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Matheolane, Mpho Moses

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Representations of the Postcolonial City through the eyes of the African Artist as Flâneur

By

Mpho Moses Matheolane

Student Number: 606416

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INTRODUCTION

In this research report, titled *Representations of the Postcolonial City through the eyes of the African Artist as Flâneur,* I am interested in addressing the question of the visual representation of the urban space of the city and the life within it. For this reason, I turn to the figure of the *flâneur* as a means of analysis as it is theoretically associated with a reading of the city, albeit a European or Western city, through the practice of not only observing the spaces of this city but more importantly, textually documenting them.

Noting the frame of reference and origin of the flâneur, I wish to explore the applicability of this figure by placing it within the geographical context of an African city, as well as having it be embodied by an African black artist, or rather asking whether it is possible to do so and what, if anything, are the implications of this. Regarding the African city, and adding an aspect that makes the application of the concept of the flâneur significant, I turn to the theory of postcolonialism, particularly as it applies or has been applied to the city. I therefore begin, in Chapter One, by considering the historical and contemporary context and theory behind the term 'postcolonialism'. In doing so, I interrogate its meaning especially in relation to the issue of urban space and its link with the city which eventually comes to be termed as postcolonial.

Johannesburg is the African city of choice for this report, mainly for its locality but also for its historical and contemporary social milieu. What does a flâneur in this city look like? As a fixed point of analysis, this report limits itself to the proposal that this flâneur may be seen as an African artist through whom an analysis of the city and its significance, under the rubric of postcolonialism, may present another way of reading the visual and artistic representations of the African city, as well as expand on the way in which the flâneur as tool and figure of analysis may be approached.

Chapter Two therefore proceeds with laying the foundation for addressing the aforementioned issues by first dealing with the history of the figure of flâneur, the development of theory about its characteristics as well as the criticism that the concept has evoked. The characteristics of this figure make up an important aspect of this pursuit, especially the critical positions that scrutinise just what it means to say that one is being a flâneur, who can be a flâneur and why.

Having laid the foundation for understanding the flâneur both historically and theoretically, Chapter Three presents the case for considering the flâneur as an African, noting how characteristics of the figure have already been used and identified within uniquely African, in this instance, South African contexts and what this has meant. Here we see that the flâneur's literary origins are still intact but the goal nevertheless remains to locate this figure within a visual narrative, or rather as an artist. This then, is the next and final step of this chapter – an exposition of the artist as flâneur, the question whether there is indeed a difference between these figures and what, if any, their shared attributes may be.

Finally, in Chapter Four, having made the case for the flâneur both as an artist and as an African, I consider the work of the African artist, Kudzanai Chiurai, as flâneur. In doing so, I make a brief comparison with other artists who have had the city of Johannesburg as their subject with the purpose being to ask if they too could be considered as flâneurs. The purpose of this is to see what perspectives are embodied in the way that each of these artists represents and interrogates the city and, more specifically, how these perspectives relate to the practice of the flâneur. Chiurai is, however, the main focus of this report and thus, by using the model of the flâneur or and applying its characteristics to him, I consider a series of his works that have the city of Johannesburg at their centre and read them as instances of *flânerie* - of the practice of the flâneur.

In conclusion, what becomes apparent and is readily acknowledged in this report, is that the flâneur as a figure of analysis need not be taken as an absolute means of interpreting and making sense of the city but, in the context of new urbanities that are different to those traditionally associated with the flâneur and whose contemporary existence invites a variation of theoretical means, the use of the flâneur allows us a richer method of not only critically seeing the urban spaces of the city, but also offers us a wider range of interpretive tools for analysing its representations.

CHAPTER ONE

POSTCOLONIALISM

Just as cities are invariably subjected to transformation and erasure, urban spaces are always haunted by the spectre of their historical past.

Paul Ashcroft, 2001

In order to map out a route towards interrogating and understanding the idea of the postcolonial city it is important to not only consider postcolonialism as theory and concept but more importantly, its relation and application to subject matter that invokes the city, its representation and the representation of life within it. Postcolonialism is not a static term that can be pinned down to one particular meaning. It is a term and concept that presents a dilemma when the intended exercise is to situate it regardless of the field of practice. Debates around postcolonialism have thus far revealed a multitude of theories and ideas which do not evince a strong sense of certainty, albeit that a few theorists have ventured to give a cohesive understanding of what postcolonialism is and how it relates to time and space as historical signifiers.

The result is, however, not one that satiates the need for understanding but rather leads to further questions, and indeed to the singular question namely; what is the aim of theorizing over that which is not and can never be absolute. According to Hall, one of the principal values of the term 'post-colonial' as a root term of postcolonialism, has been to direct our attention to the many ways in which colonisation was never simply external to the societies of the imperial metropolis. Of these societies Hall writes that "colonisation was always inscribed deeply within them – as it became indelibly inscribed in the cultures of the colonised" (Hall 1996, 246).

Hall pointedly asks: "[I]f post-colonial time is the time *after* colonialism, and colonialism is defined in terms of the binary division between the colonisers and the colonised, why is post-colonial time *also* a time of 'difference'? What sort of 'difference' is this and what are its implications?" He goes on to suggest that these questions cannot be satisfactorily explored until a lot more is known about what the concept means and why it has become the bearer of such powerful unconscious investments – a sign of desire for some, and for others, a signifier

of danger (Hall 1996, 242). To Hall it would seem that 'postcolonialism' is 'culturalism', as it is preoccupied with questions of identity and the subject and hence cannot give 'an account of the world outside of the subject'. Attention is shifted from the national origin to the subject's position and "a politics of location takes precedence over politics informed by fixed categories" (Hall 1996, 256).

Olu Oguibe (1995), like Hall, takes aim at the prefix that renders postcolonialism with such theoretically contentious weight. He points out that the prefix 'post' connotes the straightforward meaning of 'after'; thus the closest that it comes to being clear is in its indication that something has happened, that something has come before and that there is something else now (Oguibe 1995, 351). One might say that postcolonialism refers to happened experiences that are the results of the imposition of one force or set of circumstances over another. It does not, however, tell us what is *happening* now nor does it convincingly explain *why* this is happening, despite its best theoretical efforts.

When the European imperial powers set out to expand and colonise – inevitably conquering and sharing among themselves the spoils of other lands – their contact with those lands was always going to have an immediate and resounding effect. To this it may be added that the prospect and practice of colonisation did not just affect the colonised but the colonisers as well, although the stronger position certainly is that the impact on the colonised has been far deeper and felt more widely. The social, political, economic and cultural circumstances of the new found lands of the colonised, conveniently described as *terra nullius* by their 'founders', was never going to be the same again. In many ways, it is these very changes that postcolonialism, through postcolonial theory, has attempted to grapple with since its inception.

Postcolonialism, however, does more than suggest that something has happened and that there is something else now. Ella Shohat (1992) argues that the term carries with it the implication that colonialism is now a matter of the past, but, in so doing, undermines colonialism's economically, politically and culturally deformative traces in the present. We know that the past's legacy lives on, something that postcolonialism does imply, albeit indirectly. Further, the globalised use of the term 'postcolonial' has had the effect of generalising and seemingly downplaying differences, making it hard to fully address areas

where elements of colonisation still exist with far more subtlety, such as that of geography and national borders (Shohat 1992, 99).

In considering postcolonialism's treatment of geography, Fassil Demissie (2008) adds that

Despite the spatial imagery of many of the models of postcolonial narratives, most of the debates surrounding these texts have focussed on such factors as race, gender, language and nationality in the construction of colonial and postcolonial subjectivities, rather than geographical issues of spatiality (Demissie 2008, 2).

Demissie's argument accords with that of Shohat on a basic level but expands the position further by reminding us that the many colonial built forms that are scattered throughout the African continent, amongst other continents, were not only constructed at different times and characterised by different European colonising powers – these built forms are also stark reminders that "colonialism was not just an economic, political or military project. It was also spatial and its imprints are still visible throughout the continent long after colonialism's official demise" (Demissie 2008, 3).

An important aspect stands out from Demissie's argument: the seemingly unavoidable fact that buildings or built forms are carriers of not only ideology but memory as well. The key factors that tend to be associated with colonialism and indeed postcolonialism, do not simply exist in the abstract form of theory but are and have also been manifested through physical structures. The consideration of the city, as per the purpose of this paper, can therefore be seen in light of these built forms of memory and certainly as part of the 'geographical issues of spatiality' which Demissie speaks of, especially in relation to the city.

Geographic issues of spatiality are, however, not the only ones that we should be aware of. Another equally important aspect is that of 'contemporary culture', particularly when seen in relation to the aforementioned geographic issues. According to Shohat, this contemporary culture is marked by the tension between the official end of direct colonial rule and its presence and regeneration through hegemonizing neo-colonial practices within the first world and toward the third world (Shohat 1992, 106).
Often channelled through the nationalist patriarchal elites, the 'colonial' in the 'post-colonial' tends to be relegated to the past and marked with closure – an implied temporal border that

undermines any potential oppositional thrust. The teleological lure of the 'post' evokes a celebratory clearing of a conceptual space that, on one level, conflicts with the notion of 'neo'. The 'neo-colonial', like the 'post-colonial', also suggests continuities and discontinuities, but its emphasis is on the new modes and forms of the old colonialist practices, not on what may lie beyond them (Shohat 1992, 106). It is possible that in this sense, neo-colonial practices are indistinguishable from old colonial practices in so far as they use the latter as a frame of reference, intentionally or not.

Postcolonialism thus implies a narrative of progression in which colonialism remains the central point of reference, in a march of time neatly arranged from the 'pre' to the 'post', but which leaves ambiguities in relation to new forms of colonialism such as those that have come to be known as 'neo-colonialism'. Post-colonialism has not dealt convincingly with issues of 'spatio-temporal implications'. The emphasising of concepts such as hybridity and syncretism enable discussion around the multiplicity of identities and subject positionalities that are a result of displacement, immigration and exile without "policing the borders of identity along essentialist and ordinary lines" (Shohat 1992, 107-11). However, it is precisely because of its focus on these issues of multiple identities and subjectivities that postcolonialism tends to ignore how very real issues of borders and spatio-temporal arrangements persist especially through these very issues.

As Adebayo Williams (1997) reiterates, postcolonialism is still a "concept in search of proper identification" with an "ambiguous paternity in that it has been impossible for its various strands to get into a solid state" (Williams 1997, 822).

The problem with postcolonialism is that it tends to take all kinds of baggage on board, its categories being elastic while its agenda is open ended, writes Williams. A remapping of the boundaries of postcolonialism through the re-examination of the claims and efficacy of some of its major concepts like 'hybridity' and 'subaltern', particularly of the disavowing treatment that categories such as race, class and nation receive, can be discerned. On hybridity, for example, Williams writes that what this concept means and represents is "the ultimate denial of origin of subject, race, class and indeed nation" (Williams 1997, 822). It should not be difficult to see why or how Williams sees postcolonialism as "a concept in search of proper identification." He further writes,

That its celebrity is based on a universal assumption of its pedigree despite the problem with it being that the vagueness and lack of certainty that surrounds its objectives results in its use being, in many ways, over-extended - the postcolonial bespeaks not just an ideological or intellectual rupture but a historical, political and economic rupture. Its crisis then, as it has been hinted, is radically genetic, conflating as it does a concrete historical fact (the actual cessation of the colonial project in its capitalist incarnation) with its political and economic superannuation (Williams 1997, 824).

This ideological-intellectual rupture which is also historical, political and economic, as Williams argues, is a feature that is certainly distinguishable in the context of an investigation of the city and its literal and symbolic representation through the various identities that inhabit it. The figure of the flâneur is but one of these identities, but, unlike the rest of them and through his practice, he is able to present and represent the city as more than just a space for habitation but a text imbued with various meanings that can be read.

THE IDEA OF SPACE AND PLACE

Having opened with a focussed view on postcolonialism and its theoretical areas of contention, we may delve a little deeper into the ideas around postcolonial theory's treatment of space as hinted at by Hall, Shohat and Demissie when they speak about the politics of location, geography and geographical issues of spatiality respectively. We again have to begin by asking: What is this thing called space within the postcolonial context and how can it expand our understanding of the postcolonial city and its representation by the African artist as flâneur?

A preliminary answer, at least insofar as the theorization of space is concerned, may be found in Henri Lefebvre's (1991) theory of space, where he presents a three-tiered theory describing space as perceived, conceived and lived. *Perceived* space refers to the relatively objective, concrete space that people encounter in their daily environment. *Conceived* space refers to mental constructions of space, creative ideas about and representations of space. *Lived* space refers to the complex combination of perceived and conceived space – a representation of a person's actual experience of space in everyday life, not just as a passive stage on which social life unfolds but as a representation of a constituent element of social life (Lefebvre 1991, 39).

Clearly space, by and of itself, is a concept that is rich with meaning, especially when perceived from a number of perspectives including the political, the social, the economical and the cultural. These factors however, only take form due to the presence of people – inhabitants of the space. In this respect, Lefebvre writes that

Every space is already in place before the appearance in it of actors; these actors are collective as well as individual subjects inasmuch as the individuals are always members of groups or classes seeking to appropriate the space; it conditions the subject's presence, action and discourse, his competence and performance; yet the subject's presence, action and discourse, at the same time as they presuppose this space, also negate it (Lefebvre 1991, 57).

According to this, the manner in which space is approached is critical in that it can be seen as a rubric under which other related issues and concepts can be accommodated. One such concept is that of 'place.' As he does with space above, Lefebvre differentiates place into various strands, identifying and describing 'social place', for example, as a social product that exists as a result of past decisions and practices, situated in particular relations of power and wealth (Tester 1994, 130).

Where colonialism and indeed postcolonialism is concerned, Paul Ashcroft (2001) writes that determining one's 'place' is fundamental to the cultural impact of colonisation and affects every aspect of a colonised society. Citing British imperialism as an example, he notes how complete the re-organisation of the 'lived place' of many ethnic groups into political, economic and cultural boundaries of colonial space has been. Thus the concept and experience of 'place' could be the one discourse of post-colonial life most resistant to transformation (Ashcroft 2001, 124).

Place and the experience of displacement emerge, according to Ashcroft, out of the interaction of language, history, visual perception, spatiality and environment in the experience of colonised people. He writes that

The importance of one's place in the business of forming cultural identity, the myriad cultural connections it evokes, its importance as a context for the cultural knowledge make it particularly resonant in the experience of colonialism. Issues surrounding the concept of

place – how it is conceived, how it differs from 'space' or 'location', how it enters into and produces cultural consciousness, how it becomes the horizon of identity – are some of the most difficult and debated in post-colonial experience (Ashcroft 2001, 124).

Ashcroft further notes that the *domination of place* in its various dimensions has been a feature of all colonialist enterprises. Of the utmost importance, according to Ashcroft, is that in order for us to grasp the impact of concepts of place in colonization and the ways in which place is reconstructed in post-colonial experience it is necessary to understand the ways in which 'space' and 'place' have been constructed in modern European consciousness (Ashcroft 2001, 124). This understanding has some bearing in enabling us to get a better perspective on the figure of the flâneur for as it is readily acknowledged, in as much as the flâneur' traits can be commonly found in almost any space that takes the form of a city, the flâneur is also by origin a European figure defined by a space that is equally very European.

In this context, it is worth noting that "European disruption of colonial space lies in the way in which the West conceives of space itself. More specifically it lies in the prominence given to vision since classical Greek thought privileged sight above all other senses" (Ashcroft 2001, 126). This 'Greek ocular-centrism' and its progress in "Western thought has not been seamless and uncontested but it has remained a key paradigm in both epistemology and ontology, a dominant trope of knowledge and being which has tended to promote specular cognition as the natural goal of any serious activity. The identification of 'I see' with 'I know' is so deep in European consciousness that it goes completely unremarked" (Ashcroft 2001, 126). These characteristics are not at all far removed from the practice and identity of the flâneur, as I shall illustrate in the course of this paper.

