Experiencing modernity in the streets of the metropolis:

the flâneurie and the dérive .

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Abstract

Modernity is experienced on the streets, where it is born. The metropolis has arisen through the rapid urbanisation of the 19th century which suddenly also birthed the crowd and notion of a streetwalker. This essay examines first the hybrid genre of the City Symphonies, and how they captured the rhythm of the metropolis in the 1920's, and secondly how this differed with the rise of the Situationists in 1960's Paris. The shift from literature and poetry to a visual medium as a way to experience and document society, also established the chosen medium of the modern. This is largely due to the supersaturation of visual elements in the new city, and capitalisms way to also present commodity as a way to satisfy the alienation or anxiety one might feel in the constantly moving streetlife. One of they symbols of emerging modern society is the figure of the *flâneur* observing the streetlife from a detached position, which will be explored through the work of Baudelaire, Benjamin and the key Symphony films of Vertov, Cavalcanti and Ruttmann. The examination of the modern promise in these films will then shit to look at its failings and criticism in the work of the Situationists International and films of Guy Debord. The flaneurism has been replaced by the *dérive* in this context which notes the main change in modern experience - that of the psychogeographical effect of the street. We will explore how the kino-eye is used to document landmarks in modernisation and cinematic development, but through the eye of the streetwalker who experiences it first hand.

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Introduction

The idea of modernity suggests that in its essence it is something dynamic, of reconstruction and constant passage. 'Idea' is used here to describe modernity, as because of the creation of its own beginning and forms of ending it remains undefinable as a solid notion; first imaged by Jean-Jacques Rosseau as whirlwind - 'te tourbillon social'- its lack of stability is clear. (cited in Berman,1982, p 17) It creates within the societies it passes through a collective consciousness that expands and fails on itself with the passage of time and introduction of new ideas that form it; that have formed what we understand as modernity today.

 As Berman reflects, it requires of us to live in 'paradox and contradiction' (ibid. p13) which find a home in the metropolis, stemming from the Greek for Mother City (Brooker, 2001, p5). It has birthed not only the modern man/woman but also an overwhelment of capitalist regimes, revolt, and fear of the existence of a nihilistic depth (Berman, 1982, p13). People live soulless in the metropolis; their 'ideas, their needs, even their dreams' (ibid. p28) have been stripped and forced to be found in commodities. The way big cities claim to bring us together distances us from culture to the point where as Rousseau rightfully notes 'Everything is absurd, but nothing is shocking because everyone is accustomed to everything.' (cited in ibid. p18) We become numb, suffocated by the 'hyperstimulation' (Simmel, cited in Jacobs, Kink and Hielschler, 2018, p31) of visual information in the streets and constant flow of new ideas, absurdities and commodities. These distance us from ourselves and position us in the centre of the relationship between modernity and the metropolis.

The experience of the modern has changed since it first boomed in literature and art during bourgeois society, which was meant to manifest the ideas and developments of the future. We cannot talk of the bourgeois without first mentioning Baudelaire who will examine the notions of the modern in his work at a time when film wasn't available to document it. For Baudelaire,

there was the experience of modernity that was spiritual and intellectual, and the modern one that was political and social. The same is understood by Benjamin later on as the rational 'Erfahrung' (the outer sensory experience) and the meaningfulness of 'Erlebnis' (the inner lived experience). (Kang 2011, p 77) Both these experiences are intertwined in Boaudelaires work, in *Painter of Modern life* modernity is exhibited in façaded brilliance in front of which misery and class divide reign; the modern and the miserable are inseparable. In *Les Sept Vieillards (The seven old men)* the 'already weary soul' is wandering through the 'swarming city' where 'ghosts' and 'mysteries' flow through the 'mighty giant'.(Baudelaire cited in Hartley,1957, p164) In *Loss of a Halo,* the appearance of the modern in the new form of a boulevard has created 'chaos' and 'terror' that causes man to lose his 'halo' and 'dignity' to become common; that halo or 'insignia' is all that is admired in a bourgeois society. (Baudealire,1869,p94)

However, the romanticism of the modern has also been shifted by Baudeliare in his collection *Fleurs du Mal*; it is no longer the natural landscape but also urban space and the poetry of the street, gaslights and intimacy of the crowd as noted by Benjamin (Gleber,1999,p 53). With the emergence of the city as a space to be traversed, the most romantic figure is born- the *flâneur*. First as the poet's gaze of the street, and later as the kino-eye (which hereon refers to the viewers wondrous experience through the camera) as the *flâneur* of now is mirrored in the 'mobalised gaze' of the cinema (ibid. p22).

As modernity is characterised by the emphasis on the visual which 'appears as its primary and privileged sphere of perception' (ibid. p 31) the *flâneur* will become the character who examines it from a place of detachment- being the 'I' with the impossible appetite of the 'non-i' (Berman,1982.p152). This initial modern experience, explored later on through the documentation of Symphony cities during the 1920's, differs from the criticism of the unconscious metropolis explored by the Situationists International (hereon SI) in riot struck 1960's Paris. For Guy Debord, the city must be awakened to the 'vast storehouse of slumbering memories' (McDonough,2007 p 7) which will bring about a society aware of its condition and capitalist manipulation. Of the many ways Debord explores this in his writing and experimental

documentaries, the one that intertwines the city and man similarly to its predecessor is the act of *dérive* [literally: 'drifting']. This is a technique of passage through the city but with the omitted notion of detachment. The dérive is playful, aware of the psychogeographical effects the journey is having. It considered a city with fixed points, currents and vortexes that discourage entry into particular zones. (Debord,1956, p 1)

This essay will explore the experience of modernity in two periods of rapid political and social change, of the redefining moments of the city drifter that makes up every one of us. The moments it first formed which on film seem distant and dramatic through the dynamic construction of the Symphony Cinema, and the promise of modernity put forth then. This compares to the reflection of 60's Pari,s most noted in its change of cinematic style with the emergence of the French New Wave and writing of the *Cahiers Du Cinema*, *Politiques Des Auteurs* and the SI. What is the experience of modernity of the passer by? How is this captured by the kino-eye? Is the poetic city walker going to be left abandoned in the cold by his own ignorance like in King Lear, left constructing the 'mythic draperies heavy enough to stifle their dreadful knowledge of who they are?; (Brune cited in Berman, 1982,p 109) These are subjective propositions, and as the German writer Franz Hessel notes on the flanéuristic drift 'It is not necessary to understand everything, one only needs to look at it with one's eyes' (Gleber, 1999, p 83) we will explore the way film allows us to do so.

