

## Paris and the Rise of the *Flâneur*

*What exactly a flâneur is has never been satisfactorily defined, but among all the versions of the flâneur as everything from a primeval slacker to a silent poet one thing remains constant: the image of an observant and solitary man strolling about Paris.*

Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust*<sup>1</sup>

If psychogeography can be shown to have germinated within an earlier tradition which celebrates the writer as walker, then this tradition must be viewed as a tale of two cities. As we have seen through such examples as De Quincey and Stevenson, London becomes emblematic of the city as labyrinth, a darkly gothic vision in which the mundane reality of everyday life masks the eternal city that lies beneath. And yet when we think of the *flâneur*, whose aimless strolling is elevated to an art form, it is not the menacing and overcrowded thoroughfares of London that spring to mind but rather the elegant arcades of nineteenth century Paris.

Today the *flâneur* has become a somewhat overworked figure, beloved of academics and cultural commentators,

but, while he (the *flâneur* is invariably seen as male) remains inseparable from the Paris of his day, his origins remain obscure. Baudelaire is credited with providing the first description of the figure in his essay of 1863, *The Painter of Modern Life* and Walter Benjamin was to offer an analysis of the *flâneur* and his relationship to modernism in his fragmentary and incomplete account of nineteenth century Paris, *The Arcades Project*, a work that was to establish his position as the 'patron saint of cultural studies.'<sup>2</sup>

Both Baudelaire and Benjamin locate the *flâneur*'s literary conception within a short story by Edgar Allan Poe. Written in 1840, *The Man of the Crowd* ironically returns us to the streets of London and it is one of the earliest examples of the use of the crowd as a symbol for the emerging modern city, exploring the role of the detached observer who becomes intoxicated by its movement. Yet even here the *flâneur*, the 'hero' of the modern city is already showing signs of his own demise. From the outset the *flâneur* is a nostalgic figure who, in proclaiming the wonders of urban life, also acknowledges the changes that threaten to make the idle pedestrian redundant. It is only with the advance of the avant-garde between the wars and, in particular, with the rise of surrealism that the role of the *flâneur* is salvaged and he is restored to his rightful position wandering the Paris streets. The surrealists provide an account of a new kind of wanderer, alive to the potential transformation of the city and engaged in those subversive and playful practices

that were later to become the hallmark of the situationists. Here, once again, the wanderer whose movements transform his surroundings provides a link with a lost tradition that reclaims the city as the site for political and aesthetic experimentation.

In this chapter I will be discussing these figures, movements and their works and, alongside the figure of the *flâneur*, I will also discuss his less celebrated counterpart, Robinson, the mental traveller, a figure first identified by Baudelaire's successor Rimbaud, and whose armchair travels provide further links with today's brand of psychogeography.

#### Poe, Baudelaire and the Man of the Crowd

Born in Boston in 1809 and briefly a schoolboy in Stoke Newington in London (1815–20), Edgar Allan Poe spent the remainder of his life on the East coast of the USA. Within the context of psychogeographic ideas it is tempting to see Poe as representative of an American tradition of psychogeography and thus to expand the origins of this concept beyond London and Paris but, in reality, Poe is less at home within an American tradition than he is within a European one. His most famous creation, the prototype detective Dupin, plies his trade in Paris where he solves *The Mystery of the Rue Morgue*, while *The Man of the Crowd* takes London as a fictional setting and Poe was heavily influenced by the European Romantic tradition. Through the translations of Baudelaire, his work influenced later

writers such as Rimbaud and was instrumental in establishing the *flâneur* as a European figure.

Baudelaire and, later, Walter Benjamin specifically cite Poe's story as inaugurating a new urban type, an isolated and estranged figure who is both a man of the crowd and a detached observer of it and, as such, the avatar of the modern city. A man sitting in a coffee house watches the passing crowds as they through a busy London street. This passive observer catches a glimpse of a man with a strange visage and, his curiosity aroused, he sets off in pursuit. As he follows, he is led on a seemingly aimless and haphazard journey across the city from its centre to its less salubrious suburbs. Night follows day and this pursuit continues until finally, feeling that the journey will never end, our narrator approaches his quarry and stops him. The man barely notices him and simply continues on his way: 'This old man, I said at length, is the type and the genius of deep crime. He refuses to be alone. He is *the man of the crowd*. It will be vain to follow; for I shall learn no more of him, nor his deeds.'<sup>3</sup>

