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**Article:**

Coates, J. [orcid.org/0000-0001-7905-9504](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7905-9504) (2017) Key figure of mobility: the flâneur. *Social Anthropology*, 25 (1). pp. 28-41. ISSN 0964-0282

<https://doi.org/10.1111/1469-8676.12381>

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## **Key Figure: The Flâneur**

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**ABSTRACT** The flâneur acts as a key figure for understanding the relationship between the individual, modernity and the city. A reference to dandy young gentlemen, who walked, performed, and loitered within the arcades of late nineteenth century Paris, the flâneur has transitioned from a literary and theoretical figure to one used in mobile urban ethnographies. The flâneur, traditionally male, is a figure of pedestrian mobility whose sensorial and mobile engagements with the urban landscape generate distinct forms of creative practice. For this reason, the flâneur has been invoked in relation to the methods and experiences of the ethnographer, who moves and takes note in similar ways.

This paper conducts a review of extant literature on the flâneur in ethnographic research, which shows a strong connection between this key figure and its ties to a European tradition dealing with Anglo-European (post)modernities. It has also inspired a range of methodological innovations in urban ethnography more broadly. Finally, through the case of Tokyo, the paper asks the question of who is drawn to flânerie and who is deterred from it, demonstrating how the transgressive potentialities of flânerie are only desirable for some.

**KEYWORDS** flâneur, flânerie, mobility, ethnography, Tokyo

**WORDCOUNT: 7385**

Unlike a countryside Rambler, the flâneur's strolling has been framed in combative terms as the brave 'Mohican' of modern urban life (Shields 2006). The flâneur is a figure of agency in the city whose idle yet assertive negotiation of the street has been used to discuss modernity, the embodied mobile person and the urban (Adey 2009; Barker 2009; Benjamin 1996; Brown and Shortell 2014; Buck-Morss 1989; Martinez 2015 ). Originally male, and often described in heroic terms, this key figure has been adapted by scholars across the humanities and social sciences to emphasize the active nature of peripatetic practices (See Vergunst this issue). The figure of the flâneur captures a sense of idly walking in the city, with no specific destination, taking pleasure in the act of walking while making observations on urban life. As a wandering figure who was traditionally gendered and elite, he 'embodies the gaze of modernity which is both covetous and erotic' (Pollock 1988: 67). This practice of transgressive urban walking (Martinez 2013) has been extended to include the female flâneuse (Richards 2003), as well as the disabled flâneur (Serlin 2006), signifying its role as an inspirational figure, beyond its historically masculine connotations.

Flânerie, the act of the flâneur, has inspired literature, film studies, art history and practice, urban studies and anthropology. It encourages people to engage with questions related to critical and sensuous engagement with the modern city. In particular, academic use of the image of the flâneur grew in popularity in the arts and humanities following the translation of Walter Benjamin's works into English in the 1970s and 1980s. The rise of urban anthropology (cf. Hannerz 1980) also invoked the flâneur, who eventually took a firmer place within ethnographic imaginaries with the 'mobility turn' of the 1990s and early 2000s (Sheller and Urry 2006). Since then, ethnographic disciplines have used the figure of the flâneur to explore the embodied experiences of those we study, as well as the vicissitudes of mobile urban

methodologies (cf. Cresswell 2006; Urry 2007).

The keywords ‘flâneur’ and ‘flânerie’ occur across a range of disciplines and professions, connecting meanings and approaches within single disciplines, and translating often-divergent approaches to the study of urban life, both historical and present. The flâneur has made ethnographic and expressive approaches to the city hospitable within textual, visual and historical studies and has similarly made collaboration possible in the opposite direction. However, as Keith Tester noted in one of the first comprehensive English-language edited compilations on the flâneur, despite this figure’s popularity ‘the precise meaning and significance of flânerie remains more than a little elusive’ (Tester 1994:1). Indeed, for some, such as Jonathon Conlin, the continued disagreement around the flâneur signifies that its usefulness has passed. As he states: ‘It is high time that the flâneur withdrew into the obscurity which he so likes, and that we turn our attention to other figures, other voices’ (Conlin 2014: 34).

