Flanerie and Writing the City in
Iain Sinclair's *Lights Out for the Territory*,
Edmund White's *The Flâneur*, and
José Cardoso Pires's *Lisboa: Livro de Bordo*

Paul Castro

October 2003
(electronic edition 7 February 2006)

Flanerie and Writing the City

in

Iain Sinclair's

Lights Out for the Territory,

Edmund White's

The Flâneur,

and

José Cardoso Pires's

Lisboa: Livro de Bordo

Paul Castro

MPhil in European Literature 2003

Graeme Gilloch, commenting on the unlikely re-emergence of the figure of the *flâneur* in contemporary theory, a figure he himself had written off as obsolete seven years earlier (see Gilloch 1992), declares that "the *flâneur* returns as the perspicacious pedestrian, a figure with privileged insights into, and precious knowledge of, the modern city. Resurrected and recast, the *flâneur*-as-historical-figure becomes the *flâneur*-as-heuristic fiction" (1999: 105). In short, the *flâneur* re-emerges as a way in which to expound a vision of the city. This essay will examine the way in which three contemporary works use *flânerie*, the activity of the *flâneur*, as a way of both investigating metropolitan space and constructing a textual representation of it. These works are: Iain Sinclair's *Lights Out for the Territory*, José Cardoso Pires's *Lisboa: Livro de Bordo* and Edmund White's *The Flâneur*, dealing with London, Lisbon and Paris respectively.

Before moving on to the primary texts, it is important to delineate the features comprising the concept of *flânerie* in modern social and literary theory. The *flâneur* originally arose as an historical figure in the early nineteenth-century. Paradigmatically, he[1] was an aloof dandy of independent means, ostensibly idling away his time ambling through the Arcades of Second Empire Paris. However, beneath his cover of disinterest and detachment, the *flâneur* was an ever-observant artist who

---

[1] The *flâneur*, as the French noun indicates, is a male figure. For a discussion of the problems and

used his perambulations to amass knowledge of the metropolis, as material for the production of literary, or journalistic, texts for later publication. His flickering existence was eventually extinguished in the mid-nineteenth-century, when the increasingly unfashionable Arcades became obsolescent. In addition to the disappearance of the *flâneur*'s favourite haunts, according to Benjamin (1974), it was a combination of the historical figure's increasing identification with the commodity, together with the quickening pace and spatio-temporal reorganisation of metropolitan existence, that eventually led to the extinction of the *flâneur*.

The passing of the historical figure paved the way for the resurrection of the *flâneur* as a methodological persona, adopted in order to pursue the exploration of the city. Stripped to its basic characteristics and used as a *modus operandi* for the writer, *flânerie,* as a scopic methodology, involves mobile observation on the part of an individual consciousness from the supposed viewpoint of a pedestrian city dweller. As Shields (Tester, 1994: 65) says "observation is the *raison d'être* of the *flâneur* and seeing the visual lures is the *primum mobile* of the *flâneur*'s being". In his essay "The *Flâneur* in Social Theory", Frisby maintains that "an investigation of *flânerie* as an activity must explore the activities of observation (including listening), reading (of metropolis and text) and producing texts" (Tester, 1994: 82). Although these three aspects are

---

possibilities of a female *flâneuse* see Wolff 1991

broadly coterminous, the activity of *flânerie*, as practised in the texts in question, will be divided here into these loose and interrelated rubrics for the purposes of analysis.

Flânerie is employed in differing ways and to diverse ends by the three authors under consideration. This is typical of its contemporary incarnation. As Jenks points out "the *flâneur* is no absolute methodological stance but rather a creative attitude of urban inquisition and a "relative" absence of variable constraints" (1995: 156). However, it is this essay's contention that the activity of *flânerie* does comprise a recognisable framework of approaches and attitudes, accreted through its various embodiments in the work of successive theorists and writers, and which can be adduced to elucidate the works in question here. These will be delineated in the next three sections, in accordance with the schema suggested by Frisby and discussed above. This rough division will be maintained in the subsequent discussion of *flânerie* in the three works under scrutiny, wherein other theoretical approaches, which can be seen to illuminate this activity, as practised by these authors, will also be considered. Finally the similarities between these works, which can be seen to derive, to some extent, from their basis in *flânerie*, will be discussed.

Basic Observational Characteristics of the *Flâneur*

The *flâneur* is essentially a pair of peripatetic eyes, roving through the city. On the surface the trajectory taken is not pre-planned, rather it follows, in a dialectical movement, the train of the thoughts, reflections and reminiscences of the *flâneur* emanating from his encounters along the way. The *flâneur*'s discoveries are then utilised to construct a textual vision of his city. According to Shields, *flânerie* is a practice that involves the exploration of "the interior and exterior spaces of the city" (Tester, 1994: 65). The *flâneur*'s primary interest is to look at the city as an entity. He investigates its collective life (though this may be represented metonymically by the examination of an individual biography), analyses its history as it affects the present, as it subsists unregarded, and as it is appropriated by various groups in manifold ways. Himself an artist, as was the historical *flâneur*, he is especially interested in urban culture, its physical manifestations, and the mutual interplay of art and the urban environment.

The *flâneur*'s mode of observation comprises several key characteristics. The first is a mental aloofness from his physical surroundings, which form the object of his observation: the city and its population. This characteristic is an inheritance from the historical figure of the well-heeled and dandified *flâneur*. Although it was his pleasure to live in the public eye and mill with the crowd, he strenuously held at bay the hoi-polloi surrounding him. This aloofness is important in that it

permits *flânerie* to be, in Frisby's words, "a procedure for acquiring knowledge of social experience that does not immediately set up an abstract distance from everyday experiences" (Tester, 1994: 84). At the same time, this detachment gives the *flâneur* an unbiased air of disinterest and confers on his observations an objectivity that appears to result from their apparently unmediated nature.

However, this idea of an unmediated image of the city is problematic, as is the supposition of a neutral representation of urban space. In his discussion of his concept of the after-image, Resina reminds us that images are never immediate as "we always have to turn to our mental apparatus to grasp and decode the external organisation of stimuli" (2003: 4*)*. In his view, all imagination of the city follows the paradigm of retinal retention of optical data. Inevitably, there is a "nonsynchronous occurrence of impression and perception" (*ibid*: 7*)*. In terms of the works discussed here, the impressions would be visually gathered by the *flâneur*, with perception occurring in the creation of the image, which can be defined as "the provisional stabilisation of visual effect through mental or technical editing" (*ibid.*: 7*)* and is, as such, inherently artificial. In this sense, the works in question are "after-images" of the city. For Resina, the image always has a "textual dimension", in that it necessarily has an abstract relation to the object of representation. Resina describes the attraction of realism as "the illusion that images, if not presences, are at

least documents" (*ibid*: 19). It would seem to be this documentarian connotation of the activity that attracts the authors considered in this essay to the practise of *flânerie*, i.e. the aura of documentary veracity endowed with a patina of lived experience which it affords their accounts of urban space.

The *flâneur*'s claim to a truer version of the city, veracious because based on his own personal experience, alternates with an admission that representation creates the imaginary city and thus defines our understanding of the physical metropolis. So, why this striving to impose a vision of the city? According to Parkhurst Ferguson "the artist-*flâneur*...belongs to a privileged elite, the expression of the higher, because intellectual, *flânerie*" (Tester, 1994: 29). All the authors under consideration belong to, or have aligned themselves with, a minority view, aspect or group, marginalised by the city they discuss. Their employment of the trope of *flânerie*, with its connotations of direct empirical experience, serves to justify the *flâneur*-as-artist's representation of the city. The *flâneur*s considered here, as members of a perceived artistic elite, are more endowed with symbolic than temporal power and use *flânerie* to create an image of the city at odds with the official, touristic or merely stereotypical identities they see imposed on their cities. Indeed, "their" is the operative word here. In these works, *flânerie* is an attempt to take stock of a city that has changed, or where change is imminent. *Flânerie* is

a means for the marginalised author to re-appropriate the city through his investigation, to impose meaning on it or to shore up meaning that is crumbling away. Here observation shades into the reading of urban space.

The Urban Text and The Textual City

In the texts studied, it can be seen that the readings based on *flânerie* reveal the cities observed to be dual in nature. Besides the physical city of buildings and people viewed directly by the *flâneur* (and transmitted to the reader in a primary representation), there is also a city of myriad existing representations, the evocation of which plays a key role in *flânerie*. Both the physical metropolis and the imaginary city are objects of the *flâneur*'s "gaze". Indeed, the physical city is so closely entwined with its representational counterpart as to be inextricable from it in any but an analytical sense.

For the purposes of this essay, these two cities will be termed the 'urban text' and the 'textual city'. Turning first to the urban text. This is the configuration of buildings, streets and figures that the *flâneur* confronts as he moves across the metropolis. To consider this urban landscape as a text is to presuppose cities comprise "features of textuality – minimally a constellation of signs and symbols" (Frisby, 1997: 1). This essay will look at how the city is read by the *flâneur* in the works under consideration. Gilloch (1997) posits Benjamin's concept of the mimetic

faculty as the basis for the *flâneur*'s reading of the city. For Benjamin, mimesis had two moments: interpretation and imitation, which we can see as analogous to the *flâneur*'s apprehension of urban space and subsequent textual reproduction. Gilloch explains: "mimesis involves our capacity for the perception of patterns, figures or configurations in nature which can be deciphered and read" (1997: 103). Here we can understand nature in the broad sense of mankind's environment, subject to adaptation through human agency.

This decipherment takes place through the mimetic faculty's identification of "non-sensuous correspondences", the "ability to see correspondences between diverse phenomena" and "interpret these connections as signs, omens and portents" (*ibid*: 105). Looking at the conjunctions of urban features and the patterns they form in the physical surface of the city, by using this faculty the *flâneur* can read off facets of urban society, incidents and connections in history, and instances in the production and existence of metropolitan culture.

Turning to the 'textual city'. This refers to the representations of the city accessed and adduced by *flânerie*. These can take the form of memories, myths, maps or previous artistic interpretations. In the words of Frisby (Tester, 1994: 96) "the *flâneur* is nourished not merely from that which appears seriously there before his eyes, but will often seize upon mere knowledge, dead data, life experienced and lived through data. The

flâneur must listen carefully to sounds, stories, scraps of quotation, as well as search for clues amongst the "dead data" of the metropolis". This imaginary city can exist in the personal realm, in childhood memories or subjective historical experiences associated with certain places, or in the collective imagination, through the social resonance of certain streets and neighbourhoods, or else via artistic representations of certain areas or milieus of the city. The forms these take in the works in question, and the uses to which these retrieved representations are put, will be objects of analysis here.

Textual Production

As discussed, the ultimate aim of *flânerie* in these works is to produce texts on the subject of the city. *Flânerie* not only provides a method of negotiating and interpreting urban space, it also offers a metaphorical model for constructing the resulting text. *Flânerie* can be seen as a method for the author to control and order the flow of narrative information. All the works under discussion, though organised in divergent ways, are based on the topographical trajectory of the *flâneur*, in that the physical or intellectual path taken by the narrator shapes the track taken by the narrative. This results in a montage effect based on analogy in which different spaces, times, figures and themes emerge and merge, correspond and correlate.