In these few pages then, we witness the emergence of the *flâneur*, the wanderer in the modern city, both immersed in the crowd but isolated by it, an outsider (even a criminal) yet ultimately a man impossible to fathom and one whose motives remain unclear. This wanderer heralds both the emergence of a new type of city and the passing of the old, his aimless wandering already at odds with his surroundings and his natural habitat threatened, in Paris at least, by the emergence of a more regimented topography.

Baudelaire describes Poe's story as a picture, 'painted – or rather written by the most powerful pen of our age'<sup>4</sup> and, through his interpretation of this figure and his transportation from London to Paris, he is able to fashion what amounts to the closest we come to a definitive account of his, often contradictory, nature:

The crowd is his element, as the air is that of the birds and water of fishes. His passion and his profession are to become one flesh with the crowd. For the perfect *flâneur*, for a passionate spectator, it is an immense joy to set up house in the heat of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement, in the midst of the fugitive and the infinite. To be away from home and yet to find oneself everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the centre of the world, and yet remain hidden from the world...<sup>5</sup>

For Baudelaire, Paris becomes a book to be read by walking her streets, yet the labyrinthine and essentially medieval topography that is still largely intact in London was soon to be destroyed in Paris as Baron Haussmann's wholesale reconfiguration of the city was to sever the links between large swathes of the populace and the city they inhabited. In this environment the *flâneur* is under threat and Baudelaire responds by creating an idealised figure, and an idealised city, in which everyone conforms to some degree to the figure of the *flâneur* but no-one actually attains his elusive status. For, as the historian of walking, Rebecca Solnit, has commented, 'The only problem with the *flâneur* is that he did not exist, except as

a type, an ideal, and a character in literature... no one quite fulfilled the idea of the *flâneur*, but everyone engaged in some version of *flâneury*.<sup>6</sup>

The *flâneur* is elusive to the point that he cannot be located at all but the search for this figure itself takes on the characteristics of *flâneury* and offers new ways of experiencing the city. Like London before it, Paris in the nineteenth century had expanded to the point where it could no longer be comprehended in its entirety. It had become increasingly alien to its own inhabitants, a strange and newly exotic place to be experienced more as a tourist than as a resident. Soon the city becomes characterised as a jungle, uncharted and unexplored, a virgin wilderness populated by savages demonstrating strange customs and practices. The navigation of this city becomes a skill, a secret knowledge available only to an elect few and, in this environment, the stroller is transformed into an explorer or even a detective solving the mystery of the city streets. As these streets are gradually destroyed and reordered, so this wilderness is tamed and domesticated and the walker's arcane knowledge is rendered obsolete. As public spaces become private ones and the street is choked with traffic, so walking is reduced to mere promenading, explorers becoming little more than window-shoppers. In the modern city the man of the crowd must adapt or perish.

## Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project

*Not to find one's way in a city may well be uninteresting and banal. It requires ignorance – nothing more. But to lose oneself in a city – as one loses oneself in a forest – that calls for quite a different schooling. Then signboards and street names, passers-by, roofs, kiosks, or bars must speak to the wanderer like a cracking twig under his feet, like the startling call of a bittern in the distance, like the sudden stillness of a clearing with a lily standing erect at its centre. Paris taught me this art of straying.*

Walter Benjamin, *A Berlin Chronicle*.<sup>7</sup>

Baudelaire equates Poe's *Man of the Crowd* with the *flâneur* but Benjamin challenges this position by arguing that the London that Poe describes, with its overcrowded thoroughfares, cannot support the aimless movement of the *flâneur*. The detached composure of the true stroller instead gives way to manic and uncontrolled behaviour more akin to a stalker: 'He is as much out of place in an atmosphere of complete leisure as in the feverish turmoil of the city. London has its man of the crowd.'<sup>8</sup>