The flâneur is not a word conceived by a single author but rather a figure that has emerged within a particular European setting, re-invoked on multiple occasions by major writers and theorists such as Baudelaire and Benjamin (Benjamin 1996; Baudelaire 1972). As a figure (see Introduction), rather than merely a word, its semiotic boundaries blur, taking on mythical and aspirational qualities. The flâneur-as-figure simultaneously embodies a kind of person, a kind of movement and a disposition towards the world. The flâneur was originally a comical figure portrayed in mid-nineteenth century physiologies, a series of illustrations, poems and short essays about Parisian life (Ferguson 1994). The Physiologies, the works of Balzac, and the writing of a number of journalist commentators would later become the source texts which Charles Baudelaire would convert into a ‘male bohemian fantasy’

(Goldstein 2012; Gluck 2008) positioning the flâneur as an archetype for the modern artist. As Baudelaire stressed in his salon of 1946, the true artist, encapsulated in the image of the flâneur, was a man of fashionable sensibilities who, in strolling and documenting the city, concerned himself with interrogating ‘modern beauty and modern heroism’ (Gluck 2008: 67).

In his interest in the everyday, Walter Benjamin turned to the flâneur for inspiration, hoping to use Baudelaire’s depiction of the flâneur as a starting point for his wider analysis of the Parisian Arcades (2006). Benjamin discusses how the figure of the flâneur in the 19th century demonstrated a co-constitutive relationship between observing and being observed by passers-by in the street. In the interest of depicting Parisian life, the flâneur would go ‘botanizing on the asphalt’ but was at the same time restricted to strolling the Arcades due to the spatial restructuring of the city (Benjamin 2006, 68). The flâneur used a wide range of ambulatory strategies and performances to establish his place in the world. The most often quoted and famous of these is the short-lived vogue for flâneurs to walk tortoises on leads along the sidewalk. Through these sorts of iconic mythologies, the flâneur came to represent resistance based on movement, performance, and the sensory. According to Benjamin however, the artist, the photographer, the journalist and the detective replaced the flâneur in the twentieth century.

While the figure of the flâneur may be firmly set in the past, the figurative and transgressive qualities of flânerie, the practice of the flâneur, helps us understand this figure’s popularity over the past 30 years. However, it is also worth interrogating how the flâneur and flânerie are cited in contemporary practice. The rise of the flâneur in academic circles is often conflated with the practice of walking in the city in general and is used to describe any form of agency adopted to negotiate the flux of

contemporary mobile urban life. As Kramer and Short recently argued in an article titled *Flânerie and the Globalizing City*, ‘flânerie is alive and well’ (Kramer and Short 2011). This may be the case, however it is also important not to conflate all forms of urban walking practice with flânerie. Echoing Francisco Martinez’s point that flânerie is transgressive in nature (2013), this paper explores why some are drawn to engage in transgressive walking practices, while others are deterred from them. After providing an overview of how anthropologists have drawn inspiration from the flâneur in urban mobility research, I explore this issue through the case of flânerie in Tokyo, showing how subject positions largely shape the desire for, and possibility of, flânerie.

### **The Ethnographic Flâneur**

The flâneur has historically been more influential within the fields of historical literary and visual scholarship (Tester 1994; Buck-Morris 1989; Wolff 1985; Maclean 1988; Gluck 2008; Featherstone 1998; Ivanchikova 2007). However, in recent years a growing body of ethnographers have engaged with this figure (cf. Bairner 2006; Brown and Shortell 2014; Goldstein 2008; Jenks and Neves 2000; Laviolette 2014; Lugo 2010; Martinez 2015; Soukup 2013). This scholarship often rests at the periphery of ethnographic disciplines, cutting across the fields of anthropology, sociology and human geography, as well as artistic practice and subjects more commonly found within the humanities. Generally speaking, this figure has been shown as ‘good to think’ (Levi-Strauss 1966) with across a range of topics. It has inspired discussions of creative practice as a mode of being in the world (e.g. Gluck 2008); which at times have acted as form of resistance against the alienation of capitalist modernity (Buck-Morris 1986). It has been extended to the vicissitudes of post-modernity (Baumann 1994), and within ethnographic approaches, it has inspired

researchers to explore the evocative phenomenological and transgressive aspects of moving in the city (e.g. Barker and Lindquist 2013; Laviolette 2014; Martínez 2015).