Literature Review

Marshal Berman's *All that is solid melts into air* (1982) is one the the key texts referred to in the analysis of the modern condition and the literature that deals with it. It examines key texts and movements, of which those on BAudelaire roved most useful. As the essay is divided into two parts and movements, they both had key texts which structured further research. Benjamin's *Arcade project,(1999) One way street* (1978)and essay on *Mechanical reproduction* (1969) provided the analysis of the flaneur and Baudelaire that is key when looking at modernity in the 20's. As for the moderniation of 60's Paris, *The society of the spectacle (1967)* by Debord was the predominant text used with an addition from McDonoigh's *Calling from the inside: Filmic Topologies of the Everyady.*(2007) It is difficult to distinguish the most influential work that influenced this exploration as they all interweave and often merge analysys and notions; it is fair to say the essay will *drift* through these and other words to draw a conclusion.

Part 1

Symphony Cities and the Promise of Modernity

Chapter 1:
An exploration of the modern promise.

> *...that apparent disorder that is in actuality the highest degree of bourgeois*
>
> *order.*

 Dostoevsky in London, 1862. Cited in Benjamin, 1982, p 88

"All cities would look the same, were it not for the monuments that distinguish them." This is how Alberto Cavalcanti's 1926 *Rien que les heures (trans:Nothing But Time. Cavalcanti, 1926)* begins followed by the essential shot of the Eiffel Tower. The Symphony City film has been born, we are about to enter filmmaking that focuses solely on the city as protagonist and the emblem of modernity. Documentary footage is edited together in poetic, hypnotisingly rhythmic ways where the city and its industrialisation is the 'very material of which the film is fashioned' (Jacobs, kinik and Hielscher, 2018, p 3) This genre produced over 80 films in 10 years which all dealt with the musical energy and youthful capitalist complexities of the rising metropolis around Europe and America. (ibid, p 9) What these films aimed to do was exhibit the fast paced and ever changing metropolitan life, as well as the images that we are now desensitised to, but then were the symbol of economic accomplishment and First world development.

To document the modern we must use modern techniques; Baudelaire, Marx, Poe and others can see their motifs at every corner, but it is no longer enough to read about the danger of traffic or find images of ourselves in the words of poetic flanéurs. A modern city is documented with the camera, the most full and visually dominant form that mirrors the shift from the acoustic to the visual perception as a way to experience the city. Modernity, as read by Simmel, saw the *flâneur* as "conjured and defined" by this shift to the visual as he now had the stimuli to respond and react to which were birthed with modernity. (Gleber, 1999, 30)

Chapter 2:

Exploring city Symphonies- the divide in class

The day beings, and so does our journey through the capitals of Europe. These films were constructed of a day in the life structure, from dawn to dusk, to give a full overview of the work, life and entertainment in these new cities; also acting as encyclopedic documents of the impressions made on the streetwalker. The city awakens, and we first examine that it is made up of *Nothing but time.* Time is the structure of the narrative, and a 'Jeux du hasard' (trans:Game of chance) is played by the eye and the system of modernity.

 Cavalcanti opens with a set of elegant, clearly of bourgeois class women descending a staircase only to be fused into a photograph and violently ripped apart. Paintings in black and white overlay the screen, eyes blink at us through eye shaped holes. Window shutters open like the eyes of the city, a clock reminds of the passing minutes. The visual passage of time is interwoven into these films, in *Berlin: Symphony of a metropolis (Ruttmann,1927)* clocks introduce the sequences to come. Here time seems to be slower, unbroken like in *Noting* as the city awakens and yesterday's newspapers drift down the still asleep streets.

Finally, at 14 minutes in *Nothing*, we see what we are so familiar with- smoke from chimneys filling the air, and with a cut we are contrasted with a woman in ragged clothing stumbling down stairs. This is Paris, the 'margins of society' (Jacobs, Kinik, Hielsher,2018 p 11) where "Each assumes their place" (Cavalcanti, 1926) and plays a part in the intricate clockwork that allows the city to move forward. Juxtaposing images of a man washing clothes in a river, doll drowning in a stream of water and images of wealth and modern modes of transportation scream a city of modern extremes.

The promise of rest and pleasure with the fall of evening and closing of factory gates is only for those committed to the hard labour that has fed the city. The 'Jeux du hasard' here is shown in a game of taro, with the card of death; Capitalism has promised the chance to rise in society through hard work, but still time passes and the promise is masked in commodity. There is disorder in every image, but it has been calculated and manifested by the 'bourgeois order' Dostoveiski refers to.

It is essential to the running of these expanding cities, these 'living organisms' (Jacobs, Kinik, Hielsher,2018, p23), that there is an indifferent class divide which is unaware that the ruling class formed its structure, the way the camera now calculates its gaze. This disorder that we see in the streets and the organisation through images of policeman, telecommunication switchboards, and sense of running order directed by the time of day, have indeed produced 'a sense of new possibility and self invention' in the modern man. However, not without a 'sense of unbelonging and an urban mentality of fear, paranoia or nostalgia.' (Brooker, 2001,p7) that is felt by the lower class that is now an ugly reminder of the indifference of the city, and even by the *flâneur* seeking refuge from this disorder in the crowd, which will be explored later on.

Chapter 3:

Indistinguishable metropolis

Nothing is more fictional than Symphonies like *Berlin* and *Man with a Movie Camera* (Vertov, 129) but is still considered one due to its 'grounding representation of the 'physical reality'(Jacobs, Kinik, Hielsher,2018, p 11) and not so much the historicity of the city. These are all new cities that have undergone rapid growth where heritage and the nostalgia of culture is not key in their cinematic form, unlike in the psychological effect of cities during the SI. Even though emblems of a city are shown, like the Berlin Dom, the kino-eye focuses instead on the 'metropolis' being the 'locus of modernity' not its landmarks which are a part of its 'mundane spaces. (Jacobs, Kinik, Hielsher,2018, p 15) This is most clearly seen in *Nothing* as the world spins and Paris is overlayed with the rest of Europe.

The Arc de Triomphe stands proud, spilling its boulevards and overlaid with images as :pattern on a clock. The non-geographical image of a baby is followed with images of Peking. We are told this could be anywhere, these cities occupy the same space, detachment and seduction to the modern. Without a landmark we are lost. The metropolis is exposed to a 'fast telescoping of changing images' that compress and expand our consciousness; they reduce it to a single 'glance perception and the unexpected juxtaposition of violent stimuli' (Bruno, 1993,p 54) that detaches us from our place, and numbs us to the end of another day without conscious satisfaction.

Chapter 4:

Horizontal emblems of development

The promise of modernity is foregrounded in these Symphonies through emblems of development- electrification, velocity, density and the crowd. Radio towers, elevators, electric lamps, traffic packed boulevards and the factory chimneys dominating *Man with a Movie Camera* are all achievements of the metropolis; achievements of this 'locus of labour. (Jacobs, Kinik, Hielsher,2018,p 18) Within these emblems there is a vision of the modern that is expanding, a metropolis that constantly builds on top of itself.