Benjamin's unfinished magnum opus, *The Arcades Project*, offers a series of fragmentary insights into life in nineteenth century Paris and takes its title from the series of spectacular glass enclosed arcades that were the highlights of the city. These emporiums were the threatened environment of the dandified stroller and were destroyed by Baron Haussmann's redevelopment of the city, as the arcades gave way to the boulevards of modern Paris. Benjamin repeatedly returns to Baudelaire and to the

*flâneur* as symbolic of a bygone age and yet he sees Poe's character as a specifically London figure, not a prototype of the *flâneur* on the streets of Paris but rather a portrayal of the fate of the *flâneur* in the machine age. For amidst the unseen processes of the industrial city, the *flâneur* is reduced to little more than a cog in the machine, an automaton governed by the pressures of a barbaric crowd, not so much the hero of modernism as its victim. This is the fate that Benjamin recognises in Baudelaire's tragic existence, not the model for the *flâneur* but the victim of an uncaring mechanism. For Benjamin, the *flâneur* is unable to maintain his detachment and is inevitably caught up by the commercial forces that will eventually destroy him:

The crowd was the veil behind which the familiar city as phantasmagoria beckoned to the *flâneur*. In it, the city was now landscape, now a room. And both of these went into the construction of the department store, which made use of *flânerie* itself in order to sell goods. The department store was the *flâneur's* final coup.<sup>9</sup>

The role of window-shopper is thus both the high-point and the death-knell for the *flâneur* but, once the crowds have thinned and the mystery evaporated, the *flâneur* remains vigilant and, behind his indolent and narcissistic image, he retains his subversive nature: 'The *flâneurs* liked to have the turtles set the pace for them. If they had had their way, progress would have been obliged

to accommodate itself to this pace.’<sup>10</sup>

The *flâneur* may be a symbol of the city as shopping-mall but this insistence upon a walker’s pace questions the need for speed and circulation that the modern city promotes (yet seldom achieves). The wanderer remains essentially an outsider opposed to progress and while ‘the bazaar is the last hangout of the *flâneur*’<sup>11</sup> he remains, at least, a non-paying customer.

Ultimately, the *flâneur* is a composite figure – vagrant, detective, explorer, dandy and stroller – yet, within these many and often contradictory roles, his predominant characteristic is the way in which he makes the street his home and this is the basis of his legacy to psychogeography. Yet the history of the *flâneur* is one in which the cities that he inhabits are shown to be increasingly hostile to him as he is ultimately evicted from the street and forced to seek a new environment. Benjamin describes Paris as a city ‘which had long since ceased to be home to the *flâneur*’<sup>12</sup> but, as he became increasingly hedged-in and barred from the streets, the would-be wanderer devised new methods of travel that could be conducted from the safety of one’s own armchair. Soon the mental traveller, immortalised by Blake, was to make an unexpected comeback and the *flâneur*’s disreputable and rather less well-known cousin, Robinson, was to emerge.

### Robinson and the Mental Traveller

*My room is situated on the forty-fifth degree of latitude... it stretches from east to west; it forms a long rectangle, thirty-six paces in circumference if you hug the wall. My journey will, however, measure much more than this, as I will be crossing it frequently lengthwise, or else diagonally, without any rule or method. I will even follow a zigzag path, and I will trace out every possible geometrical trajectory if need be.*

Xavier De Maistre, *A Journey Around My Room*.<sup>13</sup>

In the spring of 1790, Xavier de Maistre, confined to his room under house arrest, embarked upon a voyage around his bedroom, a trip every bit as arduous as that of Magellan and Cook but one that took place almost entirely within the boundaries of his own imagination. The result was *A Journey Around My Room* and it was followed by the equally adventurous *A Nocturnal Investigation Around My Room*. These accounts, as de Maistre was to proudly proclaim, would introduce the world to a new form of travel involving little of the risk or expense facing the conventional traveller. ‘There’s no more attractive pleasure,’ claims de Maistre<sup>14</sup> ‘than following one’s ideas wherever they lead, as the hunter pursues his game, without even trying to keep to any set route. And so, when I travel through my room, I rarely follow a straight line: I go from my table towards a picture hanging in a corner; from there I set out obliquely towards the door; but even though, when I begin, it really is my intention to go there, if I happen to meet my armchair en route, I don’t

think twice about it, and settle down in it without further ado.'