To better understand the relationship between the flâneur and ethnographic research on mobility, I conducted a literature review across several anthropological search engines such as Anthrosource and the Anthropological Index Online, as well as Google Scholar, allowing for a broad definition of mobility, ethnography and the use of the terms flâneur and flânerie. This search revealed that beyond theoretical references to the flâneur in mobility studies (cf. Cresswell 2006; Urry 2007) there were two major themes within the extant ethnographic uses of the figure of the flâneur. These were, (1) the flâneur as a social category applied to what those we study do, and (2) the flâneur as a methodological figure used in explaining the ways urban ethnographers conduct research.

In many senses, it is easy to see why ethnographers draw inspiration from the flâneur. Anthropologists had eschewed the practices of the armchair academic since the popularization of fieldwork in the early twentieth century by Bronislaw Malinowski (1922). Fieldwork involved moving to locales away from home, where a practice of observing, note taking and ‘being-there’ informed one’s writing practice. Whereas the flâneur’s observation and writing produced literature and art that ‘botanized’ others in the city, anthropologists have historically botanized distant others. The anthropologist’s focus on the margins of the world were also reminiscent of the flâneur’s interest in marginalised and transgressive people within the city. The increasing recognition of anthropology as a form of writing and creative practice (Clifford and Marcus 1986), alongside the popularization of urban anthropology in the 1980s (Hannerz 1980) created new comparisons between the literary flâneur and the anthropologist. The flâneur served as both a source of inspiration and legitimation

for anthropologists turning their gaze onto the city. He became an icon of movement in the city and a methodology for understanding themes of embodiment and the urban.

Despite the popularity of the flâneur and flânerie as theoretical inspiration, instances of ethnographic descriptions of everyday flânerie in the strict sense, where connections are made between the flâneur and its emic counterparts, were fewer than expected. The instances where they have been applied however, bears much fruit. Most ethnographers showed care in juxtaposing the flâneur against the emic categories of movement people use to describe, explore, and enjoy urban spaces. Patrick Laviolette, for example, has described how people engaging in dangerous leisure practices in Tallinn, Estonia, can in some senses be seen as ‘neo-flâneurs’ (2014). Focusing on practices such as le parkour, ‘where practitioners weave through urban environments, hopping over barricades, debris and other obstacles’ (Laviolette 2014: 262) and the exploration of derelict buildings, Laviolette shows how urban explorers treat the city as their playground. Going where they should not or moving in ways that are dangerous, their mobility mirrors the resistant nature of the flâneur’s idleness that went against the grain of bustling 19th century Paris. Similarly, Martinez survey of graffiti artists, Russian shopping centres and La Sape has produced a nuanced account of how transgressive aesthetic acts are reminiscent of flânerie (2015).

Overall, the flâneur is mostly used to describe Anglo-European contexts. Laviolette explores neo-flâneurs in Tallinn (2014); Adonia Lugo discusses cyclist flâneurs in Los Angeles (2010); and Bairner explores the possibility of flânerie in Belfast (2006). Similarly, Anglo-Europeans have also been described as flâneurs abroad. Ulf Hannerz describes how foreign correspondents present themselves as



flâneurs to their readership (Hannerz 2004) and tourists (See Graburn this volume) are also likened to the flâneur (Österlund Pötzsch 2010). For non-Europeans who adopt practices related to the flâneur, the traces of colonialism are also not far behind, suggesting linkages between Anglo-European contexts and their colonial peripheries. For example, the Congolese La Sape dress in fashionable suits and uphold strict standards of glamour and comportment while strolling in the streets of Congo Brazzaville. As Francisco Martinez points out, this practice has historical roots in Africa's colonial past where La Sape 'practiced a re-colonisation and re-territorialisation of the master's style' (2015: 406).

The practice of flânerie has also been used to describe the methodologies of ethnographers, academics and research-based artists. Several scholars have highlighted the resonance between urban anthropology and flânerie (cf. Nas 2014; Bairner 2006; Kramer and Short 2011). A good proportion of methodological guides in the field of anthropology and mobility studies also make reference to flânerie as a means of understanding the ways in which walking and seeing in the city relate to the ways ethnographies are produced (Adey 2009; Okely 2013; Hannerz 1980), and this has now extended to discussions around how ethnographic methods are taught. William Buse, for example, has outlined a 'following exercise' he developed for young anthropologists, inspired by the flâneur (Buse 2013). Intended as an exercise in both ethnographic positionality and observation, students are asked to follow people within the urban landscape, as if they were flâneurs. Such pedagogic suggestions have drawn attention to the ways in which walking and observing are both a primary methodology within ethnographic disciplines and a significant topic for analysis in itself. This methodological emphasis on walking and observing has become all the more pertinent with the contemporaneous rise of interests in mobility and in sensory

ethnography (cf. Pink 2009).

