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**Negotiating figurations for feminist methodologies  
- a manifest for the fl@neur**

Abstract

*Introducing the fl@neur as a feminist figuration, this article seeks to refigure and defy the notion of Baudelaire's flâneur as a male loiterer. Hence, the fl@neur comprises my points of departure as I hope to – not only promote seamlessness between body and spatiality – but also between social, virtual and material sites. The article is drawn up as an interview situation in which I serve both as the questioner and as the interviewee; a favourable approach in order to dismantle Baudelaire's dandy-like hero. The fl@neur is claimed to be an intriguing key figure in order to understand the intertwined social, virtual and material environments; the negotiation of this figure corresponds with my intention to emphasize transgressive bodies and performances as well as multiple sites. Hence, the fl@neur can be seen as a feminist figuration, occupying multi sited perspectives and taking into consideration social, virtual as well as material settings.*

Keywords: flâneur, refiguration, fl@neur, feminism, body, spatiality, densities, virtualization, multiple sites

**FLANIFESTO**

**For the perfect flâneur, it is an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow. To be away from home, yet to feel oneself everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the center of the world, yet to remain hidden from the world – such are a few of the slightest pleasures of those independent, passionate, impartial natures which tongue can but clumsily define.**

--- *Baudelaire*

<http://www.flaneur.org/flanifesto.html> (2007-09-05)

### **Introductory remarks**

The following article adopts the form of an interview in which I position myself both as the interviewer and as the interviewee. I consider the structure of interviews to be most appealing when explicating alternative streams of thoughts as it enables frank questions and responses as well as detailed dialogues between the participating parties. Hence, discussing the *fl@neur* as a feminist figuration – being simultaneously the narrator, the writer and the respondent – I bid to pave way for an intriguing, and hopefully more explicit, encounter between enquiries and responses.

By employing Donna Haraway's presentation of the Cyborg, this article introduces the *fl@neur*<sup>1</sup> as a feminist figuration<sup>2</sup> and respectively it also seeks to convey this crucial figuration as materializing in the activities of – for instance – ethnographic- and feminist researchers. Saying this I call for the directed interview to begin:

**Interviewer:** As an interviewer being brought up in a motley field of post-modern disciplines, I find developments and negotiations of feminist methodologies interesting and challenging from a range of perspectives. One of the great benefits with feminist theories is that they enable a dismantling of traditional standards and by this means; they also show that things could have been otherwise (Star 1991:38). Therefore, it is fruitful to consider metaphors as temporarily fixed, thus always open to innovative ascriptions (Jordanova 1989:9). This gives rise to new possibilities but also to obstacles and to constant negotiations. Before turning towards the interviewee I'd like to shortly introduce the current subject and the point of departure; Donna Haraway's presentations of *the Cyborg* as well as *FemaleMan*© and *OncoMouse*<sup>TM</sup> (1991,1997,2004). These are all pivotal actors in post-modern theories as well as in Science & Technology Studies (STS). In her works, Haraway

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<sup>1</sup> Note that the French term *flâneur*; man-about-town – in itself – suggests a male person. The female counterpart *flâneuse*, which also makes it rather difficult to eschew the term *flâneur* as an inherently gendered male. Following political scientist Maud Eduards (2002); men – unlike women – are not regarded as splintered subjects in that they do not perceive them selves as gendered. The self-evident assumption of him being a man correspondingly endorses mankind as male (Eduards 2002:135). Nonetheless, acknowledging language as gendered but also as a necessity for interaction, I claim the *fl@neur* to be a promising feminist figuration in order to challenge hegemonic perspectives.

strikingly depicts the extent to what it means to negotiate different figures and mould them in order to suit feminist purposes. Using the term *materialized refiguration* or *female figuration* to depict these interrupting figures; she also challenges the notion of the *Grand Narrative*. If I understand the respondent correctly, that is also one of your intentions with bringing the term *flâneur* – or as it will turn out; *fl@neur* – into play. This figure, being introduced by, among others Charles Baudelaire and developed further by Walter Benjamin are – according to you – harbouring possibilities to challenge a traditional (and standardized) understanding of the gendered researcher as well as embodied actions and the inextricability between different spatial settings. Would you like to develop your thoughts more explicitly?

**Interviewee:** Over the last couple of years, the *flâneur* has been meandering in my mind in a most dodging and defying manner. After studying texts concerning the *flâneur*, I also find the figure to be subject for ongoing debates and negotiations, which is why I seek to partake in the discussion and bend the dynamic figure in yet another angle. Haraway’s materialized refiguration – promising as a theoretical tool but also as an embodied practice in terms of hearing aids, pace makers and mp3 players; “we are cyborgs” (Haraway 1991:150) – is an important aspect in order to understand the *fl@neur* as it appears – not only as a theoretical instrument – but also as a methodological tool and as a situated (ethnographic) activity. Indeed, the *fl@neur* materializes in the constant oscillation between observer and observed, it calls to question the material setting it inhabits and seeks to problematize the own splintered position. Correspondingly; as I, leaning towards the work of theorist Slavoj Žižek (2001:18), suggest a *virtualization* of reality rather than understanding *Virtual Reality* and *Real Life* as separated entities, I have found it inspiring to – instead of discussing the *flâneur* – introduce the *fl@neur*. This feminist figuration comprises not only the intermingling between observer and observed but also between body and spatiality as well as between virtuality and reality. Just as the Parisian *flâneur* could be seen as breaking the city apart “into a shower of events” (Weinstein & Weinstein 1991:158), the streets of today – be they physical, material or virtual – are simultaneously dismantling the *fl@neur*, thus determining the embodied actions performed. This reciprocal collaboration is certainly crucial as I also hope to further emphasize the researcher as roaming and constantly oscillating between *multiple sites*

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<sup>2</sup> Note that this article adopts the term *figuration* – as opposed to *metaphor* – in order to depict “a transformative account of the self” (Braidotti 2003:54).

