

Streets for Cyborgs: The Electronic Flâneur and the Posthuman City

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Abstract

This paper separates the city and the street in order to examine them as concepts which order our experience of both cyberspatial worlds and the 'posturban' city. The extraordinary persistence of the flâneur and his successor, the cyberflâneur, despite both having been pronounced 'dead' can be attributed to the need to reconcile these concepts in the continued reproduction of urban subjectivities under the terms of global capitalism. However, there is a tension between the understanding of embodiment which the practice of flânerie mandates and new ontological concepts emerging from the way that the biological sciences now write the body. I will argue that new practices of spatial production which subvert the conceptual cartography of contemporary urban space can emerge from an understanding of the street as responsive to a posthuman performance of embodiment.

KEYWORDS: flâneur, cyberflâneur, posthuman, urban space, cyborg, performativity

KEY ONLINE RESOURCES:

Posthuman Remains (author's weblog), <http://posthumanremains.wordpress.com>

Donna Haraway's 'A Cyborg Manifesto' <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/donna-haraway/articles/donna-haraway-a-cyborg-manifesto/>

Discussion of the flâneur on The Arcades Project Project website, <http://www.thelemming.com/lemming/dissertation-web/home/flaneur.html>

Response to Evgeny Morozov's 'Death of the Cyberflâneur', Cultural Memory in Urban Space weblog, <http://culturalmemoryurbanspace.wordpress.com/2013/01/22/the-death-of-the-cyber-flâneur/>

Interview with Karen Barad, New Materialism: Interviews & Cartographies, <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/o/ohp/11515701.0001.001/1:4.3/--new-materialism-interviews-cartographies?rgn=div2;view=fulltext>

Streets for Cyborgs: The Electronic Flâneur and the Posthuman City

First proposed by Charles Baudelaire in 1863, the flâneur is an extraordinarily persistent figure who has largely been celebrated for his¹ apparent freedom from the restraints of mundane urban existence. At best he is a dilettante aesthete expressing the leisured attitude of the middle classes and, at worst, a somewhat sinister figure; a collector of physiognomies for no other purpose than to categorise and mark the physical types who inhabit the city. Despite the fact that Walter Benjamin pronounced his demise when the Paris arcades gave way to the automobile and the department store (Benjamin, 1997, p. 54), his ghost has continued to haunt the modern city, if only in the libraries of research that have attempted to understand the relationship between subjectivity, capital, and the built environment. More recently, he has re-emerged as the cyberflâneur, associated with the inquisitiveness of casual web surfing (Mitchell, 1996; Greinacher, 1997; Featherstone, 1998) and, elsewhere, videoblogging and online gaming (Simon, 2006; Atkinson & Willis, 2007). This is hardly surprising, given that, when William Gibson coined the term 'cyberspace' in his seminal novel *Neuromancer* (1986), he characterised it in terms of the lexicon and imagery of street navigation. But, more than this, there is a correspondence between the emerging industrial city of the 19th century and the emergence of cyberspace in the late 20th century as a new space producing an urgent need for a figure that could represent the conditions of its inhabitation. Furthermore, as Adriana de Souza e Silva has pointed out, contemporary cities are 'hybrid spaces' (2006, p. 262) where mobile technologies blur any remaining distinctions between urban and information space.

On the face of it, cyberflânerie would seem to provide a suitable description for the pleasures of hybrid space. It is certainly true that, in the increasingly striated cities of the neoliberal world order, at least in the developed West, casual web surfing allows the illusion of a certain freedom. Activities associated with the flâneur ; strolling, lingering, changing direction at a whim, gazing at commodities for sale and a kind of detached inquisitiveness about fellow citizens and their social status are all provided for by Web 2.0 and, thanks to mobile devices, without the confines of four walls and with the body fully involved in movement through space. However, in this paper, I am concerned with interrogating the notion of the cyberflâneur as a figure adequate to representing the complexities of how we inhabit and experience the hybrid spaces of contemporary cities. My aim will be to not only

question the adaptation of the flâneur to information space but to interrogate what the cyberflâneur reveals about the production of space as an effect of the entangling of commodified digital space with the space of the city. With reference to Walter Benjamin's writings on the flâneur, I will argue that the practice of flânerie serves to articulate the everyday life of the street with the productive forces of the economy and the architectural arrangements of state power and its institutional histories. The cyberflâneur, as I will demonstrate, thus emerges as a figure which attempts to manage the tension between a residual subjectivity, anchored in the first flowering of the industrial city, and established by the flâneur and an emergent posthuman ontology and consciousness which, I contend, can re-structure our relationship to space and thus our understanding of ourselves as urban subjects. Drawing on posthuman theory, I will propose that we understand the production of space as performative and thus responsive to practices which confound the fixed orders of modern materialities.

