roundhouse, talking about the artist and illustrator Tomi Ungerer", loc. 4787), to *Hackney* ("Or the outstations of R. D. Laing's anti-psychiatry movement: arks of insanity incubating insanity", 67), through *LOFTT*: Laing is always presented as an actor of the counter-culture at the end of the Sixties, giving talks that Sinclair himself heard, flanking other iconic figures who collectively wanted to go beyond and thus applied mystical readings to prosaic realities, stimulated the ordinary by their epiphanic visions. On Laing and other counter-cultural figures gathered in London at the time and considering the rain to be an act of divine purge, we read in *LOFTT*:

> Weather as the cleanser of the City, as apocalyptic threat, was a popular message in the Sixties. It was delivered as doctrine from the platform of the Roundhouse by Gregory Bateson in 1967, during the Congress of the Dialectics of Liberation for the Demystification of Violence. His sobering philippic, preached with a smile, had Allen Ginsberg, RD Laing, Alex Trocchi, Stokely Carmichael, and other counter-cultural luminaries, drooling. (*LOFTT* 95)

I do not wish to dwell too long or go too deep in the counter-cultural scene of London in the Sixties as described by Sinclair. However, I want to attract the attention of my reader to the fact that Sinclair, and therefore the way he walks, is influenced by this period and the way it was trying to find new ways of looking at reality and normalcy through a poetical approach. Note that in the list of names present in the quote above appears Alex(ander) Trocchi, a friend of Debord and one of the few English-speaking members of the Letterist International, who was therefore asked to translate their texts (*see* Debord, *Correspondance vol. 2* 227). He doesn't seem to have been a very good worker since we can't find any translation from the French Letterists or Situationists made by Trocchi.conomic Nevertheless, it is important to understand that all these marginal movements were at that time creating a nexus, a community, and that knowing one meant being led to the other. What was bringing together all these fringe elements who nevertheless add a notable impact on the history of ideas? The idea of the necessity of a massive and all-encompassing insurrection, whether a global and spectacular one for Debord, or an invisible and personal one for Trocchi:

> It is rather a question of perceiving clearly and without prejudice what are the forces that are at work in the world and out of whose interaction tomorrow *must* come to be; and then, calmly, without indignation, by a kind of mental ju-jitstu that is ours by virtue of intelligence, of modifying, correcting, polluting, deflecting, corrupting, eroding, outflanking … inspiring what we might call *the invisible insurrection*. (Trocchi quoted in Ashford 145).

Coming back to Sinclair and the way he decides neither to enact his so-called free will by

wandering like the original flâneur, nor to mimic the walks of the Surrealists or the Situationists, one cannot understand the way Sinclair walks without keeping in mind where he comes from and how the counter-culture he was symbolically born in widely failed. As we have seen in our chapter on the evolutions of the notion of "psychogeography" and by extension on the Situationist movement, Debord failed to bring a global revolution or even to design or build any city, street or building. Yet his thought are still alive today and the *Society of the Spectacle* is still a bedside book for many revolutionaries and a source of many commentaries. Similarly, Trocchi's article "A Revolutionary Proposal: Invisible Insurrection of a Million Minds", from which the passage above is quoted and which was published in Debord's review "*L'internationale situationiste*", may not have single-handedly change the course of the world. Yet, the idea of forces at work in the world that need to be understood before one can perform some "modifying, correcting, polluting, deflecting, corrupting, eroding, outflanking" echoes Sinclair's approach to the urban environment and how to explore it.

That idea of hidden forces, which is also present in Debord and probably in any avant-garde and revolutionary movement on the face of the Earth, is also taken up by Sinclair, but not in a radical way, only in a soft one. The V that he draws on paper is only the proposition of an action plan. He understood, I believe, from his experience of the counter-cultural circles and what they became that eventually the marginal becomes the central and vice-versa, that like French philosopher Vladimir Jankélévitch said in 1978 about the non-conformism coming from the Sixties, the most common conformism is nowadays "the conformism of non-conformism"[144]. In other terms, Sinclair and other writers of the stalker group play with their visionary or revolutionary aspect. Unlike Debord, they don't claim to know the true forces at play in London, to have had the pure and ultimate vision of the city and how to subvert it. They accept that they are part of the fabric and that the signs they draw on urban space, like the texts they write, are somehow gratuitous; as in unjustified, uncalled for, apparently useless in terms of social change. This is nicely explained in Niall Martin's essay on Sinclair, in a passage where he discusses the impact that the experience of the London counter-culture of the Sixties had on Sinclair's writing and walking:

> This emphasis on the political potential of the aleatory and the contingent, I argue, distinguishes his practice of psychogeography from its earlier incarnations as *dérive* within the urban theory of the Situationist International and provides a ground for the formulation of a political position which attempts to maintain the possibility of critique while recognizing the inevitability of complicity and capital's power of recuperation.

144 "*De tous les conformismes, le conformisme du non-conformisme est le plus hypocrite et le plus répandu aujourd'hui.*" (Jankélévitch & Berlowitz 13)

(Martin loc. 653)

This does not mean that there is not a political message behind stalkers' writings—only that this political message does not represent the core of these texts. What is at the core is, I believe, a certain poetics of free association which is radical in the way that it *roots* the writer and through him the reader back to their environment: the city. The esoteric or magical aspect of the literature of Sinclair, Self, Keiller or Papadimitriou is paradoxically a way to connect ourselves back to reality and overcome that felt alienation and that computer-generated reality we are supposed to collectively experience in our relation to the contemporary Western metropolis that is London. The esoteric and the magical, the mix of fact and fiction therefore appear to be the most *realistic* option if one wants to re-root oneself. Likewise, the constraint which motivates their walks is not a way to reduce their possibilities but paradoxically to expand it by forcing the emergence of a state of true discovery, whether it be the discovery of the city, the self or the body.

The constraint the stalker's walks follow are always an arbitrary itinerary and are often based on a given shape, a shape that will then become a sign following what Iain Sinclair was writing in the first chapter of *LOFTT*—the will to “vandalise dormant energies by an act of ambulant signmaking”(1). As we have seen above, in that first chapter the idea is to draw a V on the map, “from Hackney to Greenwich Hill, and back along the River Lea to Chingford Mount” (1). If in this seminal text Sinclair chose a letter on which to base his itinerary on, in other works the walks follow different preplanned shapes, and often an also preplanned theme.

Instead of total randomness as the one the original flâneurs thought they had full control on, Sinclair's approach is more one akin to improvisation: From a given framework (itinerary and/or theme) he will then weave together or associate things he finds on his walks with elements of his memory to create an original work that is presented as his temporary and personal revelation on the city. Among the many books I could have taken, I will mostly based my argument on Sinclair's most acclaimed work: *London Orbital*.

London Orbital was first published in 2002 but based on a walk which started on “30 September 1998” as Sinclair and one of his most faithful acolytes (Renchi Bicknell) “stalked into town” (*London Orbital* 125). This walk by Sinclair, joined by a co-walker in most chapters, is famous for its size, itinerary and thematic since the author decided to follow as closely as possible the M25, more transparently known as the London Orbital Motorway. Completed in 1986 and inaugurated by Margaret Thatcher, the M25 is a motorway that absorbed previous sections and added new ones to entirely circumscribe the conurbation of Greater London, acting as a fast-mobility belt between faraway sections of the English capital, but also a way to avoid entering London.

The fact that Sinclair chose the M25 is not a surprise if we consider how much it answers some

of his obsessions. First, as a walker, the M25 symbolises for him the motorisation of the post-war London. The idea of drawings circles around London to facilitate the access, the rapid transport of goods, but also the escape to the proverbial English countryside is often associated with Sir Patrick Abercrombie and his two key plans for post-blitz London, *The County of London Plan* (1943) and *The Greater London Plan* (1944), two plans which were anticipating a demographic boom at the end of the war and the obvious need to reorganise urban space after the bombings. What's more, the two plans were designed to answer to the increasing number of motorists, a number which had sharply increased from 1910 to 1940, an increase that did not show any sign of slowing down in the following decades.