(Marcus 1998) and intertwined settings such as social, virtual and material spatiality. Hence, fieldworks cannot be understood as anything else than multi sited, always taking place and operating in the crucial relationship between the researcher, the informants and the spatial surroundings (Marcus 1998:84,86). Nonetheless, before delving too deep into this discussion, I'd like to pinpoint that I, by no means, suggest exhaustive explanations and full stops. Rather, I see this theoretical- as well as methodological figuration as dynamic and its framework as highly situated.

**Interviewer:** But how can the flâneur be seen as crucial in your work?

**Interviewee:** First of all, the appearance of the flâneur – and as it will turn out; the fl@neur – is indeed valuable when disclosing the intermingling between bodies and materiality as well as spatiality, be it cities, exhibition halls, online-games or virtual communities. Moreover, as I employ ethnographic methods, the flâneur as a feminist figuration calls to question my own position as a researcher. Ethnographic fieldwork and the writing of ethnographies have increasingly come to be understood as the results of a reciprocal interaction between researcher and interviewee (Arnstberg 1997:53) which is why I find the flâneur a most welcome adherent. This – indeed situated – figure proposes reciprocity between observer and observed (remember the very term flâneur as a man-about-town) and encourages an understanding of ethnographic research as inherently partial and incomplete (cf. Geertz 1973:29). However, in order to give a more detailed answer to your question, I will briefly introduce you to my thesis. The current point of departure is a short statement enveloping the difficulties in actually answering human relationship with machines (cf. Law 1994:11). And indeed, the subject has been beneficially depicted and developed by several theorists; however I sense the discussion as constantly breaking new waves, puzzling minds, adding knowledge and re-articulating existing thoughts. Delving deeper into this dilemma, I therefore suggest a scrutinizing of the closeness and reciprocity between human machine. Understanding the ambiguity between human machine, I've come to develop the area of my research; to depict this intertwined relationship by focusing on gendered embodied expressions and deterministic movements. Taking my point of departure from the body, I seek to understand how embodied knowledge is crucial in order to transgress and challenge traditional gender categories. To draw on the work of Katherine Hayles (1999), I suggest that

”when people begin using their bodies in significantly different ways, either because of technological innovations or other cultural shift changing experiences of embodiment [a variety of alternative manifests] bubble up into language, affecting the metaphoric networks at play within the culture” (Hayles 1999:206f, my comments within square brackets). Saying this, I promote Haraway’s Cyborg as an interesting female figuration and as an inspiring theoretical point of departure when introducing the fl@neur. As Haraway also states; “[f]igurations are performative images that can be inhabited” (Haraway 1997:11). Using the cyborg in order to construct “an ironical political myth faithful to feminism, socialism, and materialism” (Haraway 1991:149) Haraway strikingly elucidates the coupling between organism and machine. Nonetheless, by introducing the fl@neur as yet another feminist figuration, I seek to – to a larger extent – explicate the embodied intermingling with spatiality and artifacts, be they social, virtual or material. Correspondingly, I stress the reciprocity between body, machine and spatial sites to give rise to alternative ways of enacting gender.

**Interviewer:** So you’d claim that bodies could be extended through technological artifacts?

**Interviewee:** Yes. Bodies are not always performing according to their gender and this is – I stress – especially relevant when understanding the embodied interaction between human machine and spatial settings.

**Interviewer:** Noting the concept for this conversation – “Negotiating figurations for feminist methodologies” – I am curious to find out whether your venture can be seen as a contribution to the critique of the Baudelairean flâneur as male. Traditionally, the act of flânerie has exclusively been found within men’s bodies whereas women have been depicted as merely sites of sexuality (Wilson 1992:106) and as objects for the male gaze (cf. Wolff 1985:41; Wilson 1992:98; Mazlish 1994:52; Benjamin 1997:93). What are your thoughts about this?

**Interviewee:** Drawing on the work from Elizabeth Wilson (1992), I acknowledge the notion of the female flâneur or rather, the *flâneuse* (Wilson 1992:104f). What I find appealing with Wilson’s (1992) argument is the ways in which she presents a subversive picture to Baudelaire’s male dandy, thus advocating the woman-about-town. Correspondingly, she also responds to Janet Wolff’s (1985) early work and the latter’s emphasis on passivity and