Initially then, I want to outline an approach to urban space which can elucidate how flânerie works to maintain a hierarchy of distinctions. This will require an analysis of 'the city' and 'the street' as separate but related concepts. I want to separate these concepts for two purposes: a) to examine the cultural and social contexts from which they emerge and b) to develop an understanding of their role in the production of both urban and electronic spaces.

The City and The Street

I live in London, in the UK where the concept of 'the city' refers to a specific square mile which, traditionally, has housed the financial institutions which represent a large part of the UK economy. Although London's financial services institutions can no longer be contained within such a restricted space, 'the city' remains a metonym for the functions that it formerly contained. Although the City of London is unique in the world, being a city within a city with, for instance, its own police force, it serves well to represent the association between cities and the institutional arrangements of trade and finance. In opposition, references to 'the street' invoke spaces where social interactions take place, the world of everyday life, as well as the space where social forces are mobilised; the place from where threats to the hegemony of capital accumulation and its social arrangements may emerge.

The association of the street with both organised resistance and supposed criminal behaviour means that it works metonymically to stand for a certain edgy lawlessness and style which has been successfully worked into marketing campaigns for products associated with an identity which draws on notions of rebelliousness and irresponsibility. This not only effectively neutralises the expression of dissent by recuperating and commodifying its symbolic statements but serves to proliferate those statements as reminders of the supposed dangers that justify the draconian surveillance that plagues contemporary city dwellers (and Londoners in particular). Take, for instance, the 'hoodie', essentially a hooded sweatshirt that is a convenient foil for CCTV cameras, adopted by, predominately, young men (and particularly young black men) who are the most statistically likely to be stopped and searched by police on the streets (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-24902389>). Hoodies are everywhere in urban spaces, worn as fashion statements and promoted as such by advertising and celebrity culture but their association with lawlessness provokes not only anxieties about the street as a place of danger but over-identification with the vigilante identity that the design of gated communities and other security conscious initiatives implicitly impart to citizenship. The effect of this was horrifyingly demonstrated by the murder of Trayvon Martin by George Zimmerman, a 'neighbourhood watch' volunteer, in Sanford, Florida in 2012 (<http://www.complex.com/city-guide/2012/03/the-murder-of-trayvon-martin>).

There is thus a relationship between how the street is understood conceptually and the semiotics of race and criminality; inclusion and exclusion. The street, arguably, is where urban space is produced if 'urban' is understood to refer to the social arrangements that emerge from the organisation of capital in any given historical moment or, as Andy Merrifield puts it 'capital produces the urban as a conceived space and we are left to inhabit it as lived space' (2013: loc. 1092). My proposition that we should consider the city and the street as opposed to 'the city' and 'urban culture' for instance, allows for a formulation of difference that points to different scales of movement and different perspectives which correspond to how we experience ourselves as subjects under the terms of what Merrifield calls '*planetary urbanization*' (loc. 183, emphasis in original). Let me explain this by returning to the city as a space conceived by capital and, in particular, as an expression of, and home for, the ideal subject of scientific modernity.

Posturbanism

In Michel de Certeau's 'Walking in the City' the street emerges as a writerly space, open to re-inscription by the 'ordinary practitioners' who live 'below the thresholds at which visibility begins' and write 'an urban "text" without being able to read it' (1984, p. 93). As they follow the paths of their daily lives and negotiate the prohibitions of urban space according to either whim or need, they instantiate new and secret meanings at odds with what de Certeau calls the 'Concept-city' (p. 95) produced by the god's eye view of rational city planning and administration. However, there is a tension here between the promise of the street as a writerly space, able to subvert the panoptic organisation of the urban text and the lure of discovering the self as a unity secured by appropriating the elevated view on which the Concept-city depends. De Certeau, famously, begins his 'walk' through the textual labyrinth of the city from the 110th floor of the World Trade Centre from where he experiences the euphoria of panoptic vision which both disconnects him from the concerns of daily life and connects him with that sense of knowledge which is knowledge of the self as individuated by rational perception. '[T]he fiction of knowledge', as he says, 'is related to this lust to be a viewpoint and nothing more' (p. 92).

