MODERNISM AND THE CITY

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Abstract: Although the city is a very old form of habitation, never in the history of humankind had it been such a major yet ambivalent setting and such an essential source of inspiration as in late nineteenth and early twentieth century, a period which is economically called capitalist globalization and aesthetically known as Modernism. So steeped in the collective mind was the modern city that it became a dream, a phantasm or a metaphor rather than an actual place. This may seem surprising and bizarre, given the materialistic spirit of the age, characterized by progress, industry and an unprecedented technological development. I argue that the dramatic shift in sensibility and aesthetics which was Modernism would not have taken its shape and configuration in any other setting. This is to say that their interdependence was so subtle and so strong that any assessment of modernist arts and aesthetics needs to be one of its topos at the same time. That topos is not any one city in Europe or in the U.S., but any metropolis. Whether one considers Paris, London, Berlin, Prague, Bucharest, New York, Chicago or any other metropolis on either side of the Atlantic, the spirit was of cosmopolitan innovation and change. Nevertheless, the germs of this movement appeared and then fermented in one of them, and that was Paris of all places. Drawing on Georg Simmel's groundbreaking study of the metropolis and mental life, I look into how the arts reflected on the new metropolitan type, generating a new character in literature and the arts. Referencing mainly Charles Baudelaire and Walter Benjamin in their approaches to the city, culture, art and aesthetics, and also drawing on Edward Soja's theory of modern and postmodern urban spaces, which relies heavily on Foucault's ideas, I contend that the modern city was the locus of transnational and transatlantic heterogeneity and hybridity.

Keywords: Modernism, the city-as-text/palimpsest, writing and reading the city, hybridity.

Preamble

On the face of it and in the most concrete and tangible terms, the city is the material expression of human civilization. It has been so since Memphis, Babylon, Thebes, Alexandria, Rome, which were the largest cities of ancient times. Plato conceived the human soul by analogy with the ideal city. Ages later, Sigmund Freud considered Rome as a metaphor for the laws of the mind. This old line of thinking suggests that large cities have always had this double and dialectical aspect: on the one hand, they have been places where material values are amassed; on the other hand, they have always had this less tangible existence, being projections of the collective imagination, their dwellers' dreams and nightmares.

Accounting for modernity, Edward Soja argues that it “captures a broad mesh of sensibilities that reflects the specific and changing meanings of the three most basic and formative dimensions of human existence: space, time, and being.” (Soja 2011: 25) These three dimensions met in the modern city of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, which, as Malcolm Bradbury aptly sees it, generated an essentially urban art, “an art of cities, especially of the polyglot cities, the cities which, for various reasons, had acquired great activity and great reputation as centres of intellectual and cultural exchange.” (Bradbury 1978: 96)

The metropolis itself and its cultural climate were the upshots of a spirit of innovation. Nothing old, whether that was a matter of taste, fashion, thought, morals, arts or aesthetics could hold in the face of the ferments of novelty. So dramatically new was everything that the changes looked and felt as almost cataclysmic. The iconic painting of Modernism, Edvard Munch's *Scream* (1893) suggests an utter sense of anguish and cosmic doom of inexplicable origin, which freezes its human effigy in a sheer expression of acute pain. Although the setting is mainly natural, consisting of a sinister crimson sky and the dark waters of the Norwegian fjords, the human silhouettes leaning against the rails and perilously contemplating the fjord in the background and the figure paralysed by anxiety in the foreground hint at an inexorable fate, reinforced by the spatial indeterminacy of the man-made bridge. Likewise, the provocative abstract geometry of Picasso's urban brothel scene with its five naked women against a background that looks like shards of broken glass in *Les Demoiselles D'Avignon* (1907)*,* or Duchamp's intriguing *Nude Descending a Staircase*, *No. 2* (1912), with its cubist stroboscopic body which looks man-made rather than natural, Stravinsky's ballet *The Rite of Spring* (1913) where the primitive sounds and choreographic gestures strangely evoke the menace and confusion of the city jungle, the city novels of Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, E. M. Forster, Aldous Huxley, Franz Kafka, Fernando Pessoa, André Breton, etc., where the protean city fascinates, attracts and repels at the same time, are underpinned by aesthetics of fragmentation and collage/montage which were molded by the experience of living in the metropolis.