victimization of women. While it is important to acknowledge the diminished space in which the flâneuses often were allotted a position in the public spaces – as prostituted, widows or murder victims (Wolff 1985:44; Buck-Morris 1986:119) – one must nevertheless remember that these women by no means constituted the only flâneuses. The French writer George Sand, for instance, successfully took place as an icon for the woman-about-town and hence, she challenged the *male gaze* of the flâneur. Similar to this, I seek my point of departure by calling the flâneur, only to bend the gendered gaze in slightly different ways than the traditional. In the article “The Oppositional Gaze. Black Female Spectators”, bell hooks (1992) also highlights the male gaze as crucial in order to understand visual narratives, such as photos, pictures and movies. Nonetheless, steering away from the gaze as exclusively male, hooks (1992) introduces what she refers to as *the oppositional gaze*. Leaning towards her work, I thus call for the fl@neur and the subversive gaze of this figure. Consequently, I believe that it is possible to replace the seemingly objective male gaze of the flâneur with a subjective embodied gaze (cf. Malmberg 1998:167). Donna Haraway’s (1991) notion of *situated knowledges* constitutes an interesting input in this statement as she claims all knowledge production to derive from somewhere. Partial and strongly limited in time as well as space, Haraway (1991) nevertheless suggests situated knowledges to offer a possible allegory for feminist versions of objectivity (Haraway 1991:188ff). Additive to this, Elizabeth Wilson (1992) argues that although the flâneur can be seen as the very embodiment of the privileged male idler, his characteristics undeniably lead him towards a marginal position as he, being rebel, also constantly is torn between different sites and perspectives (Wilson 1992:107). This – according to Wilson (1992) – ambivalent and fragmented character of the flâneur and the possibility to present an unidentified face in the crowd also gives rise to an anonymity that eventually annihilates him. The flâneur thus disappears in the crowd, denied a stable masculinity, forced to meander and by this means, he also fails to banish women from the streets. Consequently, the figure must be regarded as, not representing the triumph of masculine power, but rather embodying its attenuation (Wilson 1992:109), a statement I find highly interesting.

**Interviewer:** Connected to your scrutiny of the male flâneur; can you further develop the notion of the flâneur as a crucial figuration in your work?

**Interviewee:** First I'd like to pinpoint that using the flâneur as an analytical tool is not a novel venture. In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Walter Benjamin employed this figure in order to reflect upon his own methodology for the Arcade projects he was involved in. The flâneur thus provided an understanding of how it was possible to observe and investigate the signifiers of the city (Frisby 1994:89). What I find attractive with the flâneur is the intense search for flows of people and the ambiguous relation to spatiality. Just as Baudelaire suggests in one of his quotes [see the top of page 1]; “[f]or the perfect flâneur, it is an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow”. This statement can be seen as applicable for researchers conducting ethnographic fieldwork as well. Rob Shields (1994) suggests the term *participant observer* in order to grasp the aura of the flâneur (Shields 1994:75). Just like the ethnographer, the flâneur catches things in flight (Frisby 1994:92). Simultaneously being homeless and at home (cf. Jonsson 1995:34; Paasonen 2002:100), the flâneur as well as the ethnographer are constantly oscillating between closeness and distance, local and structural (Shields 1994:74); they merge into the masses only to diverge and occupy a distant position. Lena Malmberg (1998) strikingly depicts this by juxtaposing distance and intimacy, as she stresses the perfect flâneur to be a passionate observer (Malmberg 1998:156). The flâneur thus inhabits an intrinsic ambiguity, being able to at the same time be a part of the crowd (Benjamin 1997:121) and separated from it (Malmberg 1998:147). The wish to observe without blending into the masses is combined with an insight that the flâneur, by doing so, has placed the own being outside (Malmberg 1998:163). Hence, the movements of various acts seem to counteract each other, intimacy thwarts the objective observation only to be swallowed by the anonymous throng (cf. Benjamin 1997:28f; Malmberg 1998:154). This constant oscillation between closeness and distance is also what I claim as characteristic for ethnographic researchers. Consequently, I stress the notion of the flâneur as always being on the threshold (Smart 1994:162), a statement that is relevant from an ethnographic perspective as well. Following Rob Shields (1994); “[w]hile flânerie is an individual practice, it is part of a social process of inhabiting and appropriating urban space/.../” (Shields 1994:65). Put differently; the flâneur has no possibility to occupy an objective approach towards the city (cf. Malmberg 1998:167). Rather, the figure is – as also mentioned above – situated, thus undeniably a part of the crowd. As expressed [quoting from a paper];

The flâneur has no specific relationship with any individual, yet he establishes a temporary, yet deeply empathetic and intimate relationship with all that he sees--an intimacy bordering on the conjugal--writing a bit of himself into the margins of the text in which he is immersed, a text devised by selective disjunction (<http://www.thelemming.com/-lemming/dissertation-web/home/flaneur.html> 2007-09-05)

Saying this, the flâneur presents a subversive and revolutionary approach (Buck-Morris 1986:114ff; Shields 1994:71) closely connected to refiguration and re-negotiation of meaning. As Buck-Morris, also states; “[a]s a dream-image, loitering allows a subversive reading/.../with his ostentatious composure [the flâneur] protests against the production process” (Buck-Morris 1986:136). Hence, employing the flâneur can be seen as an attempt to dismantle commodification and consumption as well as black boxing of taken for granted categories.

**Interviewer:** Returning to the above concern of the flâneur as a figure conventionally seen as male, I’d like for you to further explicate how you seek to articulate the traditional notion of the flâneur.