In the twenty-first century global city, this lust is addressed by selling the elevated view as a commodified experience, not only through the marketing of tall buildings as tourist destinations but in the way that cities are hyperrealised as experiences in themselves. This is what Sarah Chaplin and Eric Holding (2002) refer to as the 'posturban' city, a term also employed by the architectural theorist Anthony Vidler (1992) to describe the way that the contemporary city is conceptually organised according to densities of data transfer and information regulation rather than the living and working bodies of its inhabitants. In both senses of the term, the posturban thus describes the development of the Concept-city from a space regulated according to what de Certeau calls 'the urbanistic project' (1984, p. 95) to a space where regulation depends on how far it approximates its own mythology.

What makes cities attractive to both tourists and investors at the current time is their porosity to flows of information and capital and their responsiveness to the way that they are depicted in a variety of media; film, TV, the internet and magazines. Thus, in Chaplin and Holding's words, the city is '*not what it is, but what it is made out to be*' (2002, p.

185, emphasis in original). This 'fantasy city' (Hannigan, 1998), as both Chaplin and Holding and John Hannigan point out, is maintained through a 'McDonaldising' of its elements; a standardisation of different scales of movement within urban space so that, like a McDonald's hamburger, it is served up as a controlled and calculated experience. The desire for risk and adventure is equally managed through theme parks and controlled excursions which offer the chance to experience the 'dangerous' city of either the historical past or the mythologised present but with entrances and exits clearly marked². At the level of the street then, the unknown quantities, the 'real facts of urban living' (Chaplin & Holding, 2002, p. 188) must be exorcised in favour of a reified experience of 'streetness' as exemplified by CityWalk at Universal Studios in Los Angeles which 'operates like a film set, being only one street deep, all fronts and no backs, a collection of façades against which people can feature in their own movies' (p. 190).

What then, of de Certeau's 'ordinary practitioners'? In the UK, the McDonaldisation of London, given a boost by the Olympic spectacle in 2012, now continues with the removal of council (state housing) tenants from those boroughs most favoured by both tourists and investors with the economic recession providing a convenient excuse (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2013/feb/13/london-council-relocation-benefits-cap>)³. In order to inhabit the posturban city residents must themselves succumb to the 'crowd control, funnelling and shepherding' (Chaplin & Holding, 2002, p. 191) required to maintain the posturban experience, effected by electronic gatekeeping and 'preventive' policing. At the same time, while they still walk the streets of the city, the texts that they produce are no longer a secret or at odds with the institutional cartographies of urban space but contribute to the spectacularisation of the city as they are photographed, videoed, tweeted and blogged. Geotagging via mobile devices, instantly correlated with data mined from social networking sites makes an open secret of journeys across and within global cities, of use to marketers and promoters of consumer products as well as government agencies concerned with security. In the new circuit of culture (du Gay et al, 1997), we increasingly produce ourselves as consumers through representing ourselves in electronic networks which locate us in an order of commodifiable and controllable identities.

De Souza e Silva argues that, as the Internet becomes mobile, users themselves become ambulant nodes in the network which leads to a change in how physical space is experienced. While it is true that the hybridisation of digital and physical spaces creates new forms of sociability, it is also the case that hybrid space is a posturban production of space, conceived by capital, which we are left to inhabit as a form of lived hyperreality. The branded city satisfies de Certeau's lust 'to be a viewpoint' by offering both to tourists and inhabitants a pre-determined experience which is, finally, an experience of the self as an informed exerciser of rational choice. The reporting of Paris Syndrome (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paris_syndrome), a psychological condition supposedly suffered by Japanese tourists who set out to encounter the branded city but cannot avoid the reality of the street, may be apocryphal but nevertheless exemplifies the anxieties of posturban engagement. If the real inhabitants of Paris refuse to conform to the branding, consumer identities are threatened while, at the same time, the street imposes itself as an uncontrolled force which activates fear of strangers; the fear that surveillance has failed and that unruly elements (in this case the legendary rudeness of Parisiens and the very real social deprivation from which many of them suffer) will fracture the seamlessness of the experience.

Paris, of course, was where the flâneur was born and there are echoes here of the kinds of anxieties through which he is produced as an idea. The rapid development of the industrial city in the 19th century led to a fear of crowds and the social class of which they were largely composed (Le Bon, 1896). The flâneur ensures that the crowd responds to the logic of the capitalist order. Benjamin describes his disposition as an 'intoxication of empathy' (Benjamin, 1999, M17a,4, p. 449) with the commodity which is 'empathy with exchange value itself' (M17a,2, p. 448). As a detached observer, he collects the crowd into identifiable 'types', identities which can then be sold back to the people as assurance that the crowd is amenable to rational calculation; that it responds to categorisation and thus, implicitly, control. The occupation most readily attributed to him is that of journalist and Benjamin also compares him to the detective (M13a,2, p. 442). In the same *Convolute*, Benjamin remarks that the flâneur is 'the observer of the marketplace. His knowledge is akin to the occult science of industrial fluctuations. He is a spy for the capitalists, on

assignment in the realm of consumers' (M5,6, p. 427). In other words, the knowledge that he accumulates is guaranteed and given legitimacy by the logic of the market.