Second, since it is rooted in the post-war years, the M25 also interestingly follows in the North the Outer London Defence Ring, the first line of defence designed during the Second World War in case of a German invasion, just like Paris ring road follows the Thiers wall (*Enceinte de Thiers*), another defensive wall built in the 1840s to protect Paris from outside aggression (but also possibly to keep any new uprising within the walls of Paris). This association between the two motorways and defensive walls reminds us that, following the title of French geographer Yves Lacoste's famous book, geography is first and foremost used to make war (*La Géographie, ça sert, d'abord, à faire la guerre*) in the sense that walls and roads are motivated by the needs and are tools that a power has to protect, support, but also possibly trap or orientate its citizens. Both protective and oppressive, open and closed, that bleak reading of what geography and most specifically a road is fits Sinclair's view:

> Was this grim necklace, opened by Margaret Thatcher on 29 October 1986, the true perimeter fence? Did this conceptual ha-ha mark the boundary of whatever could be called London? Or was it a tourniquet, sponsored by the Department of Transport and the Highways Agency, to choke the living breath from the metropolis? (*London Orbital* 3)

For, in Sinclair's mind, the M25 is not evil in itself but surely designed following evil principles and motives, all of them embodied by a political figure that is seen by Sinclair and authors cut from the same cloth as the great destroyer of the post-war consensus in Britain: Margaret Thatcher. Because of that position in his eyes, Thatcher is for Sinclair the instigator of a new kind of urban space based on “the introduction of US mall-viruses, landscape consumerism, retail landfill” (4).

Beyond yet related to Thatcher and what she represents in British history, Sinclair's fight is directed at a certain kind of urban development in London based on speculation, a certain dose of hyperreality and generally disconnected to the nature of the land or what he considers to be the needs of his inhabitants, a kind of urban development which creates “mindless futurism, computer-

generated fictions" (*Hackney* 221), and promoted by planners and developers "who see no value in the past" and follow the principle that "it would cost more to refurbish a building than to knock it down and build something new" (quote from Patrick Wright interviewed in *Hackney*, 225). Sinclair, alongside others like Papadimitriou or Keiller, walks to fight urban projects and plans which appear to be useless to them, and what's more alienating and harmful to the city's social fabrics. The walk is therefore a reappropriation of space against the motorisation and the privatisation of the public space, and by extension a walk based on a personally set itinerary is seen as the exact opposite of going in a car to a commercial mall. If the motorisation is embodied by the London Orbital motorway, the privatisation and commercialisation of London is symbolised for Sinclair by the Millennium Dome, and later by the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park used for the 2012 Summer Olympics.

Before mentioning the case of the Olympics installations, let's discuss the building that is at the centre of *London Orbital*, The Millennium Dome (now known as the O2). Initially created as an exhibition ground for the Millennium Experience, a celebration of the third millennium opened at the turn of the year 2000, the Dome quickly became controversial and divisive. Despite political support by the Blair government (the project itself had been started by the Tory government of John Major in 1994), the exhibition and the venue failed to galvanise the public and only attracted around half of the expected number of visitors. Set on the Greenwich Peninsula, the symbolic centre of the symbolically central official time, the Dome was presented as a beacon for the century to come.

It is this connection to time and the new wave of London development that makes Sinclair target the project repeatedly. He first does so in *Sorry Meniscus*, a short book solely written on the Dome. In this work, Sinclair explores the fictional aspect of this new building and observing the site from afar in 1997 next to a computer-generated image of it taken from the Dome's propaganda, Sinclair writes:

> I hold up the promotional photograph against its pale twin. And realise that this is how the whole millennium scam should have been worked. The 'computer-generated realisation', produced by Hayes Davidson for the New Millennium Experience Company, is better, grander, more visionary than anything New Labour will achieve by dumping something close to a billion pounds into the deadlands. (*Sorry Meniscus* 8)

Symbol of that hyperreality (*Sorry Meniscus* ends on the sentence, "Like everybody else, I could play with virtual reality and settle for what ought to be, rather than what, all too loudly, is", 90)*,* the Millennium Dome is at the origin of Sinclair's walk around the M25 and acts as the centre. The Dome also gave the walk a time limit since the plan was to conclude the full circle of the M25 before its inauguration, on the 2000 New Year's Eve. The Dome has to be understood in *London*

Orbital as the centre of the new London he dislikes, the London devised in the Thatcher years and continued by Blair and his New Labour, person and party for which Sinclair has no love lost.

As opposed to this centre, the M25 is the periphery understood as the necessary Green Belt surrounding a city in traditional urban planning since the access to nature means the access to the proverbial "good life". In Sinclair's view, Thatcherites "hated the inner cities" and considered the city to be a place of sin and dirt against the moral purity of country and suburban life as embodied by its people: "Their pitch was simple: turn proles into home-owning suburbanites, stakeholders, share-buyers. London would be ring-fenced into ghetto, city of surveillance, privately policed estate" (86). Therefore, Thatcherites were still in favour of the development of a proper London suburbs, proper in the sense green, pastoral and still quite far from the city. On the other hand, New Labour, according to Sinclair, did not value such notion of green belt and eventually preferred to it the creation of parks inside Greater London, among which the Lea Valley (or Lee Valley). Speaking of New Labour, he writes again in *London Orbital*:

> Wilderness was abhorrent. Rough pasture must be rationalised into Best Value recreational zones, retirement homes for happy butterflies. Farm animals were dirty, smelly, unreconstructed: cull them. What was required was a vertical wedge through the landscape (the Lee Valley Regional Plan), a designated hierarchy (media, recreation, development). What was not required was an holistic vision, any talk of belts or girdles or circuits. What was lost was the old dream of paradise gardens. (86)

Neither a support of the purity of the countryside nor a fanatic of city life, Sinclair's quest is to explore the green belt around the M25, that wilderness that in his view the New Labour, "masters of double-talk, gesture politics, non-consenting consensus" (86), was trying to erase or tame. This doesn't mean that Sinclair's relation to the M25 is purely positive, far from it; only that the motorway still offers new possibilities, "fresh narratives" (16), while the Dome at the centre of his circumnavigation and symbolically at the centre of time, is entirely an enemy, a negative object:

> It started with the Dome, the Millennium Dome. An urge to walk away from the Teflon meteorite on Bugsby's Marshes. A white thing had been dropped in the mud of the Greenwich peninsula. The ripples had to stop somewhere. The city turned inside-out. Rubbish blown against the perimeter fence. A journey, a provocation. An escape. Keep moving, I told myself, until you hit tarmac, the outer circle. The point where London loses it, gives up its ghosts. (*London Orbital* 1)

This paragraph that opens the book highlights the main lines of Sinclair's argument: The Dome is a negative force whose creation sent ripples throughout the city, corrupting it from the centre, like ashes' clouds rolling after the impact of a meteorite. In contrast to this object set at the centre and

fully organised by the political centre, the exploration of the M25 and what's around it is a way to escape the dominant narrative about London that the Dome symbolises: a narrative of wealth, prosperity and eternal fun. The M25, because it is on the outer edge of London, is the place where one can actually reconnect with the past life of London and its wilderness, its non-marketed essence, the reality which has not already been turned into "content". When he starts fomenting the project of walking the London Orbital motorway, Sinclair writes:

> I want to walk around the orbital motorway: in the belief that this nowhere, this edge, is the place that will offer fresh narratives. I don't want to be *on* the road any more than I want to walk on water; the soft estates, the acoustic footprints, will do nicely. Dull fields that travellers never notice. Noise and the rush of traffic twenty-four hours a day, has pushed "content" back. […] The M25 walk was the next project. (*London Orbital* 16)

If the motivation being the walk are clear (walk away from the pre-chewed narrative of New Labour London), the form of the walk is also interesting. Since Sinclair's walk was against the Dome and what it stood for, he started it symbolically at Waltham Abbey, strictly North of the Dome and still on the meridian, turning the abbey into the zero of a clock whose needles would be nailed at the location of the Dome. What's more, Waltham Abbey is also the resting place of the last Anglo-Saxon rulers, King Harold Godwinson, who was dethroned by William the Conqueror in 1066: A fitting metaphor for Sinclair who wants to fight against the inevitable—the expansion of the Dome's powers and what it represents.

From that starting point, Sinclair and his eventual company would walk counter-clockwise (or anticlockwise, as he sometimes writes): "We wanted, quite simply, to get around: always carrying on from where we left off at the finish of the previous excursion. From now on the road would be our focus, our guide. We'd snatch days whenever we could […] and get it done before the millennial eve" (125). Besides discovering new areas of London were the "stage-managed spontaneity" (18) of New Labour and its Millennium celebrations had yet to reach, the walk, and through it the text of *London Orbital*, was a way to exorcise or conjure the disease of which the Dome was considered to be the main symptom. On the last page of *London Orbital*, once the full walk performed, Sinclair writes: "We hadn't walked around the perimeter of London, we had circumnavigated the Dome. At a safe distance. Away from its poisoned heritage. Its bad will, mendacity. The tent could consider itself exorcised" (551). This passage takes us back to what we have said above about drawing an arbitrary V on a map and comparing it to a rune—the magic of ritual is at the root of Sinclair's non-fiction. The use of ritual, of the arbitrary, of magic becomes a countercurrent to the mainstream just like walking counter-clockwise around the Dome becomes an act of exorcism. More than subversive, Sinclair's way of walking is subaquatic: It goes against the flow of choice,

economically-motivated reason or just comfort—who wants to walk miles around a motorway when he has the choice not to?