While Benjamin's work is often cited as the moment the flâneur was first subjected to a theoretical gaze, the past 15 years of mobilities scholarship has also argued for greater focus on Baudelaire's flâneur as a source of inspiration for ethnographic practice (Kramer and Short 2011; Barker and Lindquis 2013t; Jenks and Neves 2000). Unlike Benjamin's focus on the demise of the flâneur as a sign of the alienation of modernity, Baudelaire, alongside other literary figures, emphasized the creative and expressive potential of flânerie. Baudelaire takes the poet and the painter wandering the streets of 19th century Paris as prime examples of flânerie. He emphasizes the immersive and sensory sophistication of the flâneur, connecting the figure's marginal position to the creative practices he engages in (Baudelaire 1972).

Chris Jenks and Tiago Neves have likened the expressive and yet contradictory nature of urban ethnography to the practice of flânerie (Jenks and Neves 2000). Championing Baudelaire's flâneur, they note that much like anthropologists, the flâneur is simultaneously an elite figure and of the crowd, identifying with the 'fringes' of society. The tensions between the wandering practices of the flâneur and the question of writing ethnography is explored through a treatment of Baudelaire's artistic and literary practice as a flâneur. Finding inspiration in this resonance, Jenks and Neves argue that the flâneur is a vehicle for moving beyond post-structuralist obsessions with writing for academic purposes, and acknowledging the tension between the 'poetics and politics' of ethnographic fieldwork (Jenks and Neves 2000, 15).

In a similar vein, Kramer and Short trace how the 'Baudelairian turn' (2011, 324) has increasingly provided ways for artists and ethnographers to collaborate in

global cities. Focusing on Baudelaire's discussion of the kaleidoscopic and phantasmagorical properties of the modern city, they argue that a focus on pleasure and mobility has afforded a wider appreciation of the diversity and creative potential of pedestrian mobilities in the city. They conduct an extensive overview of artistic and scholarly collaborations that focus on 'walking practice', which not only includes Benjamin and Baudelaire's flâneur but also encompasses the concepts of de Certeau's 'pedestrian' (1984; see also Vergunst this issue) and Simmel's 'stranger' (1950).

While Kramer and Short demonstrate the wide range of creative endeavours that use urban walking as part of their practice, it is still worth distinguishing between walking and flânerie (2013). For anthropologists engaged in 'walking practice', such as Sarah Pink, the distinction between 'walking practice' and flânerie lies in the practice of walking itself (Pink 2008). Many other mobilities scholars, in discussing the embodied qualities of movement, aim to provide a multi-sensory account of movement that allows for their interlocutors to describe their movements in their own terms. For example, Tim Ingold has argued for greater focus on the tactile and grounded qualities of walking, stating that not all cultures privilege the visual in their walking practice (Ingold 2004). Alongside Jo Lee Vergunst, by discussing walking practices with a group in Aberdeen, Ingold has demonstrated that the social relationships and sense of 'being there' are as important as the visual qualities of an urban tour (Ingold and Vergunst 2008). As Pink points out, by conflating the flâneur with walking in general, we focus too much on the visual qualities of walking and neglect the other sensory and proprioceptive qualities of moving (2013).

Despite the resonances between flânerie, the flâneur and urban ethnographic practice, some significant reservations are advisable when considering whether we should draw too many connections between flâneurs and anthropologists. The flâneur

has classically been a figure of alienation, one of the crowd and yet apart from the crowd, one who ‘remains anonymous, devoid of personality, unremarkable in the crowd’ (Ferguson 1994, 28). As much as urban ethnographers dealing with the flux of contemporary mobilities might feel similar to the flâneur, the use of the flâneur as an inspirational figure in this regard potentially leads to too much focus on the anthropologist him or herself.