The flâneur then, while apparently amusing himself by strolling aimlessly, changing direction on a whim and following individuals that he finds interesting, is actually engaged in managing anxieties about the unknowability of the city; its crowds and its bewildering array of attractions and commodities by collecting them into categories which, once determined, can be sold for a profit. It is hardly surprising then that in 1986 Susan Buck-Morss would suggest that '[i]n the flâneur, concretely, we recognize our own consumerist mode of being-in-the-world' (1986, pp. 104-5). This comment is, in fact, doubly appropriate in the second decade of the twenty-first century when 'prosumption' in which 'businesses put consumers to work' (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010, p. 17), facilitated by Web 2.0, is becoming an increasingly dominant mode of economic and social relations. The concept of cyberflânerie succinctly encapsulates the appeal of prosumption which, as Ritzer and Jurgenson note, is considered highly enjoyable (pp. 20-1). In fact they suggest that the rise of prosumption signals a new stage of capitalism in which it no longer makes sense to speak of workers as exploited. While this tends to ignore the fact that prosumption requires access to computer hardware which is produced largely by sweated labour in the global south, it is also true that the emphasis on effectiveness over efficiency in the prosumer mode of production (p. 22) shifts the emphasis from traditional associations between work and efficiency maximising strategies like time management and division of labour towards modes of production associated with the artisan or hobbyist. The enjoyment of prosumption, at least in its online form, can thus be readily associated with the kinds of freedom that the flâneur enjoys and which is prefigured in the pleasures of cyberflânerie. William J Mitchell, introducing the cyberflâneur in 1996 expressed this enjoyment when he wrote 'I am an electronic flâneur . I hang out on the network ... The keyboard is my café' (p. 7) and Mike Featherstone has also written enthusiastically about the ability of the cyberflâneur to 'jump out of the street' into another street at whim, rather than waiting to pass an intersection (1998, p. 921). However, more recently, Yevgeny Morozov, in an article for the New York Times, pronounced 'the death of the cyberflâneur', mourning the 'funky buzz of the modem' which announced access to the relatively uncharted wilderness of Web 1.0 and lamenting

the 'frictionless sharing' afforded by social media which forces both the pace and character of web engagement and where strolling is replaced by a forced march in the direction of experiences for sale (Morozov, 2012).

However, this is to miss the point. Privileging the supposed freedoms of the cyberflâneur masks the deep imbrication of the practice of flânerie with the conjunction of the mechanisms of capital accumulation and the ontologies of urban forms, something of which Benjamin was acutely aware. As I will demonstrate in my next section, it is the colonising perspective of the flâneur that lends itself to the pleasure of cyberflânerie; a perspective which determines both how digital space is experienced and how urban space is consequently understood.

The Flâneur in the Wilderness

One of the most enduring myths about the city is that it is in some way inimical to human health and well being. Of course, the rapid growth of the modern city in Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the heavy industry which drove it, as Friedrich Engels has elaborated (1844), led to a living purgatory for the impoverished urban proletariat and a very real fear of the ensuing disease and high rate of mortality. It was during this period, as Henri Lefebvre has pointed out, that '[n]ature, as image and concept, nostalgia and hope, came into view, in opposition to the City' (2003, p. 107). The bourgeois concept of nature, in fact, entails the notion of access to a privileged space and the right to escape from the city (Lefebvre 2005, p. 157). At the same time, the natural world retains associations with uncharted territory; with space conceived of as empty and open to colonisation.