In his discussion of the historical figure, Benjamin (1973: 35) notes that the *flâneur* was extant at the same time as the panoramas, dioramas (and other assorted "–amas") proliferating in nineteenth-century Paris. He links the narrative form of the *flâneur's* textual production to these devices in that they "reproduce the plastic foreground of these panoramas with their anecdotal forms and the extensive background of these panoramas with their store of information". This is precisely the form taken by these modern exemplars of *flâneur* literature. Baudelaire declared, in relation to his "painter of modern life", a figure evincing many characteristics associated with *flânerie*, that "he…may be compared to a kaleidoscope endowed with a consciousness, which with every one of his movements presents a pattern of life in all its multiplicity" (1995: 400). The *flâneur*, using the data he reads off the streets and the "dead data" he reads out from the archives of his memory and from artefacts of collective culture, creates meaningful patterns with his movements within the city, in the manner of Baudelaire's 'kaleidoscope'. This pattern-creating circumambulation is performed with the aim of investing places with meaning, thus introducing new representations into the urban imaginary. Benjamin maintained "not only human beings and animals but also spirits and above all images inhabit. It is abundantly clear with what the *flâneur* is concerned and what he seeks. Namely, images wherever they are housed. The *flâneur* is the priest of the genius loci" (2002: 436). Whilst

this assertion correctly identifies the obsession of the *flâneur*, it seems to propose the *flâneur* as a passive scribe of urban images. In my understanding, and in the works under consideration, he is instead an active "painter of modern life", using found elements in his own compositions, which, in their turn, go on to help define the city, taking their part in the unending movement of representation and its eternal renewal.

The *Dérive*: Psychogeographical *Flânerie*

Iain Sinclair's *Lights Out for The Territory* is subtitled "9 Excursions in The Secret History of London". The first five excursions are based on Sinclair's actual *flânerie* through the city in the company of the photographer Marc Atkins, whilst the last four cover subjects ranging from the counterculture of cinematic London to the different representations of the city encountered in English crime fiction. *Lights Out*, as we shall see, is grounded in the concept of *flânerie*, both physical and intellectual, as outlined in the introduction.

However, Sinclair's practice of *flânerie* is augmented in *Lights Out* by an admixture of ideas derived from psychogeography. Sinclair's name is often associated with the resurrection of psychogeography from the grave of the Situationist International, where it had long lain 'reforgotten' (Sinclair's term for marginal authors and movements that, after achieving

brief prominence, slip back into obscurity). It is the contention of this essay that the psychogeographical concept of *the dérive* and the technique of *détournement* can be usefully mapped on to the movements of Sinclair, as *flâneur*, through London, so as to elucidate the methods and motives underlying Sinclair's representation of the city.

In terms of the observation of the physical city, the main technique of psychogeography Sinclair employs is the *dérive*, which Debord describes as "a technique of transient passage through varied ambiances. The *dérive* entails playful constructive behaviour and awareness of psychogeographical effects; which completely distinguishes it from the classical notions of the journey and the stroll" (Knabb, 1981: 50). By psychogeographical, Debord means "that which manifests the geographical environment's direct emotional effects" (*ibid*: 45). According to Jenks, the *dérive* reveals "spatial intentionality" (1995: 154), the attempt made on the part of ruling and contestatory discourses to impose meaning on the city. It can "uncover compulsive currents within the city along with boundaries of exclusion and unconstructed gateways of opportunity" (1995: 154). This is clearly shown in Sinclair's pedestrian excursions. He encounters a mutually incompatible 'open city' (of poetic potential) and a 'closed city'. This closed city of surveillance and property speculation from which the poetry has been hounded is epitomised by Canary Wharf. This district is straightjacketed by its "anachronistic postmodernism (the

swamp where that word came to die)" (1998: 40). Or indeed all words.

For Sinclair this is an hermetic city, which cannot be read by the poet-*flâneur* other than as a sign of his own ostracism. As he asseverates in his most damning description of Docklands: "we're trapped in an isthmus of signs, not language. A field of force deliberately set up to eliminate the freelancer, the walker, the visionary. Public funds for private roads. Systems of necrophile geometry: underpasses, barriers, security guards. Minor pyramids misaligned with the boss tower. Meaningless stones thrown by people in glass houses" (*ibid.*).

The Situationist International was an eclectic mix of neo-communists interested in the effects of consumer capitalism on the metropolis. In his discussion of the Situationists' approach to the city, Sadler highlights the Situationists' enmity to capitalism's closed rationalisation, homogenisation and commercialisation of urban space, and the attendant "depletion of space's poetic potential" (1998: 56). This is arguably what Sinclair is trying to engage with in *Lights Out*, as he rails against the effects on London of the Thatcher government and its ideological descendants. A nuanced difference, however, is that the Situationists, rhetorically at least, understood the city's poetic potential as its capacity to enable all its inhabitants to lead creative, playful, free lives. Sinclair, on the other hand, seems to regard it more as a semantic multivalency that enables its resident artists to actualise this potential in the

form of poetry, novels and films. It is true that *Lights Out*, especially in the excursion entitled "The Dog and the Dish" continues on from his novels in exploring, in Perril's words "the sense of the emergence of an underclass from the deepening poverty of London" (1999: 335). Sinclair uncovers a whole gamut of exploitation in this excursion, from the media stranglehold maintained by the "*Sun*-light" of the brutalising SkyTV network to the financial speculations of the flagship redevelopment programmes

However, the fate of the people of London who fall through the net of regeneration seems to merit Sinclair's opprobrium only insofar as their plight exemplifies, as a by-product, the operations of the Establishment in the city. Like the historical *flâneur*, Sinclair keeps his distance from those around him in the streets of the capital. It is to London's poetic richness, accessible to those who stalk its streets as he does, that Sinclair pledges his loyalty: "everything I believe in, everything London can do to you…the theatre of obelisks and pyramids, signs, symbols, prompts, whispers. The lovely ties that take you out into the light. That bless each and every pilgrimage" (1998: 24). This loyalty leads him to an ultimately ambivalent reaction to the Conservative government. Whilst their slashing of funds for culture (as a book-dealer, he talks of sifting through books from foreclosed libraries that have been "Bottomly'd" - after the Conservative culture minister) and their plundering of the national patrimony for office

decorations (*ibid:* 173) is pilloried, he partly acknowledges that the adversity they caused lent impetus and value to the insurgent artistic endeavours of he and his peers and that this, in turn, somehow justified the period. Talking about the small-press poetry produced in the 80s, Sinclair calls it "the antimatter that granted validity to the Thatcherite free-market nightmare by steadfastly manufacturing its contrary: a flame in the dark. There was never a better period to be unknown, off the record, ex-directory" (*ibid*: 131).

Sinclair exalts and makes use of this poetic capability as a way of safeguarding it from the surrounding threats. Sinclair recognises that the city lives in its representations and interpretations. As he states "history, private and universal, is rewritten by the man who owns the pen" (1998: 132). If official discourse is trying to impose a certain view of London, Sinclair does not demur from its right to do so or contest the means used to achieve this end. Instead, he 'fights fire with fire'. When discussing the defects of P.D. James's novel *Original Sin* (which he terms "the final testament of Thatcherism" (1998: 323), and, by extension, the whole body of Establishment representations of city and nation, Sinclair declares "I refuse to cede the imagination of the waterfront to P.D. James" (1998: 343), whose work he takes as embodying Tory values. In contrast to monolithic conceptions of the official city, Sinclair points us towards the feverish abundance of signification that can be found within the city,

through such varied media as graffiti, poetry and cinema. Partly through adducing and discussing the works of contemporaries he admires, partly through his own re-inventions of the city, Sinclair attempts to produce, in Jenks's words (cited in *Lights Out)* "an alternative cartography" of the city (1998: 142).

However, this is not the only enterprise in map-making that takes place in *Lights Out*. Sinclair, as well as 'creating' his own city, charts the restrictions and lets set up by officialdom on the creative movement on the *flâneur* through the streets of London. If *flânerie*, in the mid-nineteenth-century, was the preserve of the wealthy, unbounded *flâneur,* the psychogeographical *dérive* is an attempt to fathom the modern city-dweller's freedom to walk the streets of the city. Perril describes the body of Sinclair's work as "a cartography of absence" (1999: 309), glowering with "a dark sense of the establishment prohibition upon place" (*ibid*). This "prohibition upon place" is, however, broader in scope than Perril's judgement implies, ranging from the actual debarment of physical presence and the sequestration of the city by those in power, to the foisting of official "meanings" onto urban space; thus rationalising, homogenising, commercialising and ultimately depleting its poetic potential. This prohibitional process reaches its apogee in the City, which rejects Sinclair's attempts to negotiate it physically, hampering at every turn his pedestrian insurgency: "repeated walks, circuits, attempts to navigate - to

get to the heart of the labyrinth - proved frustrating. There was no centre…The city was an off-shore island surrounded, protected, by high walls" (1998: 106). The extended idea of Establishment "prohibition upon place" can be tied in to the Situationist idea of the spectacle. In visual terms, Jenks (1995: 155) describes the urban spectacle as "that which constitutes the visual convention and fixity of contemporary imagery. It is a reactionary force in that it resists interpretation. It is a prior appropriation of the visual into the from of the acceptably viewable, and this "acceptability" befits the going order." In short "the spectacle indicates rules of what to see and how to see it.". The City is Sinclair's example of totally spectacularised urban space. It is, in his words, "a totally controlled environment, a studio with the lid firmly on" (1998: 89). This is a studio that films in real time: surveillance pervades the square mile. In Sinclair's view, surveillance epitomises the parlous way 80s-style capitalism imposed univocal hegemony over the city's innate, anarchic, poetic multivalency. As Sinclair sums up "surveillance is a form of erasure" (1998: 39), a way to limit and eventually eliminate all threats to hegemonic power.

In opposition to this, Sinclair educes Luke Howard, the inventor of cloud typology and re-visits the hidden mythology of the city. Howard observed the sky in the way Sinclair perceives the poet as observing the city: attuned to its existence, attentive to its modulations and caprices, and dedicated to fathoming its secrets. Contrary to contemporary surveillance,

Howard's vigil 'under' the skies is seen as embodying the creative possibilities of observation, like *flânerie*. This creation of poetic potential from the seemingly random patterns of nature (which influenced contemporaries of Howard such as Constable, Shelley and Goethe) is paradigmatic for Sinclair and his relation to the city as poetic inspiration and influence. For Sinclair, the mythology of the city and the historical artefacts found within its limits provide not only precedents for the current state of affairs but also a welter of paths not taken, unoptioned futures which contain the possibility of renewal. History that can be rewritten. This refashioning and re-use of historic, mythic and artistic elements was termed *détournement* by the Situationists and will be the subject of the following rubric.