We find a similar logic in Werner Herzog's walk from Munich to Paris. Herzog, who is more famous for his movies and documentaries, decided one day to walk from the German city to the French capital only following a compass and not a map of the quickest roads. Like Sinclair, he carried a notebook with him on which he put down his impressions, a notebook that will be slightly edited and published under the title *Of Walking in Ice* (1978 for the German first edition). I'm mentioning this work because what motivated Herzog's walk was the magical belief that walking in the middle of the winter from Bavaria to Paris will cure his friend and mentor Lotte Eisner:

> At the end of November, 1974, a friend from Paris called and told me that Lotte Eisner was seriously ill and would probably die. […] I took a jacket, a compass and a duffel bag with the necessities. My boots were so solid and new that I had confidence in them. I set off on the most direct route to Paris, in full faith, believing that she would stay alive if I came on foot. (Herzog 5)

Lotte Eisner did survived her illness and eventually passed away in 1983, making Herzog's walk somehow successful. “I am following a direct imaginary line” (40), writes Herzog, and such arbitrarily-chosen ritual seems to have worked.

Therefore deciding the shape of the walk, whether it be around the London motorway or following your compass between Munich and Paris, becomes a way to shape space following one's personal project and urge, and the act of shaping space becomes the act of shaping reality. Sinclair goes against the derrealisation of the Dome and his walk becomes a way to reassert his own power at shaping reality, just like Herzog's only weapon against Lotte Eisner's disease is to start a magical walk, a pilgrimage. If one looks at it from an allegedly reasonable perspective, a ritual like a pilgrimage is useless. And Herzog and Sinclair are not saying otherwise. However, because they perform such acts of magic of whom they accept the uselessness, they somehow make them effective.

Like Sinclair notes while crossing one of the many peripheral villages surrounding London (Horton): “Geography has been twisted by a Lewis Carroll logic: if somewhere is featured on a sign, it no longer exists. If it isn't, it does” (341). Hence, like in that first chapter of *Lights Out for the Territory* quoted above, “Skating on Thin Eyes”, the arbitrary and magical aspect of the stalker walk is accepted as being useless as in “not helping” or directly effective—The Dome is not going to be destroyed, London speculation has not been halted. However, following one's own itinerary against the contingency and reduced randomness of a city's organisation is an act of “signmaking” in the senseconomic that since signs are no longer defining real things but only themselves, new

"signs" have to be created, arbitrarily. The magic of the stalkers root them back to reality because this magic is accepted as useless and irrational, because the magical signs, the rituals, that they perform in the *zone* of the city are a way to reveal the fallacy of the other signs, the dominant and computer-generated ones. Through the constant invocation of esotericism and magic they don't want to convince us that their reality is the true one, they only want to make us realise that the hegemony of the other signs are also willed, are also part of a certain irrational magic.

Obviously, in the quote above, the "sign" is a street sign or a display board, but I think we can take the metaphor further by saying that Sinclair's way of walking is an attempt at making *significant* the past layers of London, its concrete reality which strangely is now only surviving in the *zone*, a place between the city and the countryside, between the centre and the periphery, but also between fact and fiction, data and urban legends. By making *significant* these areas, the past of London, its culture that has been forgotten, by making his own body which walks through it, sometimes painfully, Sinclair makes the other, mainstream set of signs somehow less significant, less important, less concrete.

The kind of restrained walk that Iain Sinclair has done in *LOFTT* or in *London Orbital* are also found in most of his non-fiction writings, most of the time in relation to the city and its fake reality, its hollow concreteness.

In *Silenic Drift*, published in 2013, he suggests to put his walk to the Natural History Museum under the sign of "psychogeology". During that walk, he aims at referencing the lunar rocks present in London after he learned from an article in *The Independent* that these rocks are mysteriously disappearing from the English capital. Again, we see the recurrent themes of Sinclair's work: a restricted walk focused on an arbitrary subject, a connection with the magical, a mix of fact and fiction underlined by an attraction for conspiracy:

> Here was my idiot-simple proposition: psychogeology. The beach beneath the pavement. 20,000 streets under the sky. The rocks of the geological collection at the Natural History Museum in Exhibition Road, South Kensington, were calling me in. I would come to them, across London, connecting with, recording, investigating – and listening to, that above all – a chain of glacial erratics, Aberdeen granite, lumps, public art boulders, kerbstones, unnecessary cladding, erased memorials, and demolished terraces with the split heads of Coade stone effigies. The lapidary chill in our blood, the lime mortar in our bones, takes sustenance from a chain of volcanic detritus left behind or exposed in public parks. Interventions from who knows where? Deep space? Flying saucers? Pre-history? (5)

We see once more how Sinclair takes by-lanes to reroot the city with a certain concrete reality, here

its very stones, almost magical as they come from outer space, which are nonetheless "disregarded by tourists and speeding urban commuters", "[basking] in the achieved invisibility of things that have always been here with no requirement to explain themselves" (6).

In *London Overground: A Day's Walk around the Ginger Line* (2015), the walk is also highly restricted and closely follows a preset, predefined itinerary. Like in *London Orbital*, in this text Sinclair set himself to walk alongside the most recent London line—the Overground or ginger line. Since the line is like an octopus with many side-branches, Sinclair decides to make a full circle, a loop, but this time clockwise, from Hackney and on a single day. The author connects this walk to his previous one of the M25, both circumnavigations telling us something about the urbanism of London over the past decades as both explore "the non-space, the zone that is unmentioned, no part of any official development package", whichconomic "becomes the *only* space, covert, returned to nature, half wilderness, forbidden" (22). Green belt or ginger line, it doesn't matter: The *zone* can be at the relative centre, as long as it is in the cracks of the city's map.

Since it has to be done in one day, the walk appears to be closer to an escape than to a nature stroll, like we could argue it was the case for the M25 expedition which stretched over a year:

> If I could no longer walk above the city […] I could plod beneath the full circuit of London Overground, with the "final link" being completed on 9 December 2012.conomic […] If the M25 was the significant geography for the Thatcher era, a landscape of decommissioned hospitals concerted into upmarket compounds with no history, then the new railway, which was not new at all, but a device for boosting property values, looked like the right walks for our present doleful period. […] A walk around the circuit of the elevated railway, that accidental re-mapping of London, in a single day. That's what it had to be. (23)

Follows a fast and intoxicating 14-hour exploration of the surroundings of the new metro with the familiar invocations of lost cultural artefacts (44), famous artistic figures (notably Angela Carter, born Stalker, 99–117), and the usual descriptions of derelict streets combined with computer-generated real estate projects:

> Our zigzagging descent takes us into liminal land, disputed, ruined, recovering: with the virtue of escaping surveillance, slipping away from official heritage promotion. *It isn't happening yet*. Railway arches are breeze-blocked, developers have mesh-fenced unredeemed earth mounds: with warnings from "professionals in security" about "advanced forensic marketing". Strict corners of nowhere are schizophrenically divided between the next urban improvement and tired green space with horses and play-farm trappings. (43)

A passage which can be read against another one which also contains a similar touch of religiousness and that same tension between the redeemed and the unredeemed: "We are expelled into a nowhere of cars with smashed windows, green glass in jagged patterns on soft grey seats. And messianic religions camped in garages and defunct factories: THE REDEEMED CHRISTIAN CHURCH OF GOD, WINNERS TEMPLE. A god of unrequired margins" (63). Sinclair is himself the "god of unrequired margins" if one accepts these margins to be considered as the last remnants of reality, "the *only* space", in a thoroughly speculative London, where land and prices are ballooning away from reality.

If the way Sinclair walks his city is significant because it allows him to reveal the holes in the marketed and usual reality of London, it is often made in a less restricted way than in the examples quoted above. Besides the very coercive walks that might take some detours but which are nonetheless based on a preset itinerary, we found other texts which follow a theme and a space without the planned aspect of works like *London Orbital* or *London Overground.* No walk or text, however, is left to chance.