This, in fact, is how the flâneur views the city. According to Benjamin, the city, for the flâneur can evoke a sublime sensibility, a response previously reserved for the natural world. '[T]he old Romantic sentiment for landscape dissolves', writes Benjamin, 'and a new Romantic conception of landscape emerges – of landscape that seems, rather, to be a cityscape ... (1999, M2a,1, p. 420). Elsewhere in *The Arcades Project* he refers to the fictions of Fenimore Cooper to evoke the sense in which the flâneur experiences the city as wilderness, as a space fraught with adventure and the possibility of heroism (M11a,5, p. 439; Featherstone, 1998; Clark, 2000; Tester, 1994). Conceived of in this way, the city

becomes a wild and unruly place which not only contains exciting dangers but which holds out the possibility that it can be brought under calculative control. The flâneur's quest, to collect and categorise while 'botanizing on the asphalt' (Benjamin, 1999, J82a,3, p. 372) can be understood, as has been noted recently by Richard Pope, as a form of 'phallic *jouissance*' (2010, p. 9). He performs what Donna Haraway has called the 'god trick' (1991, p.189); arrogating to himself the ability to see everything from nowhere and thus taking up the position of the modern scientist or natural philosopher for whom nature is a feminine resource replete with 'secrets' which can be 'penetrated' (Easlea, 1981, pp. 85-6). Feminist critiques of science have pointed to the sense in which the production of knowledge has, traditionally, relied upon a disembodied gaze; an elevated view which secures the object of the gaze as providing the resource through which the rational masculine subject may emerge (Haraway, 1991; Harding 1986; Rose, 1994). 'Nature' thus becomes both a challenge to be surmounted and a threat to be subdued. It functions to represent the irrationality of the body subject to libidinal drives and is the repository of universalising myths which draw on notions of what is essential to human being. While these myths were most prevalent during the 19th and early 20th centuries, contemporary consumer culture still relies on an idea of tamed nature to sell everything from shampoo to washing machines. The simple equation of 'natural' products with bodily health is an assurance not only of rational choice but also of scientific knowledge as a guarantor of natural integrity; the same assurance that the flâneur offers when he encounters the city as a wilderness to be explored and mapped according to a logic of scopic penetration.

To return to my distinction between the city and the street, it is the street which is the hunting ground of the flâneur, the 'urban jungle' that the adventurer must penetrate in order for the city to emerge as a conceptual totality. Kristin Veel has also noted this distinction in her analysis of representations of both digital and urban space as labyrinths. As she points out, the tradition of the labyrinth, particularly in the visual arts, always implies a distinction between what she calls the 'labyrinth walker' and the 'labyrinth viewer' (2003, p. 156) where the latter is privileged with an overview and understanding of the totality which the former is denied. 'The flâneur ', she writes, is not only a spectator, he is part of the city labyrinth, and his steps constitute its outline. He is both

viewer and walker' (p. 159). As cyberflâneurs we inherit this dual perspective. We are labyrinth walkers whose steps constitute the outline of the posturban, both at ground level and in the virtual space of the networks where, as labyrinth viewers, we both produce and consume it as spectacle in the same way that the flâneur produces the modern city as 'phantasmagoria' (Benjamin: 1999, 21, I). Furthermore, there are resonances here with the way in which Benjamin alludes to the phantasmagorian city as both concealing and celebrating its history as a colonial centre. As the flâneur peruses the arcades with their wealth of goods from around the world, he does so with an orientalist eye, where vision confirms that the wilderness has offered up its bounty and the violence of colonial power is subsumed within his encompassing gaze.

As Michel Foucault has so cogently demonstrated (1994 [1970]), the grammar of physical differentiations produced by the biological sciences from the eighteenth century onwards is inseparable from the discourse which regulates labour within a market economy. As I have argued elsewhere (Shaw, 2013) this has contributed to a cognitive cartography of urban space which, on the surface, maps the city according to an organic structure which produces topographies of race, class and gender. At the same time, and in accordance with nineteenth-century notions of atavism and biological recrudescence, urban sociological discourse constructed the city as harbouring a hidden primitivism which could be exposed by the scientific method and subjected to corrective measures. The flâneur then can be understood to produce the space of the street as a resource for a particular kind of knowledge-making. As a 'spy for the capitalists', he is a field-worker among the natives, bringing the excess of the 'primitive' under calculative control. Cyberflânerie repeats this experience in an orgy of photographic excess as tourists confirm their cultural capital by snapping and posting images of exotic destinations on social media sites (Lindgren, 2007).