This London of unending poetic *détournement* dominates Sinclair's interest. According to Schlaeger, referring to the title *Lights Out for the Territory*, a quotation from Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, for Sinclair London is "a territory in the sense Huck Finn uses the term when threatened by Aunt Sally's idea of an orderly life and a decent upbringing" (2003: 55) i.e. an unbounded domain into which he can flee. This 'territory' is the polyvalent London that opens itself up to his poetic "compulsive associationism" (Perril, 1999: 315), into which he can escape from the univalent "spectacle". Sinclair's city is the heterotopic metropolis, to employ Foucault's teminology (this will be looked at in

greater depth in the following section on White's *The Flâneur*, in the consideration of which Foucault's ideas play a more important role). The concept of heterotopia is extremely rich in implication, but for Gennochio (1995), heterotopia takes two main forms, both of which are relevant to Sinclair's interests in *Lights Out*. The first is the juxtaposition in a single urban space of several places that are themselves incompatible, but which are mutually illuminating. We see this in Hackney, when Sinclair's *flânerie* brings him to a Haïtian Voodoo boutique where "Dalston (is) twinned with Port-au-Prince" and "this place becomes that place" (1998: 16). This city of myriad groups and peoples, though endorsed, is not the major focus for excursions in *Lights Out*. Instead, Sinclair concentrates on the second, paraphysical, signification deduced by Gennochio: the discursive heterotopia, the existence of multifarious compossible discourses and meanings within one space. This is the city as "a scene for multiple self projections, a space teeming with endless signification, a poly-palimpsestuous site inviting endless discoveries, mythopoeic activities in every direction" (Resina, 2003: 55). That is to say, the city as the richest, most complex poem possible, and as the basis for untold poetic extrapolations.

From *détournement* to poetry

The Situationists attempted to shape a form of critique derived from the insights of Marxism, but tailored to the twentieth-century "society of the spectacle", which they saw as being based on enforced consumption rather than the class domination of production Marx identified. By way of their techniques of psychogeography, the Situationists sought out congenial, unspectacularised spaces in the city (which they termed "unités d'ambiance") in order to preserve them, or at least highlight the importance of their existence (though they did combat the appropriation of city space through their technique of *détournement*). Whilst Sinclair shares some these preoccupations and their anti-Establishment stance, in his investigative reading of the physical city he concentrates more on encroaching onto enemy territory to indulge in critical guerilla meaning-formation. His foray into the City of London in the "Bulls & Bears and Mithraic Misalignments" excursion demonstrates this tactic through his use of City mythology, derived from such varied sources as the temple of Mithras and the old practices of bear-baiting and bull-running, to lambast the current state of the square mile.

The methodology that Sinclair and the Situationists employ in the course of their *flânerie* is strikingly similar. The Situationists comprehend "buildings through their use, their history, and their collective and associative generation of meaning and mood, life, poetry" (Sadler, 1998: 69). This applies equally for Sinclair in *Lights Out*. Sinclair comprehends

the city through what could be termed a 'poetic' reading. In the first of his excursions, entitled "Skating on Thin Eyes", Sinclair juxtaposes his experience of reading the city (often in a literal way, through graffitti) with the installation poem of the artist Richard Makin, which itself is presented in the format of graffiti. In its turn, his discussion of Makin's poetry illuminates not only this artist's work but seemingly also Sinclair's conception of the poetic city as it opens itself up to the *flâneur*-poet. Sinclair expounds "the artist (must) work within the constraints of synonyms, associations, etymology", adding that this is in order "to focus heterogeneous responses to the subject environment and its broader surroundings" (1998: 5). Makin's "seminaruim" (sic) functions as a metaphor not just for Sinclair's experience of the city, but also for the narrative pattern taken by his subsequent textual reproduction of it.

In this regard, it is important to bear in mind the idea of the 'urban text', as, in a sense, it is this that subtends the notion of the poetry of the city. If the city is a text, for Sinclair, it is one that was being increasingly dominated by a hegemonic Conservative discourse at the time that the individual essays that eventually coalesced into *Lights Out* were being written. Through his reworking of the *dérive*, he picks up on stories and histories of place to fashion a discordant voice in opposition to this dominant discourse. As Sadler says of the Situationists' procedures: "too much of the city had already been 'written' in the language of spectacle,

so psychogeographers unashamedly reread Situationist meanings into the streets, an old technique of *flânerie*" (1998: 99). The Situationists termed this technique *détournement*.

Détournement is a word of some semantic richness in French, including amongst its connotations ideas of diversion, corruption and hijacking. Debord says *détournement* is "short for *détournement* of pre-existing aesthetic elements. The integration of present or past artistic productions into a superior construction of a milieu" (Knabb, 1981: 45). Although this declaration was proffered on the subject of their re-configuration of elements extracted from artistic works, it can be validly applied to images of the city (the inherent artifice of which was discussed in the introduction). Indeed, as Sadler points out, the psychogeographical Situationists made the city "resistant to rationalisation by the layering of its pasts" (1998: 119). That is to say, the creative re-deployment of its histories, myths and representations. In terms of Sinclair's reading of the city, this can be seen in his incorporation of old myths, popular history and current affairs, through his *flânerie*, to reveal the secret patterns underlying London. Returning to his exploration of the City of London, Sinclair thunders "bilious with overripe speculations, high with ascents, cod "discoveries", authentic blisters. We've gazed down on the prospects of the city from so many church towers, it's almost as if seeing a pattern was creating it. As if walks linking discrete sites could manifest some

miraculous whole, complete with the gears and bearings of that secret machine" (1998: 127). *Détournement,* as practised by Sinclair, is a dialectical movement, revealing the construction of hegemonic meaning in physical space, which follows a similar - albeit limiting - procedure to his own, priming these places with a plethora of new meanings, before dynamiting them into a thousand associations.

Like that of the Situationists, Sinclair's *détournement* functions as "a negation of the value of the previous organisation of expression" (Guy Debord in Knabb, 1981: 55). One of the major issues Sinclair takes on is the re-branding of districts of the city, the semantic straight-jackets by which it is constrained in the name of redevelopment. Another issue is: in the name of whom and for whose benefit does this redevelopment take place? Schlaeger says "Public policies have increasingly taken advantage of the dramatically increased opportunity for visual propaganda. Manipulation of perceptions of any kind, the staging of illusions, the grand gestures of representational activities are now easier than ever to carry out. This is obvious from the way politics increasingly uses the new freedom to invent, construct and revisualise our perception for the politicians own benefit" (Resina, 2003: 52). In *Lights Out,* Sinclair explores the various uses of city representations in profiteering redevelopment. Such manoeuvres, all in the interests of real estate value, range from a "billboard poster that boasts of its (the Isle of Dogs) heritage derided as

exploiting "dead dockers queuing for a day's work"" (1998: 41) to the patronage of poet and performance artist Brian Catling's installation in Docklands exemplifying "how the developers, Dockland's underwriters, used art to pimp the territory, bring in the chattering classes" (*ibid*: 258). Sinclair's *détournement* of recuperated aspects of the textual city is a way of freeing the play of meaning within the metropolis. He vitiates monolithic uses of these representations by exaggerating them to meaninglessness, or jamming them with the random associations they evoke, thus re-writing the city in a poetical form. In his discussion of the work of Gavin Jones, one of many reflection on other artist's work in *Lights Out* that comment obliquely on his own enterprise, Sinclair declares: "The sterility of the Isle of Dogs was questioned by the sculptor's frantic acts, his predatory laughter. If the skyline was to be dominated by a crop of alien, vertical exclamation marks in mirror glass, then we must burrow like moles. We must eat earth. The life-force of the city is measured in the candlepower of its keepers, the activators place whose follies must be as imagination as those of the developers and despoilers" (1998: 246)

Textual Construction

Lights Out is a dense, intricate, overwhelming work; fractal, moving at breakneck speed. In this way it attempts to convey something of the

phenomenology of the city as experienced during the *flâneries* of the author. Explaining his conception of *flânerie*, Sinclair states "the born again *flâneur* is a stubborn creature, less interested in texture and fabric, eavesdropping on philosophical conversational pieces, than in noticing everything…walking, moving across a retreating streetscape stitches it all together: the illicit cocktail of bodily exhaustion and a raging carbon monoxide high" (1998: 4). This neatly summarises the way in which *flânerie* is used as a principle for textual construction in *Lights Out.*

The form *Lights Out* takes seems to follow Sinclair's scopic perception of London in that it concurrently presents to the reader both the textual city and London as a collection of legible signs. Thus, In *Lights Out,* the textual city is not secondary to the city-as-text. Through Sinclair's catholic interest in the capital, London consists of "layers of myths, episodes, histories, remembered impressions, stories, texts and pictorial superimpositons such as…paintings and films". The textual city is immanent to its physical counterpart for Sinclair and this is an important factor in his reading of the city. According to Mengham, Sinclair has spent most of his life and much of his shoeleather investigating the question of where London begins and ends (2001: 173). London functions as a sort of archive for Sinclair, storing data for the construction of his poetry and prose. As well as an indictment of London at the time of its composition, *Lights Out* functions as an anthology of Sinclair's poles of interest in the

metropolis. As Schlaeger argues "references to films and poems, to biographical and autobiographical episodes of city life, are never introduced as mere additions to or illustrations of a main text because there is no main text – only an assortment of subtexts barely held together by what Sinclair calls his quest". This interest in the "question" of London functions as the magnetic north of Sinclair's metropolitan navigations, and consequently also plays that role in *Lights Out*.

This conjunction of the two ways in which the metroplis can be legible for the *flâneur* indicates the overall form that Sinclair's reading of the city takes. Watson declares "Sinclair stares at reality with the same attention as an art-critic an artwork" (webpage consulted on 20/05/2003). Building on this insight, it can be said that Sinclair reads the city as a poem. His "compulsive associationism" has already been mentioned, and taken in conjunction with his psychogeographical attention to the mood created by place and other attendant concerns, such as the intertextuality of the metropolis, the case can be made for Sinclair as a poetical *flâneur*

Part of Sinclair's textual strategy in *Lights Out* seems to be the construction of what one might term textual "situations". For the Situationists, the situation is essentially the critical negation of the spectacle. As with all their theoretical constructs, this was a vague concept that could take many forms. Sadler, in an attempt to define the *situation construite* delineates its basic components as "some sort of performance"

and the treatment of "all space and all people as performers" (1998: 119). We can see something of this idea colouring sections of *Lights Out*. For instance, in the excursion entitled "Archer's Prospects", Sinclair and Atkins inveigle an invitation to view the art collection in Lord Archer's penthouse on the south bank of the Thames. Rather than focusing on Archer and his Mr Toad-like antics, Sinclair uses him as a benchmark to measure "the social temper of an era". The river view his "Lambeth Gaff" affords leads Sinclair to reflect on the M16 Headquarters, which "along with the hollow boast of Canary Wharf and County Hall, the deposed GLC Ghost Barracks…taken together, give us a new definition of shame" (1998: 162). This is a prime example of the *détournement* of the built environment; Sinclair uses these three monuments to the temporal power of construction, destruction and surveillance as brickbats against the Establishment. The textual reproduction of his visit to Archer's London residence also provides a good example of how Sinclair '*détourns*' mythic and historical elements in order to comment on the actions and effects on London of Archer and people of his ilk. Sinclair links Archer and his contemporaries to the history of alchemy and Elias Ashmole, which have strong associations with the South Bank area. In Sinclair's own words, Ashmole was "a careerist, a Tory, a royalist, and an occultist as a secondary activity, which is to do with collecting and controlling forms of energy" (Internet interview consulted on 20/05/2003). The evocation of

this shadowy figure provides a dialectical response to the tireless self-promotion Sinclair sees as characteristic of Archer and his set, and of their use of the city. Even Ashmole's alchemical dabblings find their parallel in the actions of the Tory peer and part time novelist. Sinclair explains, tongue firmly in cheek, "Archer, I feel sure, is not literally an alchemist, but the metaphor applies in that he turns his tawdry stuff into gold". In his treatment of Lord Archer, we see Sinclair's use of *détournment* and the *dérive* coinciding with another key, interrelated, Situationist gambit (i.e. the use of humour). Whilst making no further progress on the Situationist's failed attempt to construct a better society, and indeed showing little interest in doing so, Sinclair effectively adopts their techniques to puncture the monolithic self-regard and self-image of the Establishment, and to re-introduce poetic play into their representations of the city.