**Interviewee:** As I suggested above, my endeavour with employing the fl@neur is to bend Baudelaire’s dandy-like figure in yet other ways, which also take into consideration, the merge between different spatial settings. Therefore I suggest the figuration to be spelled *fl@neur*. This remodelling corresponds with my intention to emphasize transgressive bodies and performances as well as multiple sites. Put differently; the reason for employing the flâneur as a figure and augment the term into what can be seen as *the fl@neur* is three-fold. Firstly, I find the discussion whether there is such a figure as the female flâneur as pivotal for further negotiations. Elizabeth Wilson’s (1992) call for *the flâneuse* presents a subversive and highly appealing flâneur, quite far away from Baudelaire’s loitering, dandy-like hero. Being portrayed as a well-dressed man, strolling in the streets of Paris in the nineteenth century – indeed a highly situated creature in time as well as in place – the flâneur nonetheless represents a much-negotiated figure. This is evident as Zygmunt Bauman (1994) suggests, “[the] modern/post-modern history [to] be, with but a little stretching, told as one of the feminization of the flâneur’s ways” (Bauman 1994:147). I also claim this feminization to



pave way for the post-modern fl@neur, the borderland being or, if you wish, *the culturally illegible body* (Stone 1992:112). This illegible body is created in the tensions between dualisms; in order to convey what counts as deviant and abnormal, the culturally illegible body is manifested and reproduced according to standardized norms. Nonetheless, I consider some aspects of the flâneuse to be rather flawed as they sometimes tend to amplify cementing structures and gender orders. Reading the article “Damernas paradis? En historia om varuhus och köpcentrum” [“The ladies paradise? A story about department stores and shopping malls”, my translation], Hillevi Ganetz (2005) advocates the female flâneur to be found in today’s shopper (Ganetz 2005:39f). By this means, she presents a capable attempt as she, just like Elizabeth Wilson (1992), challenges the assumed connection between women and the private sphere. Nonetheless, in doing so, it seems to me like the woman flâneuse is ascribed a public position that is gendered as traditional female, which is why I suggest that Ganetz (2005) runs the risk of paving way for stigmatizing and cementing rather than for empowerment. Consequently, as women invade the shopping malls, they are allotted a spatial room, deviant from the streets of the flâneur. Moreover, these women are enacted as merely consumers (cf. Lury 2000) and as such, they are denied the relaxed idling of the flâneur. This gives rise to the second reason for suggesting a refiguration of the flâneur. By employing the fl@neur, I wish to eschew the explicit focus on the gendered flâneur, let it be dandy male loiterer or the female prostitute and shopper. Rather, my endeavour with introducing the fl@neur is to promote a borderland being oscillating between traditional categories such as men and women, Virtual Reality and Real Life as well as carbon-based life and silicon-based life (cf. Hayles 1999:231). Put differently, I hope to use this female figuration in order to trouble other categories (cf. Haraway 2004:335). Paraphrasing Nina Lykke, I suggest the fl@neur to constitute an interesting adherent to the already existing figurations of in-betweenness; the goddesses, the cyborgs and the monsters (Paasonen 2002:227). All of these figures challenge hegemonic notions. Hence forth, the fl@neur can contribute, not only to bend gender identities differently but also to challenge stabilized orders (cf. Haraway 2004:329) and promote inextricability between embodiment, artefact and spatiality.

**Interviewer:** What do you hope to imply by using the symbol @? As you’ve mentioned; the term “flâneur” as such seems to inhabit transgressive elements and subversive readings. How come you advocate the need for yet another female figuration?

**Interviewee:** As hinted above, my intentions with introducing the fl@neur are to encourage multiple sites as well as seamlessness between the ethnographic researcher and the field. I also wish to expand room for the flâneur to encompass more than the streets of Paris during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. By employing this symbol, I augment Baudelaire's flâneur as a methodological approach to also include the merging of place, body and materiality. Moreover, the @ can be understood as one of the "chief signifiers of the Net" (Haraway 1997:4). It calls for fluid identities (Paasonen 2002:91), e-mails and virtual communication, and for this reason I also hope to advocate what Žižek (2001) refers to as virtualization of reality. Saying this, I understand e-mail addresses as highly ambiguous in that they are at the same time global and local. It is today possible to reach the local and regional community from practically anywhere in the world (Haraway 1997:4) and this presents a complex picture of these, often contrasting terms. The third reason for me to employ the fl@neur is that the term enables me to interpret the fieldwork I'm conducting, in adequate ways. Attending a range of different – often liminal – contexts, I consider George E Marcus (1998), term *multiple sites* as most useful. Rather than focusing on one specific setting, I wish to meander amid the different milieus, parallel realities and thus to explicate them in light of each other. Just like the flâneur, I understand the fl@neur to occupy multi sited perspectives – virtual, social and material - traditionally being found in the street, on buses, in the arcades but in the current case also showing up in a range of virtual realities. In other words; I advocate the city as a splintered socio-technical field (cf. Rudinow Sætnan 1996:35) and the fl@neur as embodying these multiple settings. By this means, the fl@neur as a feminist figuration serves as both a theoretical- and a methodological tool. Elizabeth Wilson (1992) describes the constantly oscillating perspectives by quoting George Augustus Sala's enthusiasm; "[t]he things I have seen from the top of an omnibus!" (Wilson 1992:96). Hence, she strikingly depicts the passionate relationship between the streets and the involved observer. To encompass; by using the term fl@neur, I wish to pave way for the post-modern flâneur and hence, I strive to elucidate refiguration and multiple settings as well as the culturally illegible body (Stone 1992:112). Bodies are preferably understood as sites of power and identity (Haraway 1997:180; Lock 1998:208) and by combining this physical appearance with the notion of materiality and virtualization, I hope to bring yet another borderland being into the discussion. The fl@neur is further pinpointed as a feminist figuration in that it challenges the