The city is laid with train tracks at its base, horizontally; In *Berlin* a train rushes past us and travels from the deserted, poor landscape into the grand concrete scenery of the city. In *Man with a movie camera* the train briefly takes us out of the city to experience a false moment of pause before the steam, velocity and machinery of public transport takes us back into the centre.
 The rise of public transport encouraged the use of observation. The formation of railroads and busses oblige us to sit 'for hours without talking to each other' as Simmel notes, (Simmel in ibid,p 30) which further noted vision as the distinct way for the promise of modernity, and the metropolis itself, to be experienced.

Another key note is the tendency of such transport to 'condense time relations into space relations' (Glaber, 1999, p 37) and equate Horizontal travel through the city as :

> *This new orientation, defined by changes in technology throughout the nineteenth*
> *century, increasingly elevates[ing] space to the category of perception, the most*
> *prevalent category in modern experience and consciousness.*

Glaber, 1999, P 37

Modes of modernity (electrification, velocity, the crowd and density) can be experienced through this horizontal orientation that allows us to shrink the city and the time it takes to enter it. The

consciousness mentioned above relates to how aware we are of our surroundings, which are constantly changing before us. They, just like the ideas proposed by the metropolis, are futile and rapidly developing.

Chapter 5:

Rhythm and verticality

Our experience of this life in the 20's and the birth of modernity is at its core fast paced, dense and too rapidly changing to be understood fully. The new experience has a velocity that runs through its boulevards, which is why these Symphonies are so rhythmical and kinetic in their editing. Cavalcanti, Rutteman and Vertov take 'the pulse of a city and quite literally translate it into the rhythm of cinema' (Jacobs, Kinik, Hielsher,2018,p 26) to create a filmic form that seems recognisable on screen, with the added poetry. The pace makes them dreamlike to watch, sequences are orchestrated to allow us to aimlessly pass through them and give the impression to the viewer that we can still find stillness and musical rhythm in the business of the street.

The viewer, the extension of the flaneur, is allowed to:

> *seek the change that comes from the cameras confrontation with the*
> *unexpected and unpredictable contingencies of urban modernity*

Jacobs, Kinik, Hielsher,2018, p 23

The camera becomes the kino-eye that notices the beggar on the street, the objectifying glance up the leg in *A Propos de Nice, (*Vigo,1930) or the wounded carried away in *Man.* But we also see the other symbol of urban modernity: the vertical height. Vertov uses verticality to show a 'soviet society that was rapidly modernising and industrialising' (Jacobs, Kinik, Hielsher,2018,p

18) and to establish its place as a leader of modernity- which now too is a measurement of prosperity and accomplishment.

 In ways all these films refer to industrialisation as what shields the metropolis, what is its practical way to compress the crowd into vertical living spaces. The *flâneur* gazes up, and so does the camera, to reveal that we are far from the calm and down in the loud and hectic street; here, Vertov again establishes the symbol of the land and contrasts ' of the city's life, of human existence- work and pleasure, birth and death'(ibidp 12)

Part 2

A *flâneur* experiencing the metropolis

Chapter 1:
Phantasmagoria

The *flâneur* is a character born into the modern, into the urban space. The street becomes his dwelling place, he is at home with the business and facades of the metropolis. He is a figure who isn't comfortable in his own company, and needs to find solace in the crowd and the intimacy of a boulevard. By being amongst the velocity of society, he can hide behind the 'veil' of the crowd behind which 'the familiar city as a phantasmagoria beckoned' to him; he longs to be amongst the energy but invisible. (Benjamin, 1999,

This phantasmagoria, as described by Benjamin, is commodity-on-display and the 'intoxication' and 'distraction' it provides exhibited in the arcades or the glossed shop windows.(Britzolakis, 1999, p 73) The phantasmagoria is experienced through the eyes, the eyes through which

Baudeilaire romanticised streetwalking and the eye through which we experience Symphony Cinema. With Haussmann constructing the boulevard in 1853, and streetlights in 1878, Paris suddenly became awake at night and inviting for the stroller. His model of Paris would drastically expand and open it up for the inhabitants. (Figure 1)
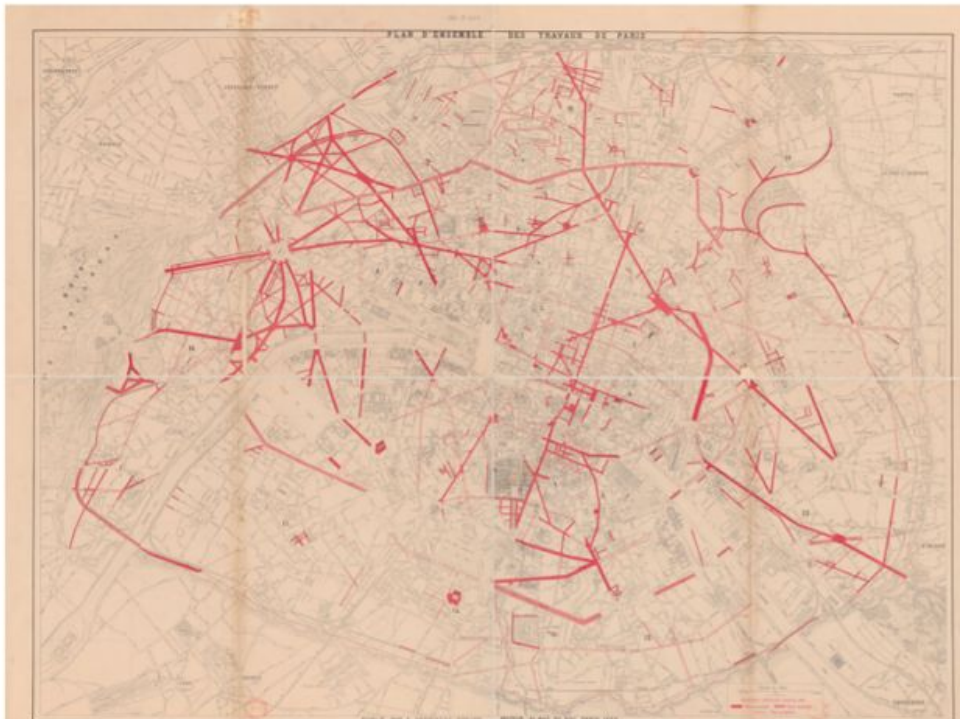
Figure 1: Map of Parisian development map of 1958. The created streets are filled, the modified ones hatches and the planning outlined.