Judith Okely (2013), in her own criticisms of references to the flâneur, points out that holding to the ideal of forming close relationships with those we study is crucial to engaged ethnographic practice. In discussing the collaborations between artists and ethnographers then, Kramer and Short (2011) are perhaps right in suggesting that flânerie and the flâneur have much to offer, but then again, they focus on a very specific group of people who combine artistic and ambulatory practices to explore the city. If we don’t widen our scope to include walking more generally we may miss out on the diversity of movement in the world, inscribing our own academically informed meanings onto the emic terrain of urban mobility. Moreover, by solely focusing on contemporary flânerie, rather than comparing flâneurs with others, we may miss out on why flânerie is potentially transgressive. Barker and Lindquist (2013) argue that while the flâneur allows us to explore the kaleidoscopic and phantasmogoric nature of the city we should not let these sensibilities distract us from the project of ethnography. ‘Baudelaire and Benjamin never interviewed the flâneur. Ethnographers always should’ (Barker and Lindquist 2013, 160).

In ascribing flânerie to those we study, or suggesting it as a methodology for ourselves, the capacity to generate grounded figures of mobility can be lost. Zygmunt Bauman, as part of Tester’s edited collection on the flâneur, makes a wide range of epochal claims about flânerie, with very little supporting evidence (1994). Arguing

the spectacular qualities of post-modern life have made Disneyland of the everyday, Bauman argues that we have now all become post-modern flâneurs. Indeed, he makes the somewhat flippant suggestion that it takes heroic courage to not be a flâneur in contemporary life. Such bold analyses can only be made in the abstract realm of theory. Bauman did not talk to flâneurs, or other walkers within the city. If we look at specific ethnographic contexts however, we find that while some of Baumann's theoretical insights resemble everyday life, they subsume the multiple practices of divergent peoples to one overarching claim about contemporary life.

### **Tokyo Flânerie**

My assessment of the flâneur and walking practices in general come from research with Chinese people living in Tokyo, Japan. I have found that, depending on a person's perceived subject position, the desire to engage in idle walking practices differs greatly. For some, the city calls to them in ways that encourage transgressive acts very similar to the flâneurs of old. At the same time, others perceive the city as threatening and dangerous, and explicitly avoid the streets of Tokyo when possible. This suggests the plural nature of experiences of the city, and raises the question: 'Who wants to be a flâneur?'

As Carolyn Stevens and Joseph Hankins have noted, Tokyo is a space that lends itself to flânerie (2013). Its narrow alleyways run adjacent to colourful intersections and shopping districts, meaning that a single turn on the streets of Tokyo often elicits new visual pleasures and distinct soundscapes. Historically speaking, the flâneur has also directly influenced Japan's literature and art. Nagai Kafū, one of Japan's major figures in early twentieth century literature, was inspired by Balzac and Baudelaire, producing tales of wandering the streets of Tokyo (Brumann and Schulz

2012; Hankins and Stevens 2013). Similarly, Tokyo has served as inspiration for generations of famous street photographers such as Nobuyoshi Araki and Moriyama Daido, whose provocative works rely on distinctly flânerie-like practices (Brumann and Schulz 2012).

Today, a whole industry exists around walking in Tokyo, i a common trope in contemporary fiction, as well as a mode of consumption supported by a plethora of magazine guides to the city. There are even people who engage in walking practices eerily similar to the historic flâneur. In Edogawabashi Park on sunny mornings for example, I have seen an elderly gentleman walking a giant tortoise. Eccentric peripatetic practices can also be found within designated areas of Tokyo that support some of Baumann's claims about flânerie in contemporary life. On weekends, combined practices of strolling, consuming and looking in Omotesando and Harajuku are popular among young people interested in experimenting with fashion. From distinct subcultures, such as goth Lolita and gyaru, to personal style choices, these fashionable youths exemplify Baumann's point that flânerie has succumbed to the ubiquitous nature of consumption and the ways it structures space and practice (1994: 146).

Tokyo has also recently become a space where anthropologists also experiment with flânerie. The artist-architect-anthropologist Raymond Lucas has produced a range of works that deal with the urban spaces of Tokyo via an innovative combination of walking and notational techniques that he broadly defines as forms of inscription (Lucas 2004; 2009; 2008a; 2008b). Lucas' work is akin to an artistic, auto-ethnographic and architectural take on *Lost in Translation* (Coppola 2003), a film which centres on what it means to be a temporary foreign traveller in central Tokyo. It is designed to answer the question, 'how is it possible for a newcomer to learn how to

negotiate this vast complex space, which is constantly changing with the ebb and flow of the crowds of rushing but ever polite commuters?’ (2008b: 182). Taking inspiration from the figure of the flâneur, and its related artistic movements, Lucas shows that we need not solely rely on the classic methods of textual note-taking, nor assume that visual ethnography is documentary film and photography.