male privilege to limit and label gendered expressions. Constantly oscillating between different settings – the own body and surrounding crowds – the fl@neur constitutes a figuration most unwilling to be encircled and categorized. Following political scientist Maud Eduards (2002); being in motion makes you harder to designate (Eduards 2002:149). Inextricably part of spatiality as well as of material and embodied collaborations, the fl@neur thus constitutes a capricious and subversive figuration that enters into a – most ambiguous – relationship with the surroundings. By this means, the figure also diverts from Haraway's cyborg in that I seek to outline the fl@neur as constantly merging with social, virtual and material surroundings as well as with embodied flows of humans. Although Haraway – in her book *Modest\_Witness@Second\_Millennium. FemaleMan©\_Meets\_OncoMouse™. Feminism and Technoscience* (1997) – does mention the crucial intermingling between time and space as mutually organizing each other in relation to what she refers to as the second millennium (Haraway 1997:41f), I seek to augment the discussion to hopefully comprise – not only the collaboration between human and organism, time and space – but also the intermingling between observer and observed as well as between embodiment and spatiality. Saying this, I claim the fl@neur to constitute a most interesting figuration.

**Interviewer:** Connected to Haraway's second millennium and the implication of time; the rise of what today is referred to as modernity is also said to, to a large extent equate with the sharpened distinction between public and private domains (Wolff 1985:43). You have already briefly touched upon how women were coupled to the private sphere (cf. Wolff 1994:115). Consequently, since modernity to a large extent, was equated with experiences in the public sphere (Wolff 1985:44), women were also being excluded from the experience of modernity. The claim that private and public domains have been – and still to a large extent are – gendered, is, as you also mentioned, something that *unables* women to flânerie. How do you relate to the distinction between public and private?

**Interviewee:** I think it is somewhat problematic to talk about the public/private as separated entities. Indeed, spatial settings are gendered differently but the divide public/private neglects these domains as inextricable and mutually feeding off from each other. Moreover, assuming the division between public and private as a-historical and universal tends to promote an anachronistic view (Wilson 1992:98). Important to remember is the notion of public/private

as subject for constant negotiations and that makes it difficult – and not particularly fruitful – to draw sharp borders. Hence, rather than reproducing the above dichotomy, I call for the fl@neur as the transgressor, the borderland being or as Donna Haraway (2004) puts it; *the inappropriate/d other* (Haraway 2004:70). As an inappropriate/d other, the flâneur occupies an ambiguous position and makes visible flaws in the web of dualisms. Similar to the cyborg, the fl@neur thus skilfully dodges and defies dichotomist expressions (cf. Haraway 1991:181). To further elucidate and disclose the ambiguity between domains such as public and private I suggest a closer look at what can be referred to as male transgressors. For as Janet Wolff (1994) also pinpoints in her later work; women in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were by no means the only ones peeking out from the private closed sphere, thus following the crowds from afar. Indeed, artists like Chagall and Matisse several times depicted the throng from the window rather than from within the street (Wolff 1994:121). Consequently, men as well as women disobeyed the borders of what was considered as public and private domains and this opposes the assumption of gender and spatiality as black boxed categories. Gender differences are indeed not at all easy to fit into the rigid boxes of public and private (Wolff 1994:124) which is why I – following the later works of Janet Wolff – advocate “gender ambiguities, unstable borders and intermediate identities” (Wolff 1994:127)

**Interviewer:** To provoke your forthright manifest, I’d like for you to discuss the flâneur and the reputation of being merely an irresponsible idler in the early arcades of Paris. These acts of purposelessly strolling seem to enact the flâneur as rather careless.

**Interviewee:** It is true that in order to engage in flânerie, one must not have anything too definite in mind (Frisby 1994:81). At the same time, the flâneur is – quite the contrary to the person who silently waits or aimlessly strolls – immersed in the surrounding world (Frisby 1994:84). Furthermore, following Wolff (1994), I understand not only the female flâneur as “engaged in a kind of purposive mobility” (Wolff 1994:125) but also the male flâneur as “ready to grasp the aim” (Bauman 1994:139). Understanding the flâneur in terms of the actions pursued, thus in the act of flânerie (Tester 1994:7) also suggest the activity as two-folded, taking place amid passionate searching and idle-like meandering. Once again, the inherent ambiguity within the flâneur (Frisby 1994:82), the constant oscillation between subject and object – remember the sandwich men who, to a large extent were reduced to signs