People were encouraged to wonder and experience the industrilisation of the future. But with this came the spectacle, the emphasis on the visual and the bourgeois way of life. Everything, and everyone, was out on the street and had to be skillful in appearing to have status and commodity as all eyes were spectating. However, here is where the *flâneur* possesses the art to see without being seen in return, something that makes him a "prince who is everywhere in possession of his incognito"(Jenks, Neves,2000 p. 146). He is given a certain freedom of exploring the metropolis that grants him to become a part of the cobblestones, of the facades and asphalt; in cinema he

provides us with a form of inner monologue of exploration, some form of visual awareness that is translated into images and rhythm.

Chapter 2:
The modern experience of the Flâneur

The *flâneur* the accelerated capitalist development and urbanisation of the modern city came together. The modern flanerie is now mostly related to cinema and the kino-eye in its 'mobalized gaze' (Castro, 2010,p 10) that is the most active and accurate way to experience what was the idea of modernity in the 20's, and what is now the way in which the audience *stroll* through the eye of the camera.

The same notion is exemplified when Giuliana Bruno refers to film as 'modern cartography'(Bruno, 2002, p 71) in the way it documents the city visually and allows for navigation through both memory and emotion. The flaneuristic stroll through Moscow and other Soviet cities that make up *Man with a movie camera,* give us a more solidified image of the city and its modern advancement than a map would; the journey into central Berlin on the train gives the visually engaging context that a map on paper would lack. The experience of the modern is purely visual.

The spectator of then and now, on the street and in the cinema, must actively engage with the fleeting scenery to paint his/her map and remain in time with the capitalist development. It is those fleeting and transitory images that make the perfect playground for the flaneuristic spectator as he is able to enjoy them silently and still; able to document them in the brief moments before their passing.

Chapter 3:

The Crowd

> It is not given to every man to take a bath of multitude;
> enjoying a crowd is an art; [...]
> Multitude, solitude: identical terms, and interchangeable
> by the active and fertile poet. The man who is unable to
> people his solitude is equally unable to be alone in a
> bustling crowd.
>
> Baudelaire,1869p 20

To be in the crowd is to be in solitude. Those who find peace in such crowds and such "multitude" are few, the flaneur is a figure fictional in its rarity. Baudelaire wished to be alone in the street, to distance himself from the "flux of the metropolis and find poetry in the asphalt" (Benjamin,1978, p 32), and that is what he did through his work. He, and his characters became alone in the crowd.The audience encountering cinema in the city at that time were uninterrupted and unacknowledged in the kino-eye of City Symphonies; and if eyes did settle on us, they quickly passed on as they would have the idle stroller. Benjamin also sees solitude as the natural state of man, the aloneness found in the great business of the metropolis that allowed for dreams and aimless wandering- for the immersion of the intensity of street life. (Benjamin,1978 p 9)

 This is a romantisied view of the emptiness one feels in the crowd, the camera positions the audience at the time at the street level where they also spectate the fleeting images and the restless eye of the *flâneur* but from a safe distance. The audience at the time become an

extension of the *flâneur* through which the city is experienced. The *movie* camera becomes a *moving* camera that transports us through the metropolis and awakens the city. The beginning of *Man with a Movie Camera* enters an empty theatre that is suddenly charged with energy as a film is played, following images of the city that exhibit the danger of height, illness and poverty. Vertov differs from the other Symphony diretos through the way he brings the process of filmmaking together with the material which would later be employed by the cinema verite. He fragments the city and seeks to diminish the distance between audience and camera. Benjamin best describes this as a surgical approach to camerawork which directly 'cuts' into its subject, here shown in the reveal of the filmmaking process.(Benjamin, 1969 p 13) (Figure 2)In this way, *Man* becomes less passive than films like *Berlin* through its more radical ways of cutting rhythm and fragmenting the city with the process of its cinematic construction.

Figure 2: the breaking of escapism as we see filmic form

The audience is safe beyond the screen; this modern flaneur romanticisses the images and solitude found by perceiving them in the mind- away from the geography of the street. Space exists to be walked, but cinema space exists to be documented and position the audience as the flaneur, a spectator.

Chapter 4:

The flaneur within the narrative

Cinema needs to give this attention to space as it is born from it; mobility is a form of cinematics that created snapshots and an image within the image. There is a certain 'mise-en-abyme' that creates the narrative of modernity within the framed image, echoing that of the theatrical experience with with a limited perception of space. *A Propos* starts with aerial shots of the city, cars, beaches and within these images the modern story come to light. A story that exhibits the fast movement of time, the spatial organisation, the clear markings and borders of the streetwalker, and the notion that the city is one organism not focused on the individual. We read what is within the image of the street the way a *flâneur* does and read the images as ones where modernity has a beauty of industrilisation that is not free from poverty and anxiety.

We can also look at Bruno again here who notes that it is the change of 'spatial perception and bodily motion' that creates a 'new architecture of transit and travel' which are the essence of modernity shown through the moving image (Bruno,1993 p 17). The characters in these Symphony Cities look over this architecture and travel through the space to experience the revolutionary society at play. He must keep moving, as the camera does most evidently in *Man* to break free of the immobility of the *flâneur* (which is now inhabited by the still audience) and use observation through rhythmic cutting to keep with the pace of the city, the fleeting idea of modernity.

Looking at Weimar modernity, shown in *Berlin,* the *flâneur* embodies an intellectual and sensory idea that records the metropolis, the new sensations of its visually stimulating streets. The senses are overloaded by this rise of sensory capitalism and 'fetishistic nature of commodities' which Kracauer describes as distractions which leave little room for contemplation or acknowledgment of the current state. (Frisby, 1986, p 32) In his essay on Weimar biography, the literature of

flâneurie emerged from the experience of individual and collective alienation that came about with the rise of the crowd and city. An emptiness that is falsely satisfied through commodities and a rhythm of life (exhibited in the editing of such films) and an unconscious which will later be criticised by the Situationusts and their new awareness.

Chapter 5:

The fall of the flaneur

For Benjamin, Baudelaire and Kracaur the 'antidote to mass culture was to be found in mass culture itself" (Gleber,1999,p 33) which is where the *flâneur* of society finds his home. But the *flâneur* is silent, this is something that has to be explored. He observes but this is as far as he goes to experience his modern landscape; he sees the poverty and indifference of the crowd but does nothing more, which is the fundamental difference between the flaneuristic and derive experience of the city. Is this the flaw of the flaneur, will this be how he falls?

Haussmann's reconfiguration of Paris threatened the flaneur, he was born in the street but he will also die there. Baudelaire, who loved solitude but wanted it in the crowd, created this idealised flaneur, where people conform to him as a figure but never attain his status. His gaze is felt through the screen but still remains indifferent.

