

Hybrid 2012

The following is assigned to the students prior to a discussion of Impressionism as a document of the modernization of Paris.

Writing and discussion assignment: Are you a flâneur?

Please read and react to the readings below. Answer the discussion questions in a roughly 700-word essay thinking about what you have read. You will post this assignment on **Blogs@Baruch**. Please make sure to use paragraph form and elaborate on your answers creating an informative and readable paragraph.

I am sharing a quote from Walter Benjamin and asking you about your own experiences of taking in the spectacle that is your city, New York City. Benjamin's writing here is directly influenced by the poet Charles Baudelaire who first wrote about the *flâneur*. Walter Benjamin was one of the great Western intellectuals of the twentieth century. He committed suicide in Portugal during WWII after an unsuccessful attempt to flee from France, which was then occupied by the Nazis. Although unfinished, one of his most important works was The Arcades Project, his collection of observations about the streets of Paris (Walter Benjamin. *The Arcades Project*, trans. H. Eiland and K. McLaughlin, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999, pages 11-12 and 417).

The Arcades Project is, above all else, the history of a city – Paris, the capital of the nineteenth-century, whose system of streets is a vascular network of imagination.

From *P. Buse, K. Hirschkop, Scott McCracken and Bertrand Taithe, 'Benjamin's Arcades: An Unguided Tour'* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2005).

Here is a quote from the section "M" The Flâneur:

"An intoxication come over the man who walks long and aimlessly through the streets. With each step, the walk takes on greater momentum; ever weaker grow the temptations of shops, of bistros, of smiling women, ever more irresistible the magnetism of the next street corner, of a distant mass of foliage, of a street name." For more on Walter Benjamin's Arcades Project click [here](#).

And another from section VI. Haussmann, or the Barricades: "Haussmann's ideal in city planning consisted of long perspectives down broad straight thoroughfares. Such an ideal corresponds to the tendency-- common in the nineteenth century--to enoble technological necessities through artistic ends....Haussmann tries to shore up his dictatorship by placing Paris under an emergency regime. In 1864, in a speech before the National Assembly, he vents his hatred of the rootless [homeless] urban population, which keeps increasing as a result of his projects. Rising rents drive the proletariat into the suburbs.... Haussmann gave himself the title of 'demolition artist,' (*artiste demolisseur*...). Meanwhile he estranges the Parisians from their city. They no longer feel at home there, and start to become conscious of the inhuman character of the metropolis."

Discussion Questions

- With "'M' The Flâneur" in mind, do you ever walk the city alone or with a friend?
- What are your experiences?
- How do you feel when you take the time to walk the streets of a city with no aim or direction?
- Do you think that New York or another city you have experienced is like the Paris that Benjamin describes?
- Do you think the city changes in the way Benjamin describes Paris?
- Think about, and address in your paper, who does the looking in New York City and who gets looked at? Is this the same in other cities you have either visited or lived in?
- Is there a modern version flâneur? What would it be?



Nana

Please also read [Chapter One](#) of Emile Zola's *Nana* (1880). You will share your impressions in class.

Face-to-Face Discussion of Flâneur assignment

In the class discussion, I present the two complementary concepts Benjamin uses to explain our human response to modern city life: the shock-induced anesthesia brought about by the overwhelming sensory bombardment of life in a modern city (*Erlebnis*) and the mobility, wandering or cruising of the flâneur - the unmediated experience of the wealth of sights, sounds and smells the city has to offer (*Erfahrung*).

This leads to a presentation and discussion of Baudelaire's ideas on modernity in nineteenth century Paris. We look briefly at Baudelaire's suggestions to artists as to what to record of modernity. First, I ask the students what they would consider to be modern in nineteenth century. Then, I read (and post on a Powerpoint slide) excerpts from his "Painter of Modern Life" (1863). This leads to a discussion of the following images. We address issues such as guided looking, the gaze, spectacle, the movement of women from the public to the private sphere as well as issues of race, social mobility, and the mobilization of the working classes.



Édouard Manet, *Olympia*, 1863



Gustave Courbet, *Young Ladies on the Banks of the Seine (Summer)*, 1855
Les Mode Parisienne, 1854 (fashion magazine)
Constantin Guys, *In the Street*, 1860s.





Charles Marville, *The rue Rivoli prior to demolition*, 1858
Gustave Caillebotte, *Rainy Day: Paris (Rue de Rivoli)*, 1877
Édouard Manet, *The Railway (Gare Saint-Lazare)*, 1872



Hausmann, *Avenue de l'Opéra Looking Toward the Louvre*, c. 1880



Charles Garnier, *Façade of the Palais Garnier Opera House, Place de l'Opéra, Paris*, 1874
Édouard Detaille, *Inauguration of the Paris Opera in 1875*, 1878





Pierre-August Renoir, *La Loge*, 1874
Mary Cassatt, *In the Loge*, 1878
Mary Cassatt, *Woman with a Pearl Necklace*, 1879
Mary Cassatt, *The Loge*, 1882



Laurie Anderson, *Fully Automated Nikon (Object, Objection, Objectivity)*, 1973



Pierre-August Renoir, *Moulin de la Gallette*, 1876





Degas, *The Absinthe Drinker*, 1875
Degas, *Practicing at the Bar*, 1877



Édouard Manet, *Bar at the Folies Bergère*, 1881
Morimura Yasumasa, *Daughter of Art History (Theater A)*, 1989

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