Paris, Capital of the twenty-first Century

White's *The Flâneur*, although the most explicit in its citation and discussion of the notion of *flânerie*, is, paradoxically, the work in which its physical activity plays the smallest role. Written on White's return to his native America after a sojourn of 16 years in Paris, *The Flâneur* represents more a synthesis of the author's hopes for the French capital than a description of a physical traversal of the city. The manner in which

these hopes are defended can be problematised in relation to Foucault's idea of the heterotopia and Marin's notion of Utopics. Before moving on to these, it is useful to look first at White's observation of Paris in order better to discuss how his technique of *flanerie* impacts on the relevance of these concepts.

Despite the paucity of pedestrian *flânerie*, White firmly inscribes his observation of the metropolis in the lineage of great Parisian *flâneur*s. He declares "Paris is a world meant to be seen by the walker alone, for only the pace of strolling can take in all the rich detail" (2001: 34), setting out both his conception of Paris (its 'big-cityness' i.e. the heterogeneity it encompasses) and his methodology of apprehending it. In the guise of a consideration of the *flâneur* in history (no demarcation is made, suggesting that White would adhere to Tester's suggestion that *flânerie* and the *flâneur* are quintessentially Parisian (Tester, 1994)), we can see that White's description applies equally well to his own undertaking. Referring to the account of an Italian traveller in Paris dating from 1577, White avers that "looking at people has always been the Parisian's favourite pastime" (2001: 34). White's account of Paris, as we shall see, is above all concerned with its inhabitants, past and present.

The Flâneur, while closely tied in to physical spaces within the French capital, really represents, to paraphrase its subtitle, "a stroll through the *biographies* of Paris". These *bioi* begin with a discussion of

the most prominent of Parisian *flâneurs*. Quoting from Baudelaire's *Painter of Modern Day Life*, White says "the *flâneur* enters into the crowd as into an immense reservoir of electricity"; and then refers to Baudelaire's kaleidoscopic metaphor describing the *flâneur* as "a consciousness that at every shake of the tube copies the configuration of multifarious life and the graceful movements of all its elements" (2001: 36). White obviously regards the teeming crowds of the new Paris he identifies as 'electric', yet he does not move within them, preferring to consider them benevolently from afar, a diversion from the technique of *flânerie* that is crucial for *The Flâneur*. From the 'multifarious' marginal populations and histories of Paris, White sees emerge the possibility of Paris as "the capital of the 21st century", to quote the Goytisolo essay he refers to at length in the second chapter of *The Flâneur*. It is important, here, to bear in mind Hetherington's observation that "margins are not only things pushed to the edge, they can also be in-between spaces, spaces of traffic, right at the centre of things" (1998: 107). In White's terms these spaces are "in the cracks", in places of physical centrality, such as the Marais, but obscured by official representations of the city. As Hetherington (1998: 136) points out "marginality…is not something that exists within a site, it is constituted in the representation of that site in practice".

After discussing the lineage of the *flâneur* from Mercier to Baudelaire, via Atget to Breton, White reaches Walter Benjamin, in his

view "the last of the great literary *flâneurs"* (2001: 45). Benjamin, the adopted Parisian, makes for an interesting comparison with White. Describing the *flâneur* as autochthonous to the French capital, a view Benjamin himself shared, White has no compunction about donning this quintessentially Parisian persona in his assessment of the status of Paris as a modern metropolis. Indeed, in his discussion of Collette, he claims that "one can make a good case that only foreigners can properly judge a contemporary - distance gives the objectivity that time will eventually provide even to compatriots" (2001: 28). White's assertion would seem equally to apply in his mind to his analysis of the city as a *flâneur*, in which he mixes the knowledge garnered from residence in Paris, both real and as a topos of 'dead data', with the outside appreciation of a sympathetic foreign visitor. This mirrors the argument that underlies *The Flâneur*, namely that Paris is all the richer for its "big-cityness", which in a sense is the capacity of the metropolis to synthesise the foreign and the native.

At first White provides a simple gloss on his notion of 'big-cityness', stating that an index of a city's bigness is given "by what you can find in it" (2001: 8). The quirkiness of Paris fascinates White, and he happily wanders through some of its anomalies. These range from the various places one can go to ballroom dance the afternoon away (where elderly ladies waltz with young gigolos) to a Russian restaurant serving

nothing but caviar, through to the Parisian equivalent of a greasy spoon where the waiting staff take turns singing like the French cabaret stars of yesteryear.

However, For White, this idea of "big-cityness" goes much deeper than mere idiosyncrasy. In the first chapter, White reflects on the attraction Paris has exerted over the world's imagination. He sketches out some of the perceptions of the city from the time of the French Revolution to the stereotypes of Paris as the intellectual centre of the world in the early twentieth-century, via a consideration of its emblematic spaces on the Left Bank (such as the cafés along the Boulevard Saint-Germain and the student world of the Sorbonne and the Latin quarter). Now, however, "Paris itself has become a cultural backwater" (White, 2001: 22). Its artistic and intellectual life has been submerged by "boutiquification" (ibid: 18) and its public culture now consists of merely curating the city as a museum of "what is lugubriously named '*le patrimoine*'" (ibid: 50). White's *flâneur* is "unhappy" with the "elegiac feeling hanging over this city with the gilded cupola gleaming above the Emperor's tomb and the foaming, wild horses prancing out of a sea of verdigris on the roof of the Grand Palais" (ibid: 51). White's *flâneur* is not interested in the trappings and now commodified products of Paris's erstwhile creativity and spontaneity, but rather these qualities themselves as they infused the city and attracted the world to Paris. White defends the possibility of Paris

moving away from this ossified, heritage-attraction world, and recovering its *élan* by drawing on the surge of hybrid Parisian identities assembling on its margins. This valorisation of minority cultures is, however, increasingly becoming a mainstay of the promotion of Western European capitals. Whether these can survive their commodification, in a way 'traditional' Paris could not, is another question entirely.

Heterotopias and Utopics

After citing with approval a eulogy by Balzac (who, for all his genius, was criticised as bourgeois and reactionary by his detractors) of the vitality of nineteenth-century Paris, White laments "since Balzac's day, of course, Paris has changed. No-one is too ambitious since its populace is now cosseted in the meagre but constant comforts of the welfare state" (2001: 16). For White, the Paris of today has been reduced to being a mediocre caretaker of the trappings of its past glory. However White is very explicit as to where the city's hopes for a renaissance lie: "The *flâneur* should turn away from matronly, pearly-grey Paris, the city built by Napoleon and his henchman, Baron Haussmann, and inhabited by foreign millionaires, five-star hotels, three-star restaurants and embassies: a phantom city. For the real vitality of Paris today lies elsewhere - in Belleville and Barbès, the teeming quarters where Arabs and Asians and blacks live and blend their respective cultures into new hybrids" (2001: 52). In an attempt to demonstrate the possibilities and pitfalls of the

development of this twenty-first century Paris, White's *flânerie* looks, not so much at these areas, but at the history of groups that preceded them in some way, namely Afro-Americans and Jews (in terms of race and religion), and gay Paris, in terms of the tolerance of difference. This reveals what one Internet reviewer termed "the national ambiguity" (Hueston, 09/04/03), namely the curious mix of ground-breaking tolerance (attracting these groups to Paris in the first place), alternating with persecution and vilification. In order better to consider this reading of urban space and its history, itself a form of textual city, it is useful to look first at Foucault's idea of the heterotopia and Marin's concept of Utopics, in particular as they are adapted and employed by Hetherington (1997, 1998). A short discussion of these will allow us to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of the textual construction of *The Flâneur* as a disquisition on White's hopes for the city.

Heterotopia is a term adapted by Foucault from medical discourse and originally referred to anomalous outgrowths such as tumours or extra digits. Returning to its etymological roots in Greek (lit. "other spaces"), Foucault re-deployed this term in a paper delivered to a group of French architects to describe the role of certain 'other' spaces in the present epoch and to speculate on their importance (all quotes from Foucault are taken from the Internet version of "Des Espaces Autres", consulted on 10/05/2003). In this talk, Foucault defended the existence of two types of

heterotopia. The first is the utopia (which will be looked at more closely in Hetherington's consideration of Marin's work on the utopic). The second is what Foucault terms "contre-emplacements". These are sites where mainstream culture can be simultaneously "représenté, contesté et inversé". Hetherington expands on this concept, underlining the status of these "counter-sites" as "'places of otherness', sites constituted in relation to other sites by their difference", a difference "that alternate ordering marks out as Other and allows…to be seen as an alternative example of doing things" (1997: viii).

To elucidate his conception of the heterotopia, Foucault adduces the example of a mirror. While the main point of this example lies elsewhere for Foucault, we can also infer from this metaphor that one of the qualities of the heterotopia is that it allows the beholder to reflect not only on the place from which the act of viewing takes place but also on the society in relation to which a space is constituted as heterotopic. White, it can be argued, not only uses his considerations of the treatment of Paris's minorities in the past as an attempt to reflect on the possibilities of the future, but also to criticise attitudes and opinions that prevailed, and in some cases continue to prevail, in his native America and in Britain, a readership for whom *The Flâneur* seems at least partially intended.

In his paper, Foucault deems the concept of heterotopia cardinal for a consideration of the present day. He commences his talk by declaring:

"L'époque actuelle serait peut-être plutôt l'époque de l'espace, nous sommes à l'époque de la juxtaposition…du proche et du lointain, du côté à côté, du disperse". Expounding on the current preponderance of space over time, he declares that the chronological conceptualisation of the present as a point on a continuum is losing its importance in favour of a spatialised idea of time as "un réseau qui relie des points et qui entrecroise son écheveau". This idea can be seen as the rationale behind propounding biographies of Paris past in order to reflect on the possibilities for the city's future. Foucault concludes this section of his presentation with the assertion that "Peut-être pourrait-on dire que certains des conflits ideologiques qui animent les polémiques d'aujourd'hui se déroulent entre les pieux descendants du temps et les habitants acharnés de l'espace". That the Establishment of Paris, the source of the dominant discourse in the competing voices representing the city as a site of heritage, is a 'pious descendant of time' seems beyond question. This attachment to a historical continuity also seems to forestall any recognition of the nature of Paris as it is today. White speaks of silencing a *mondain* dinner party, when asked how Paris had changed since his arrival in the city, with his observation that today Paris is "a black and tan (and golden yellow) town" (2001: 53).