and letters (Buck-Morris 1986:122) – seems most appealing to me. Experiences of total familiarity in the streets, alongside exposure, vulnerability and homelessness (Buck-Morris 1986:118) unables the flâneur to develop a specific relationship with any individual, which is why the figure presents a most unstable appearance. Consequently, the flâneur establishes a temporary, yet deeply empathetic and intimate bond with what is perceived and observed (<http://www.thelemming.com/lemming-/dissertationweb-/home/flaneur.html> 2007-09-05). As Bruce Mazlish (1994) expresses; the flâneur wishes both fusion and apartness (Mazlish 1994:48). Saying this, I once again claim the notion of the fl@neur to correspond with ethnographic fieldwork. The figure materializes in the ethnographic- and feminist researcher; it appears as salient in fieldworks and hence forth it enmeshes the permeable boundary between tool and myth, instrument and concept (cf. Ben-Tov 1995:139). Constantly oscillating between being an obvious participant and a foreign stranger in the field, I further acknowledge the different turns in my research as highly capricious. As mentioned above, this is also one reason for employing the fl@neur as a female figuration. In order to understand my position as a researcher, I seek to present a subverted picture of the flâneur with help from the fl@neur. Saying this, I do not by any means suggest this venture to be easily pursued. As Donna Haraway (1997) also states; “[n]egotiating metaphoric travel is an important and dangerous work” (Haraway 1997:139), which is why my endeavour should be understood as *an attempt to*, by introducing the term fl@neur, also explicate and convey my own splintered position as a researcher. Summing up the answer, I believe the flâneur to engulf more than the passive observer (cf. Tester 1994:18; Bauman 1994:147). There is indeed a sense of investigation in the approach that deserves to be illuminated and spelled out loud. Correspondingly; being anonymous in the crowd ([http://www.sociology.mmu.ac.uk/vms/vccc/s1/s1\\_2/-flanerie\\_4.php](http://www.sociology.mmu.ac.uk/vms/vccc/s1/s1_2/-flanerie_4.php) 2007-09-14) does not, according to me, imply irresponsibility. Rather, I claim the fl@neur to be actively participating in- and co-constructing different sites.

**Interviewer:** You mentioned earlier the inextricability between bodies and spatiality. Can you further develop your notion of this intertwined relationship?

**Interviewee:** Certainly. Taking my point of departure from spatiality, I claim the flâneur to be an embodiment of the streets (Wilson 1992:108). As stated above, the flâneur has strong

connections with the Parisian boulevards and the throngs of people during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, this turns out to be somewhat problematic when critically scrutinizing the city as a spatial setting. Hence, rather than understanding streets – of Paris in particular and of cities in general – as urban domains, I wish to steer away from dichotomies such as urban and rural, which is why I focus on what the Norwegian theorist Dag Østerberg (2000) refers to as *förtätningar*, or *densities*. Dismissing dichotomies such as rural and urban areas, the term densities is useful when scrutinizing so called densely organized socio materiel (Østerberg 2000:30). According to me, not only is the understanding of densities paving way for blurred boundaries between city and countryside; using the term also allows for alternative views of the embodied relationship between humans and spatiality. Put differently; by investigating densities I hope to emphasize the notion of the own physical appearance and the collaboration with other bodies (Østerberg 2000:67f) as well as with the spatial vernacular. The flow of bodies, movements and gestures indeed affects the own appearance when being situated in different densities and consequently, the limits towards the surrounding milieu as well as towards other bodies suddenly seem most vague and indistinct. Introducing the fl@neur, I seek to, not only promote seamlessness between body and spatiality but also between social, virtual and material sites. Being more than parallel – thus assumed as separate realities (Paasonen 2002:89) – I hope to depict these settings as constantly merging and oscillating. For being merely part in a flow of other bodies, I realize the difficulties with distinguishing myself from the field I am studying. Undeniably, I find myself floating between densities and throngs. I meander and by this means, I am no more and no less than a part of a constant beat. Just like the flâneur, I urge for densities (cf. Parkhurst Ferguson 1994:23); drawn to arenas for interaction, the crowd is my element (cf. Mazlish 1994:50) in that I find myself simultaneously considering the relation between the fluidity of the city and the physical negotiations of the space as well as other bodies (cf. Tester 1994:4f). However, as much as I find myself at home in the network, I adopt my own physical appearance to also critically examine the same. In this endeavour, the fl@neur becomes crucial.

**Interviewer:** If I understand you correctly, the fl@neur has much to offer ethnographic researchers in that the figure serves – not only as a theoretical tool – but also constitutes a methodological approach. Hence, the fl@neur is said to disclose the indecisive position of the ethnographer. Nonetheless, this ambiguous approach, the passionate observation, the study of

multiple sites and the close collaboration between bodies, materiality and artifacts are just some of the characteristics that – considering some of the texts mentioned above – unite the flâneur and the ethnographer. Leaning towards one of the former question above; what are the benefits from bringing yet another figuration, the fl@neur, into play?

**Interviewee:** First I'd like to refer to the discussion above, thus claiming the fl@neur to occupy multi sided perspectives and to take into consideration social, virtual as well as material settings. Secondly, employing the fl@neur, I seek to pinpoint the embodied practice as crucial in ethnographic research. Following Donna Haraway (1997) I understand the body – and particularly the female body – as a marked site (Haraway 1997:2). To recapitulate; the fl@neur allows for these bodily expressions to augment and thrive, sometimes in quite subversive manners. Even though the female body often is closely connected to earth and nature (Haraway 1997:164f) this traditional notion is, I claim, possible to thwart with the help from the fl@neur as a transgressive figuration. Consequently, by bringing female figurations such as FemaleMan©, OncoMouse™ and also, I suggest, the fl@neur into play, I promote re-articulations and explicated standardizations. Hence, the fl@neur encourages alternative ways of understanding embodied relationships with social, virtual and material settings. Just as Walter Benjamin (1997) depicts the flâneur as hard to separate from the gaslight (Benjamin 1997:50), I stress the importance of understanding embodied actions as intermingling with surrounding crowds, artefacts and spatial sceneries. Moreover, similar to Donna Haraway (1997) who claims the cyborg to be a child of the Scientific Revolution, the Enlightenment, and technoscience (cf. Haraway 1997:3) – thus being born in the belly of the beast – I suggest that even if the fl@neur takes its point of departure from the 19<sup>th</sup> century Paris, the city will never stipulate the homeland (cf. Buck-Morris 1986:129). Consequently, the fl@neur represents a splintered, non-innocent creature occupying merely a flawed position and this is also what makes the feminist figuration promising.