Paris – "the holy city of the flâneur" and the "religious intoxication of great cities" as the modern sublime

Malcolm Bradbury calls the modern cities of the *fin de siécle* and early twentieth century "culture-capitals." (Bradbury 1978: 96) Indeed, in those approximately four decades[1] the large cities gradually stopped being politically and socially homogenous and became polyglot, cosmopolitan, hybrid and cultural. With the collapse of empires, the political power that had made those cities political centres started to lose ground, being replaced by a new bohemian spirit. Bradbury argues that

> *When we think of Modernism, we cannot avoid thinking of these urban climates, and the ideas and campaigns, the new philosophies and politics, that ran through them: through Berlin, Vienna, Moscow and St Petersburg around the turn of the century and into the early years of the war; through London in the years immediately before the war, through Zürich, New York and Chicago during it; and through Paris at all times. (Bradbury 1978: 96)*

If there ever was an epicentre of the modern spirit, that was Paris. In *The Arcades Project*, Walter Benjamin accounts for "an immense literature" which makes Paris a "landscape" for the *flâneur*, "who advances over the street of stone, with its double ground, as though driven by a clockwork mechanism." (Benjamin 1999: 880). In his *fragmentarium* dedicated to the city of Paris, Benjamin compares the French capital to a Vesuvius. If the Vesuvius is in the geographical order a massif that generates a sublime landscape, Paris is in

[1] roughly between 1890 and 1930, though one may consider the whole of the nineteenth century as a series of stages preparing the cataclysmic shift that we call Modernism

the social order a ‘volcanic’ metropolis which in the nineteenth century created a “uniquely fertile ground for the blossoming of art, festivity, fashion.” (Benjamin 1999: 882)

Benjamin drew on Baudelaire’s portrait of the *flâneur* for a lot of this character’s features. In his essay *The Painter of Modern Life*, starting from Poe’s short story “The Man of the Crowd”, Baudelaire outlines this essentially modern type against the backdrop of the swarming people in the street. As water is the element of the fish and air that of the bird, the crowd is the element of the unattached stroller. Baudelaire’s insistence on the liquid nature of the cityscape is suggestive of its shiftiness, an essential characteristic of modernity.

If the city itself is protean and ambivalent, with layer upon layer of history and meaning, like a palimpsest, the *flâneur*, a fish in its waters, cannot be less so:

> *To be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the centre of the world, and yet to remain hidden from the world – such are a few of the slightest pleasures of those independent, passionate, impartial natures which the tongue can but clumsily define. The spectator is a prince who everywhere rejoices in his incognito. (Baudelaire 1995: 9)*

Benjamin sees the *flâneur’s* stroll by analogy with religious communion and the gesture of kneeling before the throne of God, but of course this is inverted religiousness in a secular age. Glossing on Baudelaire, Benjamin speaks about the “religious intoxication of great cities” (Benjamin 1999: 61), which is the modern sublime. Since Paris is a Vesuvius where art, spectacle and fashion flourish and since the sublime is a mode of excess *par excellence*, then the modern sublime is an artificial one of spectacle, gas light, street, theatre, arcades, cafés, libraries and bookshops.

Walking the streets, the uprooted *flâneur* remakes the city in his own imagination. The agent of alteration is the crowd, which Baudelaire likens to “an immense reservoir of electrical energy” (Baudelaire 1995: 9) and Benjamin to “a veil through which the city appears transformed.” (Benjamin 1995:195) However, through a bizarre hypertrophy, the *flâneur* is a vast mirror which reflects the crowd, insatiably absorbing the wet pavement and the masses of people, or a “kaleidoscope gifted with consciousness, responding to each one of its movements and reproducing the multiplicity of life and the flickering grace of all the elements of life.” (Baudelaire 1995: 9) Thus, the figure of the *flâneur* encapsulates the spirit of the age, which is dynamic, protean, transitory and evanescent, and the space which shapes and allows itself to be shaped by its new spirit.

A new metropolitan type

Echoing Baudelaire and Benjamin, Ezra Pound captured these fugitive impressions the brain receives from the crowds’ ebb and flow of Paris streets in his one-image poem “In a Station of the Metro”. Condensing the intensity and wealth of the emotions stirred by the cavalcade of impressions assaulting the brain, which then juxtaposes the urban experience of scanning the crowds as they pass by with natural elements, thus reinforcing the reflective nature of the process, Pound transfixed the fleeting and ephemeral experience of life in the metropolis. His poem is essentially visual, transposing the poet’s concepts of “Imagism”, which was an experimental and new mode of writing.