For now, however, understanding the argument put forward by Ashcroft means understanding that "our attention is drawn to visual imagery because visual perception has become the supreme metonym of consciousness itself". The prominence of the visual and the equating of knowledge and sight have had a profound impact on the conception, representation and experiencing of place in the colonised world (Ashcroft 2001, 127). Indeed, from this position we may even see Lefebvre's theorisation of space in a much clearer but limited context. It may be argued that Lefebvre's theory does precisely what Ashcroft argues in that the synthesis of his three-tier structure, *lived* space, is a combination of space being

perceived and *conceived*, both of which are predominantly visual – enabling the seemingly meaningless phenomenon of 'I see' to be transformed into 'I know'.

To live within a space is to act upon it, but also to have it structure your actions on the basis of your ideas of it – what you perceive and conceive of it – all the while doing this in light of other inhabitants or actors in the same space. Put differently and rather loosely: one's actions within a space such as a library is already predetermined by what you conceive and perceive it to be, as a space where there is silence. This will be further compounded by the actions of other individuals in the same space who share the same conception and perception.

Ashcroft allows us a further reading: that the claim that vision is historically seen as an instrument of observation and cognition makes it worth considering that city-space is or can be connected to an ordering of the world and social relations. These ideas would arguably have been implemented in the visual ordering of the colonial city, informed not only by the economic activities taking place within it but by broader ideas regarding the structures and ordering of space itself. In this way we can see how the ideas of space that were implemented in former colonies were in many ways heavily and understandably influenced by the practices of their former colonisers. Indeed, to this effect Ashcroft writes that

If spatiality itself so exceeds the visual, how much more the lived place in which people come to locate, define and understand their identity. The European dominance of space is therefore also a matter of the dominance of vision over other languages in the inscription of colonised environment (Ashcroft 2001, 128).

This spatial dominance and its undeniable link to the inscription project of colonialism is important for two immediate reasons. The first of these is that it gives a much broader and clearer historical context according to which space was not only seen but ordered from the perspectives of those who were in socio-economic and socio-political power. Secondly, these perspectives have been consolidated and reinforced over time, evidence of this being how, despite societal change, spaces such as the city still display a very specific structure of ordering.

The further significance of this spatial dominance can be traced back to Ashcroft's earlier statement that determining one's place is fundamental to the cultural impact of colonisation.

This is an important point as it alerts us to the potential shallowness of notions of a singular but diverse contemporary culture in the catch-phrase of globalisation. The potential shallowness lies in the probable fact that the phenomenon of globalisation does not necessarily provide a cultural turn towards something new, but rather a re-configuration of ostensibly former imperial power relations and values.

WHAT IS THE CITY?

The city exists beyond its architecture as there is more to it than its built forms. It evokes and invokes a multitude of meanings that can be read into and from it, especially when the presence of inhabitants is factored in. Joel Kotkin (2005) writes that cities come to exist and thrive by "occupying a sacred place that both orders and inspires the complex natures of gathered masses of people" (Kotkin 2005, 160). On the other hand, De Boeck & Plissart, quoted in Mbembe & Nuttal (2008), take the notion of cities as built-forms a little further in stating that

The built form is not only the product of a careful planning or engineering of the urban space. It is, rather, produced randomly as a living space more and more reduced to its most basic functions, that of a shelter, the heterogeneous conglomeration of truncated urban forms, fragments and reminders of material and mental urban elsewheres (Mbembe & Nuttal 2008, 7).

This careful planning speaks to the visual ordering of the city or urban space as can be inferred from Ashcroft above and may be seen as complemented by Demissie's emphasis on the geographical issues of spatiality. Cities, as apexes of urbanism, clearly begin as planned spaces however the extent to which cities are planned will differ. De Boeck and Plissart seem to say that the beginnings of cities are not planned and that this planning seems to be inevitably prone to shifts or reconfigurations by the inhabitants that come to occupy them as spaces.

In this vein, Janet Wolff (1994), citing James Donald, writes that

The city does not just refer to a set of buildings in a particular place. To put it polemically, there is no such *thing* as a city. Rather, the city designates the space produced by the

interaction of historically and geographically specific institutions, social relations of reproduction, practices of government, forms and media of communication and so forth…..*The city*, then, is above all a representation…it constitutes an *imagined environment* (Wolff 1994, 128).

Wolff goes on to assert that "at the level of discourse, there is no such thing as the city – as a single, integral, retrievable entity and that at the level of experience, too, the emphasis has been on the ways in which the inhabitants of the city, or any public space, negotiate and read that space" (Wolff 1994, 129). We may see in this assertion by Wolff an example of how dealing with the city as subject requires seeing it in its widest form – as a space that is not only planned but constructed in often haphazard ways and loaded with symbolism, regardless of whether it is colonial or postcolonial.

Another take on the city is that of John Tagg (1994) who, in writing about the city as spectacle and discussing Griselda Pollock's essay *Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity,* argues that

The city's spaces have provided a way to locate, describe and metaphorise the field of discourse. This logic of discourse has provided a way of construing the city as a system of closures, overflowed by the fluctuations of difference. The city was ground for modernist representation because – it was already text. The built environment, the productive, commercial, governmental, residential and recreational functions of the nineteenth century metropolis were systematized and demarcated, in a separation that controlled circulation and traced a pattern of dominance, but also orchestrated sights and opened up vistas that marked out a distinct function of the city as spectacle. Through an immense accumulation of capital, this city took form not only as the site, but also the *object,* of an emphatically visual consumption, experiences of exhilaration and alienation, pleasure and fear, mobility and confinement, expansiveness and fragmentation (Tagg 1994, 87).

The city is therefore a subject and an object, representation as well as text, if we read Wolff and Tagg together; with the theoretical considerations of postcolonialism's uncertain positionality in mind, these seemingly contradictory attributes make sense.

JOHANNESBURG, POSTCOLONIAL CITY

Johannesburg seemed to me just about at the ends of the earth, in the middle of the lions and the Negroes, that is to say – inaccessible.

Le Corbusier, 1939 (Murray 2008)

Bearing in mind the arguments regarding postcolonialism and its seeming limitations – the neglect of space and place specifically in relation to 'geographical issues of spatiality' and 'the politics of location' – the above mentioned aspects of space and place are particularly poignant for a discussion of the postcolonial city. For purposes of this paper, as already set out briefly in the introductory section, Johannesburg is the city of choice. Johannesburg's subjectivity relates well to the question of postcolonialism and the postcolonial city. More importantly, it offers us an array of possibilities with regard to its representation, its engendered historical and present identity, especially as these relate to its inhabitants.

But before we think of Johannesburg as a postcolonial African city we must consider its colonial history and how this shaped its present character. Achille Mbembe (2008) describes how the consolidation of white supremacy in South Africa saw the development of Johannesburg as a colonial town, stating that, like in every colonial town, there was difficulty in resisting the temptation of mimicry. This mimicry involved the emulation of an English town and the city becoming a "pale reflection of forms born elsewhere" (Mbembe 2008, 39). To this, it may be added that while an English town may have initially been the model for Johannesburg, over the course of time Johannesburg, or parts of it, began to mimic American cities something that is briefly touched upon later in this chapter.

By this "pale reflection" Mbembe is referring to the manner in which early settlers had a "dismembered sense of the world" given that their new settlements were anything but what they had left behind. In this sense, mimicry arises and continues to be seen in aspects of the city's identity (Mbembe 2008, 39). Mbembe's observation certainly accords with that of Ashcroft (2001) when he states that "European disruption of colonial space lies in the way in which the West conceives of space itself." It follows that colonial towns were always going to be characterised by architectural references that were most familiar to the colonisers.

Demissie is alluding to these positions when he speaks of the "connection between African

cities and the postcolonial setting" (Demissie 2008, 3). The colonial project in South Africa itself avers to this connection to which Demissie adds that,

The development of colonial cities in Africa coincided with the use of architectural and urban planning technologies designed to demonstrate the urban geography and ecology of the city where the 'sword, cross, money, colonial administrators and its military men, the church and its proselytizing activities' became essential utilitarian tools of the alleged colonial 'civilising mission'- a vision informed by the nineteenth century western notion of development aimed at transforming the backward and primitive societies of Africa into an enlightenment project through education, sanitation, trade and wage labour – racial segregation through zoning, legislations limiting the movement of African populations, particularly urban workers whose residence was temporary but devoid of any rights (Demissie 2008, 5).

Referring to what he terms the "central contradiction" of colonial and racially segregated society, Demissie uses the perfectly apt description that this contradiction is essentially "the politics of a place to live" (Demissie 2008, 6). It is a contradiction that can be seen in Johannesburg's history and the marks that it still bears on its social fabric today. Of course, 'the politics of a place to live' or "politics of location", as Hall terms it, are not just Johannesburg-unique but world-wide in so far as urbanisation is concerned. Given the symbolism of progress that cities represent they have, throughout history, encapsulated a focused reflection of their societies and thus require analysis that goes beyond their physical attributes alone.

While the significance of postcolonialism and its resultant theoretical implications cannot be ignored, it would be limiting to present this as the only means of reading the historical narrative of Johannesburg. Certainly, among many of the world's post-colonies, South Africa is arguably one of the more unique cases. This uniqueness is due to the fact that colonialism in South Africa was not simply followed by an abrupt end in the form of independence. What followed South Africa's era of structured colonialism is what can only be described as having been 'a more concentrated form of it', in the guise of a system of oppression infamously known as apartheid.

APARTHEID CITY, POST-APARTHEID CITY

Place-making based on exclusion, sameness or nostalgia is socially poisonous and psychologically useless; a self, weighted with its insufficiencies cannot lift the burden by retreat into fantasy.

Richard Sennett (Murray 2008)

The case of Johannesburg as subject, and indeed South Africa in general, necessitates taking stock of the period of apartheid which, if strictly and theoretically considered, can be seen as sitting uncomfortably between colonialism and postcolonialism, suggesting perhaps that it was not only a break with colonialism, but a disruptive period which pushed what should have been the South African postcolonial moment into abeyance as well.

What I mean by this is that it would be plausible to make the argument that apartheid had the characteristics of being both a more refined version of colonial policy making and social engineering as well as being a somewhat postcolonial system, particularly with the remaining colonial stranglehold of England having been finally done away with. However, given that apartheid also engendered a system of governance that catered for European descendants while oppressing those of indigenous natives, its eventual end can assuredly be marked as a transition to postcolonialism.

Throughout its turbulent history, Johannesburg has been torn between the extremes of being a utopian dream-world or a dystopian nightmare, writes Murray, adding that at its founding in the late 1880s, the city acquired its original schizophrenic urban identity – an identity that has long oscillated between the sacred and the profane:

In the popular imagination of local residents, Johannesburg after apartheid is at once an exhilarating site of exotic adventure and excitement, and a foreboding place of imminent danger and criminal violence. These twin narratives of sensuous pleasure and bodily harm parallel each other, existing in the unstable space that is neither entirely factual nor thoroughly fanciful – the utopian dreams of a genuine "rainbow nation" contrast sharply with the dystopian nightmares of impending social breakdown and racial discord (Murray 2008, 150).

But there is more to the story than competing image categories. Johannesburg is not simply a mental construct or a fleeting figment of the imagination. It is an actual place with its own

location and peculiar climate, its own history and architecture and its own spatial dispositions. Echoing Wolff where she writes that "there is no city", Murray also suggests that "like all cities, there is no essential Johannesburg" (Murray 2008, 151).

To Mbembe, the city of Johannesburg exists within the sphere of what he calls the superfluous. Superfluity, in short, refers to or denotes money and commodity value and further, pertains to the "sphere of satisfactions and enjoyments, to the world of gratifications and fleeting pleasures – Wealth in particular does not appear only in material and tangible forms. It has to be realised through its constant circulation and re-circulation. It has to exist in the subject's head as a pure fantasy" (Mbembe 2008, 41).

What Mbembe is alluding to here is just one of the consequences of the development of a city. Economic activity and advantage was a privilege of those in power but it was not only made up of consumption in the strictest sense of money and commodity. The freedom of access to and enjoyment of space was another means by which power was exercised by those who wielded it. In this sense the city of Johannesburg's growth – and leading characteristic of its existence, to respond to Murray's statement that "there is no essential Johannesburg" – can be seen in connection with the forces and relations of production, yet the existence and rise of economic advantage and power meant that class was now a fixture of the landscape, one which would be augmented by race ideology (Mbembe 2008, 42).

This race ideology, Mbembe maintains, pronounced itself as "a peculiar investment in the cognitive framing of people, things, and relationships". Johannesburg's position as a centre of capital and hub of economic activity, which it still is, made it central to the furtherance of the many programmes of oppression in the racial state of apartheid. The city therefore took on the form of a stage upon which division, separation and segregation could be played out by the apartheid government.

Johannesburg had to endure the politically and economically driven definition of being a white city despite the irony that this reality was underpinned by its dependence, for its appearance and function, on blacks who were defined strictly within the context of being a cheap labour force and nothing more. This turn of events was underpinned by the aforementioned race ideology, racism being a "transactional practice with radical

implications for the distribution of death as raw black labour was acquired and intensely consumed" (Mbembe 2008, 43).

To better understand the relation of this race ideology and the city of Johannesburg it is important to be cognisant of the basic structure of the apartheid state. This structure was for all intents and purposes a legislated one, which until 1991 was characterised by various pieces of racist legislation, most notably the Group Areas Act and the Population Registration Act, both of 1950. The former ensured that land use in cities was determined on a racial basis and this discrimination was possible under the latter, which ensured that every South African was given a racial appellation (Morris 1998, 759).

These are but a few of the significant pieces of legislation from the apartheid era, drawing on earlier legislation such as The Native Land Act of 1913. This legislation is, if anything, proof of how before and during apartheid, a segregated South Africa along racial lines, was the dominating factor in the minds of the powers that be. It is also evidence of how the law could and still can be used to normalise the status quo, even if socially and morally reprehensible.

This vision of segregation implemented by the apartheid regime finally had to come to an end because apartheid's rise also led to the establishment of a more concentrated and conscious resistance. With petty segregation being one of the initial premises of apartheid practice, Lindsay Bremner (2010) writes that this vision and those who held it dear suffered a massive blow in the 1970s, when discriminatory signs of 'whites only' sections began to be removed from certain areas such as park benches.

Bremner writes that the consequences for the city were immediate and rendered its 'fixed geographies' fluid, making porous its boundaries (Bremner 2010, 190). One can imagine what the impact of these suddenly re-imagined 'geographies', of which race was a determining factor, would have been for those who viewed the city as made for them to enjoy, compared to those whom it was made for to work.

The above shifts and "realignments of fixity and fluidity; of power and space, of the planned and accidental" implied a reinvention of the space that is Johannesburg city: it has not been the same since (Bremner 2010, 270). Johannesburg is today a space in which various forms, functions, ideas, cultures and people are contained. It is a hybrid city that refuses the concept

of homogeneity. This is undeniably what gives it the characteristic of being a postcolonial city. It has gone from being the centre of South African industrialisation and of economic and political oppression to being a theoretically semi-functional, abandoned but alluring place, a hub of cultural activity in the temptation and process of urban rejuvenation. It has emerged, as Bremner sets out, as a city that very few who knew its old form, and lament its loss, recognise anymore (Bremner 2010, 191) – a space that confronts its former inhabitants with fear and uncertain danger, or the illusion of these apprehensions.