And yet, there is a small moment of generalisation in Lucas’ work that reveals some of the dangers of aestheticizing mobility without regard to classical ethnographic concerns of interacting with others and building rapport with a particular group. In discussing Tokyo as a site of flânerie, Lucas cites the complex labyrinthine connections formed by Japanese corporate and governmental interests as the reason why flânerie is possible. In using his flâneur’s vision however, he partly reduces the city to a solely architectural lens, overlooking the experiences of others. His ability to be a flâneur, as opposed to other people within the city, is informed by the relationship between his subject position, the qualities of the space and his own creative ambitions. However, it is important not to conflate this kind of experience with those of others in Tokyo.

Despite Tokyo’s inspirational qualities and its history of flânerie, it should be noted that Japan’s urban spaces can also be experienced as threatening to some people. As has been noted in feminist critiques of the flâneur in Europe (Wolff 1985), in Japan, flânerie is not a desirable practice for everyone. Tokyo’s streetscapes are not only the product of pleasurable ambulatory practices but are also defined by practices of street based surveillance. These practices include the mutual monitoring of people’s behaviours, called ‘friendly authoritarianism’ by Yoshio Sugimoto (2002), and *seken* by Tamaki Saito (1998). Referring to the mutual gentle surveillance in everyday Japanese social life, ‘friendly authoritarianism’ includes practices such as

unspoken prohibitions against eating on the street, the taboo of incorrectly sorting one's trash, 'cute' public notices about appropriate behaviour and a general sense that inconveniencing others in shared spaces is one of the greatest social faux pas. *Seken* refers to the interconnected sense of responsibility in Japanese social imaginaries that implies one is responsible for the actions of others. These practices ensure that, save for dedicated spaces, such as parks and events where one can consume and play in the street, the street is generally not a space for spontaneous unregulated personal enjoyment. The fragmenting effects of these practices have been used to explain the heterotopic nature of Tokyo (Sand 2013) where spaces of play within buildings serve as the major sites of conviviality (Hendry 2005). More drastically, such practices have also been used to explain the self-imposed isolation (*hikikomori*) that many in Japan choose over the pressures of shared spaces (Kashimura 2011).

The prevalence of reciprocal surveillance in Japan leaves a question as to whether anyone but the most eccentric and privileged wish to stroll in transgressive ways in Tokyo. As studies in urban studies have shown, surveillance operates as a means of actualizing social control (Monahan 2008). Moreover, it facilitates the process of 'social sorting', acting as a primary technology of social differentiation and creating modes of exclusion in the city (Lyon 2007) Consequently, the reciprocal surveillance in Japan's streets has implications for how we understand the production of marginalised groups in Japan and how this translates to their experiences of the street. This is particularly the case for Chinese migrants in Japan, who have become the largest non-Japanese minority in Tokyo today making up roughly 40% of the total non-Japanese population. From the late 1980s onwards most came to Japan on education-based visas and now fill vital roles in Japan's shrinking labour market (Coates 2013; Liu-Farrer 2011; Tajima 2003). However, their prevalence and



increasing importance in Japan has also posited them as subjects of increased surveillance and suspicion.

Within my own research I have come across a puzzle that elucidates how *flânerie* is a very particular kind of practice, differing from general perceptions of walking in the city. During fieldwork from 2009 to 2011 I found that many Chinese migrants learned to want to remain ‘unseen’ in the streets and general public life of Tokyo (Coates 2015). Chinese migrants in Tokyo suffer from negative representations that posit them as criminal and deviant. This representation is exemplified by former Tokyo governor Ishihara Shintarō’s claim that the Chinese have ‘criminal DNA’ and that Japan should protect its ‘internal flanks’ from this deviant migrant group (Ishihara 2001). It is also evidenced by the continued disproportionate media coverage of Chinese crimes in Japan, which despite only accounting for a fraction of all crimes are common features in the news (Coates 2015).