> *...the only problem with the flaneur is that he did not exist, except as a type, an ideal, and a character.*

Rebecca Solnit, cited in Coverley, 2006, p 162

Every street walker engaged in some form of flanerie, gaining the skill to navigate as the city and its obstacles grew. We read about the flaneur, and can imagine him observing; but we can't distinguish him in the crowd captured on film. Through sequences of seeing, he seeks images of his society and its workings. Through the emphasis on seeing he will fall.

Benjamin saw the department store as his final coup, as the power of capitalism which used the *flâneur* to sell the commodities he was supposed to not be blinded by. The *flâneur* is so intrinsically close to the crowd and audience then, that he cannot maintain his detachment and is enticed by commercial forces that will bring him to his fall.(Coverley, 2006,p 64) All these symphony films are hyperstimulation in their shop windows, parades and traffic. The simple man described by Baudelaire who lost his halo warns of a *flâneur* in danger, the impact of one wrong gaze that will diminish his power over the metropolis that urges for the anxiety that hides its cracks. What is needed is a new mechanism, a blaze attitude that gives us the psychogeographical distance needed to live in such an intense spectacle of society. (Simmel,1900,p31) But most of the 20's cinematic modernity is observational, silent on what it is seeing; it is with the rise of the Situationists that the boulevards are no longer just a sign of prosperity but also of the flaw of the unconscious wondering. Debord and the letterists will violently go against the blaze and push for new streetwalker that doesn't spectate the burning of society but brings gasoline that will engite it- that will extend past the ideas proposed by the flaneur.

Part 3

A reflection on the false promise : A society of Spectacle

Chapter 1:

Notes on the false promise and modernity in 60's Paris

The ideas reflected by cinema in the 20's were those of a newborn medium. It's critique would come later on, in the 60's, exibiting three main attitudes of modernity: affirmative, negative and withdrawn. Even more so now, modernity represented the mechanical, of which men and women act simply as reproductions who find 'soul' in commodities.(Berman,1982, p 29) The *flâneur* himself tried to resist some of the constrictions and be self aware in this capitalist society, only to be overpowered by the arcade or danger of the busy street. Haussmann gave us the boulevards but in reconstructing Paris he also made it more convenient to 'bring in the cannon' that would destroy the metropolis. (Debord, 1954) Paris in the 1950's was experiencing rapid renovation. Between 1954 and 1974 more than 24% of its buildable surface was reconstructed and the city underwent its new wave of modernisation.(Kristin,1996,p151)

This was the opportunity to rework the social boundaries of the city which sparked the violence that fuelled the Letterists in their radical art and critical movement.Their prominent figure, Isidore Isou, met with Guy Debord at the Cannes film festival and sparked within him the drive to form his own movement. (Hussey, 2002)One that critiqued the then modern Paris and the phantasmagoria of Haussmannisation- The Situationists International.

Chapter 2:

Cinema Verite

With this new form of film, importantly sparked from the trauma of the Second World War and technological advancements, the screen had become an even bigger means for expression. The spectator was less interested in the illusory image of fiction film, which could also relate to early movements of Theatre of the Absurd, Italian Neorealism and the general feeling of wanting to see the state of the exhausted, numb spectacle reflected in the cinematic image. The phantasmagoria of the City Symphonies no longer satisfies the audience, nor their ' aesthetic need of a man brought up in a society that demands his total, unreserved commitment.' quoted by the Inventionist manifesto (Bayley,1946 cited in Danchev, 2011, 312) From this the Cinéma Vérité is introduced. A way of creating documentary cinema that held the "the authenticity of life as it is lived," (ibid) was a direct portrayal of the street image.

The term itself stems from the kino-pravda (film-truth) explored by Vertov in *Man with a Movie Camera*.(McDonough, 2007, p 12) From there it was seen in *Chronique d'un ete,(Rouch, Morin, 1961)* which was the first in a series of films that echoes the Symphonies and acted as a"a mirror, and also a window open to the outside," as Rouch once remarked(cited in ibid,p 12). Another important extension to the Cinéma Vérité is the way Chris Marker referred to is as "ciné ma verité" (ciné my truth), through which he didn't try to capture reality as unaffected by observation in *Le Joli Mai*,(Marker, 1963) but used disjunctive montage, fragmented and disconnected camerawork and a critical voice over to show it's unavoidable to not affect the mediation on reality when filming. (ibid,p 12).

However, film is 'a process of becoming, man's ongoing historical drive to manifest his consciousness outside of his mind, in front of his eyes" (Youngblood cited in Rascaroli,2015). We can become so lost in the metropolis that the only way to regain consciousness is viewing from the screen. There are endless ways to capture *truth* and consciousness, but one is the lived cinema (seen is *Chronicle)* and the other- cinematic life of *Le joli Mai's* staged camerawork(Yu, 2017, P 4) .

Le Joli Mai deals with the Algerian independence of May '62 , but seeing it simply as a documentary possible by technological advancements denounces its distinctive aesthetic and ways of rethinking and representing history. Its drive to capture the historiographical moment is "eclipsed under the aura of cinéma vérité. (Yu, 2017, p1) His images are haunted by history, in France but also in the cinematic form of his predecessors, which merge reality and fiction to portray the state of the street now batherd in political unrest; A Paris that is now verbally unhappy.

 The time-laps shots at the end create the distinct passage of time that best visualises the metropolis and its modern light and traffic. (Figure 3)We hear narrated statistics of life in Paris during May that hihglights how advanced but also impoverished some are. The idea that life in prison is the same daily, also reflects the unconscious streetwalker. The documentary form searches for comprehension and certainty, for an answer; However Marker does not provide a clear moral stance on the sociopolitical conditions of the film even if they were approached directly in interview. Similarly in *Critique de la séparation*,(Debord, 1961) Debord questions this "coherence"(McDonough,2007 p 18) of the documentary form by addressing social issues, but doing so in an incomprehensible and intentionally non-direct way to push audiences for answers.

Figure 3- Series of areal shots that allow the city to live in front of the audience- compressing the time experience.

Chapter 3:

Introduction to the Society of the Spectacle

Film as history. Film as theory. Film as essay. Film as memoir… film as spatial examination.

Kinik, 2008, p 22,

Guy Debord wrote six films between 1952 and his suicide in 1994. He questioned the direction cinema was taking at the time and was inspired by the work of the Letterists, and before them the Surrealists, in the way they approached the unconscious and seeked social change. For him, cinema had the greatest potential of other art forms to stimulate change but it was also "too heavily bound up in moral and economic chains" to be free.(Debord, 1959) This is why he saw the auteur of the French New Wave as having a "notorious lack of artistic innovation" because of their reliance on the economy and push for a certain cinema critique (ibid) The S.I. strived for

the simplification of society; Debord in his Society of the Spectacle which is a collection of 221 short thesis, criticised it and capitalism for the "obvious downgrading of being into having" (Debord, 1967,p 16). He wished to create *situations* which would be the centre of the construction of a new environment within a Paris as a "vast storehouse of slumbering memories awaiting potential awakening." (McDonough, 2010, p 11) These situations would transform the modern world by their deliberate construction and conscious special wondering.