It is important to recognise just what the implications of these changes were. As Murray shows, areas of contemporary despair and dysfunction such as Hillbrow used to be the jewels of Johannesburg, having been regarded as representative of its modernist turn despite being characterised by white middle-class aspirations. Known as the "Manhattan of Africa", Hillbrow had the kind of allure which saw European immigrants streaming into it, making it a white cosmopolitan urban hub of sorts (Murray 2008, 163).

But it is also worth noting how, with the change in the socio-racial dynamic of the inner-city, an area such as Hillbrow went from being a European-like cosmopolitan urban space to one that is now distinctly pan-African, in many ways Afropolitan. This suggests an ironic aspect, with social flux and unyielding movement seemingly entailing freedom being accompanied by the reality that all of this was contained within firmly preconceived and held notions underpinning the apartheid state and city.

In this respect Abdoumaliq Simone (2008) correctly observes that Johannesburg, like other African cities, is characterised by incessantly flexible, mobile and provisional intersections of residents that operate without clearly delineated notions of how the city is to be inhabited and used. Especially in the last two decades, these intersections have depended on the ability of inhabitants to engage with a complex mix of spaces, people and practices (Simone 2008, 69).

Under apartheid, Johannesburg was designed as a cosmopolitan, European city in Africa but only for a small segment of its population. When this truncated cosmopolitanism could no longer be enforced by a white minority regime, whites fled to distant northern suburbs and gated communities where cosmopolitanism was precluded, thus leaving the inner city open to habitation of all kinds (Simone 2008, 72).

All of these developments that characterised and essentially served as markers of the end of apartheid point to the glaring problem of how the city of Johannesburg was never prepared to withstand usage outside of the boundaries of its originally intended aims. Mbembe makes a similar point to Simone when he writes of the desertion of Johannesburg by white people, for whom it was largely made, leaving behind an infrastructure now occupied, inhabited, or used by blacks in ways sometimes radically different from its original purposes. He adds,

New forms of spatial imagination are emerging behind the mask of modern architectural forms and apartheid urban planning. Either space inherited from the apartheid city is drawn out and stretched, or the links of each part of the city with what used to be whole are interrupted or saturated. In the process, Johannesburg loses its original contours; it is reduced to an empty set, or, paradoxically, gains depth. By forcing the city to open up, this process of deframing and enframing has set different repertoires of spatial imaginations and practices into collision (Mbembe 2008, 59).

Mbembe reminds us that apartheid functioned as a "deterritorialising machine" through which cities played the critical role of being "theatres of cruelty and desire", which involved "the appropriation of land, the disassembling of older territorial lineages, the formation of neoterritories and artificial enclaves" like reserves and homelands, and "their overcoding and progressive transformation into fragments and scattered partial forms hanging on to the state's body." The significant formation of the apartheid city was inseparable from the institutionalisation and demise of the reserves – a function that began in the early twentieth century and which served to regulate the flow of migrant labour. An intrinsic feature of the Johannesburg city under apartheid was that it was home to this very migrant labour (Mbembe 2008, 50).

Mbembe, however, warns that one must not lose sight of the incompleteness of apartheid rule and its attempts at colonizing the city. Johannesburg was, for many blacks who migrated to it, a place that offered cultural release and a partial state of freedom. Mbembe sees the potential of this freedom as having existed through urban experience and the "contingency and unpredictability of everyday life" despite the disparate reality of order and disruption (Mbembe 2008, 51).

Perhaps it is in this potential and eventual freedom, owing to new forms of spatial imagination as Mbembe writes, that we see the beginnings of Johannesburg's hybridity. Of course we have to bear in mind that this hybridity cannot simply be accepted without caution. We have to remember Adebayo Williams' warning, even if it seems conclusive, that hybridity is the "ultimate denial of origin of subject, race, class and indeed nation." In this sense, the tag of 'postcolonial city' can be problematic – it suggests a position that is not accurate or clear.

As an apartheid city, Johannesburg was a city of contrasts. As a postcolonial city it still carries these contrasts – albeit under different social contexts – and other markers of the policies that apartheid imposed on and through it. Significantly, the architecture of Johannesburg planning stemming from the policy of the apartheid state resulted in the creation of different lived experiences for white citizens in stark contrast to their black counter-parts (Mbembe 2008, 47). Traces of this order of things can still be seen in the contemporary reality of the city of Johannesburg.

CHAPTER TWO

A HISTORY OF THE FLÂNEUR

In his essay, *Following the flâneur: A methodological and textual critique*, Kevin Milburn (2009) begins with a definition of the flâneur as provided by sociologist Chris Jenks (1995):

> The *flâneur* is the spectator and depicter of modern life, most of which is specifically in relation to contemporary art and sights of the city. The *flâneur* moves through space and people with a viscosity that both enables and privileges vision. He possesses the power to walk freely, seemingly without purpose but simultaneously with an inquisitive wonder and infinite capacity to absorb the activities of the collective or crowd (1995, 146).

Jenks' description does a number of things which are of use to our preliminary understanding of the flâneur. First, it presents us with a figure that is seemingly contradictory, "a spectator and depicter of modern life, walking without purpose but simultaneously with an inquisitive wonder". Secondly, it intimates the probable areas of significance with which this figure is or can be associated, namely, contemporary art as well as the city. The flâneur, at this point, comes across as a figure that may be considered part fictional and part realistic. Part fictional because he is ultimately a conceptual construct, as the discussions in this report will illustrate, and part realistic since it is not difficult, nor is it impossible, to superimpose him on a tangible figure like that of the artist and, equally, within a tangible physical environment such as the city.

Milburn cautiously reminds us that the flâneur has on occasion been aligned with another "paradigmatic leisured figure from a slightly earlier era", the *dandy.* But the conflation of the two figures is a misleading one. The dandy's role was, by all accounts, to be extravagant – his major concern was to be seen rather than to see (Milburn 2009, 1).

Dandyism is popularly recognised as a form of "vanity, frivolity, hedonism, a preoccupation with externals" (Walden 2002, 35). These characteristics, along with Milburn's brief description, illustrate the difference between the social figure of the flâneur and that of the dandy. While the one prefers anonymity, the other wants to be seen. Of course this raises the

question whether it is ambiguous to use ‘performance’ as an active description of what the flâneur and the dandy both do.

I would submit that there is no ambiguity for the simple reason that it is in fact different types of performance that we are concerned with here. The dandy ‘performs’ in that he wants to be seen and, as a result of this, confronts the viewer with seemingly nonsensical and entertaining activities like taking turtles for random walkabouts and parading through public spaces. This type of posturing can be seen specifically in relation to the use of clothing to signify success and sophistication, amongst other things. Contemporary examples can be seen through acts like those of the Congolese Sapeurs and the South African Swankers and even in certain men’s fashion retail stores, where the ideal of the dandy is invoked and promoted.

The flâneur, on the other hand, performs by and through not only being invisible, seeing instead of being seen, but most importantly by documenting what he sees and relating it to himself and the greater context of his space *and* time. Another important point in understanding the confusion that often accompanies the figure of the flâneur and that of the dandy can be described as a result of misplaced theories by the very thinkers with whom the figure of the flâneur is most associated.

Keith Tester (1994) writes that Walter Benjamin, despite his fixation on Charles Baudelaire, nevertheless took him as an anachronism of the flâneur. Benjamin saw the flâneur as being out of place in a city; more exactly, Baudelaire’s city, which was increasingly being developed and further coupled with industrialisation. Through these developments came photography, which essentially changed the way the environment and certainly the people within this environment, were seen (Tester 1994, 15).

This was for Benjamin a development which, apart from placing the practice of the flâneur in a precarious position, also established a time-associated discipline. For Baudelaire, the flâneur’s practice was predicated on the irrelevance of time, but Benjamin’s interpretation of this was that it was a “protest against the clock” – a resistance to time and its effects. Thus his description of flâneurs using turtles to set the pace for them, wishing that progress would be “obliged to accommodate itself to this pace.”

It is also important to note that Benjamin's understanding of the flâneur was highly influenced by Baudelaire, who was from a completely different time and era. In his translated collection of essays Baudelaire (2010) , instead of referring to the flâneur, refers to the dandy:

> These beings (dandies) have no other status but that of cultivating the idea of beauty in their own persons, of satisfying their passions, of feeling and thinking. Thus they possess, to their hearts' content, and to a vast degree, both time and money, without which fantasy, reduced to the state of ephemeral reverie, can scarcely be translated into action. It is unfortunately true that, without leisure and money, love can be no more than an orgy of common men, or the accomplishment of a conjugal duty (Baudelaire 2010, 26).

Despite Baudelaire's importance to our understanding of the flâneur, he may in fact have had another figure in mind. Benjamin, by reading in Baudelaire the markings of a flâneur, seems to have overlooked this predilection for the dandy – what Milburn comes to describe as the alignment of the flâneur with a "paradigmatic figure of leisure" which, it turns out, precedes its very existence. It is necessary that we bear this in mind as we proceed: Baudelaire's dandy was, for all intents and purposes, Benjamin's flâneur.

Adding to the definition of the flâneur as laid out by Jenks above, and perhaps in support of the artist-like characteristics that seem to make up the flâneur, David Frisby (1994), writing about the flâneur in social theory, states that

> The flâneur and the activity of *flânerie* is also associated with Benjamin's work not merely with observation and reading but also with production – the production of distinctive kinds of texts. The flâneur may therefore not merely be an observer or even a decipherer; the flâneur can also be a producer, a producer of literary texts (including painting), a producer of narratives and reports, a producer of journalistic texts, a producer of sociological texts (Frisby 1994, 83).

Frisby provides further useful insight when he states that the flâneur is "an urban observer who goes about botanizing on the asphalt, collecting and recording urban images, social interactions and social typifications, is someone clearly at home in the metropolis and capable of combining observation, watchfulness and preserving his incognito" (Frisby 1994, 92). Of

importance here is the aspect of the flâneur's space of activity, the metropolis, which is arguably part and parcel of his identity.

What stands out as a minor issue of contention in Frisby's definition, however, is the statement about the flâneur "preserving his incognito" since it suggests, even if not directly, that the flâneur goes out of his way to do so. I believe that he does not, or at least should not be seen strictly in that sense. I would contend that a better description would be to say that it is through being part of the crowd that the flâneur is hidden *rather than* deliberately hiding. In order, however, to understand the various possible uses of the flâneur it is important that its layered history be understood as clearly as possible.

The flâneur made his first public appearance in an anonymous pamphlet that seems to have escaped the notice of literary historians and lexicographers alike, argues Parkhurst-Ferguson (1994), citing the thirty two page pamphlet of 1806 – *Le Flâneur au salon ou M. Bon-Homme: examen joyeux des tableaux, mele de vaudevilles,* which presents M. Bon-Homme – better known in 'all of Paris' as *the* Flâneur (Parkhurst-Ferguson 1994, 26-7). Added to this, the flâneur, or characters that resemble him closely, also appear to have been on the literary scene in other early works such as Balzac's *Physiologie du marriage* of 1826, long before the works of Baudelaire and Benjamin on the subject and before Paris had the characteristics that would have it associated so closely with the flâneur (Parkhurst-Ferguson 1994, 28).

Parkhurst-Ferguson (1994) argues that this figure has been the subject of social and literary analysis and that this has turned it into an emblematic representative of modernity and a personification of contemporary urbanity. In this way, the study of the flâneur has played the role of "critical theory on many different kinds of relationships with the city and within the modern society that the city incarnates at its most intense" (Parkhurst-Ferguson 1994, 20).

Parkhurst-Ferguson gives us an invaluable clue to the origins of the flâneur where she refers to him as "the subject of social and literary analysis." The flâneur is a literary figure for all intents and purposes. While this paper seeks to consider the flâneur from a figurative point of view, it recognises that his origin is literary – not surprisingly so. It is in literature and its various forms that the experience of place and space has been captured far more consistently than in other art forms. As I will illustrate by use of examples in this paper, literature has,

amongst other things, sought to understand the human condition with reference to the lived environment of the imagined and real characters that populate it.

Parkhurst-Ferguson cautions that the abstraction of the figure of the flâneur, brought about by the title of 'emblematic representative' having been thrust upon it, has its costs. This is due to a number of things, most notably isolation from the time, place and texts in and from which the flâneur emerges, something that turns it into an analytical category that by definition lies outside history (Parkhurst-Ferguson 1994, 22). This formulation suggests a kind of detachment on the part of the flâneur, particularly from the city, but also a figure of analysis.

This detachment, writes Parkhurst-Ferguson, becomes "the anomie and the alienation of the individual beset by an invasive consumer society that precludes creativity" (Parkhurst-Ferguson 1994, 23). Despite this, the flâneur may be taken as a historical agent or an emblem of modernity, as per Baudelaire's perspective, for it is through these points of departure that he undeniably exists and has been understood and preserved thus far.

Another widely held attribute of the flâneur is that he is modelled on, and for, a specific landscape: Paris and its arcades. For Baudelaire, Paris was his home for much of his life and it is therefore within its burgeoning urban context that Baudelaire conceived of the flâneur. On the other hand, Benjamin, the great chronicler of Baudelaire as Kevin Milburn (2009) calls him, seems to have focussed on the physical aspect of Paris and the city's modernisation through the rise of arcades. It is to these arcades that Benjamin believes flânerie owed its existence and so too, as a corollary, the flâneur (Milburn 2009, 3).

Of course, this take on the flâneur's landscape of existence has a blind side. Milburn points out that the problem with Benjamin's thinking when it comes to the flâneur and the practice of *flânerie* is that it ascribes a lot of significance to the city of Paris and its arcades, whereas the impulse behind the practice "has been resilient and more geographically dispersed" than suggested by Benjamin and Baudelaire (Milburn 2009, 4). There are literary works that had a direct and indirect influence on Baudelaire and as a result on Benjamin, which also happen to go against the idea of the flâneur being bound to Paris as a specific environment. One need only consider Thomas De Quincey's 1821 autobiographical work, *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, which Baudelaire translated into French, and the American, Edgar Allen Poe's *The Man of the Crowd* from 1840 (Milburn 2009, 5).

Benjamin, however, whether it was intentional or not and despite his alleged limiting of the flâneur to one place and its associated constructs, managed to expand upon the practices of the flâneur by seemingly expanding on the challenges to *flânerie*. These challenges revolved around the rationalisation of the spaces of Paris, with Benjamin himself expressing the view that "with rationalisation, all mystery is removed from the city." *Flânerie*, observes Tester, is reliant on the possibility that "there might be secrets to be imputed to things". With the advent of administrative rationality such a possibility was destroyed (Tester 1994, 14).

The flâneur's most significant characteristic, however, still remains his relation to the physical and symbolic environment and constructs around him and the activity which results because of them. We know that this environment is predominantly the urban space of the city. I nevertheless must point out what appears to be a missing point of emphasis in the consideration of the flâneur's environment thus far. While the urban space of the city gives the flâneur a dwelling place, his practice and subsequent activities would be rendered meaningless if not for the presence of the crowd or other people within this urban space. What is, after all, a flâneur without a crowd to get lost in and to observe? Surely, without a crowd we are left with the figure of a person abandoned amidst a plethora of barren urban landscapes, a *mise-en-scène* without much to show or to be documented.

The crowd, I would contend, is the anchor of meaning for the flâneur's observations and for the most part, his documentation. It is against and through this crowd, the individuals that share the space with him, that he notices the effects of time and circumstance: modernisation, colonisation, apartheid and postcolonialism and postapartheid. It is also against and through this crowd that he tests, by comparison, how these times and circumstances impact on his life and sense of being. In this way, there is something of the autobiographical in the practice of the flâneur.