De Maistre's sedentary journey, an early example (perhaps the earliest) of stationary travel, anticipates the fate of the *flâneur*, himself reduced to circling his room, the hostility of the modern city forcibly replacing the street with his armchair and thereby internalising his wandering. This image of the housebound *flâneur* increasingly cast adrift from his familiar surroundings is given fictional form in Joris-Karl Huysmans' notorious decadent novel *Against Nature (À Rebours)*. Published in 1894, Huysmans' celebrated account of arch-dandy and domesticated *flâneur*, Duc Jean Floressas des Esseintes, was the novel that Oscar Wilde used as a text-book for his *Dorian Gray* and this sickly and indolent aesthete, surrounded by the trappings of his luxurious home and unable to muster the energy to walk the streets, stumbles upon the advantages of mental travel. Des Esseintes, fuelled by the novels of Charles Dickens, formulates an energetic plan to visit London for himself. Having ordered a taxi and visited an English tavern in Paris, however, he finds himself unable to complete his journey and, exhausted, he returns home. Yet he realises that the imaginary journey he has undertaken is a more than preferable substitute for the real thing:

'Get up, man, and go,' he kept telling himself, but these orders were no sooner given than countermanded. After all, what was the good of moving, when a fellow could travel so magnificently sitting in a chair? Wasn't he already

in London, whose smells, weather, citizens, and even cutlery, were all about him? What could he expect to find over there, save fresh disappointments... As it is, I must have been suffering from some mental aberration to have thought of repudiating my old convictions, to have rejected the visions of my obedient imagination, and to have believed like any ninny that it was necessary, interesting, and useful to travel abroad.<sup>15</sup>

Both de Maistre and Huysmans direct us toward a new form of wandering that promotes mental travel in preference to that conducted in the street. The verb *flâner* has been defined as *Errer sans bout, en s'arrêtant pour regarder* which translates as 'wandering without aim, stopping once in a while to look around'<sup>16</sup> and yet, as these examples demonstrate, travel in late nineteenth century Paris increasingly approximates to another verb, reputedly coined by Arthur Rimbaud, *robinsonner*, which means 'to let the mind wander or to travel mentally.'<sup>17</sup>

*Robinsonner* refers back to Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* with its twin themes of the imaginary voyage and isolation and, in the figure of Robinson, we find the model for the urban wanderer in the modern city, a figure who, like Rimbaud himself, is a mental traveller with the ability to survive in hostile territory. If Robinson has a familiar ring to him then it is because this figure has undertaken a literary journey since Defoe's day to become something of an emblem for today's psychogeographer, linking the *flâneur* of nineteenth century Paris with the urban wanderers of contemporary London. Defoe, as I have discussed in the

preceding chapter, is a figure who returns us to the origins of psychogeography and, with it, the origins of the novel itself. His most famous creation is something of a literary revenant who returns through a cycle of novels and films from *Robinson Crusoe* to Patrick Keiller's *Robinson in Space* and, in the process, traces out the evolution of psychogeography.

Rimbaud's *robinsonner* both defines the role of the mental traveller in the fictions of de Maistre and Huysmans and reflects his own experiences as *flâneur*-in-exile on the streets of London. For Rimbaud, along with fellow expatriates Verlaine, Mallarmé and Apollinaire, represent the moment that the *flâneur* crosses the Channel, joining the visionary tradition of Blake and Defoe to the lineage of Poe and Baudelaire and providing the urban wanderer with a new role. These figures, exiled renegade poets leading marginal and disreputable existences within the city, act as templates for the fictional role that Robinson was to play in the coming century. Thus, in Kafka's *Amerika (The Man Who Disappeared)*, we see a character named Robinson, an exiled European and shameless chancer, lead a picaresque and haphazard journey across a country that the author never visited. A few years later, in Céline's *Journey to the End of the Night*, we once again witness the travels of an elusive character named Robinson who inhabits the margins of a story that is really a journey, or series of journeys, guided only by the vagaries of the author's own experiences. In an epigraph to his novel, Céline writes: 'Travel is very useful and it exercises the imagination. All the rest is disappointment

and fatigue. Our own journey is entirely imaginary. That is its strength.'<sup>18</sup> Once again a journey is given meaning only through the intervention of its author's imagination and the wanderer is represented by an émigré European with an unreliable past. This is the unfolding history of the *flâneur*, expelled from the streets and the city, even from the continent, but continuing to wander, in rather reduced circumstances, and compelled to bear witness to what he sees.