That kind of lightly constrained walks can be found in the short text *Sorry Meniscus* (1999) that we mentioned above, a work for which Sinclair walks around the Millennium Dome, looking for an entrance into the perimeter fence. In *Hackney* (2009), he walks all the streets and retells the stories of his elected neighbourhood, Hackney in East London, a borough undergoing gentrification, noting "how every disappearance clears a space on the map, a hole in the perimeter fence through which the future can be glimpsed" (loc. 1872). Again we find that recurring idea of a perimeter fence that has to be crossed or passed under if one wants to witness an unknown area that is paradoxically more real than the completed London of the real estate developers.

A similar idea is at the root of the more melancholy *Ghost Milk: Calling Time on the Grand Project* (2011). The text that is presented as a memoir is centred on the London Olympics and other grand public projects which somehow failed to become real in Sinclair's eye even when they are actually made of concrete. It is the case of the Earth Centre in Doncaster designed by architect Will Alsop to celebrate the mining past of the region and described by Sinclair as a "conceptual landscape where reality was declared bankrupt" (loc. 3786). Funded by the Millennium Commission, it closed in 2004 due to low number of visitors, a fact Sinclair sees the funny side of as he writes after meeting the project's architect almost a decade after it was shut down:

> The strategy, as Alsop explained it, had been 'to expound in a vivid, hands-on way, the principles of sustainable development'. And, in a negative fashion, this is exactly what the Earth Centre achieved. They proved that nature sustains itself. It abhors the despoilers of a vacuum. Abandoned mine-workings, after a few years left to themselves,

> have a wild beauty which includes visible traces of a previous history: the rusted rails, coils of wire, scars and fissures. (loc. 3779)

The whole of Sinclair's *art poétique* is here, with always this fascination for the full and the empty, the "traces of a previous history" and a celebration for the failed and the overrun, a fascination that is the reason why Sinclair's poetics could be described as based on the tension between apparition and disappearances. The latter term appears to be the key London characteristic for Sinclair since he used it in *London: City of Disappearances*, a collective work on the English capital edited by Sinclair and with texts from other "stalkers" like Patrick Keiller, Nick Papadimitriou, Will Self, Stephen Smith or Patrick Wright.

"The book of disappearances assembled itself as a deflected autobiography, scripted by an automatic pen in an end-of-the-pier booth in an out-of-season resort. Friends and friends of friends sent me the missing chapters of a book I was incapable of writing" (4), Sinclair tells us in the introduction to the anthology, accepting himself as the centre of this literary production on London. All the names and works of the recurring people we come across in Sinclair's works is too long to be given here but the fact that certain characters endlessly come back from one book to the next creates a sense of community, a community of which Sinclair is at the centre. "By soliciting contributions to an anthology of absence, I hoped that the city would begin to write itself (punningly, in both senses)", he notes, still in his introduction, continuing the metaphor of the act of writing as simultaneously an act of erasing and revelation, appearance and disappearance. Because summoning a ghost is at once a way to reveal it and yet prove that it is but a spirit which will soon vanish, Sinclair's prose is traversed by the need to reveal these disappearances, making them disappear by the very act of revealing them, as he seems to consider that disappearing is a better state for an event, a person or a space than being simply unnoticed, unreferenced, unregistered.

I believe this is why most commentators, mostly in the press, consider Sinclair to be focused on a Golden age of London he looks kindly back to. Writer James Heartfield coined a term for this feeling, "Londonostalgia" *(see* Heartfield)*,* or the sense that everything was better before in the English capital. Heartfield gives to this "Londonostalgia" a mayor, not Sinclair himself but another prominent London writer, Peter Ackroyd:

> The London imagined by Ackroyd, Sinclair and Moorcock is, above all, a backward-looking one. The Londonostalgics adore everything arcane and archaic about the city. […] Emotionally, Ackroyd, mayor of Londonostalgia, appeals to history to underline his conservative faith in continuity. But as history, this is very poor scholarship - the subordination of historical truth to Heritage London. (*see* Heartfield)

The argument is valid but like most harsh criticism it conceals the complexity of one's writing under

its polemical tone. That Sinclair is nostalgic of the London of the past cannot really be discussed since, and increasingly so, he seems to fit into his walks a certain dose of autobiography, like in the passages in *Ghost Milk* about the manual work he performed at Chobham Farms in his first years in London (loc. 302) or Hackney's “anarcho-communal days” (loc. 4864).

His past and the past of the city merge like when he describes the memory he has of the birth of his daughter in the introduction to the collection *London: City of disappearances* (7), an introduction he ends by the following, “all we can ever know is the shape the missing object leaves in the dust – and the stories, the lies we assemble to disguise the pain of an absence we cannot define” (12). The disappearances, the vanishing presence of the past, are only made visible by the traces of it, traces that have to be referenced even when they are not solely data but also stories or lies, because these traces are part of the continuity of London. I believe that Sinclair can be considered to be a nostalgic author simply because he deals with the passage of time, not because he is regretting in a conservative way the good old days, the good old ways.

Registering is not always regretting, and that's what Sinclair does, he registers, “noticing everything” as he writes in the first chapter of *LOFTT*, “Skating on Thin Eyes”. He registers through his notebooks but also his pictures and sometimes his tapes, a massive amount of documents whose written part has been recently acquired by the Harry Ransom Center in Austin, Texas (*see* “American Smoke” in *Ghost Milk*). He notices the unnoticed, and doing so he creates a continuous emotional reality of London, the description of an intimate ghost that goes against the fake concreteness of Heritage.

Of course, since his works have become more and more popular over the years, Sinclair may have participated in turning into “Heritage” certain parts of London or even helped or supported their gentrification. However, I don't think it was his primary goal, only a consequence of what he had accepted: His inevitable recuperation by the dominant forces behind the city's concrete and imaginary organisation. I think that his primary goal was to summon the past and create a continuity in the emotional fabric of London, in the flesh of London.

Again in his introduction to *London: City of* disappearances, in a passage discussing how London treats its disappeared, we read:

> The disappeared of the First War were named and published on English memorials because they were not here; their bodies, what was left of them, could not be returned from the battlefield. In our present climate of shoulder-shrugging amnesia, we have memorials to memorials, information posters telling us where the original slab has been stored. Heritage replaces the memories which should be passed on, anecdotally, affectionately, from generation to generation, by word of mouth. (1)

I would take this important passage as a manifesto of Sinclair's art, an art which considers writing as a way to make affectionate memories, not official memories but personal, secret, sometimes irrational ones that can be based on nothing more than fiction because fiction is as important in the creation of a personality than facts, and that stories are needed to develop one's affects.

Passing down anecdotes and stories, Sinclair becomes a sort of griot, at once story-teller, historian and poet whose function is to keep together the community. Just like most societies are based on magical rituals, with his walks and with his invocation of a certain magic of London, I would argue that Sinclair wants to create that sense of community in London. In some sense he succeeded in that aspect since around him have been gathering different authors in different cities practising the same kind of restricted or semi-restricted walks in the *zone*, effectively creating a community of stalkers.

We can start with the most famous of them, Will Self, mostly known for his novels, who has co-opted the term psychogeography for a column he publishes in *The Independent* since 2003. Some articles from this column have been compiled in 2007 in a book simply called *Psychogeography*, in which he gives his own description of the stalking community:

> Nick [Papadimitriou] points out that most of the psychogeographic fraternity (and, dispiritingly, we are a fraternity: middle-aged men in Gore-Tex, armed with notebooks and cameras, stamping our boots on suburban station platforms, politely requesting the operators of tea kiosks in mossy parks to fill our thermoses, querying the destinations of rural buses. Our prostates swell as we crunch over broken glass, behind the defunct brewery on the outskirts of town) are really only local historians with an attitude problem. (Self loc. 95)

As an important and very public part of that fraternity, Self appears in most of Sinclair's books, from *London Orbital* (551) to *London: City of disappearances*, where he clearly shows an interest for space and how it impacts one's personality: “It matters where you are born. Not just the country or the city, the burg or the hamlet—but the precise location, its height above terra firma, its positioning in the welter of the world; for this is the still point at the exact centre of the ever-expanding shock wave of your life” (59).