I must clarify that the aforementioned crowd need not be present at all times, least of all around the flâneur and throughout his practice. This crowd is also not intended to be understood literally, as a grouping of individuals in one specific place.

Parkhurst-Ferguson captures and articulates clearly two points made earlier: the flâneur's theoretical association with thinkers that invoked him and the aspect of the figure being

literary. She argues that "writers recast the flâneur in the image of their own changing conceptions of the social order and their place in it" and, more importantly, notes that to recover the flâneur requires that we look to a) the city and b) to the writers (producers of texts) who seek to make sense of the social and cultural urban landscapes of the city (Parkhurst-Ferguson 1994, 23). But what are the characteristics that we ought to look out for in doing this?

CHARACTERISTICS

We can say with certainty that the flâneur is in many ways an extension of his creator, a producer of text, visual or otherwise, and that the producer of text must have or will usually have a relationship with the city. This is however, not the crux of what the flâneur is. The clue can be said to lie in its various descriptions which have as a common denominator the activity that is undertaken by this figure. This activity or practice of the flâneur is the observation and recording of his urban environment, no doubt through the production of texts, as Frisby (1994) sets out.

Flânerie is the term and concept assigned to this practice. It urbanizes observation by making the observer part of the urban scene. To this extant Parkhurst-Fergusson (1994) writes that the flâneur's "field of action is encompassed by his field of vision, in the Paris of the arcades, the city of restaurants and boulevards and gardens, of crowds jostling in public spaces. The reciprocity between the city and the flâneur is complete" (Parkhurst-Ferguson 1994, 27).

Keith Tester articulates it best by making sense of *flânerie* as the activity of the flâneur in which there is the "observation of the fleeting and the transitory". This observation he suggests as the other half of modernity, compared to a permanent and central sense of self (Tester 1994, 7). But in defining the activity of the flâneur in this manner, Tester could be accused of equally limiting if not obfuscating it to a seemingly definitive set of circumstances, in this instance, fleeting and transitory moments. This is difficult to reconcile since the space in which the flâneur undertakes his practice includes in its environment, elements that are not just fleeting.

These elements may include the social and economic landscape as would be reflected in the physical structures of the urban landscape and, more importantly, the individuals or citizens

who inhabit this landscape. These are undoubtedly important pieces of the puzzle for the flâneur, especially when he undertakes the process of documenting what he sees. Put differently, these elements can be said to be the very things that enable the flâneur to be the complex figure that he is.

Rob Shields (1994) adds that *flânerie* is more specific than strolling and that it is a spatial practice of specific sites – the interior and exterior public spaces of the city which includes parks, sidewalks, squares and shopping arcades or malls. This practice, according to Shields, is more public and other-directed than 'taking the air' or going for a walk. The flâneur is out to see and therefore requires a crowd to be able to watch others and take in the bustle of the city in the security of anonymity (Shields 1994, 65).

Perhaps in anticipation of the unavoidable disparities of the flâneur and his activity, Tester alludes to the way in which the activity of walking and observing has become more elusive with time (1994, 1). The activity of walking and observing is given a semblance of specific meaning through the device employed by Baudelaire when he invokes a poet as the flâneur, writing that "the crowd is his domain, his passion and profession is to merge with the crowd" (Baudelaire 1972, 399). The poet of Baudelaire's "is the man for whom metropolitan spaces are the landscape of art and existence" (Tester 1994, 2).

Baudelaire's poet essentially has a dialectic tool which is "one of sovereignty and of individual self-hood synthesising a situation in which the practice of self-hood is dependent on the contingencies of the spectacles such as crowds". This dialectic is, according to Baudelaire, "the divine prostitution of the soul giving itself entire, all its poetry and all its charity, to the unexpected as it comes along, to the stranger as he passes" (Baudelaire 1970, 20). But Baudelaire's poet is in fact a projection of Baudelaire himself.

As in the case of Benjamin, Baudelaire's flâneur reflects himself and his activity. Frisby points out that in Benjamin's case, the flâneur functions not only as a historical figure in the urban context but also as an illumination of Benjamin's methodology and activity in the Arcade Project. To properly investigate flânerie as activity we must therefore explore the activities of observation, reading and producing texts. Flânerie can therefore be linked with a way of seeing and a form of *reading the city* and its population – its spatial images, its architecture and its human configurations (Frisby 1994, 82): in other words, those elements

that cannot always be reduced to fleeting moments.

Another perspective on the flâneur is that within his Western setting he is a figure that does not participate in anything outside of the scope of his actions, which are predominantly made up of observing and later documenting. This observing and documenting is not done all at once; rather, the latter follows the former as a kind of post-analysis. By this I mean that Baudelaire's poet would write down what he had seen from his wonderings of the city streets, sometimes doing it as he walks. He would essentially document his experience of the urban landscape through literary and artistic means. Naturally the question that can and should be raised at this point is: to what extent does the urban landscape influence the work of the flâneur as poet and as artist?

An obvious answer to this question would be that the influence of the landscape on the poet/artist is highly dependent on it being part of his or her subject matter. In the case of this report and its focus on Kudzanai Chiurai and his works as representative of the 'African' flâneur and his produced texts, the logical conclusion is that Chiurai's work reflects the city particularly because of the broader ontological questions that arise from a critical reading of its urban landscape. Thus, Chiurai's *flânerie* involves being attuned to what he has witnessed above all else and reflecting this through his chosen visual text.

Not everyone is sold on the notion of *flânerie,* however. Stefan Morawski (1994) presents the argument that flânerie represents what he calls the growingly dramatic destinies of those intellectuals and artists who are most sensitive to and ambitious about their vocation as opposed to mass culture (Morawski 1994, 182). *Flânerie,* he contends, has nothing to do with phantasies about the public scene as it does not "rehearse any theatre of the wanderer" (Morawski 1994, 184).

According to Morawski, the artist as flâneur enjoys the fortune of seeing without being seen. This seems to be the only positive that Morawski is willing to extend as he goes on to criticise the flâneur by arguing that his activity, especially his 'produced text', does not have much to offer theoretically. In this way, *flânerie* is limited to what it has to apprehend and appropriate and is thus obligated to an inner dialogue between the artist as flâneur and the artist as intellectual. As a result of this mediation, the artist as intellectual is distanced further and further from the crowd and the people (Morawski 1994, 185).

While Morawski's criticism and concerns may be well founded, it is difficult to agree with him, especially on the point that the artist as intellectual would be distanced further away from the masses as a result of the mediation of the artist as flâneur. Morawski seems to assume, problematically, that there is no intellectual component involved in the role of flâneur. If we accept however, that *flânerie* is the practice that enables the flâneur to function within his chosen space, it cannot be that it is limited to any 'inner dialogues' that the artist may have with him or herself; rather, we should asses this practice with reference to the manner in which it is done and the quality and meaning of the text that is produced because of it.

Perhaps as a further response to Morawski, it is well worth noting the cautionary observation made by Parkhurst-Fergusson when she writes that *flânerie* inevitably enters its decline when it loses the connection with the city; when the flâneur becomes aimless, a rootless wanderer, flânerie signifies failure (Parkhurst-Ferguson 1994, 23). This observation re-informs and confirms the position that the flâneur is conceptually a figure that cannot be separated from the city's urban environment and that he must, of necessity, produce text concerned with the city.

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES

In light of Morawski's writing we can see that the figure of the flâneur is certainly not exempt from criticism. Rob Shields makes the point that the flâneur is a mythological ideal type found more in discourse than in everyday life. This view is attractive and may be helpful as a means of keeping in check the overly idealised notions of what or who the flâneur is or should be, many of which inevitably serve to limit his application as a figure of analysis that is available outside of the realm of Western thought.

Shields' analysis of the flâneur is more critical still. The flâneur is a personification of "the ideal-type of the citizen but one who is not fully self-controlled and indulges in non-rational pleasures." He is the "indulgent fantasy of a writer not writing but whose observing eye nonetheless transmits directly to the novelist's page" (Shields 1994, 64). Indeed, there is agreement with the position postulated by Shields. Janet Wolff (2006) writes that the critic of urban observation identifies strongly with the flâneur who *is*, in fact, the critic – the writer,

artist, and sociologist – whose detached observations might well be reported in literary and visual texts. Importantly, she highlights that "for Baudelaire, the illustrator, Constantin Guys, was the archetypal flâneur. For Benjamin, Baudelaire himself was the flâneur of the nineteenth century" (Wolff 2006, 24).

For Shields, the flâneur is evidently mythological: an abstraction whose currency appears to lie significantly in the fact that it is through his inventors, the writers and their works that his personality comes to life as if he were indeed a real living persona. For Wolff, the same argument holds sway except for a slightly more expanded reason. Wolff's comment on Baudelaire and Benjamin is also crucial. That it is arguably these literary figures whose writings have predominantly shaped the idea of what a flâneur is cannot be ignored - and so too, the limitations with regards to where and how this figure could function that this imposes – something that Milburn mentions in his assessment of the history of the flâneur.

GENDER AND IDENTITY

In an earlier essay, Janet Wolff (1994) makes the observation that the flâneur of Parisian origin has predominantly been male through the simple exclusion of any possibility that there could be a female counterpart. The question that then follows, which I will deal with briefly in this paper, is whether there is anything gender-restrictive in the way that the flâneur has been theorised about. Does this theorising indeed pertain to the male only? An indication can be found in the fact that *flânerie* has been regarded as a gendered, male occupation, due perhaps to the fact that nineteenth-century women indulging in similarly aimless pursuits risked being seen in an unflattering light, as prostitutes touting for business (Wolff 1994, 125-7).

Briefly, in the history of the figure of the flâneur it is clear that women did not hold the same rank as their male counterparts. Among some of the reasons for this is the view that women were incapable of disconnecting themselves from the city and its enchantments. Further, women were considered incapable of attaining the aesthetic distance required for the flâneur. They were unfit for *flânerie* because they desired objects spread before them and acted upon that desire, unlike the noble flâneur whose only desire was the city as whole. Women were, in

any event, objects of desire themselves. They were *othered* by the male gaze which included them in its set environment of observation (Parkhurst-Ferguson 1994, 27).

Clearly then, the above views of the role of women in comparison to the flâneur who was and always had to be for all intents and purposes a man, indicate a strong patriarchal view which is not unique to Europe and has certainly not been overtaken by history. The history of the flâneur as a socio-cultural figure does little to hide the absence of women or the female equivalent of this figure. Like Parkhurst-Fergusson, Wolff also grapples with the question of where women are situated in the theorising of the flâneur. She does this particularly well under the rubric of her essay "The artist and the flâneur", through which she explores the relationship between these two seemingly different figures by looking at the lives of artists Rodin, Rilke and Gwen John in Paris.

Initially, Wolff seems to make the very same argument upon which this paper is premised, which is that the artist can and should be seen as a flâneur if his lived space is the city, and his activity involves not only interacting with and within its various spaces but producing texts (written or visual) that document the aforesaid interaction. But Wolff, while she does indeed make an argument as to why the artist fits the role of flâneur and how her chosen artists support her claims, focuses on Gwen John as the only female in the group. All three artists are in the city – Paris, the home of origin for the flâneur.

The difference between these artists, or rather between the male artists and Gwen John, lies in their work, the manner in which they go about producing it and the manner in which it is received. Looking at the works of all three, Wolff makes the argument that Rodin and Rilke are representative of the assumed position that the flâneur in Paris was male and that his perspectives on the city were constituted by the already prominent and normalised reality of the male gaze (through the eyes of artists). In this sense, Gwen John is remarkably different from her male counterparts.

She captures the city, through her work, not from the streets but rather from her room/studio. Her works, mostly portraits of women sitting in chairs and busy with some activity or other, hint at the longing to be out in the streets, or just outside – an escape that is impossible due to social constraints. To John, as a female artist in Paris, the accepted maxim that for the artist

in Paris, “the studio was part of the street and the street part of the studio, and that the relationship between the two was symbiotic”, did not apply (Wolff 1994, 132). We can only ask why this was the case but Wolff has already provided a clue: the streets were considered a masculine space and by this one may read that public space was considered as the natural domain of men – women in this space, even if for the purpose of art, were simply reduced to objects of the gaze along with the space itself.

CLASS

The flâneur, almost by definition, has attracted to it meanings such as “a loafer, a directionless man and lazy-bone” and thus was often seen as a figure that is a type of deviant and a rebel against the emerging bourgeois society (Parkhurst-Ferguson 1994, 26). For Parkhurst-Ferguson, the flâneur’s “ostentatious inaction offers evidence of what seems to be a superior social status” in the familiar unthreatening contours in which the bourgeoisie can recognise one of its own. Despite this leisurely class characteristic the flâneur, I would like to believe, still has the potential of being redefined, in the same way that his environment can be redefined.

Not everyone is of this opinion, however. Marxist critic Terry Eagleton (in Acott 2009) dismisses the flâneur and defines him as

> That drifting relic of a decaying petty bourgeoisie who for Benjamin bulks so large behind Baudelaire’s texts…Strolling self-composedly through the city, loitering without intent, languid yet secretly vigilant, he displays in living motion something of the commodity’s self-contradictory form. His solitary dispossession reflects the commodity’s existence as fragment…and his meanderings are as magically free of physical traces as the commodity is absolved from the traces of its production. Yet at the same time his painstaking production of himself as ‘personality’, his genteel-amateur distaste for the industrial labour through which he glides, signifies the protest of a fading aura in the face of commodity production – just as the commodity itself, that glamorous, eternally self-possessed subject, offers itself as compensation for the very drab division of labour of which it is the product. Both flâneur and commodity tart themselves up in dandyish dress. The flâneur at once spiritually pre-dates commodity production – he strays through the bazaars but prices nothing – and is himself the prototypical commodity, not least because his relationship to the masses

> is one of simultaneous complicity and contempt. In this, indeed, the flâneur resembles the allegorist, for both dip randomly into the ruck of objects to single out for consecration certain ones that they know to be in themselves arbitrary and ephemeral. The flâneur 'becomes deeply involved with (the crowd), only to relegate them to oblivion with a single glance of contempt' (Eagleton 1981, 26).

This is a rather harsh assessment but an understandable one given the contextual history of the flâneur. The conflation between him and the dandy can also not be denied, although it has become clearer and clearer, from the literature, that grouping these two characters into a single entity has not been theoretically justified. Against Eagleton's criticism, however, I would argue that his reference to Benjamin is at best limited if not altogether misleading.

Eagleton's denunciation sees nothing but evidence of the leisure class and mere commodity in the invocation of the flâneur and his produced texts. But Eagleton has the Western and European flâneur in mind – a figure that is arguably nothing like the African flâneur. As Tester affirms, Benjamin saw the flâneur as "the humanisation of the bad faith commodity, a passive spectator who was (as) duped by the spectacle of the public as the consumer who is duped by the glittering promises of consumerism" (Tester 1994, 14). To Benjamin the flâneur did more than obsess over the crowd; he also obsessed over the built environment. Seen in this way, it is evident that Eagleton, in reducing the flâneur to a relic of a certain class, ignores that the activity he engages in is neither necessarily class-bound nor limited in its social or cultural manifestation.

CHAPTER THREE

AN AFRICAN FLÂNEUR

Thus far, we have looked at the history and characteristics of the flâneur – and everything about this figure points to him being at home in the urban landscape of Europe. However, noting that the flâneur is more a figure of analysis than a concrete historical figure, we are compelled to ask whether this figure can be said to possess the same function and symbolism in an African context as in a European one. Incidental to this question is perhaps the probability that in the African context, the flâneur may well make available to us a more detailed and theoretically wider means of interrogating the urban African setting.