The concept of heterotopia, as it is used by Foucault, is a nebulous, suggestive one, which is perhaps why it has been taken up by so many people in such divergent ways (See Hetherington 1997, for a discussion of

this). Nevertheless, it is useful to look at some of the principles he establishes as constituting heterotopias in the light of White's apparent aims in *The Flâneur*. Foucault's first principle suggests that heterotopias are derived in some way from, or are in some form of confrontation with, ideas of crisis or deviation (Hetherington prefers the term "incongruity" for the latter). This can be seen in White's idea that the heterotopic spaces of Paris have come to prominence in the course of the French capital's gentle decline and the increasing emergence of groups deviating from the majority ethnicity, religion or sexuality. Foucault's third principle maintains that "l'hétérotopie a le pouvoir de juxtaposer en un seul lieu réel plusieurs espaces, plusieurs emplacements qui sont en eux-mêmes incompatibles". Paris, in its multiethnic condition of 'big-cityness', juxtaposes peoples and practices from all over the globe in one place. That they are considered "incompatible" by certain strains of official discourse is evident from the embarrassed silence with which White's observations were met at his *mondain* dinner-party. The fifth principle developed by Foucault is that "Les hétérotopies supposent toujours un système d'ouverture et de fermeture qui, à la fois, les isole et les rend pénétrables" and that "on ne peut y entrer qu'avec une certaine permission et une fois qu'on a accompli un certain nombre de gestes". This is the terrain of the *flâneur* who, as pointed out in the introduction, is "a figure with privileged insights into, and precious knowledge of, the modern city" (Gilloch, 1999:

105). White traverses historical Paris with an understanding and attentive gaze, which allows him to discover that "in the cracks are those forgotten places that appeal to the *flâneur*, the traces left by people…in the margins - Jews, blacks, gays, Arabs - or mementoes of an earlier, more chaotic and medieval Paris" (2001: 190). Importantly, however, this ability of the *flâneur* is not applied to present-day Paris, which could be seen as compromising White's assertions. The sixth principle returns to Foucault's conception of the mirror, he maintains that "elles ont, par rapport à l'espace restant, une fonction". His discussion of Paris's heterotopic spaces is part of White's gambit to comment not just on Paris, but on the places occupied by the author and also by the reader, as shall be seen.

The heterotopic spaces White discusses, in the positive aspects of their history, are not utopian but rather utopic, to employ Marin's term (see Hetherington 1998). Hetherington describes this as "the spatial practice associated with making utopias, attempts to cross this gap, to create out of an ou-topia, no place, a place whose existence appears insignificant, a eu-topia that can serve as a model for future society" (1998: 128). This returns to the roots of the word coined by Thomas More as a combination of ou-topia (nowhere place) and eu-topia (good place). Hetherington sees utopics as the impulses to move spaces from one category to the other. This ties in with Hetherington's notion of the "arena". As alternative lifestyles are tied to specific spaces there is, in

Hetherington's words, "a relationship between place and identity which, though not causally necessary is made significant through an attachment to a symbolism of Otherness, difference and marginality" (1998: 108). We shall now turn to how these two ideas can be used to elucidate White's textual construction of the city, past and present.

The Biographical *Flâneur*

As maintained in the first section, White is, above all, a biographer of Paris. This affects the textual production of *The Flâneur*, which is based on a metaphorical use of the trope of *flânerie*. Thus, White's narrative proceeds via analogy, comparing and contrasting place with place, life with life, historical period with historical period. The first group White examines are the Arabs and Turks that Goytisolo discusses in his essay "Paris, Capital of the twenty-first century". White does not give a detailed description of their Paris, indicating Goytisolo's work (which he himself draws upon) as being a rich mine of information for anybody interested in reading more. While this is justifiable, it does mean that White's 'case studies' of African-Americans and Jewish Parisians are well known personalities, whose lives are in no way paradigmatic (though the treatment they received is often symptomatic of wider attitudes). White's observation of the new Paris he champions is often from a distance, looking down from friend's windows or from behind the barrier of his

class and race that he gives no suggestion of having tried to traverse. The '*topoi*' White's utopics draw upon are entirely historical and often idiosyncratic in many ways.

Goytisolo, quoted by White, declares that "the only way France can continue to function as a beacon of civilisation, as anything more than a custodian of its great heritage, is by embracing the international, hybridised culture that is already thriving within the city limits" (2001: 54). White's example of the reception and life of Black Americans in Paris is a positive example of what the city's capabilities in this direction. It is, however, concerned with a group who arrived in France in relatively small numbers and with whom the French had negligible historical issues to negotiate (in contrast, for example, to immigrants issuing from their former African colonies). Although their reception and treatment is in many ways a success from which to draw inspiration, it does not mirror the current situation of French Arabs, or even French Caribbeans or immigrants from France's sub-Saharan ex-colonies.

Through White's' discussion of two key biographies (Sidney Bechet and Josephine Baker), we see that Black Americans in Paris found an acceptance, success and mobility to which they could never have aspired in their native land. Bechet, being a man and a French Creole from Louisiana, arguably fared the better of the two. As White summarises, Bechet "had spent the last third of his life in France and become famous

there - but only there" (2001: 69). More importantly perhaps, he found an audience receptive and appreciative of his art, and with an interest in his life and works to a degree which America would not achieve for decades (see 2001: 69-74). Equally for Josephine Baker, although her career was subtended by relatively mild yet nonetheless deleterious forms of racism and sexism (which White does not pass comment on), it is undeniable that she "could never have had the career in the States that she enjoyed in France, for after all she'd reigned supreme in her country of adoption as *the* leading variety artist" (2001: 69). Via these biographies, White shows not just Paris's proud heritage of welcoming and hybridising Black American culture, but also its heterotopic role as a mirror to race attitudes in America. As one Black American soldier declared of post-war France "there is an air of liberty, equality and fraternity here which does not blow in the black man's face in liberty-loving, democratic America" (2001: 65). As a refuge for not just Black American performers, but also artists and intellectuals, who were, in addition, treated as such, Paris became "an offshore base and headquarters for some of the most important thoughts and acts concerning the increasingly volatile issue of race in America" (2001: 81). In terms of Paris itself, White recounts personal testimonies to acts of racism in the city streets and reminds the reader that, not long before *The Flâneur* was published, the *Front National*, France's extreme right-wing party, gained 15% of the vote in national elections. In view of

its leader Le Pen's subsequent successes in the presidential elections, it is clear that, whatever a city's heritage, tolerance is an acquisition that must be continuously and vigilantly safeguarded.

France's treatment of its Jewish minorities, on the other hand, whilst not lacking in achievements, is more an example of the dangers of intolerance. In a sense, the Jewish minority of Paris, concentrated around the Rue des Rosiers in the Marais, serves as another exemplar of the treatment of Paris's ethnically, socially and religiously different inhabitants. France's republican principles of equality and non-differentiation afforded French Jews more rights than Jews elsewhere in Europe and, as a community, exemplified by White through the Camondo family and their munificence towards their host country, they made a great contribution to French society and culture. Yet, on balance, their historical experience in France has been chequered at best, involving religious repression, overt racism, and attempts to divest them of their culture and assimilate them into the rest of the nation. This culminated with the Vichy regime's heinous betrayal of French Jewry, a large percentage of whom perished in the Nazi death camps with no French intercession. White seems to be a partisan of multiculturalism, at odds with France's traditional assimilationist stance on immigration. For him, not only can minorities be part of the nation without sacrificing their differences, they can also criticise and help construct the nation on the same level as autochthones.

This would be ideal, but it is France's very political culture that gives the groups he champions such rights as individuals. Yet France's institutional republicanism enshrines values that are very different to, and often incompatible with, their own. How is this merger between the margins and the mainstream to operate? No such problem existed with secular Jews (although it was perceived to exist) or Black Americans (who didn't really engage with the French population outside certain areas of Paris). The synthesis of this dialectic would seem to be the main obstacle barring Paris's emergence as the "Capital of the twentieth-century" and *The Flâneur* provides no indication of how it may be successfully navigated.

White's discussion of Paris's gay population follows a similar pattern to his consideration of other groups. He discusses historical breakthroughs, such as the first repeal of anti-homosexual laws anywhere in the world, right through to the introduction of PACS (the "pacte de solidarité social") by which any couple could claim marital rights in the eyes of the law after two years of co-habitation. Although the historical treatment of gays is not flawless, White compares France's historical treatment of its gay population with the hysterical and pitiless treatment of Oscar Wilde in England and White's own experiences in his native America. As he explains, when reminiscing about his arrival in France: "I'd been conditioned by three decades of gay life in America to be in a permanent state of alert about possible police raids of bars, baths and

cruising places; equally feared were roving gangs of queer-bashers. But in Paris the streets and parks and saunas and back rooms seemed positively tranquil by contrast" (2001: 157). The real strength of *The Flâneur* is its provision of a heterotopic mirror for the reader to consider the reaction of Britain and America to these issues in the recent past.

White concludes "*Flânerie* is the best way to impose a personal vision on the palimpsest of Paris. It's a bit like being a film director, who puts together his own take on a place by selecting only those scenes that conform to it" (1998: 187). In his utopic discussion of Paris's heterotopias, it would seem that White is doing exactly that. It is questionable, however, whether the scenes he has chosen truly represent the 'rushes' of reality, so to speak. As mentioned earlier, Hetherington sees a fundamental aspect of heterotopia (one that, in his view, distinguishes it from other purely contestatory spaces) as its drive towards a re-ordering of society. In a sense, this is what White is attempting to do in *The Flâneur*, to defend the introduction of these vital spaces into the mortified mainstream of Parisian life and its representations, to push these spaces from ou-topia towards the horizon of an encompassing, but libertarian, eu-topia. *The Flâneur*, though it provides valuable information about how this process has succeeded and faltered in the past, shies away from pinpointing how this should, or could, be realised in the future. White's acquaintance with the Paris he champions so unreservedly seems

to be passing at best, almost entirely theoretical at worst. In this way, it provides an important testimony of the difficulties of translating positive attitudes into action without engagement with the daily reality of the streets. To put it another way, White's work shows the difficulty of theorising "eutopia" from "outopia", no-places precisely because untouched by the *flâneur's* footfall.