**Interviewer:** Noting that you're frequently referring to Donna Haraway I want to pinpoint the risk of treating the flâneur as an objective, alienated observer, merely depicting from afar. This is also subject for constant discussions within feminist research. Gathering these voices, Haraway (1991) presents the term *God's eye trick* to convey how (western) knowledge production to a large extent remains naturalized. Important to remember, however, is that

there is no such thing as a disembodied, omnipresent gaze, deriving from nowhere (Haraway 1991:189f). You have briefly touched upon this dilemma earlier, mentioning the flâneur as a situated figure. Would you like to further develop your thoughts?

**Interviewee:** Firstly I'd like to agree with your concern. The God-eye's trick is certainly an important dilemma to consider and moreover, to actively encounter. As I mentioned earlier; male artists like Chagall and Matisse can be seen to – alongside with disobeying the borders for what was considered as male and female domains – also represent the notion of the objective observer simply depicting from an above omnipresent perspective. Saying this, I also draw parallels to Haraway's (1991) God-eye's trick. Nonetheless, according to me the flâneur constitutes an identity, far from stable and uniform. Rather, the figure is subject to considerable ambiguity or put differently; the precise meaning of the flâneur still remains elusive (Tester 1994:1). But because of this, I'd also claim the term to be highly mouldable. Hence, it encourages elaborations and refigurations. The assumption that the flâneur should be regarded as disconnected from the multiple sites being depicted is only partly adequate. Indeed, this figure inherits ambiguous feelings towards the surrounding. At the same time as being closed off, the flâneur is undeniably a part of the density. Hence, the passionate spectator, the centre of the milieu conveyed, simultaneously remains hidden from the world (Gluck 2001:76). Consequently, the flâneur has the most shifting identities, oscillating between vaporization and centralization of the Self (Gluck 2001:77). Being the close cousin, I argue for the fl@neur to harbour an ambiguity similar to the flâneur. Further, I'd like to once again emphasize the similarities between the flâneur and the ethnographic researcher; both figures have the possibility to partly re-articulate meaning. Saying this, I ask you to note the expression “partly”; sometimes re-articulations are possible just as long as the standards remain uncontested (Tester 1994:12). Leaning towards the work of Susan Buck-Morris (1986), I thus claim “the flâneur as-writer [to] have social prominence, but not dominance” (Buck-Morris 1986:112). Consequently; the flâneur's gaze must be seen as flawed and undeniably situated. The ways in which this figure deploys different settings are nothing but flawed representations and saying this, I stress the flâneur as well as the fl@neur – who has inherited a range of traits from its cousin – to be quite far away from the omnipresent God-like gaze. Idling around, paving way through densities, the flâneur certainly has to take into consideration, the throngs of surrounding traffic and the crowds of people passing by, which



is why the seemingly mobile characteristic for the flâneur can easily be turned into immobility (cf. Parkhurst Ferguson 1994:32). Hence, the flâneur takes place and is allotted a position in constant collaboration with the social, virtual and material surroundings. This reciprocity indeed requires an awareness of the own being. The notion of the own embodiment is also strikingly conveyed by Mary Gluck (2001) as she displays the portrait “A Frenchman painted by himself” (Gluck 2001:74); a graphite sketch of a man – presumably a flâneur – portraying himself in front of a mirror. Nonetheless, as Zygmunt Bauman (1994) also pinpoints; the mirroring is twisted, the portrait is situated and the flâneur is – rather than reflecting – displaying crumpled pictures, mimics (Bauman 1994:139) of the settings as well as of the own being. Once again the fl@neur adopts the traits from the flâneur, the figure can indeed be seen as part and parcel of the multiple sites depicted, the body being mapped and marked by others. Also, similar to the flâneur, the fl@neur reads the flows of people passing (cf. Frisby 1994:99), writes about the shoals of embodied actions (cf. Wilson 1992:95) and by this means, this feminist figuration advocates humans, rather than representing ends and conclusions, to preferably be regarded as means (cf. Shields 1994:77).

**Interviewer:** As can be seen in texts considering the flâneur, this figure was, at least initially, strongly connected to the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century Paris (Tester 1994:1). However, being limited in time as well as in place, the flâneur also faced a rather quick death. What are your thoughts about the conveyed death of the flâneur?