The consideration of the flâneur as African is not widespread given the geographically rooted aspect of this figure's history. Writing on the existence of the flâneur outside of the physical context of Europe Morawski (1994) states that

> The birth of the phenomenon of flânerie in our European culture (I have not heard, maybe because of ignorance, about anything similar in say Asiatic or African cultural history) confirms the assumption that it was a quite specific set of circumstances which triggered the emergence of the artist as flâneur" (Morawski 1994, 181).

These specific circumstances can be seen to be referring to the rise of modernity, as specifically exemplified by the (European) city, as well as the spatial narratives and meanings that inevitably rose with it and indeed gave birth to the flâneur. It is in the evolution of modernity, through mankind's most progressive form of habitat that the flâneur, and his actions and that of other agents in utilising this habitat's spaces, gave it meaning beyond its mere physical structures. These other agents allude to other dwellers in the city, whose actions may not have included walking about observing and recording their environment by way of flânerie. Rather, they were getting from point A to point B – going to work and keeping the city's proverbial engine running.

The lack of recognition and/or existence of the flâneur in a strictly African cultural history is unsurprising of course; after all no comparable concept has been developed in relation to Africa and the African city. It is however, to the aforementioned specific circumstances that

we must turn yet again when considering the flâneur in a more contemporary and postcolonial African city. These circumstances are the same as those of European cultural history – the rise of the city and urban life – the difference being the context under which this rise occurred in Africa and the varying implications that this has had. One may further add that even though it cannot ultimately be said that the flâneur refers to concrete historical figures, it is nevertheless true that the concept does refer to activities that are only possible in a fairly well developed urban context. And thus wherever there are cities, the existence of the flâneur and the practice of flânerie should be deemed as possible in principle.

Writing on the "African flâneur", Heather Mary Acott (2009) is undoubtedly amongst the early and few thinkers to venture a position on the matter. She makes the argument that Nat Nakasa, the late black journalist and writer who worked as a journalist in the apartheid days of South Africa before leaving the country, is an African flâneur. To Nakasa, she attributes the qualities of Benjamin's flâneur, excavating the urban asphalt. Nakasa is, however, not the same as the flâneur of Benjamin, Baudelaire or even Eagleton as Acott correctly illustrates. He is everything that the Parisian flâneur is not. He was black and was in no way in a leisurely disposition as the habitat for his flânerie was the apartheid city in an apartheid country – a city that was not meant for his kind save for providing manual labour, which had attached to it a highly regulated movement in and enjoyment of space.

Acott's flâneur provides a flexible framework for thinking about the flâneur as her assessment of this figure within an African context relies on and illustrates the importance of allowing the inhabitant of the urban space the freedom to speak for himself. By using Nat Nakasa as an example, she is, in fact, asserting his observations, the recording thereof and most importantly the experiences upon which his flânerie-like practice was premised. Nakasa was primarily a journalist, but amongst his writings were political and philosophical musings which show clearly that he was well aware of the environment in which he and others like himself lived. Acott provides an example of Nakasa's astute vision where he writes;

> I would like to see white South Africans begin to think about the apartheid signs which one sees all over the country. You find them at pleasure resorts, at the gate of private homes and flats. Some read: 'Dogs and Natives not Allowed'; 'Hawkers and Natives use Back Entrance'. Imagine what would happen if an African businessman were to put up one of these signs, with 'Whites' substituted for 'Natives', at the

> entrance to his premises. The thought of it excites me, for I know of no other way in which we could get people to begin to think (Acott 2009, 19).

The consideration of Nakasa is important for the fact that he reminds us of the significance of understanding Johannesburg's socio-political terrain as an apartheid city. His are the lived experiences of an African black man negotiating his way in a space that was not meant for him but one which had legalised his exclusion from it. Nakasa fits the profile of flâneur because of the actions that preceded his 'production of text', a factor that Frisby (1994) considers part and parcel of the flâneur's identity. He, however, expands this profile by the very fact of being black and devoid of the other luxuries that circumstance affords the European and Western flâneur.

Another manifestation of a character that can be said to capture the lives of black people as city dwellers can be found in the work of the late writer Phaswane Mpe titled *Welcome to our Hillbrow* (2000). In this debut novel, Mpe's fictional character has moved to the 'postapartheid' city of Johannesburg where he, like many other varieties of migrant, has come to carve out what he hopes will be a successful living in the city of gold. Along with this, a striking aspect of Mpe's writing is the dedication to detail in as far as the city is concerned. It also reflects on the relations of people who, despite being strangers, extend some measure of humanity to each other.

In this way, Mpe's words and descriptions bring to mind Murray's assessment of areas and sections of Johannesburg such as Hillbrow – how in changing under the influx of new inhabitants, these spaces seem to have taken a turn for the worse but more importantly, how this is only half the story. Mpe's work can therefore be seen as an example of the literary encapsulation of the spaces of the city of Johannesburg, a reminder perhaps of how, despite seeing the city first, it is the description of it that takes the form of words. This literary encapsulation, more than anything, also provides us with a means of seeing, or rather reading, Johannesburg as text.

THE LITERARY FLÂNEUR AND THE CITY AS TEXT

We know that a consideration of the flâneur cannot exclude that of the city in which this figure resides and which, for the most part, provides the context for his practice. The city is therefore something to be read not just from the documented observations of the flâneur but also through the *flânerie*. These are but some of the ways of seeing and reading contemporary African cities which, as Mbembe and Nuttall (2008) argue, are still "dominated by the metanarrative of urbanization, modernization and crisis" (Mbembe and Nuttall 2008, 5).

It may therefore be said that, if we can see the likes of Nakasa and Mpe as 'Johannesburg' flâneurs, these flâneurs and especially the many inhabitants through whom they are able to capture the animated spaces of the city both passively and actively, inform the 'metanarrative' of urbanisation which Mbembe and Nuttall speak of.

To illustrate further just what different forms the exercise of flâneurship and the resultant nuances of writing the city into being and making of it a text can take, we may briefly look at the use of poetry. Baudelaire is best known as a poet, and indeed referred to the poet-flâneur in his own musings on the city. Writing on the *Literary City*, Sarah Nuttall (2008) refers to the poetry of Mongane Wally Serote and Lesego Rampolokeng. She specifically refers to their poetic takes on the city of Johannesburg:

Jo'burg City
I travel on your black and white and robotted roads,
Through your thick iron breath that you inhale,
At six in the morning and exhale from noon
Jo'burg City
That is the time I come to you
When your neon flowers flaunt from your electric wind,
That is the time when I leave you
(*Serote* in Nuttall 2008)

Johannesburg my city,
Paved with Judas gold
Deceptions and lies,
Dreams come here to die
(*Rampolokeng* in Nuttall 2008)

In both poems there is an intimation of the knowledge of the subject, Johannesburg, the unmet desires that accompany it along with the feeling of being entangled with it but not completely feeling at home in it. Both poems also speak of Johannesburg at different times despite sharing common conclusions: Serote's observations are rooted in apartheid and those of Rampolokeng in the more contemporary post-apartheid city (Nuttall 2008, 196-7).

Of interest to the analysis of Serote and Rampolokeng is another work of a different poet altogether, the Mozambican writer Rui Knopfli. In an essay titled "Johannesburg, Metropolis of Mozambique" Stephan Helgesson writes that the Mozambican writer's poetry is so intrinsically focused on the detail of Johannesburg that an inference of *flânerie* is impossible to dismiss (Helgesson 2008, 264).

My Paris is Johannesburg,
A Paris certainly less bright,
Cheaper and more provincial.
But Johannesburg reminds me
Of the Paris I've never known..
(*Knopfli* in Helgesson 2008)

Apart from the *flânerie* reference, what makes Knopfli's view of Johannesburg interesting in relation to that of Serote and Rampolokeng is not only the fact that he was a white foreigner but that despite this, his "modernist outsider poetics" displayed an innate view of Johannesburg as a city beyond its segregated functions. Helgesson further states that Johannesburg, through the poetry of Knopfli, exhibits signs of alterity demanding recognition and including within it "the regional stranger's complex sense of being at home and away in Johannesburg" (Helgesson 2008, 270).

THE FLANEUR AS ARTIST

It is clear, thus far, that the flâneur is almost always a literary figure, from his European history to the more contemporary African setting. Nakasa, Mpe, Serote, Rampolokeng and Knopfli are but some examples of this and more especially, of the possibility that the flâneur can also be considered African. Naturally, the next question is whether the flâneur can be an artist, and African – and what this entails when viewed through the lens of the various theoretical issues presented by and present in and by this invocation.

The flâneur as artist is nothing new of course. Baudelaire, who we credit with the popularisation of the flâneur and who imagined him as a poet, equally provides us with the setting that enables us to see him as an artist. In his essay, "The Painter of Modern Life" (Charvet 1995), Baudelaire describes the artist – a man of the world and of the crowd – as the flâneur. The artist of Baudelaire's concern is Constantin Guys, in whose work Baudelaire interprets depictions of the urban environment and city streets of Paris.

These depictions are more than just passive recordings of sights. Seen from the perspective of the narrative woven by Baudelaire about modernity and the artist's role as its main catalyst, Guys' work hints at a critical and active observation. What we are in fact seeing is the acknowledgment, perhaps indirectly by Guys but certainly directly by Baudelaire, of a world and time in transit – observations of modernity unfolding in the streets of Paris, through the very development and growth of its space.

Through Guys Baudelaire gives us a model that can be used to make a comparison between the figure of the flâneur and that of the artist. Through this model the artist assumes the role and practice of the flâneur and from it we may extrapolate a further model in which an African artist, living in a postcolonial space-city, could also be said to assume this role of the flâneur. But what does the association of the flâneur with the artist or even their interchangeability entail? Stefan Morawski seems to see these figures as separate from each other when he writes that,

> The flâneur does not idealise the contingency he encounters. The fact is that he is sunk in the fugitive and fleeting moments, but the string of elusive episodes does not

> reveal to him any deeper sense of being. The contingency of occurrences and opinions is observed and taken into account as related to the social matrix. Hence the randomness appears as regularly on the surface but never refers to the human condition, i.e. the structure of being and mind. Flânerie, wanting to be innocently receptive and detached, has nothing to do with fantasies about the public scene. It does not rehearse any theatre of the wanderer. On the contrary, if there is a spectacle, it is given here and now and behind it there are labels, codes, conventions which cannot be jettisoned or undermined. In a word, the flâneur spectator smelling at novelties like a well-trained hunting dog is at odds with the role of the scriptwriter and or the director because the stage is reserved for the artist (intellectual) in his genuine embodiment – beyond flânerie (Morawski 1994, 185).

Observations such as those of Morawski allude more than anything to the traditionally held idea of what the flâneur is or ought to be, albeit one that is not directly emphasised. The flâneur is below the scriptwriter, the stage director and the artist-intellectual – as far as Morawski is concerned, he fails to even reflect on the "human condition" in his practice of flanerie. Morawski, however, appears to recognise a point of intersection between these two figures as illustrated in his further observation:

> The artist as flâneur, being the deputy of the artist as such, enjoys the fortunate chance of incognito; seeing without imprisonment by surrounding looks. In the name of the artist he can assent to the vanishing beauties of contemporaneity or turn a back on its ugliness. But his report never provides a grazing ground for sovereign reflection. Flânerie sticks too much to what it has to apprehend and appropriate. It serves as an inner dialogue between the artist as flâneur and the artist as intellectual. Thanks to the mediation of the first, the second's distance from the crowd, the people and their matters becomes greater (Morawski 1994, 185).

Clearly Morawski recognises the possibility of the flâneur being an artist but he does not seem to be convinced by it. This may be because Morawski sees the flâneur as the deputy of the artist; because of this, the flâneur is too bound by what he sees to form a reflective enough opinion. I would argue, however, that this particular approach tends to see both figures in their extreme positions, without recognising that an intersection between them need not be a limitation on the roles of either. For the purposes of this paper, when I say that the artist is a flâneur or that his works are indicative of characteristics similar to those of the

flâneur, I do not imagine him as aimlessly wandering the city streets without an emphasised interrogation of its space or a reflection of its various possible meanings, especially post-flânerie. The mistake that Morawski makes is to conceive of the flâneur too strongly, to the extent that he fails to recognise how his practice or even instances of it may be manifested in not only the artist but other city dwellers.

As can be seen from this report, the research question that cannot be avoided is this: Can the flâneur be considered an artist *ab initio* and, consequently as an African artist living in and representing a postcolonial space through his work? The potential of this approach to understanding the concept of the flâneur is certainly multi-faceted, but through the comparative analysis between the European and African flâneur an important question arises: How does the function and activity of the flâneur resonate with the social constructs and issues that dominate the postcolonial African city? One way of answering this question could be that it is through the characteristics of documenting and depicting his chosen space of flânerie, not forgetting that the flâneur is himself a means of documenting the city.

This answer however, would just as well apply to the flâneur in the European city. The difference, therefore, has to be seen as emerging from the cities themselves, the structure of the societies in which they are established and the effect that this has on their inhabitants. Further, the question of whose perspective we ought to turn to when considering these issues is an important one since it will invariably be formed by those city dwellers who assume and/or appropriate, knowingly or not, the role of flâneur as they live, navigate and make sense of the African city. In this way and by this report seeking to imagine an African artist as flâneur, it inevitably becomes important to note the kind of flânerie that they undertake and how this can be said to affect the resultant documentative and interpretative text of this practice.

In the historical context of Baudelaire and Benjamin, and the contemporary theory as it has developed, the flâneur is white and male, and leisure is what occupies his time despite his documentary work. One could go further and say that the leisure enjoyed by the European flâneur goes as far as to give the impression that his documenting of the urban environment is itself a matter of leisure. In the context of the postcolonial African city and as a black African, as this paper imagines him, the flâneur is arguably more likely to be the unfortunate

beneficiary and product of a disadvantaged past; the benefits of leisure and privilege cannot simply be attributed to him. His observations, therefore, will not be similar to those of the European flâneur.

But this difference between the African flâneur and the European flâneur need not render our investigation into the meaning of the flâneur in the postcolonial African context moot. Generally, our concern with the flâneur ought to be with his practice and its resultant texts: it is through this that he "domesticates the potentially disruptive urban environment" (Parkhurst-Ferguson 1994, 25). Within this framework of domesticating a potentially disruptive environment, the African as flâneur and indeed the African artist as flâneur, is able to speak to the issues that have been raised regarding the changes that have come to define the lived experience of a city such as Johannesburg, from colonial town to an apartheid and ultimately postapartheid/postcolonial city.

To summarise this chapter and perhaps, to get a clearer sense of what the figure of the flâneur can mean within a context outside of the historically and geographically accepted one, it may help us to think of it in the following way: Firstly, the flâneur is a phenomenon of the developing city and thus of a notion of modernity that is normally associated with the city. Secondly, there are certain typical activities that make up a flâneur beyond simply his historical environment and these activities may be said to illustrate a particular way of occupying and appropriating space such as the city. Lastly, despite the contentions of history and theory it is clear that the kind of flâneur-like role that is so closely associated with Paris has been adopted in one way or another, by individuals in urban spaces and cities outside of Paris such as the artist in an African city, as this paper proposes.

CHAPTER FOUR

READING THE WORK OF THE AFRICAN ARTIST AS FLÂNEUR

The artist of focus for this report is Kudzanai Chiurai, and particularly his early series of work from the exhibitions *Yellow Lines* (2008) and *Graceland* (2007). Through an analysis of this collective series of work I wish to argue that Chiurai exhibits instances of *flânerie*. This emerges from his attempt at making sense of the urban spaces of Johannesburg, its effect on those who live in it, and what these spaces actually have to say about the city itself. In this way Chiurai, like Nakasa or even Mpe, encapsulates the idea of the African flâneur, albeit through the medium of visual art.