According to the testimonies of my interlocutors from 2009 to 2011, these perceptions translated into increased attention paid to Chinese migrants as they walk in the streets, particularly men who are the primary target of discourses about criminality. Consequently, the reciprocal surveillance of Japan’s street spaces took a different quality for these migrants, who were not only expected to conform to the dominant modes of behaving in the street but were also subject to spot-checks for documents and other forms of police harassment. These migrants experienced the street as an annoying (*fan*), transient and threatening space largely due to the various technologies of surveillance to which they were subject (Coates 2015). They learned to avoid transgressive behaviour and purposefully made themselves ‘invisible’ through practices of racial ‘passing’ when moving through the city, generally restricting their social lives to small spaces within building complexes. When

considering the potential for flânerie in Tokyo, we can see that this is only considered desirable to certain people.

Previously, I made the mistake of seeing this phenomenon as an issue that reflected the vicissitudes of certain kinds of ethnic subjectivity in Japan, however, it is not simply the case that Chinese people do not want to be flâneurs. More recently in another period of fieldwork from 2014 to 2016, I have come to know a group of some fifteen young Chinese who complicate my previous findings. This group are passionate visual artists and musicians, who relish walking the streets of Tokyo at night, and show little concern for the forms of surveillance my other interlocutors feared. Stating that they are not afraid of the Japanese police, or what others may think of them, they go into the night to take photos and sketch drawings; exploring different Japanese music sub-cultures; and engaging in mischievous drinking sessions in places they should not. They cite and perform bohemian identities, referencing fin de siècle artists and punk rockers, and champion an aesthetics of transgression that, as Francisco Martinez suggests ‘draw meaning from stepping away from prevailing connections, working on retrieval and making the public intimate’ (2013:427).

Unlike Baudealaire’s lone flâneur, these young Chinese band together as a group of flâneurs and are able to laugh off the fears of street surveillance. In this way they produce their own form of mobile intimate public. Indeed, when I asked them about my previous interlocutors’ testimonies and concerns about street surveillance, they said that only a person with no friends and, citing Nietzsche, no desire to ‘realise themselves’, would succumb to these kinds of fears. On one occasion one of them was even detained overnight by the police because they were found too intoxicated to return home. However, seeing this experience as a humorous and heroic tale, this

potentially damaging event was narrated as part of their own 'bohemian fantasy'.

Unlike my earlier interlocutors, this group's brazen desire to act in transgressive ways suggests that their approach to the city is in many ways reminiscent of the flâneurs of yore.

Juxtaposing this group with my previous experiences with non-flâneurs suggests that the desire to engage in flânerie is dependent on certain social privileges coupled with an interest in transgressive projects. This new group of interlocutors differ from my previous interlocutors in several ways. Excepting one who has lived in Tokyo for 5 years, the majority have lived in Tokyo for less than 2 years, and are under the age of 27. Moreover, while my previous interlocutors were largely self-supporting, or supported by families who had invested most of their family income into sending their children overseas, this new group came from families with higher levels of economic, social and cultural capital. They are the children of professors, artists and journalists, by no means the wealthiest strata of China's booming urban economies, but nonetheless comfortable enough that they can help their children if need be. While these young Chinese bohemians choose not to rely on their parents too much, as a matter of principle, they do on occasion call home to ask for more funds when their own efforts to make money run out. Consequently, their background ensures that they perhaps face fewer risks in behaving in transgressive ways.

However, it would be wrong to merely subsume these young flâneurs' projects to the product of privilege. Other wealthy Chinese I have met during my fieldwork did not exhibit a disposition towards flânerie. It is their interest in creative practice, based on a foundation of economic, social and cultural security that inspired their flânerie. As one of them, a young woman interested in street photography, explained

to me, it was her admiration of Japanese street photographers that drew her to Japan. The works of these artists inspired her to seek out the margins in Tokyo's streets. Many Japanese street photographers have produced a large range of provocative works on Tokyo's nightlife, and she seeks to emulate some of the transgressive nature of their work in her own photography. As a Chinese artist, inspired by Japanese photographers, she refuses to allow her position as a young Chinese migrant and the negative aspects of Japan's streets deter her from participating in what she sees as one of her main motivations for coming to Japan in the first place. As she told me, if she did not go out into the streets to explore, then she may as well be back in China.

The rise of the flâneur, as Stefan Morowski states, was the result of 'definite sociological processes' that reshaped the position of intellectuals and artists in the nineteenth century (1994: 181). As Morowski suggests, these sociological processes were typified by a disjuncture between elite artist-intellectual pursuits and reflexive anti-elite aesthetics among artist-intellectuals, which he claims have become amplified within a post-modern era. Building on Morowski's point, we might suggest that the sociological processes that define flânerie today are perhaps less about epochs of modernity, consumption and postmodernity (as Baumann suggests), than they are about transgressive acts that produce a particular form of sociality. Flânerie is no longer the remit of the lone man in the crowd, but rather a means of producing collective intimacies in the street (Martinez 2013). For these young Chinese, it is about being a transgressive group within the crowd.