The other important terms of urban criticism for the SI were détournement, psychogeography and the *dérive* which he speaks about in his Society of the Spectacle. Détournement is a technique he adopts in all his films, it is almost the refusal to create new context. It requires a distance towards whatever is being recycled or collaged into a new form that holds its own"fluid language of anti-ideology" (Debord, 1967) Cinema is oversaturated, and that is why his films *Critique* and *Sur le passage de quelques personnes à travers une assez courte unité de temps* (Debord, 1959)explored here are made almost entirely of pre-existing media but with a new context provided by the voice over. The *dérive*, which was the rapid passage through varied ambiances (Debord, 1956) held the awareness of the urban area. Psychogeographies were achieved through this awareness of change and reflexive wandering through a city; the dependency on the walker being enticed by events, situations and images which navigate the journey.

 The practise of the drift was employed by Debord and others as a way to criticise the spectacle again for its "invasion of life" and the idea that images in a varied metropolis merge into one "common stream". The *dérive* wanted to map the urban space considering its vortexes and character, and to disagree with the aim of the spectacle to make spaces where "nothing of note happened, and where everything remained the same" (Archibald, Laverly,2019 p 110" In one of Debord's notes, we can see similarities to the *flâneur* as this new drifter also has no home and finds it in the street. However, he is trying to escape and criticise the spectacle, which is everywhere.

Chapter 4:

Key themes of spectacle cinema: communication

We must, however, not forget that language has other functions than that of ensuring mutual understanding.

Andre Martinet, cited in McDonough, 2007, p 7

This period in Paris seemed absent of communication and activity leading up the protests of May 68, which were the largest in France's history and sought social reform and rejected the new mode of modern life driven by consumerism and class divide. Debord wanted cinema to exhibit the isolation and false coherence in both fiction and documentary forms as a way to 'demystify' cinema and 'dissolve what is called its subject'(Debord cited in McDonough,2007, p 18) Breaking down its language, clarity and process of the filmmaker themselves, he through, would shift cinema from a neutral, observational state, to one highlighting social positions.

Godard, as one of the most influential directors of the French New Wave, also saw filmmakers as entrapped by consumerist society in terms of the influence of money on film production. He frequently uses imagery of violence (*Breathless (Godard, 1960),*Pierrot le Fou (Godard, 1965*)* to suggest that capitalism has turned our modern city into one of nightmarish repression and violence. (Harrison, Mushburn, 1989, p1933)

 Two or three things I know about her subtly shows this as us and Juliette are enslaved within the physical landscape of dominance in the city that is inevitable from capitalist and consumer culture. This advancement of capitalist way of life, for Godard, has turned us 'all into prostitutes'(Kline, Conley, 2014, p245) *Two or three things* gives us the perspective of a new

modern environment that we drift through with Juliette, but also one saturated with Guallist images, alienation, uncomfortable angels and images of new buildings suspended in the air.

Godard wanted the film to 'emotionally correspond to the laws that one must discover and apply to live in society'(Kline, Conley, 2014,p 248) which seem to be those of detachment in the street. As Berman notes, the 60's fought for change and the ability to control their surroundings at a time when Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man* claimed the people weren't even fully alive to seek it. Society has no ego, satisfied with images and objects which have been 'totally administered' for it;(Berman, 1982,p 28) Godard overwhelms characters in the frame through colour, or positioning them into a spatial void. (Figure 4 and 5)

Figures 4 and 5: Characters isolated in spacial void

 Here, he has eliminated some of the sensations of his earlier films with a mundane and detached docu-fiction to communicate they don't belong in the street because it has been dominated by modernity. They are outside modern society, the way the *flâneur* remained still and the *dérive* streetwalker aims for a phychological awaening; the drifter represented in Juliette, a housewife engaging in prostitution, is entirerly in her own microorganism. She is detached from what is a blaze conversation about Vietnam bombing, and addresses us, the distant but observant audience, when she states " I know how to talk" rather than communicating with the characters of her space. Communication is broken with the outside world. There is a barrier that stops us from communicating consciously and fully, which is a modern flaw then and now. 'Elle' here isn't

Juliette- she represents Paris, her story was supposed to represent the ensemble',(Kline, Conley, 2014,p247) an ensemble and city that is just as silenced and repressed towards its own fate.

The sentences are unsure and questioning in *Two or Three Things*; We hear several voices in the film that are internal/external and represent how Juliettes 'experiences her rapport with others and the world'. As one hears the ' voice of others with the ears, and one's own voice with the throat.'(Kline, Conley, 2014,p249)The viewer is silent, and we have the chance to hear what 'Elle' feels truly. Her deep thoughts when staring at a cup of coffee thinking that objects are what "serves as a link between subjects" and that since she "cannot rise to a state of being, nor collapse into nothingness" she must listen , must "look around me [her] at the world, my [her] fellow beings". (Godard, 1967)

Evidently, Satre is echoed here with the harmonious link between objects and people in achieving the "being in the world" (Kline, Conley, 2014,p254) She, and the others in the cafe are alone, a man thinks that through speech he "limits the world"; Satre states that man is a "being of distances" within which he will reach consciousness. When we are static, but with movement referencing Jean Tinguinalis' Static Manifesto, 1959, cited in Danchev, p336) we move inward to explore our conscious. Our being formes and "organises itself as the world" without the need to move within it or be recognised by it (Satre,1943, p 41) Drifters experience a city entirely inwardly through its psychogeographies, through that act of listening and looking they can create the change needed for mass consciousness.

Chapter 5:

Key themes: Anxiety

Debord too, in *Critique,* used the reflexive means of documentary to question why we are so limited in the way we converse and understand each other. The loss of communication is

something the *dérive* tried to rebirth into the street, trying to infuse the pathways of the city with conversation and historicity. In the voiceover, he says "none of this is very clear. It is a completely typical drunken monologue" ,(Debord,1961) and later on that it is the fast pace of life that doesn't give us the time to say or do what is necessary- before we do "we've gone. We've crossed the street." or "we've gone overseas"(referring to the young conscripts sent to fight in Algeria).(ibid)

There is an underlying anxiety within communication and clarity in this film essay. A drunken monologue flows without hesitation but doesn't present ideas clearly to the audience. They flow past quicky, experienced predominantly through the narration rather than the detournement images. Is Debord echoing an anxiety of uncertainty that comes with modernisation? One that requires us to constantly cross streets in the kinetic movement of society that leaves little space for consciousness? There is a certain involuntary feeling to the notion of movement he proposes. Even the *dérive* is affected by the contours, currents and fixed points of a city that control and discourage entry and exit into certain zones.