So fragmented and anguished is everything that meets the eye, the ear and the mind in the metropolis that the perceiving subject feels schizophrenically split. Thus, key modernist

poems like Baudelaire's "Au lecteur", T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. A. Prufrock" and *The Waste Land* are dialogues with the self or with an other. What these modernist poems share is a sense of *ennui* or boredom of being exposed to the city's onrushing impressions of tedious streets, nights spent in cheap hotels, and all the other man-made paraphernalia of the modern city, where even "the evening is spread out against the sky / Like a patient etherized upon a table." (http://www.bartleby.com/198/1.html) It is not only meaning that is strategically deferred but also a sense of order and continuity: "Oh, do not ask "What Is It?" / Let us go and make our visit." (http://www.bartleby.com/198/1.html) Any activity is devoid of any purpose, or if there are any traces of purpose left, that is walking *per se*.

Walking the streets of London, one feels dizzy at the sound of intermingling languages in *The Waste Land*, and, just as Benjamin saw it in *The Arcades Project*, the modern city is metaphorically liquid, its streets are streams or rivers or the sea. So liquid is the city in "The Love Song of J. A. Prufrock" that it fills with mermaids like in a dream, until in the last line we drown. In *The Waste Land* there are "Trams and dusty trees. / Highbury bore me. Richmond and Kew / Undid me. By Richmond I raised my knees / Supine on the floor of a narrow canoe." (http://www.bartleby.com/201/1.html) However, the urban landscape in *The Waste Land* is arid, and this barrenness translates as meaninglessness and chaos, the very opposite of meaning and order which, towards the end, is tentatively contemplated as an alternative: "Shall I at least set my lands in order?" (http://www.bartleby.com/201/1.html)

Modernism's experimental one-day novels Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* and Joyce's *Ulysses* constantly describe the city as metaphorically fluid. Clarissa Dalloway's impressions in the very opening of the novel are, through associative memory, of a garden in Westminster that feels "like the flap of a wave; the kiss of a wave" (Woolf 1996: 5), an aquatic image which dreamily fuses with the terrestrial flowers and trees. Throughout *Ulysses* there are "wavewhite wedded words shimmering on the dim tide" (Joyce 1946: 11), which turn Dublin into the twentieth century mythopoeic counterpart of the seas navigated by Homer's Odysseus. In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* Stephen Dedalus turns "seaward from the road at Dollymount" (Joyce 1992: 179), crosses a trembling wooden bridge, then from it "on to firm land again", and from there he gazes at what looks like an aquatic city, and then "beyond the Irish Sea" at a "Europe of strange tongues" (Joyce 1993: 181). The most significant epiphanic scene in the novel is set on the strand, where Stephen sees a girl standing "before him in midstream, alone and still, gazing out to sea." (Joyce 1993:185)

Virginia Woolf and James Joyce created the technique of stream of consciousness out of a need to do justice to what Georg Simmel called in his 1903 study *The Metropolis and Mental Life* "the metropolitan type of individuality." (Simmel 1950: 409) Their strollers pace the streets of London and Dublin, respectively, enjoying the show, as Clarissa or Peter Walsh do, or fearing the traffic noises and the crowds, as Septimus Warren Smith does. Nonetheless, whether they are attracted or repelled by the city, all the characters in Woolf's and Joyce's novels take it in, let themselves be carried away by the ebb and tide of the streets, flooded by memories triggered by urban sights, at the same time "making it up, building it round one, tumbling it, creating it every moment afresh" (Woolf 1996: 6) or interweaving their most intimate thoughts and their own readings with its spots in a kind of daily mnemonic exercise.

Thus, Stephen Dedalus allows avenues, roads, shops evoke in him characters, emotions or states of mind related to his readings in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*; every time he takes a morning walk across the city, Stephen rehearses this internalized performance shaped by the city and his own readings, and so Dublin is reshaped and re-written by the young artist's mind.