The most notable collaboration between the two writers is found in *Hackney* where Self is one of the many people interviewed by Sinclair. Unlike with most of the people he meets, Sinclair does walk with Self before interviewing him, a walk around Hackney which once more has to do with the magically revelatory aspect of walking, as Self himself explains, recorded by Sinclair:

> “After that circumnavigation of Hackney, I felt as if we had been traversing a widening

> gyre. Having completed the circuit, I realized that it had been a very interesting exercise. The route imposes a centripetal force, pulling you out still further. In other words, Hackney was defined as an absence. And the London beyond it was therefore a more graspable presence. And in defining this presence, as it were, within the walls of Hackney, Hackney itself becomes apprehensible. So our walk did work." (Sinclair, *Hackney* 448)

If he is a recurrent character in Sinclair's books, when it comes to walking in itself and writing non-fiction about it, Self is only represented by his "Psychogeography" column in *The Independent* and most notably by his famous expedition from Stockwell in London to Manhattan in New York, going on foot to Heathrow and then away, still on foot, from JFK airport. This excursion only interrupted by a plane ride is described in the chapter "Walking to New York" opening the compilation of articles, *Psychogeography.*

From London and its *zone* to New York and its own, the chapter and walk have a lot in common with Sinclair's own work, as we can see in the following quotes, "I am the reverse commuter, for while they head from the suburbs into the city centre, I pack my briefcase and walk to work on the periphery; it's there that I stake my claim, mine my words. I'm gathering pace—and satisfactorily losing definition" (loc. 343) or, "I've been doing this for a few years now: stepping from my London house and stalking a hundred miles or so into the hinterland. In middle age I no longer want to know where I'm going—only where I've been all these years" (loc. 377).

For Self, walking in the *zone*, "stalking a hundred miles", is a way to root oneself back, to sew up what has been torn (loc. 149), which is, in the case of Self (true to his name), mostly his own identity. A major one in terms of literary fame and miles walked if not in terms of the amount of non-fiction he has written about his walks, Self is also fascinated by Andrei Tarkovsky's cinema and how he deals with the urban and the rural, the inside and the outside, how he refuses the traditionally linear aspect of time:

> His films are full of locations such as this: unmade environments, discombobulations of the urban and the rural. His favoured leitmotif is rain falling *inside* a building, a suspension of natural law that is curiously mundane. He is a refusenik – of dialectical materialism, and of all simple, linear progressions, such as time, or narrative commonly understood. (loc. 546)

We see here how the three authors—Tarkovsky, Self and Sinclair—are similar in their themes. The three of them refuse the "linear progressions" of time, unearthing past layers of the city or past layers of the self in a non-narrative but associative, accumulative way.

In the first, London half of his walk to New York, Self meets up with another fellow

stalker (loc. 465), a stalker who also appears regularly in Sinclair's universe: Nick Papadimitriou. I have already discussed Papadimitriou's non-fiction text *Scarp* which follows a similar spirit than Sinclair's own work by exploring a region of peripheral London based on a certain *modus operandi* and repeated visits (Papadimitriou 11). But it is worth it to come back to this lesser known figure of what I consider to be the stalker movement.

Like Self, Papadimitriou also published a text in Sinclair's collection *London: City of Disappearances*, a text in which he explores "the unmapped zone, out beyond the airport's Western Perimeter Road" (Sinclair, *London: City of Disappearances* 612). Titled "Bedfont Court Estate" after the name of an estate which predated the airport, the text deals with the same tension between the rural and the urban in spaces which find themselves at the cross of some of London most recent expansion projects (in that article the building of Heathrow's terminal 5), with a special interest for noticing, registering and recording the traces, making Papadimitriou's essay a condensed sample of stalkers' poetics:

> I would take my camera and my plant recognition manuals and set out with an eye open for roadside skips and empty houses. I have spent years building up an archive of material – old photos, documents, household objects – recording traces of lives lived in the old county of Middlesex. Retrieving discarded letters, diaries and borough guides from these unofficial time capsules was one of the pleasures of my walks.
>
> It was while exploring the land around Spout Lane North that I discovered Bedfont Court Estate, a colony of derelict smallholdings set upby the Middlesex County Council in the 1930s. For years this little enclave of farmhouses remained hidden beneath the Heathrow flight paths. Later the M4 wormed out from London, while the M25 slashed around to the west, closing in on the farms and concrete tracks. (*Ibid.* 612)

If Sinclair's work is more interested in the cultural production of London and if Self's is more introspective, Papadimitriou's is more inspired by nature, as we can see in his repeated references to Richard Mabey's *The Unofficial Countryside*, a key text written in 1973 which celebrates the resilience of nature in the *zone* and the abundance of untapped resources on offer there. When Sinclair, Self and Papadimitriou see the *zone* as a place of fresh narratives away from the standardisation of computer-generated and mediocre London, a space from which to retrieve traces of past lives, past selves, a space where one can scratch the surface and see what's underneath, Mabey is enthralled by how nature reclaims man-made space and constructions:

> Yet I think all these places do have one quality in common, and that is that, in them, the labels "urban" and "rural" by which we normally find our bearings in a landscape, just do not apply. It is not the parks but the railway sidings that are thick with wild flowers.

> Hedgy scrub springs up and spreads luxuriantly in the waste ground between factories just as surely as it is clipped down to size in suburban front gardens. […] Nothing seems quite complete or rounded off. Buildings and greenery alike are liable at any moment to be levelled, trimmed, landscaped, incinerated, modernised, or just vaguely "redeveloped" as if they were some under-used muscle. (Mabey 12)

If they focus on different forms of traces, the logic is essentially the same: Walking somewhere that one is not naturally or socially attracted to in order to extract something so far untapped.

Besides Sinclair, Self and Papadimitriou, other non-fiction writers in London evolve in the stalking galaxy, also looking for untapped resources in the *zone*. In this category, Patrick Keiller is worth mentioning. Like the great majority of London authors we have discussed in the course of this chapter, Keiller is another recurrent character in Sinclair's work. First a photograph, Keiller will produced a trilogy of films around the city of London. These three creations (*London* in 1993, *Robinson in Space* in 1997 and *Robinson in Ruins* in 2010) deal with urbanism through still frames of different parts of London, with a focus on industrial sites and old buildings left unused. All these films are narrated by an unknown character and tell the story of another unseen character, Robinson, a man who is trying to solve what he calls the "problem" of London, namely the social and political changes the United Kingdom has undergone after Thatcher took power.

Keiller comes back to this experience in the text *The View from the Train: Cities and Other Landscapes* (2013) where he explains the making of his film trilogy:

> Both *London* and *Robinson in Space* had set out with a perception of economic failure, the result of a backward, specifically English capitalism; but in the second film, this gave way to an understanding that the UK's social and physical impoverishment was not a consequence of some inevitable "decline", but of the successful operation of a particular economic system in the interests of those who own it. The "problem" that the film had set out to examine was revealed as the result of political decisions that could be challenged. (6)

More than only being a retrospective look at his past works, *The View from the Train* is also an opportunity for his author to develop his notion of "found architecture"; elements of the urban landscape familiar now to the reader of this thesis: shutdown factories and derelict houses left abandoned and that one can spot along the railways while travelling by train, not only in London but across England:

> I saw them initially as possible models for architectural production, as early twentieth-century modernists regarded some industrial and other structures, but they also seemed to admit the possibility of a more inclusive transformation of everyday surroundings,

> and I began to think they might be subjects for cinematography. (1)

To get close to these buildings once he has spotted them from a train's window, Keiller walks or cycles through the area surrounding them, expeditions that make most of *The View from the Train*.

Unlike Will Self, Keiller does not appear in *Hackney* but in *Ghost Milk* when, as Sinclair ponders about the "English train" at the start of the chapter "Kissing the Rod", he describes Keiller's *modus operandi* when it comes to exploring London and other English cities: "Keiller called his chosen sites 'found' architecture. A favoured technique involved spotting possibles from a train window, then making an expedition, by bicycle, to bag the view" (loc. 4572). Once again, Keiller's practise can be connected to the one of the authors we discussed in the previous pages—he retrieves, or finds, lost or invisible architecture and burns them on film or through his writings. If similar, he is also different from the three authors aforementioned in the sense that his writings possess a clearer and more direct political edge than Sinclair's, Self's or Papadimitriou's works:

> The juxtaposition of successful industry and urban decay in the UK's landscape is certainly not confined to the north of the country. A town like Reading, with some of the fastest growth in the country (Microsoft, US Robotics, Digital, British Gas, Prudential Assurance) offers, albeit to a lesser degree, exactly the same contrasts between corporate wealth and urban deprivation: the UK does not look anything like as wealthy as it really is. The dilapidated appearance of the visible landscape, especially the urban landscape, masks its prosperity. (Keiller 46)

Further down, he summarises his thought: "Modernity, it seems, is exemplified not so much by the business park or the airport, but by the dilapidated dwelling" (54). The juxtaposition of wealth and poverty, prosperity and deprivation recalls the articulation between marketed, computer-generated images of the city and its hidden, derelict reality.