 Looking back at the modern promise of the 20's, the advancement in transport and pavements was meant to expand our horizons, to give us the freedom to move and experience. However, what we notice with these films is almost that through that modernisation the city has been taken away from the streetwalker. Debord rework Marx's opening in *Das Capital* (1867) by asserting that :

In societies where modern conditions of production prevail, all of life presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. Everything that was directly lived has moved away into representation.

Debord, 1967, p1

The representation of feeling, being, freedom and communication. Both Marx and Debord acknowledge that the spectacle and economy go hand in hand and that even though the metropolis is the nuclei of development of new rational ideas, it doesn't have the capacity to allow people to "directly live" and thus creates "autonomous movement" of "non-beings" (*Debord, 1967)*. These beings are separated from the poetic and modern life, which is what psychogeographical movement tried to return. In the opening of *Critique*, the slow panning and elliptical movement try to frame some of discussions taking place in the city, of the connection between people. From that point on the narrative, which loseley starts as a love story between Debord and Catherine Rettener, collapses on itself and enters an audio-visual incoherence. Hollywood film sequences, riots, theatrical imagery and streetlife dominate screen time as we enter Debord's monologue and essay on the failings of capitalism and societal development. But no answer is directly given to us..

In the finale of *Critique*, Debord directly asks us how we can defeat modernity through the voice over, and as he does so silence follows over footage of man fighting. Before we can answer, images of man and woman smoking are intercut to diffuse the intensity of the ideas posed. After all, this spectacle is at a safe distance from the fighting and resistance; they are safe smoking and walking the streets. Debord himself doesn't seem to know what conclusion to draw. He ends the silence to tell us that film has been interrupted and will not conclude, it must be recalculated. He insists that as there is apparently no reason to begin the " formless message, there is none to conclude it.", his intention isn't to inflict some form of control or following in the audience. He appears not to have the answer on how to better society, but simply discusses its failings. The audience must "directly live" what he criticises, they must themselves enter the street and seek the answers, ending with the statement that he refuses to play "the game" of the spectacle. (Debord,1961)

Part 4:

The Derive

Chapter 1:

The New mapping

> *How could I know that this city was made to the measure of love? How*
> *could I know that you were made to the measure of my body?*

Hiroshima mon amour, Resnais, 1959

What the *dérive* enables the streetwalker of the 60's to do is experience the psychogeographical articulations of a modern city. The purpose of these drifts groups or individuals would take part in, wasn't simply about the discovery of a new ambiance in the lived city but also to acknowledge the 'principal axes of passage'. This gives the metropolis and the streets it's composed of the power to guide the walker and show the "existence of psychogeographical pivotal points"(Debord, 1956, p 5)

Yes, the streets described here are the same ones traversed by the *flâneur* 40 years prior, but the innovation and opportunity they brought then is only now starting to be criticised. This terrain of Paris is Haussmanian in the ways it uniforms space to its capitalist purpose and movement. The modernisation that came with Haussmanian renovation of the city streets and neighbourhoods of 19th century Paris evicted the working class from its centre and segregated the city along class lines. (McDonough,2010, 65) The *dérive* wanted to shrink the divide in space. It aimed to firstly, encourage individuals to practice the rapid passage through urban environments, guided by their

attractions and currents. Secondly, as an activity that criticises the control capitalism has over space, and finally as a reflexive form of production. (Rascarol. 2015)

One such reflexive production was made by Debord before the formation of the SI in which he explored how space is constructed in the urban scene and affects the perception of the walker.The map he made in 1957 called *The Naked City* (figure 6) fragments unrecognisable parts of Paris and connects them with bold, red arrows. The map visualises the drift through areas of a city that would be specific to the walker- thus his actual movement through a city is already limited to ones daily routine. The purpose of the *dérive* was exactly that of unlocking areas of the city that would otherwise be unexplored and influsing that space with its historical, cultural and psychological effect on the walker. With the *Naked city* there is an element of time, or passage, through the arrows but due to the ambiguity of the selected places there is no way to find out the verite or journey it's exhibiting.
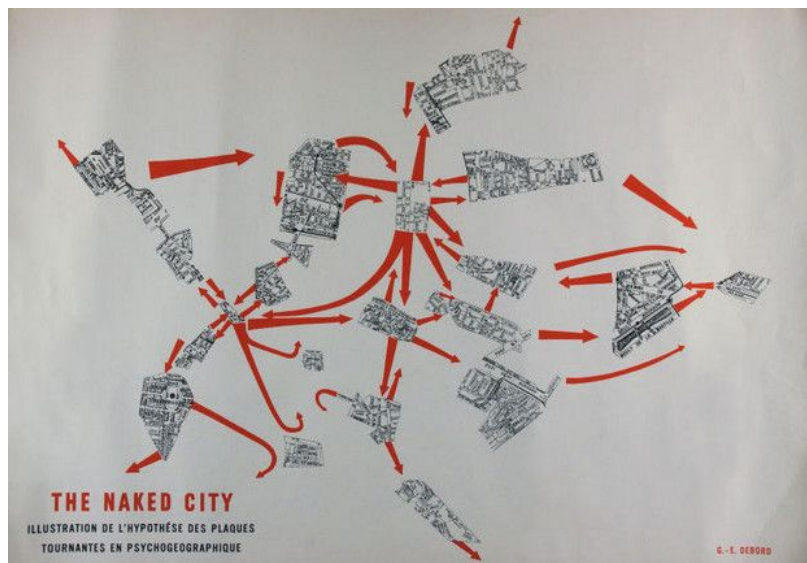

Figure 6: The Naked City

 Maps are what we use to spatially communicate, to understand a city. By fragmenting the map, Debord fragments the city and its boundaries. Even in *Hiroshima mon amour*,(Resnais, 1959) the simultaneous representation of Nevers and modern day Hiroshima without an established

change in temporality break the boundaries between time, place and its identity. The space occupied by the characters triggers unconscious memories that fuse the past and present to create a dreamlike docu-fiction narrative, and exhibit the strength of psychogeography on the mind and mapping of urban space. Through slipping in and out of sequences in different time frames, the drift here manages to be used as a device that produces memory and highlights how the city is created by those memories, to their "measurement" in the mind of the spectator.