Sometimes the characters find the hustle and bustle of the city too chaotic and protean to grasp, and when they are overwhelmed by its myriads of stimuli they may end up feeling *blasé*. Simmel accounts for the *blasé* attitude as resulting "first from the rapidly changing and closely compressed contrasting stimulations of the nerves." (Simmel 1950: 413) What characterizes the metropolitan type in the first place, according to Simmel, is "the *intensification of nervous stimulation* which results from the swift and uninterrupted change of outer and inner stimuli." (Simmel 1950: 409) In Walter Benjamin's approach to modernity it is the arcades of Paris that become metaphors of the modern *passage* connecting interiors with the public space; to Benjamin's mind, the *passage* itself is "a city, a world in miniature." (Benjamin 1995: 3) This blur of demarcations between interiors and the public space, and the ongoing flux of the city perplex the mind, and the characters find it impossible sometimes to read the city. This perplexity brought about by "the rapid crowding of changing images, the sharp discontinuity in the grasp of a single glance, and the unexpectedness of onrushing impressions" (Simmel 1950: 409) may turn the city into a monster or an unreadable cipher. In E. M. Forster's *Howards End* (1910) the narrator wonders:

> *Nature, with all her cruelty, comes nearer to us than do these crowds of men. A friend explains himself; the earth is explicable - from her we came, and we must return to her. But who can explain Westminster Bridge Road or Liverpool Street in the morning - the city inhaling - or the same thoroughfares in the evening - the city exhaling her exhausted air? We reach in desperation beyond the fog, beyond the very stars, the voids of the universe are ransacked to justify the monster, and stamped with a human face. (Forster 1973: 114)*

In *Mrs Dalloway* the characters are startled by the noise which sounds like a pistol shot in the street. Then they see a car, but nobody really knows whose car it is or what face they have seen in it. The noise, followed by the actual presence of the mysterious car, stirs curiosity and bafflement precisely because the stimuli are uncertain. The sun becomes "extraordinarily hot because the motor car had stopped outside Mulberry's shop window" (Woolf 1996: 17), the traffic accumulates, everybody looks at the car, Septimus feels guilty for blocking the way, Clarissa tosses hypotheses about who might be in the car in her head, but the event deflates as suddenly as it started, actions are taken in a rapid succession, the mysterious car leaves the scene, and the traffic is resumed. Likewise, characters are astounded by the letters an aeroplane writes on the sky. Everybody looks up, but each makes out a different thing. The sense of confusion and uncertainty brought about by these stimuli reinforces the ungraspable nature of life in the city.

Streets, arcades and iron constructions; catacombs

Streets are one of the most attractive sights in a city. They are the *flâneur's* sometimes labyrinthine routes, and they are lined with shops, which, according to Walter Benjamin, are his last destination. Apart from London's parks, the city's streets fascinate the characters of

the modernist novel, which never seem to tire of walking them. Clarissa Dalloway loves the whole show of the city, but especially "Bond Street early in the morning in the season; its flags flying; its shops; no splash; no glitter; one roll of tweed in the shop where her father had bought his suits for fifty years; a few pearls; salmon on an iceblock." (Woolf 1996: 13)

Walter Benjamin quotes the description of a *rue-gallerie* in Paris named Passage du Saumon in similar synesthetic terms, where smell, taste, colour and light combine in the image of a modern urban spot which inescapably attracts the stroller through its mix of sense impressions, its confusing lack of demarcations between indoor and outdoor space, its crepuscular atmosphere, its inviting signboard, despite its filth:

> *It was a narrow corridor decorated with pilasters supporting a ridged glass roof, which was littered with garbage thrown from neighbouring houses. At the entrance, the signboard – a tin salmon indicating the main characteristic of the place: the air was filled with the smell of fish…and also the smell of garlic. It was here, above all, that those arriving in Paris from the south of France would arrange to meet…through the doors of the shops, one spied dusky alcoves where sometimes a piece of mahogany furniture, the classic furniture of the period, would manage to catch a ray of light. Further on, a small bar hazy with the smoke of tobacco pipes; a shop selling products from the colonies and emitting a curious fragrance of exotic plants, spices and fruits; a ballroom open for dancing on Sunday and workday evenings; finally the reading room of Sieur Ceccherini, who offered to patrons his newspapers and his books. (Benjamin 1999: 46-47)*

Benjamin argues that Balzac was one of the first to have intuited the power of advertisement, of which newspapers were unaware in his times. About Dickens, Benjamin says that "his tales always started from some splendid hint in the streets. And shops, perhaps the most poetical of all things, often set his fancy galloping. Every shop, in fact, was to him the door to romance." (Benjamin 1999: 57)

The architecture that gives the city its modern feel and aspect is that of the arcades. It is around their iron and glass structure that Benjamin weaves his book. He traces their birth in 1822, when the textile trade boomed. The modern arcades, which developed into temples of commodity, were not only new, being also the scene of the first gas lighting, but also central to the modern city. The emergence of the arcades is not related only to the development of modern trade but also to the beginning of iron construction, used for railroads.