Nor is the association between colonialism and cyberspace restricted to social media. As early as 1995, Mary Fuller and Henry Jenkins published a dialogue in which they compared the experience of playing Nintendo games with the sixteenth and seventeenth-century narratives of new-world travel writing. Both are 'forms of narrative that privilege space over characterization or plot development' and they share 'a logic of spatial exploration and conquest' (1994, p. 71). When Jenkins watches his son playing Nintendo,

'I watch him play the part of an explorer and colonist, taking a harsh new world and bringing it under his symbolic control' (p. 69). 'Streets', writes Benjamin, 'are the dwelling place of the collective' (1999, M3a,4, p. 423) but the flâneur is both of the street and removed from it so that 'the collective' becomes the object which confirms him as a colonising subject. He, like Jenkins' son playing Nintendo, brings the harsh new world of the metropolis under symbolic control. Thus, as David Gunkel points out, '[c]yberspace, despite its futuristic rhetoric, is not ahistorical. It has a history, and this history is directly connected to some problematic precedents' (2001, p. 46). Gunkel here is not referring only to game space but to the way that the 'electronic frontier' (p. 14) in general has been understood. Cyberspace may well be, in Gibson's words, a 'consensual hallucination' (1986, p. 12) but the terms under which we give our consent are determined by a logic which, as Gunkel puts it, 'falls under the purview of new world adventure, namely, the quest for discovery thinly veiling a search for gold' (2001, p. 39).

It is possible to argue then that the cyberflâneur is alive and well and can stand as an analogy for the contemporary urban subject who, like the flâneur, can get 'lost in the labyrinth of the streets' (Veel, 2003, p. 159) while, simultaneously producing and accessing the totalising perspective afforded by immersion in digital space. In digital gaming and social media, while historical memory is rehearsed and hyperrealised, we are privileged with the perspective of Veel's labyrinth viewer while, at the same time, as labyrinth walkers, we sell ourselves like Benjamin's prostitute who is 'commodity and seller in one' (Buck-Morss, 1986, p. 121). The street here is established as a resource for the city and the production of hybrid space can be seen to depend upon the mode of abstract individualism which the flâneur figures. This, as I have demonstrated, is dependent upon the construction of the human subject as an effect of the economic and scientific discourses of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. If informational paradigms can be held to account for what it means to have a life in the *twenty-first* century, how can we use this to figure new concepts of embodiment which can oppose the entrenched hierarchical social structures that cyberflânerie appears to endorse?

Streets for Cyborgs?

The computing technologies which make information space possible have also had a profound effect on the biological sciences and the way that the composition of life is

understood. During the latter half of the twentieth century, as the sequencing of genomes became a reality and the advent of the Human Immunodeficiency Virus challenged accepted models for the working of the immune system, there was a shift from an understanding of life determined by organic structures to a model which privileged information as the determinant of biological systems (Hayles, 1999). At the same time, new patterns of working and social life were emerging from the rapidly developing networks of computer mediated global capital (Castells, 2010 [1999]). As these models have converged life, understood as a set of exchangeable codes, has itself become a commodity and new sciences of tissue engineering from regenerative stem cells are issuing in a change in concepts of corporeality from a fixed organic topography to an understanding of bodies as a topological field of possibilities (Cooper, 2008, pp. 102-127). In the process, what corporeality consists in has become an open question and the once inviolable human body has emerged as a contingent multiplicity of viral, genetic and technological variables. Although the labouring body has always been marked by its imbrication with the machine, the cyborg body which emerged at the end of the twentieth century was not just technologically enhanced or extended (McLuhan, 1994 [1964]) but received its constitution as a form of read-out from technological processes which applied across species boundaries. This has forced a revision in what were previously thought of as immutable taxonomic distinctions between the human and other animals and between the human mind and its mnemotechnic devices (Stiegler, 1994, 2009).

It is this which informs Donna Haraway's cyborg which she first proposed in 1985 as a figure through which feminists might re-imagine a politics attuned to what she calls the 'informatics of domination' (Haraway, 1991, p. 161). The cyborg is both un- and non-natural in that it cannot be incorporated into any modernist taxonomy of natural 'types'. It is not found in the wilderness, nor does it desire it as a space of escape. Opposed to the 'god trick of seeing everything from nowhere' (Haraway, 1991, p. 189), it does not pretend a totalising vision of the world, nor does it write a mythology of space but, rather, is concerned with the production of space as an effect of the digitalisation of the body, both as constructed through the discourse of genomics and virality (Sampson, 2012) and as a virtual presence in networked communication and the flows of data that

mark the operations of virtual market economies. According to Haraway, the cyborg 'is our ontology, it gives us our politics' (1991, p. 150).

As a figure which challenges the anatomy of both bodies and their synergistic relationships, the cyborg has had a powerful influence on ideas beyond its original intervention in the gender politics of the late twentieth century. As Matthew Gandy has noted (2005) the city is where the cyborg finds its conceptual home, and it is in the politics of the street where the cyborg may realise its potential as a figure that stands in opposition to the categorical forms of subjectivation on which the flâneur relies. Rob Shields' suggestion that the characteristic activity of the cyborg is 'simulation at a microscale' taking place '*beneath* the scales at which domination has been understood to operate socially and politically' is useful here. If the cyborg can be understood to open up a 'virtual terrain of struggle' (2006, p. 219, emphasis in original) how might the boundary crossing contingent relationality that cyborg ontology promises be actualised as a move towards a restructuring of the street as a space for oppositional social politics? My suggestion is that we can begin to address these questions by attending to the sense in which both flânerie and cyborg simulation can be understood as *performative*.