Since he adopts a similarly political tone, we will conclude this brief overview of the stalker's network in the United Kingdom, and more particularly in London, with Patrick Wright, author of *A Journey Through Ruins: The Last Days of London*, a text which was first published in 1991 and later augmented in 2009—it is this edition that we will be working with.

Dedicated to "Lady Margaret Thatcher" (loc. 55), the book is described as a "'thick' description of small areas" (loc. 119), the areas in question being Sinclair's favoured walking territory and home: Hackney. In Wright, the area of investigation is more precisely the district of Dalston, now famous for gentrification. The *modus* operandi for the walk and the book that goes with it, like in writers we are relating him with, is plainly presented at the start of the 2009 introduction: "I used Dalston and the wider reaches of East London, I hope not too exploitatively, as the location for a series of investigations into the culture and politics of Britain under Margaret Thatcher's

government" (loc. 100).

When Wright first writes his book at the end of the Thatcher years, large swathes of Dalston are still immensely deprived and yet some other parts are already benefiting from gentrification, like Mapledene Road, home of another favourite target for critics of English urbanisation—Tony Blair, who was living there 1980 and 1986. In the introduction to the 2009 edition titled "Going back to Dalston", Wright returns once the gentrification of his neighbourhood has been completed, and if he is not entirely negative about it, he still regrets that the whole urban process pushed the locals back and never solved the problems he had noted down in his 1993 account: lack of public service and mindless real estate development which are "uprooting not just buildings but also the memory of the life that once made the neighbourhood" (loc. 254).

As we are now used to, the connections between Wright and other writers that I label as "stalker" are innumerable. Like Sinclair and others, Wright walks to describe meticulously his environment but also to make sense of it. "The whole borough of Hackney is like that: a bizarre confusion of fact and fiction, a place where one person's grim reality serves as everybody else's exotic film set" (loc. 645) is the kind of sentence that we would not be too surprised to find in one of Sinclair's texts on the London district. Wright writes about Sinclair and Hackney, while Sinclair interviews Wright in *Hackney*. The latter also includes of Wright's text in *London: City of Disappearances* ("The Quaysides of Brick Lane: Walking with Emmanuel Litvinoff", 232-53), an interconnection which yet again highlights the intertextuality between different stalkers and supports the idea that this is indeed a specific and united artistic movement. Another interesting meeting point between Wright and Sinclair, and a fitting figure on which to finish our inventory of the stalkers in London, is to be found in the person of David Rodinsky.

The chapter "Rodinsky's place" in Wright's *A Journey Through Ruins* and and Sinclair's and Rachel Lichtenstein's non-fiction text *Rodinsky's Room* tell the same story: The story of David Rodinsky, a Polish Jew living at No. 19 Princelet Street in Hackney. I let Wright continue that now famous urban legend:

> Latterly described as a translator and philosopher, he is said to have lived here in some sort of caretaking capacity. One day in the early Sixties, or so the story goes, Rodinsky stepped out into Princelet Street and disappeared for ever. His room has since become fabled: a secret chamber still floating above the street just as it was left. Caught in time warp of the kind that property developers are quick to straighten out, it has become the new Spitafields' version of the *Marie-Celeste*. In the more imaginative versions of this myth, Rodinsky is even said to have left the table set for a meal. (Wright 2293)

Rodinsky's room was open decades after he supposedly left it and he became a Hackney myth

thanks to this successful disappearing act, as well as a neat embodiment of what we said above about ghosts and how the stalkers are at once revealing them and then paradoxically making them disappeared: Rodinsky left without leaving much traces of what happened to him and yet whether it be Wright and to a larger extent Sinclair and Lichtenstein, they all tried to bring him back and in the process made his vanishing almost palpable, actualised.

If so far we have only discussed stalkers who are working on and mostly around London, it is important to note that Sinclair's aura went beyond the London Orbital Motorway and that the way himself and others have walked urban landscapes following a pre-established itinerary or theme was emulated by others.

Since we have been discussing France in relation to psychogeography and the flâneur in previous chapters, it is interesting to note that mostly inspired by Sinclair and their own urges, some authors followed closely in their works such experimentation with urban space. It has to be noted that Sinclair has been translated into French. First on the list, and as soon as 2002, was *Rodinsky's Room* which became *Le Secret de la chambre de Rodinsky* under the translating pen of prominent French translator Bernard Hoepffner, who also recently vanished in Wales, the birthplace of Sinclair, before the sea brought back his dead body after weeks. Then were published a translation of *London Orbital* in 2010 by Maxime Berrée, followed by *Ghost Milk* in 2011, under the title, *Londres 2012 et autres dérives*[145], this time translated by Héloïse Esquié and Yann Perreau. Finally in 2016, Maxime Berrée came back to Sinclair with his translation of *London Overground*.

If Sinclair has a relative editorial success in France for an author so rooted in London, his approach has been replicated on the other side of the channel with a direct homage to his work. It is the case of Philippe Vasset who published in 2007 the non-fiction text *Un Livre blanc*. Like in texts produced by Sinclair and other stalkers, the text starts with a description of the *modus operandi* as Vasset set his mind on visiting the places left blank on a map of Paris and its suburbs, once a week and in the course of a year (95): “What is there in theoretically empty places? What phenomenons have been deemed too vague or too complex to be represented on a map? […] I was hoping, like the heroes of my childhood books, to reveal the false bottom my world was missing.[146]” Similar to Sinclair's approach, an inspiration he acknowledges (80), Vasset plans methodically because he wants to go beyond the Situationists' drift and thwart the complex systems set in place by the

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145 The word “*dérive*” is here a reference to Debord in regard to Sinclair's walks but also a way of hinting at mismanagement of funds, or “*dérive financière*”.

146 “*Qu'y a-t-il dans ces lieux théoriquement vides ? Quels phénomènes ont été jugés trop vagues ou trop complexes pour être représentés sur une carte ?* […] *j'espérais, comme les héros de mes livres d'enfant, mettre au jour le double fond qui manquait à mon monde*” (Vasset 9-10).

urbanists[147]. He is also torn apart between the desire of describing the blank places he visits (mostly industrial complexes or government properties for future projects) and the wish to let them be untouched, in their state of wilderness, invisibility, and non-existence in the city's dominant script:

> Projected on the virgin background of the map, everything was sign, and I registered every detail […] Strong was the temptation of turning each blank zone in a little theatre […] But such act would have emptied out the places of their strangeness and so I had to endlessly fold again my texts on the naked, directionless space, in order to avoid the narrative chain to lock itself shut, to let it beat on the flank of things.[148]

He solves the dilemma of taming/revealing or continuing with non-registering the blank places represented on the map by suggesting the creation of literary "*ouvrages*" and not "*oeuvres*" (54), two related terms which are different in the sense that the first connotes the idea of a work in progress and the latter the idea of a finished work. We find this problematic in the stalkers with their accumulation of data, their mix of fact and fiction and the endless flow of their prose, clearly visible in Sinclair or Papadimitriou. The *zone*, or the blank space or place is, like in Sinclair, the territory to find fresh narratives but also to break away from the linearity of the very concept of narrative.

As we are still in France, it is also worth mentioning Xavier Boissel's *Paris est un leurre*, ("Paris is a ploy, an illusion"), a text in which the author visits with his son and a camera the legendary fake Paris built at the end of the First World War on the plain North East of the city to avoid the destruction of the actual capital in the possibility of a German air raid. That second city was supposed to look like Paris from the sky, with lights mimicking key infrastructures like train stations, but was eventually never put into use. Boissel's text retells the story of the project and through his walks visit the actual space of the fake Paris, now in the Parisian suburbs, covered with supermarkets and retail parks, motorways and unclaimed terrains, implying that the real Paris is as illusory as its fake relative when one looks at its suburbs.

Outside of London and Paris, there is one author that can also be related to the stalker movement: Sam Miller, the English author behind *Delhi: Adventures in a Megacity*. A journalist by profession based in Delhi for many years, Miller decided one day to find the best possible way to explore a city on foot, to exhaust it, thinking about doing that kind of walk in the Indian capital:

> I used Delhi—as wide as it is long, and vaguely circular—as my model. I was searching

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147 "*La dérive des situationnistes ne suffit plus* […] [*il faut*] *déjouer les complexes mises en scène des urbanistes*" (*Ibid.* 78).

