

COLT 475: Who Walks the City? The Question of the Flâneur and the Flâneuse

Professor Richard McLaughlin

Fall 2022, Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9:30-10:50 AM in VPD LL101



(still from *Playtime*)

The figure of the flâneur has had a lot of critical currency since Walter Benjamin and his Arcades Project, but as feminist critics have noted since the 1980's, that figure's freedom of movement and freedom to experience and represent the city in their artwork is in marked contrast to an unaccompanied woman's experience in the street, where she is read as endangered or a criminal. The flâneur in his 19th / early 20th century modernist city-space also doesn't experience the forms of postcolonial state control and policing experienced by people of color in everyday traversing of space. The flâneur is, then, in his high modernist conception, a white male figure whose movement across the city and freedom of expression is constrained by the increasing pressure of the market but whose race and gender does not constrain them. Moving this concept into the late 20th and 21st century, then, requires us to critically read the flâneur alongside authors like Susan Buck-Morss, Janet Wolff, and Achille Mbembe, among others, to consider how gender and racial difference complicates mobility in the contemporary city. We will also engage with a wide variety of literary texts (novels, non-fiction genres like memoir, and fiction and documentary film) to explore how different generic and formal artistic approaches pose the question of flânerie in a new way, as this question of movement, mobility and freedom is never (we hope!) foreclosed.

Key texts will include works by Virginia Woolf, Teju Cole, Annie Ernaux, and Faïza Guène, and films like *Cléo from 5 to 7* (Varda, 1961), *Playtime* (Tati, 1967), and *Code Unknown* (Haneke, 2000).