Conceived by Judith Butler (1997) as an anti-essentialist description of the techniques through which gender and sexuality are reiterated through linguistic utterances, performativity has gained traction in concert with posthuman theory because it emphasises the radical contingency of the body as information while, at the same time, it accounts for the motions at the level of the body which perpetuate discursive power relations (Mackenzie, 2002). Despite the fact that Butler emphasises the linguistic aspects of performativity, it lends itself also to understanding the movement of bodies through space and how they comport themselves in relation to spatial norms. Indeed, Butler emphasises the sense in which the performative is not only produced out of the body (as an act of speech) but how it regulates the range of affective gestures which the body incorporates (Butler, 1997, p. 158-9). However, what is important for Butler is the way in which the performative is enacted repetitively and necessarily in varying contexts. It is this repetition (or, in the Derridean sense, iteration) which renders the conditions which it seeks to instantiate unstable.

Flânerie is inherently performative because it is not only a theatrical act which depends on a particular styling of the body but is conceptually aligned with performativity in that it attempts to iteratively enact the human subject as the monocular centre of any and all space. Equally, it activates a set of discourses which determine how urban space can be represented in concert with dominant ideas which differentiate according to a range of permitted performances. Cyberflânerie can be understood here as a further iteration which attempts to re-confirm the posturban subject as a unified labyrinth walker/viewer in hybrid space. Put simply, the cyberflâneur borrows the flâneur's performative styling and, in doing so, also borrows his discursive authority. This ensures that not only is the ontology of digital space aligned with that of urban space, but the way in which it is performatively realised, through the discourse of cyberflânerie, confirms the prosumer identities on which the production of posturban space relies.

Cyborg simulation, on the other hand, performs contingent relationality. That is, it is organised according to codes which do not respond to fixed ontologies or to a hierarchy of signs but is attuned to virtuality. Originally conceived by Henri Bergson (1896), the concept of virtuality has gained in significance as a way of accounting for simulation as providing the conditions for our experience of both the world and ourselves. Although Jean Baudrillard (1983) famously presented a somewhat gloomy analysis of simulated experience as the final result of the increasing hypostatisation of the commodity in the virtual networks of capital exchange, the concept has become important to posthuman thought in that it enables embodiment to emerge as a reflexive *process*, rather than a state which persists.

In this scenario, bodies are not passive recipients of inscriptions or discursive mediations but are contingent stabilisations or actualisations which emerge from the set of potentials of which the virtual is composed. Conceiving of bodies in this way enables them to be understood as undergoing a continual process of individuation (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980). On the level of materiality, bodies are individuated by the way in which they negotiate, incorporate and produce environmental constraints in continual feedback and feedforward loops of interaction between other living entities as well as non-sentient objects and machines. On an ontological level, the borders between living and non-living, sentient and non-sentient, human and animal and object and subject become

increasingly unstable. And, on the level of subjectivity, as we are confronted with the displacement of the human as the standard by which all other things in the world are measured so the way that we have differentiated ourselves according to race, gender, sexuality and cultural practices are also destabilised. Cyborg ontology, in fact, confounds the distinction between labyrinth viewer and labyrinth walker in that simulation at a microscale performs a production of both bodies and space as what Adrian Mackenzie calls a 'radical contingency' (2009, p. 29). If, with Mackenzie, we accept that '[s]ince living entities individuate continuously, rather than being formed once, they *are* information' (p. 50, emphasis in original) then we must also accept that the space in which they move can no longer be thought in terms of a fixed cartography but rather as a variable field of possibilities responsive to what Karen Barad calls 'posthuman performativity'.