148 "*Projeté sur le fond vierge de la carte, tout m'était signe, et je consignais chaque détail* […] *La tentation était forte de transformer chaque zone blanche en un petit théâtre* […] *Mais une telle pratique aurait vidé les lieux de leur étrangeté et il fallait sans cesse rabattre le texte sur l'espace nu, sans direction, et empêcher la chaîne du récit de se refermer, la laissant battre sur le flanc des choses*" (*Ibid.* 39).

> for a solution that was practical, mathematically sound, and aesthetically appealing. Circles, in the form of ring roads and *périphériques*, provide a simple, encompassing route around most cities. But, by their very nature, they leave out the heart, and are usually suffocatingly polluted. I considered other solutions: letters of the alphabet, as used by Iain Sinclair, a self-proclaimed proponent of "ambulant signmaking". The "W" for instance, mapped on most cities, would give considerable variety. So does the "S", in a rather more elegant way. But there was no logic to these solutions—and they left out too much. (11)

The solution to solve this mathematical problem? A spiral, starting from Connaught Place and ending in Gurgaon, the Millennium City. "From Walled City to World City", said a promotional campaign for the Times of India, and walking the spiral allows Miller to discover the city in fresh ways, including the many parts of it which are hovering between urban and rural, but also the "westernised urban utopia" of Gurgaon, heavily motorised, deadly to the pedestrian and where dreams and reality are blended together in the mortar of marketing:

> "Dream" is the key motif of the marketing message: "Dream Homes—Dream Lifestyle", "A paradise in the making", "Homes to recreate the essence of royalty", "Make your dream come true", "At last the enriched lifestyle you've aspired for becomes unbelievably affordable".
>
> The name resonate with suburban America—Rosewood City, Malibu Towne, Belvedere Park, Carlton Estate, Scottish Castle, Maple Heights, Greenwood Plaza, Hamilton Court. (279)

The same themes we find in Sinclair and other stalkers are here presented without as much literary quality as in previous texts quoted; however, the idea behind Miller's *Delhi* is the same: Exploring a capital city in a fresh way to map its unnoticed areas, its *zone*.

To conclude this chapter but also, I will take a by-lane and discuss something that I do not feel I highlighted enough in the last pages.

If we dwelt extensively on the arbitrary and the shape of the walk and how these shapes are in themselves an instrument of personal expression, paradoxically transforming the constrain into a mean of liberation from urban plans; if we also dwelt on how the stalkers, like their counterpart in Tarkovsky's movies, are motivated by the fact of retrieving lost artefacts from the *zone*; we might not have dwelt long enough on the physical pain that go with such walk, a pain that is a good reminder of the difference between the original flâneur, or even the flâneur in its Surrealist avatar, and the stalker. The flâneur was never in pain, the flâneur was bodiless—the stalker soldiers on,

suffers, walks miles and miles with hunger and exhaustion for only companion.

It is most strikingly the case in Sinclair's *Sorry Meniscus* which can be read as an apology letter to his knee, but also in *London Overground* ("Mean time is suspended, we calculate by degrees of hunger", 49) or in *Ghost Milk* ("By the time I reached the outskirts of Liverpool, I just wanted to get home. My legs were gone", loc. 4532).

Obviously, Sinclair is not the only one to suffer, with for instance Will Self and Nick Papadimitriou battling with hogweeds on their way to Heathrow: "The stems of the hogweed contain a photoactive poison; if you touch them and then are exposed to sunlight, painful blisters form full of gleet. Nick shows me the hogweed scars on his hands – nothing is really safe" (Self loc. 547). But the medal for the most painful description of body pain induced by a self-imposed forced march is to be found in Werner Herzog's *Of Walking in Ice*, and more precisely at the end of it, when Herzog, after walking from Munich to Paris in the middle of the winter, reaches the apartment of his friend Lotte Eisner who he thinks he just cured of a serious disease thanks to this magical walk: "For one splendid fleeting moment, something mellow flowed through my deadly tired body. I said to her, open the window, from these last days onward I can fly" (Herzog 90).

Therefore the way the stalkers walk make them bodies, full bodies, with blisters and knee pain, when the original flâneur was never hungry, never tired, and only an eye, the proverbial "gaze of the flâneur", nowadays more related to the "tourist gaze" as in John Urry and Jonas Larsen *The Tourist Gaze* 3.0, a book on tourism:

> When we 'go away' we look at the environment with interest and curiosity. It speaks to us in ways we appreciate or at least we anticipate that it will do so. In other words, we gaze at what we encounter. This gaze is as socially organised and systematised, as is the gaze of the medic (1).

The flâneur was gazing at his own environment, he was going out like tourists now go away, to find the exotic, the picturesque, the novelty. The stalker has a widely different approach as he goes in, inside or under his environment, scratching, clawing and struggling to find the "false bottom" of Vasset or the different layers of Sinclair. The fact they exhaust their bodies is I believe significant in their approach: These authors want to be re-embodied.

Nowadays, and especially in major cities like Paris, London or even Delhi, writers like the ones we have studied in the course of this chapter can avoid walking. If they do walk, and if they do it so intensely, it is because the body pain means something to them and I think we can distinguish at least two meanings to this experience of pain. First, walking is a way to reconnect oneself with one's bodily envelope in a world that these authors consider to be increasingly derealised. If one wants to fight back derealisation, the growingly shallow aspect of concrete and what they consider

to be a computer-generated, motor-centric urban space, one needs to have a tool, and the first tool is one's body. Second, the ritual aspect of their walks. The bodily pain and its descriptions is a way to make the magical aspect of the expeditions more real. Whether it be in Herzog, as we have seen, or in Sinclair with many times the idea of an exorcism, a conjuration, especially in *London Orbital* with the Dome, or even in Self with the thought sustaining the London-to-New York walk being the wish to sew up his identities and western societies after the trauma of 9/11, the walk is a magical act aiming at repairing something. And like in many rituals, the pain becomes proof that the ritual works.

What is interesting, and which shows again that the traditional binary separations have to be reconsidered, is that the stalker, looking for a re-enchantment of his urban world, does not only use his brain and his imagination. He labours in a quest that on paper look more spiritual than physical —The search of things from the past, time continuity, beauty in unnoticed places, etc. What is the need of walking when one has libraries and archives big enough to tell you everything you want to know about any street in London? I would suggest that the stalker *has* to walk because body and spirit should not be separated, because his spiritual quest has to be embodied just like his physicality has to be idealised—through writing itself, through the magical and ritualistic aspect of the walks, through the associative aspect of his prose. What suggests the stalkers are a holistic experience of the city that allow them to break away from compartmentalisation—the urban and the rural being two compartments, the centre and the periphery, the beautiful and the ugly, the useless and the useful, the past, present and future ("every disappearance clears a space on the map, a hole in the perimeter fence through which the future can be glimpsed", Sinclair, *Hackney* 137), the revealed and the hidden, the ghost and the concrete, the noticed and the overlooked, and one could go on and on like this. The stalkers walk simply because walking is the easiest way to go through, to traverse, to cross from one compartment to the other, from the street to the pavement to the doorstep to the stairs to the rooftop to another roof, to cross physically, to experience the limit of the compartmentalisation that the human brain applies on things and that we experience first-hand in our language-based consciousness. The walk and the pain that comes with it turns the stalker into a conjurer; a conjurer of the derealisation or what Mumford called the "felt alienation", and that I would link to compartmentalisation experienced by a certain portion of urban denizens.

The original flâneur was passive and enjoying himself. He was not asking questions, neither to himself or about the society around him, he was not doubting. His approach to the city was as straightforward as the boulevard he was walking on and he had no political agenda. He was not alienated because he considered that there was no power to alienate him.

On the other hand, the stalker is agitated and torn between his incapacity to act and his will to do

so. His approach to the city is as confused as he is himself, and he tries to explore the last corners of the city to finally find a solution to his problem even when he knows that there is no solution, that there is no limit because he just crossed them, the city he endlessly walks cannot be circumscribed into text just like his consciousness and the language that goes with it cannot be ended. He will never be able to "come terms" with the city, to sift out the fact from the fiction, or vice-versa, the centre from the periphery, the allegedly real and allegedly imagined, and I believe this is what makes him happy—the fact that, like it is the case in a language, or languages, possible associations are limitless.