Weldon Kees was a man who, like Kafka's hero, really did disappear, vanishing for good in 1955. His series of poems about Robinson survive, however, continuing the journey of this enigmatic figure as he juggles identities across time and space:

Observant scholar, traveller,  
Or uncouth bearded figure squatting in a cave,  
Keen-eyed sniper on the barricades,  
A heretic in catacombs, a famed roué,  
A beggar on the streets, the confidant of popes –

All these are Robinson in sleep, who mumbles as he turns,  
"There is something in this madhouse that I symbolize –  
This city – nightmare – black –"<sup>19</sup>

From stationary traveller to sleeping traveller, Robinson continues to wander even as he dreams and, after a journey spanning continents and centuries, Robinson finally returns home to the streets of contemporary London. In

his novel *Robinson*, filmmaker and sometime collaborator of Iain Sinclair, Chris Petit, offers a vision of London as film location in which Robinson emerges as a filmmaker who criss-crosses the city following an unknown agenda. Here Robinson becomes an updated version of Poe's *Man of the Crowd*, a deranged voyeur with a camera, shadowing the streets of Soho in search of a shot that will make sense of his weakening grasp on reality. He is a figure who retains the detachment of the *flâneur* but for whom the boundaries between reality and imagination have become blurred: 'He was both as substantial and as thin as a character in a movie. Robinson was there all right, a character, but all the little things about him... suggested someone outside everything.'<sup>20</sup>

Finally, as Petit's novel anticipates, Robinson makes the transition from book to film as the protagonist of Patrick Keiller's *London* and *Robinson in Space*. In these two films, Keiller updates Defoe's journeys around London and the UK to the 1990s, in this case following Robinson and his unnamed companion as they provide a commentary on the state of the nation. I will be returning to these films in a later chapter but they take their place here as the most recent point on a fictional journey that begins with Defoe and which traces the evolution of the urban wanderer in all his guises, from mental traveller and armchair dreamer to *flâneur*, vagrant and stalker. Robinson is a totemic figure mapping out his own journey from text to text, from literature to film and, in the process, he provides a parallel history of urban wandering as it moves from London to

Paris and around the world. Here we see writ in miniature the development of psychogeography, as it mutates from detached observation to a more committed and involved practice engaged with its surroundings and increasingly determined to change them. This history culminates in the activities of the situationists but the mood of political radicalism and subversive experimentation can itself be traced back to the avant-garde practices of an earlier generation and, in particular, to the rise of surrealism.

### Psychogeography & Surrealism

*We are doubtless about to witness a complete upheaval of the established fashions in casual strolling and prostitution.*

Louis Aragon, *Paris Peasant*.<sup>21</sup>

If the *flâneur* celebrated by Baudelaire and Benjamin is merely a passive observer detached from his surroundings, then his female counterpart, the *flâneuse*, is ascribed a quite different role, that of the prostitute. The Parisian arcades are repeatedly identified as the haunts of both prostitutes and their clients, amongst them Benjamin and Baudelaire and, as we shall see, the prime movers of the surrealist movement. As we approach the avant-garde flowering of the inter-war period, the streets of Paris are increasingly characterised as an erotic location – a place to procure, seek out or simply think about sex.<sup>22</sup>

Surrealism is usually dated from the publication of André Breton's *Manifesto of Surrealism* in 1924 but it was in 1918



that two of its key members, André Breton and Louis Aragon, first met and between them, they were to produce the closest we have yet come to what has been described as the psychogeographical novel.<sup>23</sup> With their absence of plot and digressive style, Breton's *Nadja* and Aragon's *Paris Peasant* offer accounts of journeys conducted through the Paris streets which are governed, in varying degrees, by sexual desire and, in their aimless strolling, they provide not only a precursor to the situationist *dérive* but a blueprint for contemporary wanderers on the streets of London.