Chapter 2:

The Derive rhythm

In Debord's later work, the *dérive* is noted in the rhythm of the films. In essence, as one physically drifts in the metropolis the images seen impact the consciousness of the drifter through an "internalised montage" that is almost cinematic. (Thierry Davila 2002:31) The street becomes the "external setting of our story" (SUR LA PASSAGE) that takes place in the mind and, when done physically, has the control to choose what it notices. However, Debord disorientates audiences in their seats, he exposes them to disconnected images, spaces and histories from which they can't escape. In *Society of the spectacle* and *In Girum Imus Nocte Et Consumimur Igni (debord, 1978)*he created rhythm and movement in the montage of disjointed visual modes; photographs of historical figures, advertisements, film sequences, soft porn and animated films merge past and present.

 He relies on memory to invent the future, for disorientated images to allow the viewer's perception to drift. He called this the 'static *dérive'* which released the viewer from the " static refrains of spectacular time" in the same way the *flâneur* became static in front of the screen as

to have the chance to process the images and- in Debord's case- reinvent the future by reconnecting with the past. (Archibald, Lavery,2019)

His refusal to frame his film with a coherent narrative and end, open up their possibility to be used as methods to invent a future that isn't tied to the failings he discusses. Like time and history itself, his films seem unfinished;s he wants the audience to use those drifting and out of context images as a way to acknowledge the past, its similarity to the current state and possibility to change what's to come. An audience in the 60's, with its political anxiety and reinvention of the city, would experience a similar drift to an audience watching today. His words can directly be positioned in our modern society of the spectacle, his images saturated with the temporal ambiguity to make them appear current and recognisable.

Conclusion

"The city
All roads lead to the city […]
The sun cannot be seen:
Mouth of light, closed
By coal and smoke"

Emile Verhaeren, 1895 cited in Hartley, p 287

The vast metropolis is the locus of our modern experience and the ideas and production that come from it. Everything leads back to its streets, our journey of development is in its centre, but those streets ground our attention and distract us from its discruction. To say something is modern, is to distinguish it above what has occurred prior and acknowledge the new possibilities it offers society. It is also the ability to be self reflexive of the modern experience and aware of its past failings and future promises.

Modern Paris of leisure as seen in the 1920's through the kino-eye is that of Haussmann's Paris and the design he set out for the city which would make it the metropolis it is today. The urban streets were filled with crowds which became synonymous with modernity. Poets, most notibally Baudelaire, would take "a bath of multitude" (Baudelaire,1869, p20) to surround themselves with the energy of the boulevard. He found a romanticism in the city illuminated by night; in the fleeting moments of the street and momentary gaze into another's soul he sees excitement, and a touch of sadness in the inability to hold on to moments (To a Passer-by, Baudelaire, 1954). But Baudelaire belongs to the *Poètes Maudits (*The cursed poets) who lived in opposition to modern society or in criticism of it, even if he was less directly critical as Verharen- who would have been classed as cursed had he been French. Verharen offers us a modernity in this writing that identifies with the suffering of the working class and was highly critical of the immorality of the capital (Silverman, 2018)

Cinema was the new form which took these notions exhibited on the streets, replacing the reader with the viewer. The kino-eye presented the experience of modernity as a rhythm driven by industrialisation and crowds. To an audience then, the images of Berlin, Paris and the collective identity of Russia (as *Man with a Movie Camera* was filmed in several cities) would have enticed and drawn them to the screen in which they were seeing a mirror image of their own metropolis, or the promise and leisure a metropolis offered.

Unfortunately, this promise wasn't fulfilled in the eyes of Debord who saw modernity in 1960's Paris as a failing and representation of what it means to live. In a capital left empty after World War Two and reborn with political unrest and the lead up to May 68, the SI sought to unify and simplify society. To make them conscious once again and aware of the image of the streets. As modernity is conceived by the visual, using documentary with fictional elements was the most accessible way to portray political stance and ask for change. *Le Joli Mai* comments that there are 'More cars than people' and gives a voice to those who seem lost underneath the surface of the spectacle- like a family with 8 children just rehoused, or a simple salesman for whom only

cash in the till matters. *Sur la passage* also asks us to question who the subject is in a way to also criticise the standard cinematic form of the FNW. (Archibald, Lavery, 2019, p111)

 Debord saw the theatre as a place where 'the desires can traverse' and thus have the space and time needed to be absorbed and discussed for what he thought of as "at least an hour"(Debord, 1955). The cinema feels like a form that echoes the desire of the promise, and desire of the people for it to be true; only now it has gained a new awareness of the failure that modernity proposed. Desire can indeed traverse in front of the screen but what that desire is changes with the context of modernity. An audience today will find Symphonies rhythm and imagery mundane and lack to see how new everything in frame was, from the mannequins to the organised pavement. However, the critique of modern experience in the 60's mirrors some of the desires of the time- those of a society that is consciously advanced and less dependent on consumerism.

> *It is a society, and not a technique, which has made the cinema like this. It*
> *could have been historical examination, theory, essay, memoirs. It could have*
> *been the film I am making at this moment.*

—Guy Debord, In Girum Imus Nocte Et Consumimur Igni, 1978

The societal condition is after all what influences the formation of groups like the SI, and what in turn is the groundbase for cinema and writing that is reflexive of the current social state and failings. Cinema, however, is only alive if spectated. The audience was an extension of the flaneur. However, seeing as the physicality is omitted through the screen, the spectator can also be referred to as a Robinsonner which was coined by Arthur Rimbaud meaning to "let the mind wander or travel mentally".(Coverley, 2006) The audience then, and now, took on this filmic journey in the mind; just like Robinson Crusoe they are free to imagine what goes on outside the frame, or on the streets. In the same way the social current of 60's Paris extended the *dérive* as a filmic concept to make accessible the criticism presented.

Modernity is changing with each new film, with each new idea presented in it society. We still, in our modern city, engage in flanerie or the *dérive* . We refer to them as poetic, romantic concepts that seem to give the city streets an authenticity and history bound to an experience. But still that experience is flawed; we are ever more saturated by commodities and a capitalist system that must struggle to contain individuals into the "game". Can we even fully drift anymore? Can we be lost the way the *flâneur* was? With the expansion of development, the metropolis seems to shrink. We no longer need to traverse to discover or experience what modernity feels like, it is at our fingertips. Cinema now must deal with this new, even more detached and numb feeling of the street, and opposed modernity.

To end with Verhaeren here would be appropriate. In *Towards a future,* he calls out to the human race to be aware of its labour and creation of its world. He questions if the fields will again create a "world saved at last from the grip of the towns?". But his questions aren't answered, like those of Debord, and he must accept the rulings of modernity which was born before him. He knew, like Debord, that "abundant life is satisfied to be immoderate, fertile human joy; rights and duties?". But he also knew that opposition is inevitable with the change in society, and in that he found hope.

Modernisation is the natural progression of our world, cinema its medium of choice, and its critisism without which modernity cannot exist is found in the 'The various dreams that the world's youth created before each new hope'. (Verharen cited in Hartley, 287)

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