A *Flâneur* in Lisbon

José Cardoso Pires's *Lisboa Livro de Bordo* is the only one of the three works discussed in this essay that does not make explicit reference to the concept of *flânerie*. However, in view of the stated physical and textual traversal of the city in his work (and Parkhurst Ferguson's observation that the *flâneur* is partly identified by three key areas of interest: the ordinary social world, his city and the world of art (Tester: 1994)), we can say that Cardoso Pires qualifies, without reserve, as a *flâneur*. Indeed, and paradoxically so, in *Lisboa Livro de Bordo* Cardoso Pires comes the closest of all the authors considered to following the observational and narrative methodology (if not revolutionary aims or deductions) of perhaps the most self-reflexive *flâneur* and theorist of *flânerie*, Walter Benjamin. Both are unequivocal about the paramount role of the city in their textual production. Cardoso Pires declares wistfully that "já te disse

e contradisse, Lisboa, e sempre em amor sofrido"[2] (2001: 11), while Benjamin asserts, in a letter to Gershom Scholem "Where is my production plant located? It is located…in Berlin" (quoted in Gilloch, 1999a: 56). In this chapter, the themes, motifs and methodology present in *Lisboa Livro de Bordo* will be examined in light of Benjamin's investigation of the city in order to elucidate Cardoso Pires's' work.

Cardoso Pires's work, concerned as it is with the analysis of aspects of city life, the examination of his native Lisbon as it subsists in memory and the scrutiny of urban artefacts, will be mapped on to the confluence of these avenues of investigation in Benjamin's theories of the Urban. Benjamin deals with these areas, respectively, in his *stadtbilder* ("literary snapshots" of, most prominently, the Naples and Moscow of his day), his *Berlin Chronicle* (a portrait of the turn-of-the-century city constructed from reminiscences of his youth) and his "ur-history of the twentieth-century", the *Arcades Project*. In the latter, Benjamin discusses the historical *flâneur* at length. However, it is in the *stadtbilder* and the *Berlin Chronicle* that the most thoroughgoing use of *flânerie* as an observational and narrative device is made. It is in this context, with special regard to Gilloch's analysis of Benjamin's engagement with the city (1999a) that *Lisboa Livro de Bordo* will be discussed here.

---

[2] "I've spoken and gainsaid you, Lisbon, and always with a fraught love"

Gilloch (1999a) identifies several key dimensions to Benjamin's concern with the city: the physiognomical, the phenomenological, the mythological, the historical and the textual. *Lisboa Livro de Bordo* will be looked at in this section and compared to some of Benjamin's ideas and writings, using these dimensions as parameters rather than discrete categories. According to Gilloch, for Benjamin's physiognomical gaze "the key to understanding social life is, on one level, located in the physical structures of the cities themselves" (1999a: 6). Benjamin was particularly interested in how historical 'traces' of other times linger in the city and how their true meaning could be revealed in what he termed their 'afterlife'. Of particular interest to Benjamin were the statues of Imperial Berlin seen through the optic of Weimar Germany. In two key passages Cardoso Pires examines two of Lisbon's statues, in a way that is revealing of his view of the epistemology of history in the city and significant for his textual aims in *Lisboa Livro de Bordo*. The physiological analysis of history as it lives on in the physical structure of the city dovetails in Benjamin's work with another two of his concerns: city mythology and urban archaeology (this latter a mix of Benjamin's physiognomical and historical gaze, being concerned with reading the layers of history that encrust urban space).

A phenomenological observation of the city was paramount to Benjamin. For Gilloch (1999a), this consisted in identifying and

examining the overlooked, mundane experiences of the urban population with a view to writing the experience of the city 'from below'. Benjamin was engaged, according to Gilloch, in the representation of the city as "a landscape of noisy life" (1999: 7). One of Cardoso Pires's main preoccupations in *Lisboa Livro de Bordo*, is with what he sees as the soul of the city: the speech of its people. As quoted in the introduction, Frisby (Tester, 1994: 82) sees the activity of listening as an integral part of the *flâneur's* pursuit of observation. The subtitle Cardoso Pires annexes to the work - "vozes, olhares, memorações"[3] - is indicative of not only how the work implicitly aligns itself with the lineage of the *flâneur*, but also of how important the 'voice' of *Lisbon* is to its narrative economy.

This interest in the overlooked aspects of the city ties in with what Benjamin identified as a key characteristic of the *flâneur*: an eye and interest for 'periphera' (Gilloch, 1999a: 7). Gilloch sums this up thus: "Benjamin passed by the landmarks of the city, and instead was preoccupied with and stressed the significance of apparently banal and trivial features of the metropolis" (1999a: 7). Echoing this sentiment Cardoso Pires says that it is necessary for the observer, the *flâneur*, to "desatender à beleza do evidente"[4] (2001: 37). Walter Benjamin says of Franz Hessel's depiction of their native Berlin "the superficial pretext - the exotic and the picturesque - appeal only to the outsider" (1999: 262) and,

---

[3] "Voices, gazes, rememorations"

for his part, Cardoso Pires happily eschews the guidebook-friendly Lisbon "o *slide* oficial, as setas do turismo, alfamas, miradouros, fados fadários" (2001: 37) that has become all but invisible to its inhabitants such as the Cristo-Rei or the Torre de Belem in favour of such out of the way places ("rosas íntimas da paisagem consagrada"[5]) (2001: 40) as Poço do Bispo, with its intriguing ambience of a "largo de província esquecido"[6] lined with incongruous Art Déco buildings, or the Arqueduto das Águas Livres from which the infamous but little known Diogo Alves tossed his victims to their death. As outlined in the introduction, intrigue and interest provide the motive rationale behind the *flâneur*'s trajectory, and Cardoso Pires takes in and ponders such eccentricities as a huge apple set into the *calçada*[7] outside a *croissenteria* and the word "electricidade" outside a funerary agents. It is these anomalous, idiosyncratic curiosities, with their margin for imagination, that fascinate the *flâneur* more than trite monuments and tired sights.

Street Spirit: Reading, and Listening to, the City

Gilloch (1999b: 105) declares, apropos of Benjamin's use of the figure: "the *flâneur* becomes the urban archaeologist. *Flânerie* leads into the depths, achieves an intimate acquaintance with the buried secrets of the

---

[4] "Pay no heed to the beauty of the obvious"
[5] "the intimate roses of the consecrated landscape"
[6] "forgotten provincial square"
[7] mosaic pavement

cityscape". Gilloch identifies two moments of Benjamin's urban historiography (1999a: 13), ones that Cardoso Pires shares: the archaeological, which is "an approach concerned with the salvation and preservation of the objects and traces of the past that modern society threatens to destroy", and the memorial, which aims to "oppose the modern propensity for amnesia, to remember those whose struggles…in the past would otherwise be forgotten". These, however, can only be achieved when the deceptive and illusory representations of the city have been critically disassembled. One of the major ways in which the city and its history are presented duplicitously is through monuments and statues, the ways in which official discourse attempts to brand a city's history and personality.

In *Lisboa Livro de Bordo*, Cardoso Pires dedicates two log entries to two Lisbon monuments: the statues of São José Tomás and of Dom Pedro IV, where it is evident, in Gilloch's words, that "in the monuments of the city, the past becomes phantasmagorical" (1999a: 177). Benjamin's unmasking of the phantasmagorical is linked to his interest in the mythological. This concept is a complex topos in Benjamin's thought, but for the purposes of this essay the mythological may be considered as "erroneous thought and misrecognition", a "deceptive vision of the past" and, in sum, "the antithesis of truth and human freedom" (Gilloch, 1999a: 171). A similar conception can be clearly seen in Cardoso Pires's

consideration of the statue of São José Tomás, which Cardoso Pires had already used in his novel *Balada da Praia dos Cães* to allegorise the state of Portugal under the Salazarist dictatorship, a regime he describes as "um bestiário de terror, da mediocridade e da superstição"[8] (2001: 27).

One of Benjamin's key concepts in his decipherment of the city was the monadological image, an image summing up the totality from whence it is drawn. Cardoso Pires uses this statue to epitomise the true nature of the Salazar regime. He explains that São José Tomás is really Sousa Martins, a minor doctor at the school of medicine and an avowed atheist. Under the Salazar regime his memory was corrupted and, with the connivance of the Church, he was canonised and credited with the power to heal the faithful. Cardoso Pires explains that, under the dictatorship, which used Catholicism explicitly with a view to maintaining the populace uneducated and obedient, the statue "iluminava-se a velas pobres e tinha à volta muletas, óculos de cego e botas macabras que os seus milagres tinham tornado desnecessários, pezinhos e mãos de cera, orelhas, seios de virgens - um estendal de orgãos ortopédicas e de mimosas *morceaux choisi* do corpo humano, abandonados às flores e à duração"[9] (2001: 15). These phantasmagorical ex-votos provide a telling image of the superstitious, mythological (in the Benjaminian sense) Portugal built on the oppression

---

[8] "a bestiary of terror, mediocrity and superstition"
[9] "was lit up with cheap candles and surrounded by crutches, dark glasses for the blind and macabre boots that his (São José Tomás) miracles had made unnecessary, little waxen feet and hands, ears, virgin's breast – a display of orthopaedic organs and dainty "morceaux choisis" of the human body, abandoned to

and deception of ordinary people. The statue can perform this monadological role because it now finds itself in its "afterlife". This is the state when, for Benjamin, the truth of an object can be deduced, when it is on the point of oblivion, when its original context has disappeared. Gilloch says that "as an object falls into a state of ruination (not necessarily a physical degradation in Benjamin's terms), the pretensions which accompanied its construction crumble, and its truth is unfolded" (2001: 75). At this point, history can be "brushed against the grain", to show the truths occluded by these monuments. Now both São José Tomás and Sousa Martins are names found in history books, and the only thing surrounding the "santo herético"[10] are "pequenas placas de mámore com nomes de gratidão como cartões endereçados à eternidade"[11] (2001: 15).

The fragility and untrustworthiness of monuments are also shown through the statue of Dom Pedro IV that presides over central Lisbon's main square, the Rossio and that, in reality, is an effigy of emperor Maximilian of Mexico. That this known impostor has reigned untouched over almost a century of republican Portugal speaks volumes for the ultra-conservative Salazar regime, as does the fact that it has become just "um caso para entreter"[12] speaks volumes about modern Portuguese society and politics. Regarding Benjamin's *modus operandi*, Gilloch states "the

---

the flowers and the passage of time"
[10] "Heretic saint"
[11] "Small marble plaques inscribed with grateful names like letters addressed to eternity"
[12] "An interesting anecdote"

destructive moment of critical physiognomical reading is balanced by a constructive impulse. To the monuments of the city, Benjamin counterpoises his own memorials" (1999a: 75) Cardoso Pires opposes to this statue the memory of his friend, the poet Alexandre O'Neill, much as Benjamin countervails his critical unmasking of the Siegessäule Victory Column with the image of a friend, the poet Fritz Heinle, who committed suicide in protest at the outbreak of the First World War.