## **Conclusion**

As Lambek, alongside Barker, Harms and Lindquist, argues (Lambek 2013; Barker, Harms, and Lindquist 2013), a key figure should be grounded in the worlds we hope

to explain. Benjamin's original reference to the figure of the flâneur focused on the flâneur as a historically and geographically contingent figure whose decline signified social and economic change. Today, as part of the mobility turn and a reinvigorated connection between urban ethnography and creative practice, the grounding of figures such as the flâneur are at times lost. Fascination with the transgressive potentialities and phenomenological implications of flânerie should not replace attention to who desires to engage in these transgressive practices and who does not.

Prior to the rise of the flâneur within ethnographic disciplines, feminist scholars rightly pointed out the hyper-masculine nature of the classic figure of the flâneur (Wolff 1985; Wilson 1992). Wolff criticized the overly celebratory tone of literary analyses of the flâneur, noting that the conflation of public experience with that of modernity and the city neglects to conceptualise women's experience of the city (1985). Moral panics and concerns for public safety surrounding women's relationship to the street have also been shown to severely inhibit the potential for women to engage in flânerie (Wilson 1992). At the same time, scholars have also argued that practices that make the marginalised visible create subversive possibilities reminiscent of the flâneur. With the rise of department stores, for example, the shopping flâneuse became a significant cinematic figure that portrayed women's relationship to the city (Friedberg 1993; Richards 2003). A growing body of scholars have also argued that flânerie that makes disability visible, performing disability as a spectacle in the streets, acts as a form of resistance to dominant narratives that posit disability merely as disadvantage (Campbell 2010; Serlin 2006). This debate suggests that the potential for walking practices that challenge hegemonies is constituted by a tension between subject positions and the projects that subvert these positions.

As Martinez argues, the flâneur can in many ways be seen as a particular

figuration of a longer history of transgressive figures as a social form (Martinez 2015). Citing the anthropology of the 'trickster' and other liminal figures as other examples of this social form, Martinez states 'Flâneurs and tricksters appear within the interstices, from the in-between, provoking gamelike situations, twisting meanings and reshaping the world through the use of craftiness' (2015:408). By situating the flâneur within its socio-historical specificity, we can suggest that as a specific figure its existence has passed, but that the practice it embodies, flânerie, continues to inspire new transgressive tricksters and walkers.

With this in mind however, it is worth paying closer attention to the ground onto which such new figurations become possible. In their attention to the aesthetics and practice of flânerie, recent anthropologists who invoke the flâneur have provided few details about the backgrounds of their interlocutors. What is their status in terms of class, race, gender and ethnicity, and how might it inform their capacity or desire to engage in flânerie? Related to this issue is the question of the anthropologist as flâneur. When flânerie is applied as a methodological innovation for the anthropologist, these experiences can be potentially generalized to the point where the voices of those who do not desire to be flâneurs are overlooked. As I have explored in my discussion of flânerie in Tokyo, one's social position and the way this influences one's approach to the city forms the ground unto which flânerie is made possible, or desirable. For some precarious Chinese in Tokyo, the street is an undesirable and threatening space, while for those with a more stable position, the rewards of flânerie outweigh its risks.

This raises a final note that cannot be fully attended to here, but is worth mentioning as a means to opening debate. The celebratory tone of recent work on

flânerie in anthropology is engaged with a wider concern with the phenomenology of resistance, subversion and/or transgression. However, the question remains as to what these transgressive acts produce. In the case of the young Chinese bohemians I have recently encountered, their production of a new intimate public sphere defined by artistic practice is often premised on elitist attitudes towards other Chinese. Their transgressive flânerie could also potentially re-inscribe wider concerns about Chinese migrants in Japan rather than challenging them. Conversely, some of my current fieldwork suggests their position as Chinese tricksters in Tokyo also creates new connections and intimacies between Chinese networks and Japanese subcultures. It is too early to tell, but these potentialities suggest that anthropologists need to not only attend to the agency embodied in figures such as the flâneur, but also the grounds that position them, and the ways this dynamic might relate to other figures within social life.

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