One could say that the stalker is a tortured character as opposed to the blissful original flâneur. But that would be missing the point since the pain he experiences, the bodily pain he walks through as well as the mental pain of seeing things vanish, is a positive pain because it re-roots him and it allows him to get a grip of a liquid reality, a "liquid city" in a reference to another work by Sinclair, that he has otherwise no grasp on. There is pain, and there is confusion, and there is coercion. But these three things have to be taken positively in the stalker's approach because it is the only viable way he considers to be open for one who hopes to improve his personal life and the community around him. After walking around Hackney with Iain Sinclair, Will Self tells him: "Hackney itself becomes apprehensible. So our walk did work" (Sinclair, *Hackney* 448). The walk did work because the physicality of walking, the fact that you can cross different areas, stories, people gives you a grasp at the essence of a place—the essence being that, like any space, it is in all aspect limitless.

Therefore, the *zone*, the grey area between things, is both an evasive place and the only graspable reality, the only traces left of the limitless aspect of reality. The constrained and painful walk is a tool to reroute and re-root body and self, to admit that there is no *true* limit between them,to transform it into a weapon or only into a cure. Derrida in *Specters of Marx* defines a conjuration as, "first of all an alliance, to be sure, sometimes a political alliance, more or less secret, if not tacit, a plot or a conspiracy. It is a matter of neutralizing a hegemony or overturning some power" (Derrida 58).conomic And this I believe what the stalkers aim at: Conjuring through walking the hegemony of their times which I would identify with general compartmentalisation.

They are not the only ones in history and I'm sure that we could argue in one way or the other that a good number of artistic movements have wished to overcome the compartmentalisation of things. However, the city being the ultimate space of compartmentalisation (where else do we find blocks?) because it is so far the ultimate expression of mankind, the stalker's poetics and the space in which they express it, whether it be the physical space (the *zone*) or the genre (literary non-fiction), makes them nowadays spearheading the struggle against compartmentalisation. Like metaphors in Sinclair's, the lesson of the space explored by the stalker, the lesson of the literary

genre they express themselves in, is that everything “leaks and spills”.

Conclusion:

As we reach the end of this thesis, one could ask if such conclusion about everything “leaking and spilling”, about the limitless or all things is not nihilistic, PoMo or any other fashionable insults; if writers like the members of what I consider to be the stalker group are not rather true revolutionaries or, the other way around, social traitors and useless bourgeois.

To that virtual objector I would say that I tried, in this whole dissertation, to show that this kind of absolutely binary thinking cannot be applied to the city and non-fiction writing walked and produced by stalkers. At the end of this research, what I want to suggest is that we should consider the *zone,* the mix of fact and fiction in urban non-writing, psychogeography, the flâneur and finally the stalker movement as proofs that notions or very concrete things are fleeting, spilling, leaking into one another, yet without becoming entirely liquid, entirely impossible to grasp.

Even when one cuts a tree there is still a root. Even when one uproots it, there is still a seed, somewhere. And likewise the notion of city has been uprooted yet we are still discussing it. The notion of fact has been attacked by the fire of fiction yet we are still writing about it, and fiction. The practise and term of psychogeography were never really born and yet I have just written it and you just understood. And this too for the flâneur and the stalker.

Now read this passage from Richard Mabey's *The Unofficial Countryside*, mentally replacing the notion of everything natural by the notion of idea:

> Our attitude towards nature is a strangely contradictory blend of romanticism and gloom. We imagine it to “belong” in those watercolour landscapes where most of us would also like to live. If we are looking for wildlife we turn automatically towards the official countryside, towards the great set-pieces of forest and moor. If the truth is told, the needs of the natural world are more prosaic than this. A crack in the pavement is all a plant needs to put down roots. (11)

By walking, the stalker offers this crack in the pavement, this *faille* in French that is etymologically related to the English “to fail”, because he seems to know that the time of the watercolour landscapes of ideas are gone; that the perfect garden city will never come into being; that the utopia will not be materialised just like the dawn of the universal revolutionary will never happen. The stalker fails, continuously, into describing his own environment, he only accumulates, fails more and more, endlessly, but he fails better, his failure opens something, a crack that can be used to start drawing what Fredric Jameson, inspired by Kevin Lynch's *The Image of the City* (1960), calls “cognitive mapping” in *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*:

> In contrast, what I have called cognitive mapping may be identified as a more modernist

> strategy, which retains an impossible concept of totality whose representational failure seemed for the moment as useful and productive as its (inconceivable) success. The problem with this particular slogan clearly lay in its own (representational) accessibility. Since everyone knows what a map is, it would have been necessary to add that cognitive mapping cannot (at least in our time) involve anything so easy as a map; indeed, once you knew what "cognitive mapping" was driving at, you were to dismiss all figures of maps and mapping from your mind and try to imagine something else. But it may be more desirable to take a genealogical approach and show how mapping has ceased to be achievable by means of maps themselves. (Jameson 409)

The writings and walking that performs the stalkers are the missing link between the modernist "cognitive mapping" of Lynch and what Jameson calls for: A way to locate oneself which will not be enclosed in the limitations of maps be will go beyond while still being practical. Mapping can no longer be achieved by "means of maps themselves" like it is declared by Jameson because maps are based on limits and now everything is understood to be enmeshed into the rest.

The texts of the stalkers, even if they are writing on that very limitlessness of things, the permeability of different periods, of the good and the bad, the centre and the periphery and all the others pairs I have repeatedly mentioned all along this thesis, are still practical in the sense that they still create effects, and they still create effects because they are inherently affective. One can locate oneself through the writings of someone like Sinclair because even if his descriptions of London are endless and will never find a conclusion[149], that very failure allows a localisation since it echoes that you can't come to terms with the city of London or things in general.

The gleeful failure of the stalkers becomes in that sense a political act because it renders visible the limitlessness, the infinity. In his interview with Catherine Geel for the French radio, Italian designer Andrea Branzi, creator of *No-Stop City*, a conceptual architectural blueprint in the form of a simple grid, is asked about the meaning of that chart and what that radical approach. Branzi answers that the grid paradoxically offers an emancipation through constraint that a blank page could not provide. Branzi continues by saying that the great leap forward in his view on architecture which happened while he was developing *No-Stop City* was that everybody can think and realise its own habitat and that this a social and political right[150]. Still talking about the impact one can have

149 *The Last London* is scheduled for September 2017 and is presented as the last book on London from Sinclair—I safely guess that it will not end in a clear-cut conclusion of what London is.

150 "*Dans ce contexte, pour rester sur la problématique que vous abordez, quel est le passage entre le grand silence de* No-Stop City *et de l'exposition au musée d'Art moderne de New York, et la naissance du nouveau design qui prépare l'idée de laboratoire autonome du design ? C'est, il me semble, l'affirmation que chacun peut penser et réaliser son habitat et que ceci est un droit social, politique*" (Branzi 28).

on society in another passage when he says that he does not aim at changing the world, only adding to it (Branzi 78).

I believe that the mapping, the political or personal possibilities offered by the stalkers, and therefore their utility and their importance, come from the fact that, like in Branzi's *No-Stop City*, they offer self-emancipation and expression through constraint but also through the acceptance of the limitlessness, the permeability and simply the "no-stop" aspect of the city, and by extension of human experience altogether.

In that sense the stalkers are radical because they fail and accumulate, and while doing so they enable themselves and the people paying attention to them to re-root themselves, to reconnect themselves with reality. The act of almost ritualistic walking and describing what they traverse becomes a way to create a sense of community, a sense of place, not through an admittedly finite product as it is often the case (national narrative, holy book, common language, etc.) but through a process—one step after the other, one ghost before the other, one layer on top of the other—, an endless process, a failure to finish, an unlimited accumulation that creates permeable connections and perspective.

Inspired by the spatial shift in the Humanities, the oscillation of fact and fiction and the imports of concepts like "psychogeography" and "flâneur", the ethos of the stalkers and their distinctive walk is that accumulation is a political weapon and that physical contact with the urban reality can create a sense of togetherness and recreate the collective aspect of the construction of the cities of the past. To offer an alternative to the privatised nature of today's London, the stalkers suggest that other private actors, the citizens themselves, build their own city through traces and other texts in order to reclaim and re-root their relation to their direct environment.

Stalking therefore becomes a way to personally protest and by extension to be one of the actors in the collective and perpetual construction of the city. Instead of decorating their bedrooms, the stalkers go out and take to the street to decorate with their own visions and memories public space so that such space in its turn becomes their home. In this light the act of walking and writing is paramount since it is free and available to all, an accessible mean of reclaiming. The walks of the stalkers become a way to come to terms with the city's unlimited aspect and yet paradoxically re-root oneself in this chaos. Like Sinclair puts it, "Nothing connects with nothing until you spread a little mud from your footprints" (Sinclair, *Hackney* 441); and this applies even if possible associations are unlimited.

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