Barad proposes that performativity be understood as 'a contestation of the unexamined habits of mind that grant language and other forms of representation more power in determining our ontologies than they deserve' (2003, p. 802). Barad's analysis is particularly important here because her focus is on the kinds of taken-for-granted materiality which determine the distinctions between object and subject and thus nature and culture or the knower (as a secure and delimited entity) and what is to be known, where knowing is, in itself, a process of delimitation. Her concept of the 'agential cut' draws on insights from Neils Bohr's development of quantum indeterminacy to foreground the contingent nature of both knowledge claims and the objects or things which become known. This is not just a question of epistemology; of the production of ideas which attach to already existing phenomena but an understanding of discursive production as effecting the bringing-into-being of things in the world. Barad distinguishes between interaction and *intra*-action where *intra*-action identifies a local and specific 'cut' which produces differentiability in that which was previously undifferentiated or differentially different. Interaction presupposes the coming together of already existing and a-historical entities; *intra*-action refers to the contingent social and historical forces through which things come into being '*(re)configurings of the world through which local determinations of boundaries, properties and meanings are differentially enacted*' (Barad, 2003, p. 821, emphasis in original).

Other theorists, like Bruno Latour (1993, 2004) have argued that both the concept and terrain of nature are discursively produced by those practices that claim to explain it but Barad goes further. In what she calls '[a]gential separability', 'no priority is given to either materiality or discursivity' (p. 825) because the agential cut is what might be called a locus of performativity which is not discourse acting on a material substrate but a dynamic intra-action which actualises a contingent material formation from among the multiple possibilities on the plane of virtuality. What is important here is that Barad's concept of performativity immediately problematises the notion of the human as either self-identical or a-historical and time and space as understood from the point of view of a fixed human presence give way to what Barad calls 'a much larger space that is more appropriately thought of as a changing topology' (p. 825). It is through conceiving of this 'larger space' as where we find ourselves in what Rosi Braidotti calls 'the post-anthropocentric predicament' (2013, p. 89) that we may be able to think beyond the restrictions that figures like the flâneur impose on our concepts of subjectivity.

As Braidotti has pointed out '[t]he most serious political problems in post-anthropocentric theory arise from the instrumental alliance of bio-genetic capitalism with individualism, as a residual humanist definition of the subject' (2013, p. 101). I have drawn attention to this problem as it is revealed in the continued production of urban space in terms of the institutional power structures of modernity through the articulation of digital space with new world travel writing, the posturban concept-city, contemporary street style, renaissance perspectivism and the practices of prosumption which I have mapped out in the previous sections and which coalesce in the figure of the cyberflâneur. In positing streets *for* cyborgs my intention is to return to the street as the space where everyday life is performatively enacted but with an understanding that performativity entails responsibility for what Haraway has referred to as 'what we learn to see' (1991, p. 190). In a recent paper she has again stressed the relational aspects of cyborgs which she describes as 'imploded entities, dense material semiotic 'things' - articulated string figures of ontologically heterogeneous, historically situated, materially rich, virally proliferating relatings of particular sorts, not all the time everywhere, but here, there, and in between, with consequences'. (2012, p. 301). Haraway's famously poetic prose, infuriating to some (Cachel, 1990), is itself a performance of cyborg articulation in that it

eschews logocentrism while actualising conceptual simulacra which are related in a structural contingency. The consequences to which she refers can be understood through Barad's agential realism as what must be accounted for in the 're-configurings of the world' made possible when bodies escape their species constraints and thus the imperative to name themselves within pre-determined taxonomies. If human exceptionalism is a product of anthropocentric modernity then the post-anthropocentric predicament requires us to find our politics in the kinds of knowledges and praxes which brought about the predicament in the first place. These are what the cyborg figures and what it exploits to displace the oppositional binaries of 'natural' subjects. I want to end here by suggesting that we finally lay the flâneur to rest by claiming the street as a space for the production of posthuman urbanism; for a performance of everyday reality attuned to the potential for re-articulations of space which new technoscientific ontological configurations ironically promise.

NOTES

- ¹ The requirement for flânerie to be practised on the street and with an air of purposelessness secures the gender of the flâneur as indisputably masculine, due to the fact that, in the nineteenth-century the term 'street walker' applied to a woman could have only one meaning. Several commentators have speculated that the rise of the department store allowed for the emergence of the flâneuse (eg., Wolff, 1985; Nava, 1995) and for Anne Friedberg (1994) the cinema similarly allowed women to maintain respectability while appearing in a public space. However, as my later argument will demonstrate, the association of flânerie with the city understood as wilderness re-asserts a gendered reading in which a masculine flâneur is provided with the means, the attitude, leisure and motivation to penetrate the mysteries of what becomes, in effect, virgin territory.
- ² A return to the street is also effected in digital games like *Grand Theft Auto* (Rockstar Games) which, in its various incarnations, simulates the 'down below' of the post-urban city, both celebrated by Hollywood and hidden from the tourist view.
- ³ See also Owen Hatherley's article for Mute, 'This Property is Condemned', 30 April, 2013. <http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/property-condemned>

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