Kudzanai Chiurai was born in Zimbabwe in 1981. He attended the University of Pretoria in South Africa as a Fine Art student and was the very first black student to graduate from the university's Fine Art programme in 2005. Following his graduate exhibition, Chiurai soon found himself banned from his home country, due mostly to some of his politically inclined art which featured Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe being depicted as a stencilled devil. Through these early works Chiurai effectively announced himself as an artist who was willing to not only look at socio-political conditions but also to critique them, even if this came at a price.

His ban was effective for five years. It is safe to say that being removed from the rest of his family, far more than his country, affected him deeply as the possibility of danger befalling them as well as himself was made all the more real by the manner in which the Zimbabwean government had taken a turn towards autocratic rule. Being banned from his home country made of Chiurai an immigrant of sorts, and South Africa, particularly Johannesburg, where he still resides and has his studio, became his home away from home.

That said, it may be asked: what, then, makes Chiurai an African flâneur? Firstly, we know that the flâneur produces illustrative texts as a direct result of his practice of flânerie as per the description by Frisby (1994); as such, Chiurai fits perfectly into the description. Secondly, he has about him and his early series of work an outside-observer's perspective that has

arguably enabled him to document his surroundings from a seemingly detached but critical vantage point.

Like the "modernist outsider poetics" exemplified in Rui Knopfli's romanticising of Johannesburg, Chiurai's *Yellow Lines* and *Graceland* present a Johannesburg whose inner-city space denotes the experience and reality of alterity. More important is the fact that this alterity is not simply characterised by social factors, but by economic and political ones too. By capturing and representing it, or instances of it, in some of his ghostly cityscapes, Chiurai as flâneur brings to the fore the idea that in any contemporary present, social actors will negotiate the physical and cultural structures of given spatial systems, thereby incrementally transforming them (Tester 1994, 130). But he is not the only representative of these social actors: the spaces that he captures are also significant.

It has already been argued that the position of the African artist as flâneur is likely to be informed by a different set of circumstances than those of the European flâneur. Amongst these circumstances are what Elfriede Dreyer (2008) raises as the "dystopian impact of the globalisation processes." This impact, according to Dreyer, is visible in the city of Johannesburg and more especially manifested in the works of Chiurai, to whom she also attributes the characteristic of flâneur (Dreyer 2008, 129).

What Dreyer is referring to as regards the dystopian impact of the globalisation process, is the effect that a rapidly changing world has had and is having on local identities, especially in those countries whose people were always going to be set back by past injustices. Globalisation does not care to wait but instead expands on the illusory basis that a world culture and identity is possible, making the process of those who are only now beginning to reassess and take stock of their cultures and identities due to past experiences of colonisation, seem redundant.

All of these issues, as raised by Dreyer and as can be seen in the earlier discussions and critiques of postcolonialism, are in some way or other evident in Chiurai's work and this is what makes his being a flâneur all the more important. It points to the flâneur not simply documenting the present and outward world, but rather grappling with the past and its effect

on the political and the personal. Chiurai, however, is not the only African artist who may be seen as flâneur where the representation of Johannesburg is concerned.

While he is important for the purpose of this paper, it is necessary to set him against some other artists, to see the other possible means of representing Johannesburg and what this implies for the question of African flânerie. Like *Chiurai*, some of these artists are residents of the city of Johannesburg and their observations and subsequently produced (visual) texts are therefore in many ways significant to its representation.



Fig 1: Herman Niebuhr, *City Chromatic* (2012) Oil on canvas

Herman Niebuhr (fig. 1) for example, in his series of work culminating in the exhibition *City Chromatic* about Johannesburg cityscapes, presents us with distant stylised vestiges of its urban environment and architecture. His works are mostly, like the figure above, displays of a Johannesburg that seems devoid of life, which forces the viewers to pay extra attention to the captured urban landscape. Reviewing Niebuhr's exhibition of 2012, titled *City Chromatic*, Laurice Taitz (2012) writes that

The paintings are suggestive of the life that's not shown in them. They depict a momentary suspension of the noise, the people, and the drama. In them the moods of the city are on display, the gold-tinted sunsets, the broody rain-filled afternoons, the quietness of dusk and the stirring of night. Niebuhr says they are about "what you see and what you don't see. You

start to train your eyes (and) there are clues." There are hints of the stories and lives that swirl about the place. As the viewer you are compelled to know what is going on, "to unearth it, discover, and get closer to a truer story". But there are lots of stories and each has a place in this mythical city.

Another artist is Peter Hall (fig. 2), whose approach is similar to that of Niebuhr, albeit from an angle of vision that is literally on a different level. Unlike Niebuhr's above ground level vestiges, Hall's images of downtown Johannesburg are of impressionistic city 'streetscapes'. A seeming absence of people is noticeable, while there is an emphasis on the fleeting spaces they traverse.



Fig 2: Peter Hall, *Commissioner Street, Evening Light* (2012) Oil on canvass

An aspect of similarity between Niebuhr and Hall is that their works, in both of the series on Johannesburg, do not really deal with the detail of life in as far as the city's inhabitants are concerned; but they do imply such detail. There is detail of buildings in Niebuhr's cityscapes and far less so in Hall's inner city. Niebuhr obviously seeks to highlight the suspension of activity in the city by making the buildings and other infrastructure the central points of focus, while Hall's depiction of the city at street level signifies its mood.

There is however, nothing suggested about the condition of the city's inhabitants in both artists' works, this despite Niebuhr's assertion of the stories that exist in that which is unseen. Both Niebuhr and Hall can probably be attributed with some level of *flânerie* in the

production of their work, and as such, being seen as African flâneurs. This attribution would however require scrutiny, especially in relation to the effect of their work, which seems to deny the very possibility of such activity by presenting an unwelcoming and distant urban environment. Niebuhr at least has indicated that his work could be suggestive of such occupation by his invocation of the "lived stories" that make up his cityscapes; the difficulty is of course the fact that without his mentioning of this, the cityscapes remain devoid of this association.

It is impossible to deny that what both Niebuhr and Hall appear to suggest through their work, is a sense of exclusion from the possibility of *flânerie*, and this may be seen as leading us to another issue and that is, white alienation. Can it be read into their work that there is an aspect of this? The answer would have to be a resounding yes. Both artists are white and in the light of this paper's deliberate concern with the black African artist as flâneur the question that begs to be asked is whether this has any impact on the way in which they represent the city.



Fig 3: Sam Nhlengethwa, *Cyclists Mural* (2012) Oil and mixed media on canvass

To answer this question, we may look at another artist who, like Chiurai, is black and has also grappled with Johannesburg as a subject. In Sam Nhlengethwa's work *Cyclists Mural* (fig.3) we have the representation of the city of Johannesburg in a manner that is completely different from that of Niebuhr and Hall. Apart from the very busy scene, the prominence of the figure of the miner on the building in the foreground is interesting as it can be read as a signifier of Johannesburg's past as a mining town-cum-city of gold. The work itself, and as

part of a series titled *Conversations* about Johannesburg's exuberance, deals with the social activity of the city's dwellers and the vibrancy of its spaces.

Like most of Chiurai's work and in particular, *Yellow Lines* and *Graceland*, *Cyclists Mural* shows the aesthetic use of mixed media, along with an overall imagery that is not a single and smooth depiction of a scenery but rather one that is layered through collage. One naturally wonders if in Nhlengethwa and Chiurai's works, a certain deliberateness is at play. Given that they are both black, their representation of Johannesburg seems to reflect a deep consideration of the impact of its spaces specifically on the lives of black people.

The work of Nhlengethwa and Chiurai is, in accordance with the comparison made between the poets Serote and reinstated by Nuttall (2008), indicative of an older and a younger view of Johannesburg as a space that was never meant to cater for black people but is nevertheless defined by their presence. In this context, the question of whether Niebuhr and Hall's whiteness impacts on their representation of the city may be answered in the affirmative. There is nothing inherently wrong with this of course, just as there is nothing wrong with the aesthetic form that their works have taken. There is, however, as indicated above, very little if anything in their work that tells us who defines this city in both the past and the present. The city as a living space is not interrogated; being both too clean, too moody and stylised their work verges on the abstract.

In Chiurai's work, apart from a deliberate investigation of social conditions closely tied to urban spatiality, there is a peeling away of the layers that make up Johannesburg's urban experience. What is revealed is the very issue that is hinted at in the comparison of Chiurai and Nhlengethwa above: that of capturing the black urban experience, which can be said to be a predominant characteristic of Johannesburg. This black urban experience can be seen as what Demissie (2008) terms "postcolonial urbanity", a phenomenon whereby urban Africans remake and imprint postcolonial cities with their own forms of urbanity (Demissie 2008, 3).

This postcolonial urbanity expands into the geographic issues of spatiality that Demissie presents us with in chapter 1 in that it speaks of the "new" dwellers of the city. It also links up well with what Elfriede Dreyer (2008) observes when writing on Chiurai's work – that his use of and approach to the contemporary city is reminiscent of the theoretical view that new

city users make immense claims on its space by reconstituting strategic spaces in the city in their own cultural image, which seems to be becoming more and more globalised. Dreyer notes that

> At present transnational diaspora and metropolitan flâneurs are the paramount attestations of the globalising impulse in South Africa. Due to raging political changes in sub-Saharan Africa over the past few centuries, cities have become cosmopolitan and identities have become hybrid, nomadic and pluralist (Dreyer 2012, 127).

These cosmopolitan cities and the hybridity that marks their character is a clear reference to postcolonial theorisation just as is the notion of postcolonial urbanity. But they link up with postcolonial theory in another way, through the construction and existence of black masculinities. We need to remember that we are also dealing with the question of the flâneur, a figure that has largely been defined as masculine and would, even when extended to the African city, be likely to be still conceived as masculine. As evidenced in the chapter on the history of the flâneur, this is a figure that encompassed and reflected the social relations – public space being considered masculine space while the private was feminine – of its time and in part, has continued to do so albeit within the variations of environmental context.

In the case of Chiurai, this masculinity is undoubtedly black. The logical position is that it is the black urban experience that we are confronted with in the artist's works. Writing on South African masculinity, Robert Morrell (1998) argues that black masculinities relate strongly to a sense of place, and that this is informed by the manner in which the black body was subjected to the rules and regulations of apartheid ideological discourses (Morrell 1998, 615). He goes further by considering the history of this construction and making the strong case that black masculinities came about as part of the need of white masculinity to control what it did not understand and feared.

In the era of colonisation, black identity and indeed masculinity were defined within a certain perspective that had to do with 'othering', and this continued and intensified well into apartheid. The difference is that in colonial times, the type of black masculinity that came about was one that came to be seen as traditional, associated with rural black identity. As urbanism began to take hold through the rise of cities, a second form of black 'urban' also surfaced and it was immediately set apart from the 'traditionally' rural masculinity not just by

social actions between whites and blacks but poignantly between blacks as well (Morrell 1998, 617).

In looking at Chiurai's representation of the city, we must be mindful of the aspect of black urban masculinity as it applies to the artist as flâneur as we ought to be mindful of how postcolonial urbanity is inherent to the work. "My interest in Chiurai's work is stimulated by the paintings of the city night landscape. It is not the specific parts of the works that capture my attention but rather the entirety of the work which speaks all at once and not only illustrates a particular environment" (Robert Hodgins in Chiurai 2008, 68).

It is this combination of elements in Chiurai's work that echoes the impact that a geographical setting can have but also the various positionalities – of the postcolonial, the postcolonial city and postcolonial urbanity – that can be found in this geographical setting. In both the *Graceland* and *Yellow Lines* series Chiurai's subject matter is for the most part the spaces within which the city is inhabited and the subjects, seen and unseen, who inhabit these spaces. Amongst the characteristics of this space are aesthetic demarcations of despair, desolation and dislocation brought about by factors of politics and socio-economic sustainability.

Chiurai also deals with his own awareness and perhaps his own fears as an outsider and an insider – one who is witness to the in-between states in which his fellow city dwellers find themselves. The significance of being an outsider is emphasised by Dreyer: "as incognito voyeur or a flâneur in the hub of transcultural and cosmopolitan activity, Chiurai experiences xenophobia and loss of identity, being in the city and part of it all, yet at the same time not belonging" (Dreyer 2012, 128).

The work *Repatriation* (fig. 4) denotes some of the harsher realities of being in the city, particularly for those who have perhaps escaped to it as asylum seekers or refugees. It speaks to the phenomenon of immigrants having to go back to their home country, usually by force or expulsion, returning without having experienced the promise of a better life that the city held for them. The shadowy image in the foreground is very likely that of Chiurai himself, a practice that he used in earlier works and still makes use of in his more contemporary works.

This inclusion of himself, if we should accept it as that, is telling in that it speaks of an almost autobiographical aspect to the image-making that represents Chiurai's *flânerie*. Perhaps one of the more interesting things about Chiurai's work, as artist-flâneur, is that it enables him to disappear into it. One is made aware that the work, rather than only being observational, also presents an inkling of the artist's own position in relation to his subject. Another important point is that Chiurai's inclusion of himself in his work may further and perhaps more accurately suggest that the work is meant to be recognisable to the immigrant from across the South African border at a cross-national level, as well as to the immigrant to the city on a local level. There is an inevitable sense that this immigrant is not at home, needs to or may have to return home. The buses and train in the image add further significance to this reading as they themselves elicit the idea of movement, a constant restlessness.

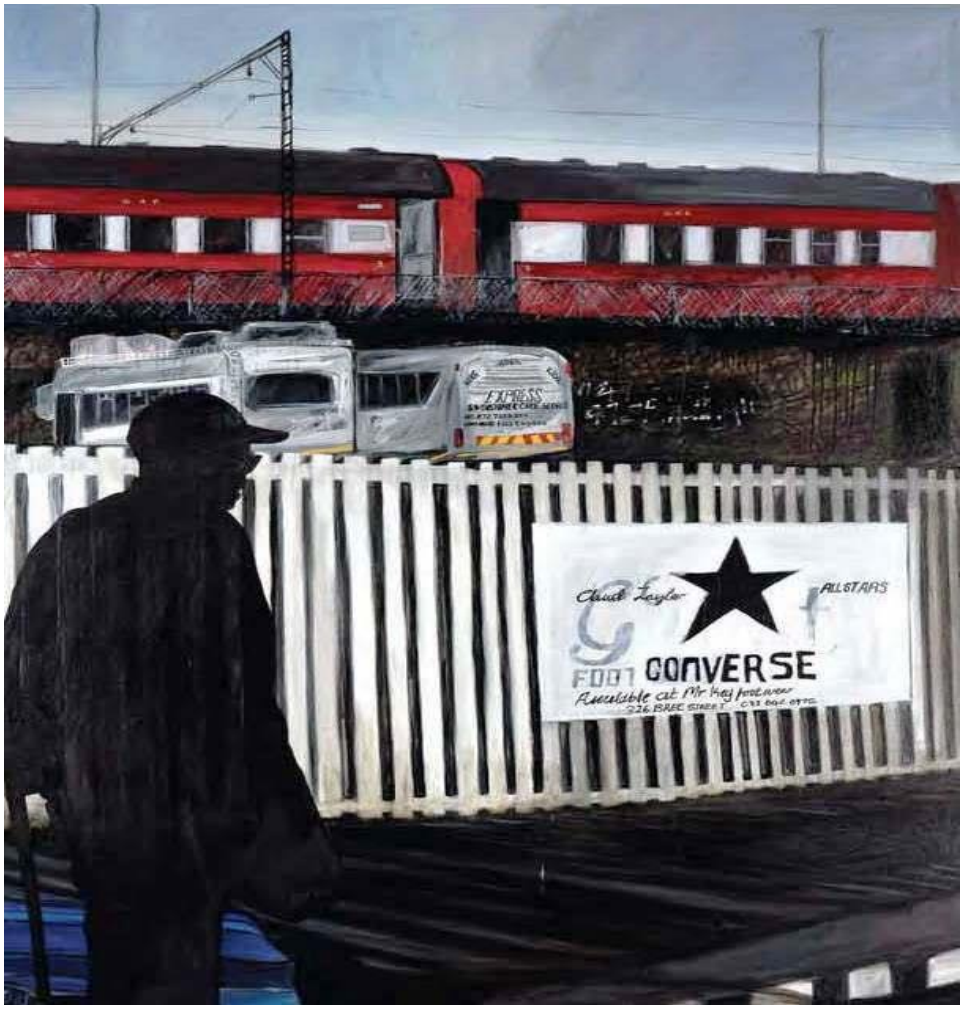


Fig. 4 Kudzanai Chiurai, *Repatriation* 2008 mixed media

A reading of Chiurai's works strongly suggests and supports the assertion that he has had to play a role akin to that of the flâneur in order to produce his visual texts. In doing so, he has been a kind of social ethnographer, a participant observer, which at first sight stands in contrast to the flâneur because of the distinction between the aspects of participation, which is sometimes seen as central to ethnography, and the act of observation which is typical of the flâneur. It is arguable; however, that participation is in fact something that he does through his activities – by taking the kind of actions that enable him to observe. Amongst the reviews of his work are observations to the effect that

(His) works confront the viewer with the psychological and physical experience of inner-city Johannesburg, the continent's most cosmopolitan melting pot where thousands of exiles, refugees and asylum seekers battle for survival alongside the never-ending swell of newly urbanised South Africans. The actuality of these environs is reinforced by Chiurai's use of photographic transfer. Boldly stencilled figures and anonymous text provide running commentary, leading viewers on a journey through his intricately painted turn-of-the century buildings, bustling streets and congested transit systems (Kauru 2013).