Rather than concentrate on the instrumentalisation and exploitation of the people of Lisbon which underlies the history of these statues, Cardoso Pires prefers to remember his friend O'Neill, who, for him, "foi o poeta que decifrou os versos e os reversos dos traquinices da Lisboa dos nossos dias, conhecia-a como ninguém pelos quês e pelas vírgulas a falar"[13] (2001: 13). O'Neill and his work represent Lisbon, both in the sense of symbolising the city and in recreating it artistically. Indeed, the recollection of his friend O'Neill is part of a wider effort to wrest the Rossio from its slumber as a mere backdrop for this faintly ridiculous relic and remember it as a memorial to the practices, the life it harboured as a "praça de tertúlias das letras e da política"[14] (2001: 13), the haunt of himself and his peers during the Salazar years and the site of their struggles against it. This intimate interweaving of people and place

---

[13] "Was the poet that deciphered the verses and marginalia of latter day Lisbon's mischievous nature, her knew it better than anyone through the interjections and pauses of its speech"

[14] "Square of literary and political meetings"

exemplifies the idea Benjamin defended concerning the "regimen cities keep over imagination" (2000:318), namely the fact that "the veil it (the city) has covertly woven out of our lives shows the images of people less than those of the sites of our encounters with others or ourselves" (ibid.).

It must not be forgotten that Benjamin had "a dialectical view of myth" (Gilloch 1999a: 10). For Cardoso Pires too, there are some myths that can be appropriated and refashioned to symbolise the city more accurately. This is the case of the crows, which in legend accompanied São Vicente's dead body as it floated into the city. This is the mythological origin of the birds that were to be found in the city in former times. One of the mainstays of Cardoso Pires's work is that one of the true faces of Lisbon is the "Lisboa Popular", and he finds the most apposite symbol for this in the crows that have slipped, almost unheeded, into the city's imaginary. They are to be found everywhere in the city, from the municipal flag to *fado* lyrics, from the names of streets, squares and alleys, to a famous painting of Fernando Pessoa by Júlio Pomar, where one of the birds perches with pride on the poet's shoulder. Cardoso Pires describes them fantastically, making them emblematic of the city (at least, the city as it was) of the people, as "irónicos e sabedores…figuras dotadas de sentido de vizinhança e de instincto popular. Andaram séculos pelas tascas, as tascas foram a escola onde aprenderam…o dia-a-dia local…era lá que, ao correr do vinho…os ditos e as estórias tinham o sabor travesso que

marcava o território cultural e tudo isto somado valia de muito para um corvo citadino"[15] (2001: 16).

Cardoso Pires contrasts the crow, a wilful, ludic representation of the city and *Lisboetas*, with representatives of the powers behind the deceitful statues, calling it "uma ave ao deus-dará, sem sagrado nem nobreza (ao contrário da pomba das escrituras ou da águia dos Impérios"[16] (2001: 17). This symbol of Lisbon, however, is problematic. The presence of crows in the now metropolitan Lisbon is almost nonexistent, as, almost, are the *tascas* and the urban habits to which they played host. The city, the people and the practices these crows represent are no longer a common feature of modern life, but rather, in words of Resina (2003), of the 'after-image' of Lisbon in the author's mind.

Lisbon Log-book

Nicole touches on one of the difficulties concerning the textual production of the *flâneur* with his observation that one of the pitfalls of city writing is its reduction of urban space's iconicity to mere symbolism (see Caws, 1991: 124). In C.S. Peirce's semiotics, an icon is a symbol that partakes of the same characteristics as what is symbolised. One of Nicole's

---

[15] "Ironic and knowledgeable…figures endowed with a sense of neighbourliness and a popular instinct. They frequented the "tascas" for centuries, the "tascas" (neighbourhood restaurants) were the school where they learnt about local everyday life…it was there, as the wine flowed, that…the stories and comments had the mischievous flavour that characterised the cultural territory and all this added up was invaluable for the city-dwelling crows"

[16] "A bird on the wing, without sanctity or nobility, contrary to the dove of the scriptures or the eagle of empire"

main examples of the type of iconicity that cities possess, and that is often omitted from their representations, is the particular accents and speech patterns that often tie people to cities. He explains that the accent of a people is part of a city's history, not just representation of it; it is a direct experience of history, and of being in the city (*ibid)*. Heavily influenced by modernist techniques, the maintenance of the city's iconicity was a major concern of Benjamin's textual production also. As Gilloch puts it "Benjamin seeks to produce texts which not only give an account of the city, but have metropolitan experience fundamentally embedded in them: form and content coalesce" (1999a: 19). This aim is fundamental for Cardoso Pires, for whom the soul of Lisbon is in "a cor da voz"[17] (2001; 18), a quality that abounds in *Lisboa Livro de Bordo*, thus presenting the key characteristic directly to the reader. Cardoso Pires says of Alexandre O'Neill that "leio-o e, a cada frase, estou a ouvir a cidade na tal entoação que a torna singular"[18] (2001; 19). This perfectly describes Cardoso Pires's own achievement in *Lisboa Livro de Bordo*.

In the manner of Benjamin (whose commentaries on Baudelaire, Hessel, Atget et al. are often germane to his own approach to the study of cities), Cardoso Pires's observations on O'Neill and his poetry speak volumes for his own relationship to Lisbon, both affective and textual.

---

[17] "the colour of its voice"
[18] "I read him and, in each phrase, I hear the city in that lilt that makes it unique"

Lisboa Livro de Bordo is full of examples of "lisbonense cerrado"[19] from demotic verbal tics such as the interjection "rapaz!"[20] to carefully wrought speech that exploits the resources of the 'português popular", to the asides of Sebastião Opus Night, a character from Cardoso Pires's novel *Alexandre Alpha* (which is also set in Lisbon), who accompanies the author on certain walks. To give an example, passing by the statue of Pessoa seated outside the *A Brasileira* café, Cardoso paraphrases the opinion this character, a sour drunkard, holds of Pessoa: "lá esta ele…o pai de todos os desempregados que andam aos poemas por esse Tejo fora"[21] (2001: 28). Cardoso Pires identifies the crux of the city's speech in "aquele trilar ladino assente no mandar-vir e no cuspir-fininho com que o Lisboeta tece o seu discurso mais traquejado"[22] (2001: 19) that he finds in Alexandre O'Neill. Cardoso Pires defines "cuspir-fininho" as "contestar com argúcia pelo avesso"[23] (2001: 18) and "mandar-vir" could be described, politely, as insisting volubly and intransigently for the veracity of one's own version of events. According to Cardoso Pires "é realmente a cuspir-fino e a mandar-vir que se trabalha o intruso e se dá expediente à discussão"[24] (2001: 18). This is what Cardoso Pires attempts to do in *Lisboa Livro de Bordo*.

---

[19] "thick Lisbonese"
[20] "mate!"
[21] "there he is…the father of all those layabouts that scribble poems on the banks of the Tagus"
[22] "that street-smart tone based on "mandar-vir" and "cuspir fininho" with which the *Lisboeta* improvises his most cheeky patter"
[23] "cannily argue the contrary"
[24] "it's by "cuspir fino" and "mandar-vir" that the outsider is worked over and the conversation wrapped

It is commonly agreed that representations of the city determine to some extent what we imagine the city to be (see, for example, Caws, 1991: 1). This undoubtedly is one of the reasons why the role of the city in literature has attracted increasing attention. Cardoso Pires first drafted *Lisboa Livro de Bordo* when Lisbon held the title of European Capital of Culture in 1994, revising and eventually publishing the work to coincide with Expo '98. This was a period in which multiple representations of Lisbon were being produced, both for internal and external consumption, ones which Cardoso Pires saw as depicting his city in too summary a fashion. Benjamin's *flâneur* was characterised by "a conscious refusal, or resistance to, the presentation of an overarching, integrated, coherent view of the city" and this is what Cardoso Pires also resists, implicitly, in *Lisboa Livro de Bordo*. The form, based on, as the title suggests, the organisation of a ship's log-book, eschews a unified overview of the city in favour of individual thematic sections, loosely bound by the topological itinerary of Cardoso Pires's *flânerie*. This form also allows Cardoso Pires to avoid the trap of autobiography, despite Lisbon's close connection to his life and work. Benjamin's comments on his own *Berlin Chronicle* neatly explain the way in which Cardoso Pires's narrative methods negotiate this problem: "reminiscences, even extensive ones do not always amount to an autobiography…For autobiography has to do with the flow

---

up"

of time, with sequence and with what makes up the continuous flow of life. Here I am talking of space and moments and discontinuities" (cited in Gilloch, 1999a: 25).

Cardoso Pires begins his first entry by categorically rejecting facile stereotypes, "é que isto aqui não é só luz e rio"[25] (2001: 10), although, as the reader sees later, he does not deny these a place in Lisbon's identity. Overlooking Lisbon from the Castelo São Jorge, Cardoso Pires explains how his city isn't so much the physical, historical, telephotogenic and ultimately abstracted "nostalgia adormecida"[26] (in the words of John dos Passos), rather "a voz e o humor, o tom e a sintaxe, aquilo te está, cidade, mais no íntimo"[27] that "são regsitos inconfundíveis do espirito do lugar, qualquer coisa que se sobrepõe àqule visual imediato"[28] (2001: 10). It is this city, transient, invisible, yet reiterated daily by its inhabitants that Cardoso Pires sees as having been marginalised by its omission from all these representations and without which a true understanding, a "cumplicidade" with the city is impossible. As he says "aqui tem porque é que eu, nesta vista tirada do Castelo de São Jorge, me sinto assim distante, quase alheado. Talvez porque daqui não te ouço cidade. Porque não te

---

[25] "This here isn't just light and river"
[26] "sleeping nostalgia"
[27] "voice and humour, tone and syntax, that, city, which is most intimate to you"
[28] "are unmistakeable signs of the genius loci, something that takes precedent over the immediate visual impression"

respiro os intentos nem te cheiro. Porque não te apanho os gestos do olhar"[29].

For Cardoso Pires, the city can only be felt at city-level. He takes particular umbrage at the kind of short-haul exoticism that representations of the city such as Wim Wenders *Lisbon Story* and in particular Alain Tanner's *La Ville Blanche*, which both purport to show life in Lisbon, seem to exploit. In response to the clichéd idea of Lisbon as a dazzlingly luminous city of light, Cardoso Pires exclaims scornfully "uma cidade de caprichos como esta nunca o sol pode iluminar por igual"[30]. This idea of an abstract city, encapsulated, indeed encapsulable by an epithet like "la ville blanche" is impossible for Cardoso Pires. In response to this trammelled depiction of the city, Cardoso Pires remarks sardonically "Cidade Branca, que cegueira a deste Tanner Lumière. É cor, o branco do filme dele ou é metáfora? Interroga as impetuosidades duma luz que no mesmo lugar, no mesmo instante e na mesma cor nunca se repete? Pergunto."[31] (2001: 20) .   Gilloch (1999a: 76) says "for the urban physiognomist, the city is a series of monuments", in the sense that monuments are attempts to set the representation of the city in stone, and we can see *Lisboa Livro de Bordo* as attacking the basis of these

---

[29] "Here we have why I, from the vantage point of the Castelo de São Jorge, feel distant, almost alienated. Maybe it's because I can't hear you from here, city. Because I can't breathe in your intentions or your scent. Because I can't catch your gestures with my gaze"

[30] "the sun could never evenly illuminate a city of caprices like this one"

[31] "White City? What blindness afflicts this Tanner Lumière? Is the white of his film the colour, or a metaphor? Does he question the impetuosities of a light that, in the same place, in the same instant and in the same colour is never repeated? I ask you"

monumental representations of Lisbon erected in the early nineties, cutting away their base at street-level.