André Breton, surrealism's arch-theorist, offers a definition of surrealism in his 1924 *Manifesto* when he writes: 'I believe in the future resolution of these two states, dream and reality, which are seemingly so contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality, a *surreality*, if one may so speak.'<sup>24</sup> Surrealism, like its forebear the Dada movement and in common with many of the avant-garde groups that flourished in the aftermath of WWI, was guided, not merely by the aim of producing works of art, but by the hope of transforming our experience of everyday life and replacing our mundane existence with an appreciation of the marvellous. In short, surrealism's domain was the street and the stroll was a crucial practice in its attempt to subvert and challenge our perceptions. It is through this stated aim of reconciling the contradictory roles of everyday reality and unconscious desire that the figures of the *flâneur* and Robinson begin to coalesce, forging a figure whose journey through the streets is both directed and transformed by the dictates of these unconscious drives.

The surrealist practice of automatism, in which the unconscious was given free rein, was not simply confined to automatic writing but also extended to walking. The aimless drifting that was later to become the *dérive* was initiated here in a series of walks whose free-floating exploration of Paris was designed to 'remedy the incompetence of guides... and to discover the places that really have no reason to exist.'<sup>25</sup> It is this open-ended geographical automatism that characterises Breton's *Nadja*, a largely autobiographical account whose mysterious heroine was inspired by one of the writer's real-life lovers who, in true surrealist fashion, ended her days in an asylum. *Nadja* has been described as 'a psychogeographical novel *par excellence*'<sup>26</sup>, a surrealist romance filled with those correspondences, coincidences and uncanny juxtapositions that characterised the movement. Breton's account is dominated by the spontaneous and unexpected and reflects an outlook in which chance governs all:

Perhaps life needs to be deciphered like a cryptogram. Secret staircases, frames from which the paintings quickly slip aside and vanish (giving way to an archangel bearing a sword or to those who must forever advance), buttons which must be indirectly pressed to make an entire room move sideways or vertically, or immediately change its furnishings; we may imagine the mind's greatest adventure as a journey of this sort to the paradise of pitfalls.<sup>27</sup>

*Nadja* is a lightning-rod attuned to the voices of the past

and the resonance of place and she sleep-walks through Paris, leading Breton in her wake, as memory and desire refashion the streets: 'I don't know why it should be precisely here that my feet take me, here that I almost invariably go without specific purpose, without anything to induce me but this obscure clue: that it (?) will happen here. I cannot see, as I hurry along, what could constitute for me, even without my knowing it, a magnetic pole in either space or time.'<sup>28</sup> *Nadja* details a journey governed by chance but also dictated by desire yet, while Paris is transformed into a place of erotic intrigue, it is given no political content.

If we are looking for the text that will bridge the playful practices of the avant-garde and the revolutionary politics of the situationists then this link is provided by Aragon's *Paris Peasant*. While *Nadja* is an embodiment of the city as the eternal female, *Paris Peasant*, although it acknowledges the erotic content of the streets and contains the customary visit to a brothel, also rails against the destruction of this city, whose arcades were soon to be demolished. In the same vein as Baudelaire and Benjamin, Aragon's text is a document of a city disappearing before his eyes and it was *Paris Peasant* that first drew Benjamin's attention to the significance of the arcades and to the role of walking as a cultural act, leading him to comment on the impact of the book: 'Each evening in bed I could not read more than a few words of it before my heartbeat got so strong I had to put the book down.'<sup>29</sup>

Aragon's account of two walks undertaken in Paris

between 1924 and 1926 is unlikely to provoke heart failure in the contemporary reader but, if there is one book that may be identified as a handbook for today's breed of psychogeographer, then this is it. With its casual and seemingly unplanned combination of local history and biography, political and philosophical debate and digressive style, it reminds one of Iain Sinclair's documentary accounts of London walks in *Lights Out for the Territory*. When Aragon laments the destruction of the arcades and the Haussmannisation of Paris, writing that, 'The great American passion for city planning... now being applied to the task of redrawing the map of our capital in straight lines, will soon spell the doom of these human aquariums'<sup>30</sup>, the parallels with London in the 1980s, when writers railed in a similar fashion against the banalisation of the city under Thatcherite redevelopment, are unmistakable.

