

In 1929 Walter Benjamin wrote a review of Franz Hessel's *Spazieren in Berlin* which he entitled "The Return of the *Flâneur*," translating the German *Spazieren* into the French *flânerie*. Four years later Benjamin was obliged to leave his native Berlin and move to Paris, where he continued to work on the idea of *flânerie*, now in connection with Baudelaire and in the context of *The Arcades Project*, which examines Paris as the "capital of the nineteenth century."

This six-and-a-half-minute video, *Flânerie*, is an audiovisual projection of a number of themes in Convolute M ("The *Flâneur*") of *The Arcades Project*, with a focus on the *flâneur*'s "kaleidoscopic consciousness" and experience of the crowd, as well as on the "colportage phenomenon of space." It is one of nine chapters in a longer celebration and elaboration in digital video of Benjamin's unfinished masterpiece, which is entitled *Walter Benjamin's Paris: Projecting the Arcades*.¹

Transcription from the script:

Narrator: For Benjamin (as for Baudelaire before him) the *flâneur* is someone who strolls around the city without any particular goal or purpose—and is thus unusually open to the multitude of things going on there.

Odilon Redon: The sense of mystery, the secret of which we have learned from Leonardo da Vinci, comes from always remaining in the equivocal, in double and triple perspectives, in suspicions of perspectives (images within images) — forms that come into being in accordance with the mental state of the viewer.

Walter Benjamin: The peculiar irresolution of the *flâneur*. One of Schiller's elegies speaks of "the butterfly's hesitant wing." This refers to the same association of elation with the feeling of doubt that is so characteristic of hashish intoxication.

Charles Baudelaire: The pleasure of being in a crowd is a mysterious expression of the sensual joy in the multiplication of numbers. ... There is number in *everything*. ... Intoxication is a number. ... The religious intoxication of large cities.

Walter Benjamin: The dread of doors that won't close is something that everyone knows from dreams — or rather of doors that seem to be closed without being so. ... The path we follow in walking through the arcades is basically a kind of spectral walk, on which doors give way and walls are insubstantial.

Charles Baudelaire: The perfect *flâneur* is like a mirror as vast as the crowd itself, or a kaleidoscope endowed with consciousness, which with each one of its movements represents the multiplicity of life and the dynamic grace of all life's elements.

¹ Please visit <http://german.berkeley.edu/transit/2006/60406.html> to watch the video clip.

Walter Benjamin: The fundamental experience of the flâneur is of the “colportage phenomenon of space” — in which everything that potentially happened in a particular place is experienced all at once. [Such experiences of superimposition, or overlap, are especially common in the world of hashish.] ...The place winks at the flâneur: “Now what do you think may have gone on here?”

Walter Benjamin: One can assume that the crowd as it appears in Edgar Allen Poe, with its hurried and spasmodic movements, is realistically depicted. ... These movements are less those of people going about their business than those of the machines in whose service they work.

Maxim of the flâneur: “In our standardized world, one must go into the depths right here; estrangement and surprise, the most gripping exoticism, are all close by.”

Walter Benjamin: [In watching a film] no sooner has the viewer’s eye grasped a scene than it has already changed. It cannot be arrested. ... One’s process of association when viewing filmic images is interrupted by their constant change. This constitutes the shock effect of the film, which, like all shocks, can be absorbed by heightened presence of mind. (“The Art-Work in the Age of its Mechanical Reproducibility”)