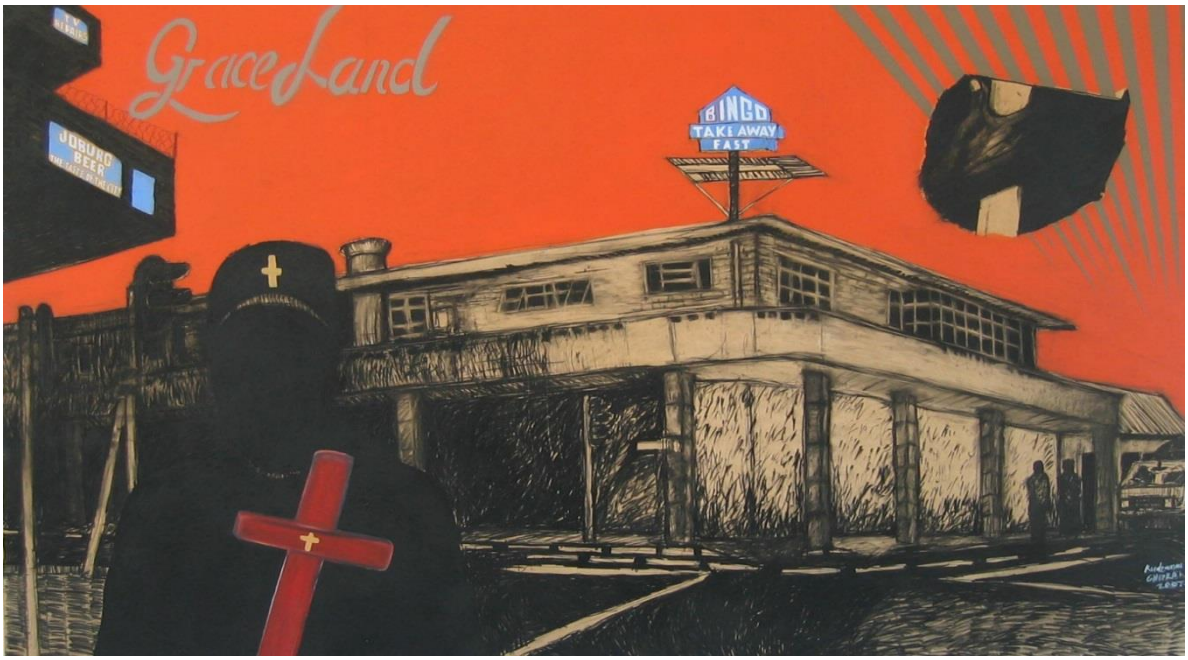


Fig. 5 Kudzanai Chiurai, *Graceland,* 2007 mixed media

Chiurai's work also provides a documentation of how black people's lives take on new forms of visual expression and culture in response to the city. Black cultures, their presence and

absence in the city are an informative aspect of Chiurai's fascination, the more so as they exist within the 'new' postcolonial-post-apartheid Johannesburg city. The *Graceland* series presents us with an imagined notion of Johannesburg, specifically Newtown, which is often read as a utopia that turns out not be real. Nevertheless, there is faith that it might become real from what one reads in the image titled *Graceland* (fig. 5).

Graceland speaks to us of faith, both literally and figuratively. This faith is what many that come to Johannesburg have as only silver lining to the dark clouds of their difficult life. This elicited faith, however, speaks of something else, something more sinister that often accompanies the faithful: religion used for commercial exploitation. It may not necessarily be the artist's intention in this image of *Graceland* to offer so many signifiers but they can be validly read into it. The sign above the building in the background reads "bingo" as if to say this is where you will strike it lucky, whether it is through your faith or because of it that others strike it lucky.

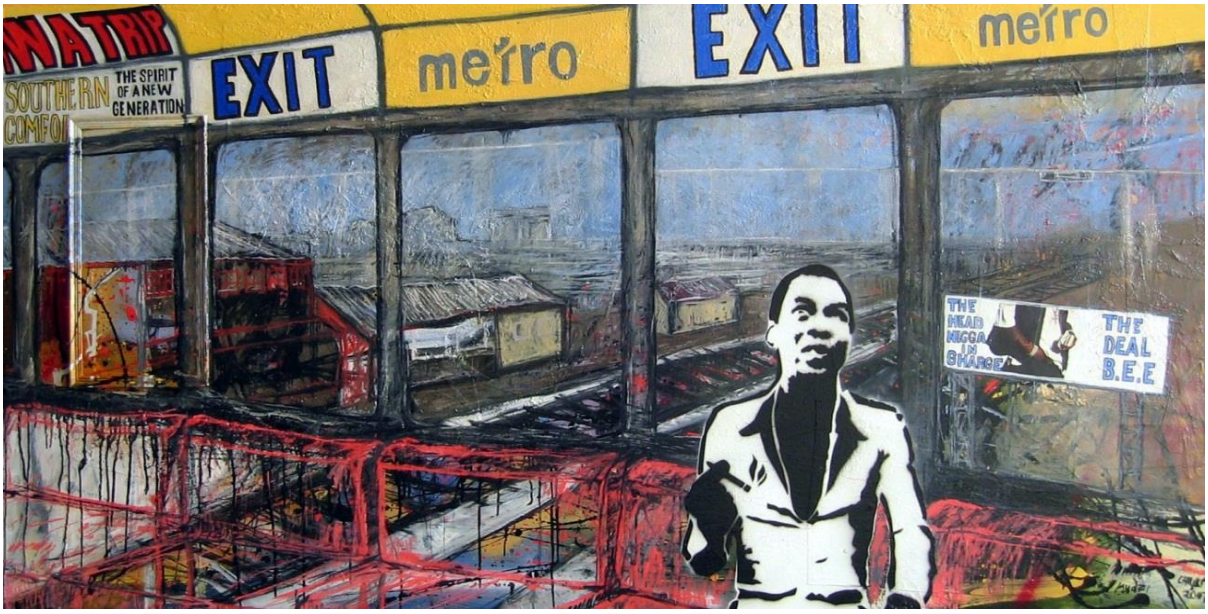


Fig. 6 Kudzanai Chiurai, *Fela*, 2007 mixed media

In the *Graceland* (2007) series there are also works that connote the cosmopolitanism of Johannesburg as an African city. To this effect Chiurai uses the iconic image of the Nigerian singer Fela Kuti to indicate, perhaps, that like Fela's music and personality, we are dealing with an unconventional space. In *Fela* (fig. 6) Fela is stencilled onto a train with a sign next to him reading "the head nigga in charge, the deal B.E.E." A little away from Fela's image, at

the far top left corner is a text that read “Southern comfort: the spirit of a new generation.” These texts are indicative of the attitudes that make up Johannesburg’s landscape.

The first text borrows from Black American language and uses what is perhaps the popular but certainly stereotypical image, albeit just a midriff, of a black man. He is or at least represents the “head nigga” – a combination of asserting one’s self through the appropriation of a previously, and presently, oppressive slur. When linked with the second part of the text, “the deal B.E.E”, it becomes uniquely South African as it denotes black economic empowerment, a government policy aimed at redressing past inequalities through the provision of opportunities for black businesses. In this case however, the redress is not formal or governmental – it is as brash as the cityscape that we’re given a glimpse of in the image. It is the new space of black masculinity.

The use of the second text, “Southern Comfort: The Spirit of a New Generation” is perhaps a cheeky parody of the advertising of the alcoholic beverage in that it suggests what, for the most part, may not be considered as the reality of things. Read with the other text, the inserted stencil of Fela Kuti and the general scene captured in the image, it may be said that this type of Johannesburg is what one is inevitably bound to be confronted with, where black masculinity asserts itself in its occupation and use of the space but more importantly, its re-imagining and subsequently, re-inventing of the urban space of the African city. These are but aspects of what Chiurai arguably seeks to make us aware of about the city of Johannesburg and its spaces. It is a *Graceland* that is not quite graceful in its existence or the existence of its inhabitants.

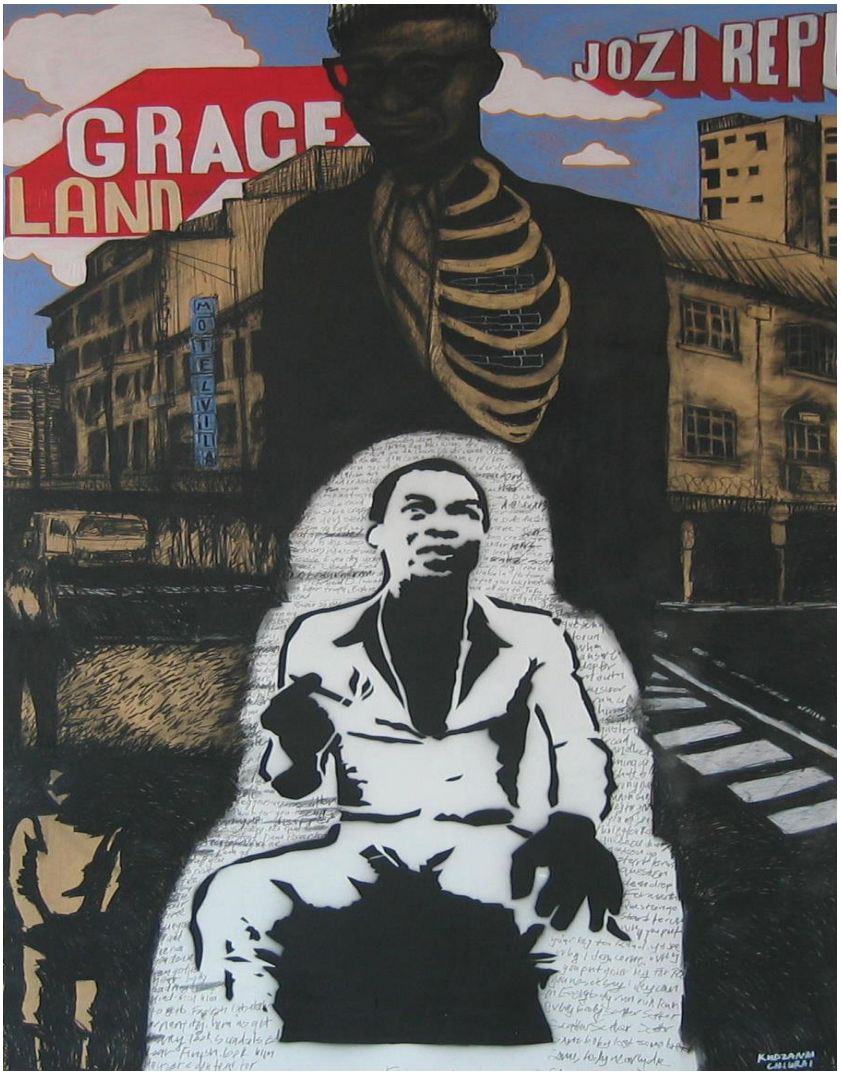


Fig. 7 Kudzanai Chiurai, *Jozi Republic*, 2007 mixed media

In *Jozi Republic* (fig. 7) there is a recurrent use of the Fela icon, and behind it stands a figure with a transparent chest in that we can see his ribs and what appear to be bricks instead of a heart beneath them. This image, along with *Fela*, may be seen as further signifying the new black masculinity and identity that goes with being in Johannesburg. A new kind of black urbanised, individual has been created and there are opportunities to be had even in the midst of what seems like decay in both this image and the *Fela* image (fig. 6).

However, despite this new black urbanised masculinity, there are parallel issues at play – issues that affect more specifically black people who come to the city. In the foreground, next to the Fela stencilled image is another stencilled but less defined image of what appears to be a "street kid." This child is not clearly defined, as many of the other street bound children that unfortunately colour Johannesburg's landscape are unidentifiable. And yet, despite this discrepancy of what being a city-dweller is, in a city that is not at all welcoming, there is the

unmistakable visual presence and intention of occupying it. Chiurai captures these competing narratives particularly well. His efforts, especially through these images, may not necessarily encompass flânerie but it certainly encompasses its by-product of documentary text. It is through these examples that one may see how it may not be the fact that Chiurai is himself a flâneur but the fact that using this figure as an added means of reading his treatment of the city's urban landscape as a subject, that provides us with new insights.

The *Yellow Lines* series (2008) continues this train of thought as well as echoing, almost to the letter, the words of Mbembe regarding the fluidity and transgressed boundaries of the city – nuances that avail themselves from a documentative interrogation and/or *flânerie* of the city. *Yellow Lines* is representative of the notions of crossing over defined and undefined territories within the city; of aspects of the city that lend their own definition to it; micro cities made up of communities of different language groups and cultures, most of which are foreigners in an often hostile environment.



Fig. 8 & 9 Kudzanai Chiurai, *Moneylenders* 2008 mixed media

Looking at *Moneylenders* (fig. 8 & 9) reveals another area of critique that the artist has taken upon himself to explore. This area is closer to the artist as a black man, for it is a critique of how within this new found freedom and space, black people have come to see each other and themselves. The meaning and implications of economic empowerment on black people are wrestled with. Substantively Chiurai seeks to peel off the layers that make up this contemporary black person but he does this through a rather haphazard means of illustration, albeit with an eerie feeling about it.

Moneylenders arguably addresses itself to the aforementioned black urban masculinity and the conflict of identity that has come about within black masculinity itself. In the image a giant magazine billboard reads, "the new face of advertising, how blacks see themselves." This is crucial, as it indicates the manner in which relations between blacks have taken a turn towards self-critique even if it is not explicitly stated. This critique is an extension of a past critique, related to white masculinity seeking to define and control black masculinity, harking back to the colonial and apartheid times which are hinted at by the old buildings in the background.