'How long shall I retain this sense of the marvellous suffusing everyday existence?' muses Aragon<sup>31</sup> and sadly, for the surrealists, the answer was to be, 'Not for much longer.' Breton, in particular, promised much in his *Manifestoes* but the reality was to remain stubbornly mundane and the realm of divine enchantment tantalisingly out of reach. Automatism turned out to provide rather tedious and uninspired results and, as far as walking was concerned, a lot of leg-work was expended with little obvious result. The surrealist engagement with communism had a rather desultory effect on those members more used to the spirit of playful abandon from which the movement had

arisen and, in a foretaste of the problems that were to beset Debord a generation later, Breton managed to alienate almost all his former allies as surrealism collapsed under the weight of personal vendetta and in-fighting. *Paris Peasant*, however, remains alongside *Nadja*, as a document to a way of life under threat. For, as the ill-fated surrealist dalliance with communism was to indicate, the day of the apolitical and dispassionate stroller was at an end. What the avant-garde in general, and these books in particular, demonstrate is the degree to which the *flâneur* can no longer stand at the wayside or retreat to his armchair but must now face up to the destruction of his city. In the aftermath of the war, the streets were radicalised as never before and revolutionary change was in the air. If the urban wanderer was to continue his aimless strolling then the very act of walking had to become subversive, a means of reclaiming the streets for the pedestrian. Psychogeography was about to be born.

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust*, p199
- <sup>2</sup> Ibid, p198
- <sup>3</sup> Edgar Allan Poe, 'The Man of the Crowd' in *The Fall of the House of Usher and Other Tales*, p139
- <sup>4</sup> Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life*, p7
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid, p9
- <sup>6</sup> Solnit, p200
- <sup>7</sup> Quoted in Solnit, p197
- <sup>8</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire*, p129

- <sup>9</sup> Ibid, p170
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid, p54. This passage is celebrated but, according to Solnit, apocryphal: 'No one has named an individual who took a tortoise for a walk, and all who refer to this practice use Benjamin as their source.' *Wanderlust*, p200
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid, p54
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid, p47
- <sup>13</sup> Xavier de Maistre, *A Journey Around My Room*, p7
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid, p7
- <sup>15</sup> Joris-Karl Huysmans, *Against Nature (À Rebours)*, p142–3
- <sup>16</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, 'Desert Spectacular' in Keith Tester (Ed) *The Flâneur*, p138
- <sup>17</sup> John Sturrock, *Céline: Journey to the End of the Night*, p37
- <sup>18</sup> Louis-Ferdinand Céline, *Journey to the End of the Night*, p7
- <sup>19</sup> Weldon Kees, 'Robinson at Home' *Collected Poems*, p136
- <sup>20</sup> Chris Petit, *Robinson*, p34
- <sup>21</sup> Louis Aragon, *Paris Peasant*, p14
- <sup>22</sup> Rebecca Solnit comments: 'The love of a citizen for his city and the lust of a man for a passer-by has become one passion. And the consummation of this passion is on the streets and on foot. Walking has become sex.' *Wanderlust*, p20
- <sup>23</sup> Roger Farr writes: 'In the psychogeographical novel, the journey is really a drift, which is to say it is open-ended, because unlike other narratives of the journey, the hero on the *dérive* is without a destination.' Farr identifies both *Nadja* and *Paris Peasant* as examples of the

psychogeographical novel, as well as Poe's short story *The Man of the Crowd* and, less obviously, Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*. See Roger Farr, *The Chronotype of the Dérive: Towards a Generic Description of the Psychogeographical Novel*, at [http://merlin.capcollege.bc.ca/english/rfarr/psychogeographical\\_novel.html](http://merlin.capcollege.bc.ca/english/rfarr/psychogeographical_novel.html)

<sup>24</sup> André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, p14

<sup>25</sup> Antony, Rachel & Henry, Joel (Eds) *The Lonely Planet Guide to Experimental Travel*, p19/20

<sup>26</sup> Roger Farr, *Chronotype of the Dérive*

<sup>27</sup> André Breton, *Nadja*, p 112

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, p32

<sup>29</sup> Susan Buck Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* quoted in Solnit, p206

<sup>30</sup> Aragon, p14

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, p11