Nicole maintains that the city cannot be totalised in writing. The most that can be done is "to attain, in the movement of writing, the individuality of the place" (Caws, 1991: 128). This is what Cardoso Pires has achieved in *Lisboa Livro de Bordo* through his re-working of the typical speech, slang and syntax of the populace and his perambulations across the city. Cardoso Pires negotiates a difficult compromise between recognising the irrefutable polyvalency and lability of the city and conveying his own interpretation of Lisbon. Although he recognises this multiplicity, saying that "com o saber dos séculos e os sinais de muito mundo que a perfazem, sugere várias leituras, e daí que a cada visitante sua Lisboa, como tantas vezes se ouve dizer"[32] (2001: 48), Cardoso Pires seems to have a deeply held idea of what Lisbon *is*, for example, concerning the decline of the traditional *fado de bairro*, he comments that it is "uma cidade a perder as raízes"[33]. Cardoso Pires's Lisbon is still the Lisbon of his youth, of his peers that, with him, struggled through the Salazar years, the people, sounds and scents that pervaded this period. This is a problem. If the 'real' Lisbon is the Lisbon of the past, how can the city possibly evolve without losing its identity? He is under no illusion as

---

[32] "With the knowledge of centuries and the signs of the world of which it consists, it (Lisbon) suggests various readings, hence for each visitor there is a Lisbon, as we so often hear said"
[33] "a city losing its roots"

to the labile nature of Lisbon, and of cities in general: "O Tejo não é de fábula nem de poema e corre sem nostalgias. E Lisboa a mesma coisa, disso podemos estar bem seguras"[34].

Saudade for the past is, and can only be, in the heart of the beholder, Cardoso Pires's *flâneur*. *Lisboa Livro de Bordo* was the last work published in Cardoso Pires's lifetime, and in many ways, like Benjamin's farewell to his native city in *A Berlin Chronicle*, it is an expression of "love at last sight" (Gilloch, 1999a: 179). Yet, despite the sadness at the passing of aspects of 'his Lisbon', Cardoso Pires seems confident that the city possesses some essence that will always prevail: "eu quando ponho os olhos numa mariposa que está em pedrinhas de cor na Rua Lopes de Mendonça, quase a vista do Aeroporto, sei que a quilomentros de distância na Panificadora de Campo de Ourique,, há uma outra moldurada em barro vidrado por Rafael Bordalo Pinheiro no ano de 1905. Mas não são duas imagens repetidas, nem pensar, é apenas uma borboleta que venceu a distância entre a Lisboa Velha e a Lisboa Nova e que nesses noventa anos de trajecto se apresentou em diferente sem deixar de ser a mesma"[35] (2001: 42). For Cardoso Pires, there *is* a spirit of the city, a concept at odds with much of contemporary theoretical

---

[34] "The Tagus is neither a fable nor a poem and flows without nostalgia. Equally so Lisbon, of this we may be sure"

[35] "When I lay eyes on a butterfly set with coloured stones in the Rua Lopes de Mendonça, almost in view of the Airport, I know that kilometres away in the bread factory of Campo de Ourique there is another made of glazed pottery by Rafael Bordalo Pinheiro in the year 1905. But they are not repeated images, now way, rather one butterfly that has managed to cross the distance between the old and new Lisbon and, from this journey of ninety years, has appeared in a new version without having changed"

engagements with the Urban. It emerges in the recurrence of images and practices, basic similarities subtending the shifting, evolving surface. Whether this is wishful thinking on the part of an old man about to depart the city he loves is moot. In *Lisboa Livro de Bordo*, in the textual world that Cardoso Pires as *flâneur* bestrides and creates with his gaze, this is undoubtedly true.

Conclusion

The three works discussed in this essay, whilst widely different in style and scope, are all drawn together by their common use of *flânerie*. The observational construction of each is based on the viewpoint and outlook of a single pedestrian consciousness in the city. As we have seen, this city can be physical or already 'textual', ranging in form from cinema to historical biography. *Flânerie* can be as diverse as the physically exhausting treks undertaken by Sinclair and the (presumably!) sedentary perusal of biographical sources by White. Trips can cross the contemporary city or can lead back into the past, as Cardoso Pires's traversal of Lisbon so often does, taking him deep into personal reminiscences as much as through the topographical city.

These authors are also united by the fact that each one's *flânerie* finds a city tramelled by official discourse and bound into static, and therefore reductive, representations. For Sinclair, this is a cynical ploy on

the part of developers, politicians and the amassed forces of the Establishment, to hamstring the endless, and richly poetic, play of London, in order to further their own economic, political or cultural ends. For White, on the other hand, the Establishment's blindness to the vitality of the heterotopic spaces within the city, is deleterious, above all, to the Establishment itself, hampering Paris's potential once more to play a major role on the world stage. Whilst for Cardoso Pires, the mishmash of representations of Lisbon which have teemed in recent years all hark back to a superficial, stereotypical city, which obfuscate the rich, albeit ethereal, vitality of the inhabitants of Lisbon and their immaterial embodiment of some 'true' essence of the city.

All three *flâneurs* propound alternative visions of urban space based on material encountered in the course of their excursions, in opposition to such calcified representations. Theirs is a textual city over which each *flâneur* holds sway. Sinclair espouses a chaotic city of a thousand, million constantly morphing poetic associations and inspirations, which escape the Establishment's stranglehold, but in which the passive inhabitants provide a colourful backdrop. White advocates a Paris where "Blancs, Blacks et Beurs" unite to make it one of the capitals of this century, though there is no suggestion of a blueprint for this *flâneur*'s wishful thinking. In his turn, Cardoso Pires avails himself of aspects of a "*Lisboa Popular*, using elements taken from its people and practices to bring into relief little-

known aspects of Lisbon, generally ignored by the average citizen, thereby alerting future generations to their existence.

However, as White himself discerns, there is an air of sadness that hangs over the *flâneur*. This is because, despite his seeming omnipotence over his text, this representation is a mere 'after-image' of the physical city, which continues apace outside the pages of his work, regardless of his intentions. Whilst, in Baudelaire's words, on his own terms the *flâneur* is "a prince enjoying his incognito" (1995: 400), in the city he is simply another face in the crowd.

Word Count: 14, 995

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Texts

Cardoso Pires, J. 1997. *Lisboa: Livro de Bordo*. Lisbon: Publicações Dom Quixote

Sinclair, I. 1998. *Lights Out for the Territory*. London: Granta Books

White, E. 2001. *The Flâneur*. London: Bloomsbury

Primary Sources

Baudelaire, C. 1995. "The Painter of Modern Day Life" in *Selected Writings on Art and Literature*. Harmondsworth, Middx: Penguin Classics

Benjamin, W. 1973. *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*. London: NLB

Caws, M.A. (ed.). 1991. *City Images: Perspectives from literature, philosophy and film*. New York; London: Gordon and Breach

Foucault, M. 1969. "Des Espaces Autres". *Foucault.Info.* 30/05/2003. http://foucault.info/documents/foucault.heteroTopia.fr.html

Frisby, D. 1997. "The Metropolis as Text", *Journal of Renaissance and Modern Studies*, vol 40 special issue 'Reading the City': pp 30-47

Genocchio, B. 1995. "Discourse, Discontinuity, Difference." in *Postmodern Cities and Spaces*. Watson, S & Gibson. K (eds.). Cambridge: Blackwell

Gilloch, G. 1997. *Myth and Metropolis: Walter Benjamin and the City*. Cambridge: Polity Press

---. 1997. "'The Figure that Fascinates": Seductive Strangers in Benjamin and Baudrillard', *Journal of Renaissance and Modern Studies*, vol 40 special issue 'Reading the City': 17-29

---. 1999a "The Return of the Flaneur": The Afterlife of an Allegory',
New Formations special issue 'The Legacy of the Frankfurt School in
Cultural Studies': 101-109

---. 1999b. *Illuminations*. London: Pimlico

---. 1992 'The Heroic Pedestrian or the Pedestrian Hero: Walter Benjamin
and the Flaneur', *Telos*, 91: 108-116

Hetherington, K. 1997. *The Badlands of Modernity: Heterotopia and
Social Ordering*. London and New York: Routledge

---. 1998. *Expressions of Identity: Space, Performance, Politics*. London;
Thousand Oaks, Calif, New Delhi, India: Sage Publications

Hueston, P. "Walkabout in Gay Paree". 04/06/2001. *The Age On-Lnie*.
29/05/03. http://theage.com.au/books/2001/06/04/FFX29ZJ4JNC.html.

Jenks, C. 1995. "Watching Your Step: The History and Practice of The
Flâneur" in Jenks, C (ed.) *Visual Culture*. London: Routledge

Knabb, K (ed. and trans.). 1981. *Situationist International Anthology*.
Berkeley, Calif: Bureau of Public Secrets

Mengham, R. 2001. "The Elegiac Imperative" , *Kenyon Review, Vol.
XXIII, Num. 1:* pp. 73-178

Perril, S. 1999. "A Cartography of Absence: the work of Iain Sinclair",
Comparative Criticism 1999: pp 309-339

Resina, J R. and Ingenschay, D (eds.) 2003. *After-Images of the City*.
Ithaca, N.Y. and London: Cornell University Press

Sadler, S. 1998. *The Situationist City*. Cambridge, Mass. and London: The
MIT Press

Sinclair, Iain. "Interview". *Fortean Times*. 19/05/2003
www.forteantimes.com/articles/147_iainsinclair.shtml

Tester, K (ed.). 1994. *The Flâneur*. London: Routledge

Watson, B. "Iain Sinclair: Revolutionary Novelist or Revolting Nihilist?" *Militant Aestetix*. 20/05/2003. http://www.militantesthetix.co.uk/critlit/critlitfr.htm

Wolff, J. 1985. "The invisible *flâneuse*: women and the literature of modernity" in *Theory, Culture and Society*. Vol.2, no.3 pp 45-70

Zibart, E. "An amusing stroll through Paris" consulted at http://www.bookpage.com/0103bp//nonfiction/the_flaneur.html on 26/05/03

Consulted

Baker, B. 2003 "Maps of the London Underground: Iain Sinclair and Michael Moorcock's psychogeography of the city" *Literary London: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Representation of London*. March 2003: 17 paragraphs. http://homepages.gold.ac.uk/london-journal/baker.html

Benajmin, W. 2002. *The Arcades Project*. Cambridge, Mass. and London: The Belknap Press

Cardoso Pires, José. 1999. *Alexandra Alpha*. Lisbon: Dom Quixote

---. 1999. *Balada da Praia dos Cães*. Lisbon: Dom Quixote

McRandle, P. "Review of *Lights Out for the Territory*" on http://www.thesecondcircle.com/pwm/sinc.html 20/04/03

Reynolds, S. 1999. "Down and Out in London" consulted at http://www.villagevoice.com/issues/9933/reynolds.php on 17/04/03

Sinclair, I. 2002. *Downriver*. London: Granta