An interesting point to add and consider is that of the figure in the foreground of the second image. This was taken from the cover poster of the biopic film *Basquiat*, about the late black American artist Jean-Michel Basquiat who is often credited with bringing "the streets" (the use of graffiti and tagging) into the gallery. Basquiat lived on the streets for brief but occasional periods of his life before being discovered by the powers that be of the art world (Davis 2010).

Of interest to this paper and in relation to Chiurai himself, is the fact that Basquiat's modus included the production of work that was both textual and illustrative, as referred to in relation to the various forms of activity that make up the flâneur by Frisby (Tester 1994, 83). The use of stencils, spray paint and other mixed media which gives Chiurai's work a gritty appearance may be seen as an extension of the style employed by the likes of Basquiat. It also gives the cityscape a rough image, which, it may be argued, is its true image.

As stated earlier regarding Chiurai's banning from Zimbabwe, the effect of such autocracy was to make an emigrant out of him. It is therefore not illogical to link him with the historical framework of the black migrant worker in South Africa, albeit for a different and more nuanced reason. Of this black migrant worker, Mbembe and Nuttal write that

> Living in places and circumstances not of his or her choosing the migrant worker is constrained to experience the metropolis as a site of radical uncertainty, unpredictability and insecurity. Under those conditions, culture and aesthetics become an open-ended construction structurally built in existing and often misused infrastructures (Mbembe and Nuttall 2008, 23).

The difference between Chiurai and the migrant worker, however, is that he has the ability to choose where he wants to live – his freedom is not contrived nor explicitly controlled. Compared to the migrant worker, his place of habitation is of his own volition but like the migrant worker, he suffers the same fate of unpredictability, uncertainty and insecurity. These experiences are brought about by the fact that he is an outsider, a foreigner living in an environment that despite being open and seemingly characterised by multiculturalism, is nevertheless permeated with the remnants of division, an us-and-them binary that is no longer strictly defined by the relations between white and black but rather between blacks – and by what we now recognise as the dangerous practice of xenophobia.

That Chiurai is Zimbabwean and that the people of this particular nationality, along with those of Mozambican and Somali nationality, have from the evidence of contemporary news coverage on the issue, endured the brunt of a xenophobic black South African populace brings us to a full circle of sorts: the freedoms that differentiate Chiurai from the migrant labourer are freedoms that exist within a system that was never quite concluded, but that has morphed and infused the new urban dispensation with some of the characteristics of the old.

The city, being a space that would be nothing but architectural abstraction without the presence of people and ideas to give it meaning, became and has largely remained the stage on which different acts of meaningful existence have been performed and continue to be performed. Walter Benjamin treated the built forms of the modern metropolis as compressed microcosms of the social world and emblematic expressions of hidden social relations (Murray 2008, 149).

Rather than taking the built environment at face value, Benjamin insisted on looking behind the semblance of the ordinary to draw attention to those marginal, repressed and ignored features of the cityscape that typically escape notice. Yes Benjamin also looked on the taken-for-granted built forms of the cityscape as vast repositories of eclipsed relics, outmoded remnants, and obsolete fashions, something akin to archaeological sites containing clues to understanding the ephemeral ‘transitoriness’ of modernity (Murray 2008, 149).

Like Benjamin’s treatment of the modern metropolis’s built forms, Chiurai’s work has the characteristic of ‘excavating through the asphalt’. There is a sense that he is exposing the city

and its nooks and crannies for what they are – haunted and hollow spaces of modern day urban Africa which do not so much offer "clues to understanding the ephemeral transitoriness of modernity" but, instead, clues to postcolonial, post-apartheid and increasingly globalisation-infected reality and the effects of these on those attracted to the city and the city itself.



Fig. 10 Kudzanai Chiurai, *Since 1900*, 2007 mixed media

With this comparison to Benjamin in mind, we may consider works from both *Graceland* and *Yellow Lines*, notably *Since 1900* (fig. 10) and *City Fabric* (fig. 11). The first work presents us with an old building in the foreground while the background is lined with more modern buildings. It connotes the past and present of Johannesburg, but these are both fleeting and volatile ideas where Johannesburg is concerned. The buildings in the background are just as indicative of 'old' Johannesburg as those in the foreground. Given the exodus of those for whom it was originally made for, Johannesburg's past is presented as layered but within all of this is the fact that some of the relics, such as the buildings, of its past are now active objects of its present.

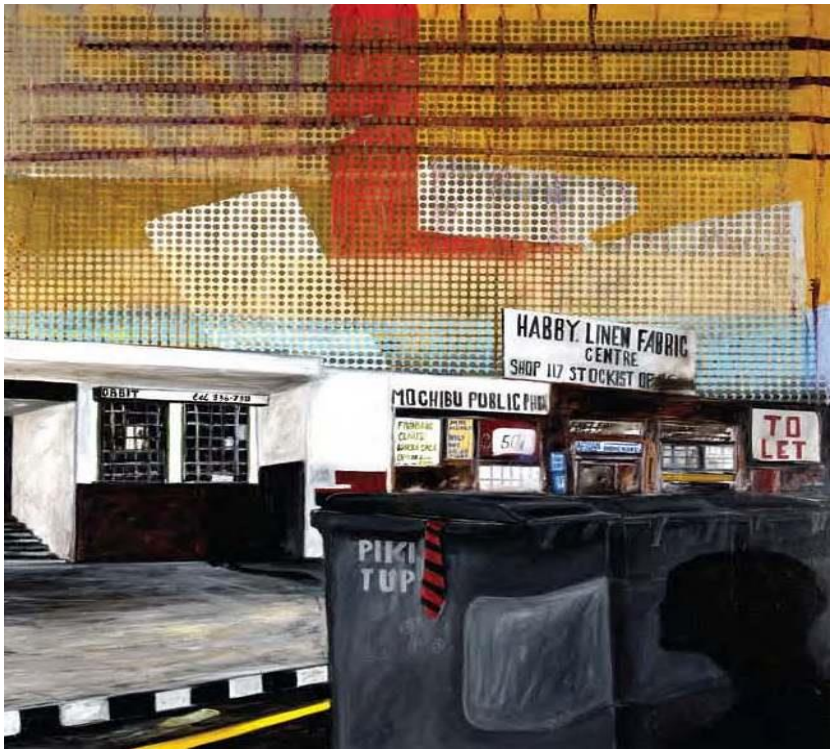


Fig. 11 Kudzanai Chiurai, *City Fabric* 2008 mixed media

City Fabric is itself physically layered in mixed media, perhaps signifying how its subject, the city of Johannesburg, is also layered. In the foreground of the work we see a tie hanging out of a Pikitup refuse bin. The tie could signify the formality of business, which is what cities are often associated with. That it is hanging out of a refuse bin is indicative of the direction that this very notion of formal business has gone to waste and all but disappeared. It is a scene of remnants and 'empty' signifiers: the signs are no longer connected to a functioning economy but an informal one. There is also a looming shadowy figure reflected on one of the refuse bins who, when read in conjunction with the tie, may be seen as adding to the idea of the business identity of the city as being nothing more than a spectre. It also reflects the shadowiness that is often associated with the inner-city.

Chiurai's practice of *flânerie*, which he may not necessarily define as his own practice can, as Frisby helps us to see, be linked with a way of seeing and a form of *reading the city* and its population – its spatial images, its architecture and its human configurations (Frisby 1994, 82). Of course this requires us to consider the question of walking. It may be argued that Johannesburg as an *experienced* place evinces an environment that has been subverted into a walking one even though its architectural landscape suggests otherwise.

The space itself does not seem to cater for the type of *flânerie* that is characteristic of the city of Paris, but it is reasonable to suggest that despite Johannesburg being a large city, made up of smaller former mining towns, some of its contemporary spaces have come to be reimagined and renewed through continued programmes of gentrification and rejuvenation, and are now in fact suitable spaces for *flânerie* to occur. But these are not the spaces Chiurai shows us and in this way, he deliberately averts our eyes from what may be the typical assumption of what *flânerie* is: an occupation with only the sanitised spaces of the city when in fact this is only one way, a limited one at that, of doing so.

We have seen how through his work Chiurai represents the black artist capturing black people, the meaning of their presence and absence, in a space that they have come to define but which ironically was never intended for them. The landscape of the contemporary city thus offers a view of different and dynamic imaginaries at play. Indeed one finds within all of this, projects of urban renewal whereby the claim, arguably a capitalist driven one, is that rejuvenation is good for the city and that its aim is to bring people back to the city.

Of course without saying so directly, this claim suggests that the city is void of life, of culture and vibrancy. The city, however, as Chiurai illustrates "is eternally a source of energy, empowered, empowering, and dis-empowering, with desire eternally at its centre" (Mary Ann Caws 1991, 10). In a postcolonial city such as Johannesburg, this energy is made all the more palpable by the fact that an array of people and cultures suddenly find themselves in a space that no longer is regulated strictly. Unsurprisingly, it is here that the claims behind city rejuvenation fall and fail: they claim to infuse the city with life and culture, overlooking the already present mix of cultures which are not prescribed by a certain space.

This claim of rejuvenation and the infusion of culture are far from the authentic fact that it would like to be seen as. Let us consider Chiurai's work *Opportunity* (fig. 12). This work captures in some ways the essence of the city as a place of opportunity, yet it equally insinuates the existence of irony behind this very claim.



Fig. 12 Kudzanai Chiurai, *Opportunity*, 2008 mixed media

Opportunities associated with the city have taken on various forms over the course of its history, from migrant labourers whose interaction with the city was strictly controlled as a formal function to the influx of immigrants, local and foreign, attracted by the prospect of a better life to be had in the city. It is perhaps this false claim that Chiurai directly or indirectly fixes his attention upon through what seems to be a problematizing of advertising texts that can be found in the city's landscape. Just like the *Fela* (fig. 6) and *Moneylenders* (fig. 8 & 9), *Opportunity* casts a light on these texts that have become part and parcel of the city. They speak not only of what may be had in the city but what the city itself promises or perhaps can be said to falsely advertise. In is this way, Chiurai reveals more of the city by not giving it what would be the advertisement treatment of a sanitised and glossy image but rather one that is closer to reality in its jaggedness.

It may be further implied that through his work, Chiurai asks, in response to the above claims of renewal, whether there was no culture before, or whether it is merely the case that the existing vibrancy and expression does not fit comfortably into the more class appropriate and high culture mould. The work, *I write what I like* (fig. 13) speaks to, amongst other things, the new social and cultural imaginings of the city that is made possible by the increasingly urbanised identities that mark its landscape. A straightforward reference to the book of the same title by apartheid struggle icon Steve Biko, the title of the work further enhances the audacity that the work itself hints at, an audacity that is directly linked to the aforementioned urbanised identities which comprise mostly black youth and their popular culture, for which

the streets are a place of credibility, status and performance. The streets are also a place of anti-establishment attitudes as signified by the presence of street art forms like graffiti in the work. In the same image, the background text and sight of a tavern speaks not only to the accessibility of entertainment but the manner in which previously or predominantly black township iconography has found its way into the city.



Fig. 13 Kudzanai Chiurai, *I write what I like* 2008, mixed media

Taverns are a township phenomenon, and their existence in the city, or the simulation of them in the city, indicates how the city has come to be defined, in some parts, by a black urbanity that has progressed from the outskirt townships – former regulated and limited spaces for black people to live in during apartheid – to the city itself. It is arguably away from this, along with other urban realities, that projects of gentrification and rejuvenation try to steer the city.

It may be said that in this way Chiurai emphasises and re-emphasises the position that the city of Johannesburg is a black territory – despite never being intended for the enjoyment of blacks – that is specifically defined by black masculinity and cultural motifs. If one considers the reference of this work in and of itself then it is worth making the argument that by invoking Steve Biko, Chiurai is himself invoking the idea of a 'black consciousness' of the city, thus the emphasis on blackness as the definitive aspect of Johannesburg in not only this work but others in both the *Graceland* and *Yellowlines* series.

CONCLUSION

While this report has dealt with the various aspects and nuances involved in discerning what a flâneur is and could be, it has also sought to deal with the idea of the postcolonial space in the form of the city, especially as it relates to the flâneur. This city, as has been presented, is essential to the flâneur in that it makes up a significant part of what the flâneur is and does, if not defining this figure altogether. Thus, to conceive of the flâneur as an African black artist, under the rubric of postcolonialism as this paper has done, is to consider how urban space is both constructed as well as interacted with in the periods preceding and succeeding it in order to understand its present forms and idiosyncrasies.

Bearing in mind the lack of fixity that postcolonialism invokes, the perspective and resultant texts of the flâneur as African artist are given a context that cannot be overlooked. In Chiurai's work depicting and dissecting the city, there is a similar lack of fixity, a restlessness of the city landscape. This restlessness is owing to the energy of the city of Johannesburg as a melting pot of different identities and cultures.

Chiurai's representations of Johannesburg are certainly eligible for being treated as particular kind of *flânerie*. It may be disputed that Chiurai's practice should be defined as flânerie, but this practice, as it has been theorised, has revealed one very important element – it is a means of making sense of the city. Milburn articulates it best when he says that

Flânerie now serves two principal functions, one, as a way of reading urban texts, a methodology for uncovering the traces of social meaning embedded in the layered fabric of the city and secondly, as a stance that helps one to cope with the shock and discontinuity experienced in the modern city. Such discontinuities show no sign of abating, and thus it is of little surprise that the impulse for flânerie shows no sign of receding (Milburn 2009, 10).

This discontinuity and the shock that accompanies it is more than fitting where Johannesburg is concerned. As a city that has undergone so much change, from colonialism to apartheid, to a mesh of post-apartheid and postcolonial markers, Johannesburg is the perfect environment for instances of flânerie as well as the perfect case-study for the subsequent analysis of its implications. The consideration of the artist within this formulation only adds to its potency

as it allows us to combine a number of analytical tools that go beyond the literary and sociological.

Equally, we have been able to expand upon art historical analysis in considering Chiurai's work, even when comparing it to that of Nhlengethwa, Niebuhr and Hall. We must remember that taking the city as a given set of clear and identifiable social facts, results in a limited point of view which only perceives and understands exclusions and absences, never what is present.

But if the city is understood as a discursive construct and the widest possible means of interpreting it is employed, there is a strong likelihood that we will be able to notice counter-narratives far more easily than by sticking to a single approach that disregards the existence of "shadows and obscurities." These shadows and obscurities need not be threatening presences but rather figures that have been hidden by "narratives of fixity" (Wolff 2006, 28).

Wolff affirms the position that a crucial aspect of urban wandering (as is characteristic of the flâneur) is the 'reading' of the urban environment and the production of texts – exactly the task of the social theorist and urban ethnographer.

The importance of the flâneur is amongst other things the *self*-importance of the sociologist of modernity, for whom this poetic figure serves as a prototype as he has proven to be an attractive and suggestive figure, one that gives us a certain grasp of the peculiar features of life in the metropolis such as fragmentation and anonymity, to name but a few (Wolff 2006, 29).

Perhaps the most important point that Wolff makes in the context of theorising about the flâneur is that this figure ought to leave centre-stage and instead allow for other means of interrogating the city and understanding it. She is not wrong to make this call since the notion of the flâneur as artist is certainly not absolute. However, in the context of new urbanities as they exist under the necessary analysis of postcolonial and even postapartheid thought, the flâneur and the possibilities that his significance invokes can certainly provide interesting ways of understanding these urbanities. It may further give us a means of expanding upon a visual cultural analysis of the city by allowing us to look at more than just artworks and the

artist but to read into the possible actions that inform these artworks, other images and the city itself.

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