**Interviewee:** Indeed, the flâneur was originally used in order to depict a man who loitered around in the streets of Paris, a picture that also can be seen in several of Charles Baudelaire’s texts. Hence, the figure is – although I like to understand the fl@neur as occupying densities rather than boulevards – situated in an urban context (Wilson 1992:94; Tester 1994:9) and more exactly, in a Parisian context (cf. Parkhurst Ferguson 1994:22). The strong connection between the streets of Paris during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the flâneur can also be seen in the text of Buck-Morrs (1986) where she claims “[t]he “flow” of humanity [to have] lost its gentleness and tranquillity” (Buck-Morrs 1986:102). Nonetheless, reading the article of Buck-Morrs (1986), I suggest the fl@neur to allow for shoals of people and artifacts in the post-modern era. Following Allucqère Rosanne Stone claiming; “I live a good part of my life in cyberspace, surfing the Net, frequently feeling like a fast-forward flâneur” (quoted

in Paasonen 2002:116), I accordingly promote the flow of humanity to proceed, however in different patterns and within altered settings. Even though this figure preferably is understood as closely connected to the Parisian context, philosophers like Sartre have been adopting the flâneur into other contexts as well (Tester 1994:10). Consequently, I claim that it is possible to find traces of the flâneur, for instance in the laid back zapping between TV-channels or as Stone mentions above; in surfing the net. Drawing on the work of Zygmunt Bauman (1994); the post-modern flâneur can be seen to practice the art of flâneurism without being mobile (Bauman 1994:155), as in this case, not being forced to even leave the couch. Nonetheless, in order to promote renegotiations, it is of importance to take the traditional flâneur seriously. For, as Haraway stresses; “the collapse of metaphor and materiality is a question/.../ of modes of practice among humans and nonhumans that configure the world/.../” (cf. Haraway 1997:97). Hence, on the one hand, in the minute the flâneur is refigured and removed from the streets of Paris, it begins to disappear and lose clarity. By this means, I’d like to elucidate the flâneur as inhabiting a historical specificity, which cannot be foreseen. As Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson (1994) also writes; “[a]bstraction has its costs. Isolating the flâneur from the time, the place and the texts in and from which this urban personage emerged turns the figure into an analytical category/.../” (Parkhurst Ferguson 1994:22). I strongly agree with the above claim; every attempt to transform metaphors is somewhat flawed as it harbours elements of discrepancy and mismatching, of this we have to be aware. On the other hand, the notion of the flâneur as contextualized opens up for other interpretations, which is why I also find it possible to augment the term flâneur, thus presenting the fl@neur as a feminist figuration. As hinted above; as tool and myth mutually constitute each other (Ben-Tov 1995:139) the death of the flâneur might be relevant in a Parisian context but according to me, the figuration certainly has the capability to live a rich life outside the boulevards of Paris.

**Interviewer:** This interview is coming to an end but before we finish, let me just ask one more question. As much as we’ve been discussing your intentions with using the fl@neur as a figuration, can you see other benefits with using the fl@neur and how do you connect this to yourself as a researcher?

**Interviewee:** Studying the flâneur and also bringing the fl@neur into play is a most interesting journey. Leaning towards Haraway's feminist figuration – the Cyborg – I call for the fl@neur in order to thwart dualisms. As already mentioned I stress the fl@neur as a feminist figuration to challenge the notion of men and women, observer and observed as well as body and spatiality. The fl@neur presents a subversive reading of embodied collaborations and with its multiple appearances it challenges the notion Baudelaire's flâneur as a man-about-town, suggesting that things indeed could have been otherwise (cf. Star 1991:38). Moreover, comparing the flâneur with Gilles Deleuze's and Félix Guattari's (1987) term *rhizome*, the metaphor seems to best be understood in light of what it is not. Indeed, the rhizome can be understood and resembled to the network of branches in a tree, but interestingly enough, it comes into being from the very separation to the tree (Deleuze & Guattari 1987:7). Following Priscilla Parkhurst-Ferguson (1994) and Walter Benjamin (1997), I find the flâneur to be defined in similar ways; “to stroll is to vegetate, to flâner is to live” (Parkhurst Ferguson 1994:29), “[t]o wander is human, to *flâner* is Parisian” (Parkhurst Ferguson 1994:22) or “[the joy of watching] can stagnate in the gaper; then the *flâneur* has turned into a *baduad*” (Benjamin 1997:69, his italics) are all expressions that define the flâneur through what the figure does *not* do. Also, I'd like to once again stress the similarities between the fl@neur and the ethnographer. For rather than reflecting true conditions, I believe the fl@neur to divert readers from dullness (cf. Buck-Morris 1986:112), thus presenting a rather crumpled picture of the surrounding settings. Moreover, together with Østerberg's (2000) term densities, the fl@neur constitutes a re-negotiated scene for encounters between observer and the masses (cf. Malmberg 1998:165). Indeed, it is motivated to scrutinize my own reasons for trying to wake up the lost male flâneur from his dwellings and introduce the fl@neur. This feminist figuration – introduced as both a theoretical tool and a methodological approach, but also as materialized in the appearance of the ethnographic- or feminist researcher – allows for a chance to present a subversive picture of the flâneur and bend it slightly differently. Crucial for me is to understand how the fl@neur merges with the social, virtual and material surroundings and the embodied flows of humans. As mentioned above; at the same time as the flâneur transgresses the borders between individual and community, the figure is no more and no less than a part of a constant flow. I wish to conclude with my hopes for the fl@neur; to act as “a shifting projection of angst rather than a solid embodiment of male bourgeois power” (Wilson 1992:109). The

fl@neur is certainly an intriguing key in order to understand the intertwined social, virtual and material environments (cf. Tester 1994:18) and by this means, I urge for a continued meandering in these multiple sites.

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