Not only was iron an artificial man-made material, but it was used for constructions that served transitory purposes. Thus, from an economic point of view, iron is the equivalent of Baudelaire's aesthetic modernity, which he defined in terms of "the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable." (Baudelaire 1995: 13)

The iconic iron construction of modern Paris is the Eiffel Tower, erected in 1889 to serve as the entrance arch to the World's Fair and greeted initially by a storm of indignation. For 41 years, the Eiffel Tower held the title of the tallest man-made structure in the world, which was actually a celebration of the new urban spirit of artificiality and utilitarianism. Benjamin argues that "the historical extension of the horizontal" is one that moves from the palaces of the Italian High Renaissance and the *châteaux* of the French kings, epitomes "of majesty itself" to "its new triumphal advance in the nineteenth century [which] begins under

the sign of the purely utilitarian structure, with those halls known as warehouses and markets, workshops and factories." (Benjamin 1999: 160)

The modern city, like the mediaeval one, has its underground system. Benjamin accounts for its subterranean aspect, showing that Paris "is built over a system of caverns from which the din of Métro and railroad mounts to the surface, and in which every passing omnibus or truck sets up a prolonged echo." (Benjamin 1995: 84) There is a ring of the cursed underworld to these catacombs, and Ezra Pound's "In a Station of the Metro" may hint at the idea that the modern underground is a counterpart of the underworld in ancient mythologies.

Lithographs – writing and reading the city

The printing process of lithography, which relies on reproduction technology, reinforced the sense many had that they started to live in a soulless and gradually dehumanized world of copies and copies of copies, which blotted out the original and did away with the human essence which, by contrast, painting may be said to have rendered. In Fernando Pessoa's *The Book of Disquiet,* "a hopelessly bad lithograph" (Pessoa 2003: 28) draws Bernardo Soares's attention against his will. Staring at it, Soares gives its flat surface depth until the lithograph stops being a reproduction, acquiring "lithographic reality" and expressing "a truth of some sort." (Pessoa 2003: 28) Although it is a print, in the eyes of the lithograph there is a "silent shout that there's a soul there." (Pessoa 2003: 28) In a world in which God is dead, the man fascinated by the lithograph still wonders whether he might have broken into some secret of God, and where the window under the stairs where he saw the lithograph leads to.

This is a frisson of unaccounted for mystery, which surrounds like an aura the apparently most trivial and cheap reproductions of Pessoa's times. It is also a reminder of a transcendental dimension which, although under serious attack, is still there. There is no answer to the rhetorical question what eyes stared at him from out of the lithograph. The only thing that matters is the emotional intensity of the experience.

Insecure locations and identities?

Industrialization and the triumph of utilitarianism made all cities look strikingly similar. In any such context, people felt confused and insecure. As Malcolm Bradbury argued:

> Realism humanizes, naturalism scientizes, but Modernism pluralizes, and surrealizes. (Bradbury 1978: 99)

The first signs of identities on the edge appeared in the late nineteenth century with the figure of the dandy. The dandy's place could really be any city, as long as it was an artificial haven.

Arthur Rimbaud, who prefigured surrealism, confessed that "*je est un autre*", thus synthesizing a modern sense of one's self as heterogenous and pluralistic. As the surrealist André Breton felt in *Nadja*, the self wondered at who he was and felt that he played a ghostly part in his own identity. So did Bernard, the novelist in Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*; Berand felt he was not one but many, or rather as many as other selves he felt he had, and those were the male and female sides of his own self. Fernando Pessoa felt he was so many that he

invented his own heteronyms, i.e. as many versions of himself as he could conceive. Echoing Bernard and Rimbaud, Pessoa wrote:

> *We are who we're not, and life is quick and sad. The sound of the waves at night is a sound of the night, and how many have heard it in their own soul, like the perpetual hope that dissolves in the darkness with a faint plash of distant foam! /…/ How many we are! How many of us fool ourselves! (Pessoa 2003: 92-93)*

So close was Pessoa to Rimbaud's insecure sense of self that he drew a selfscape where he declared that he was a stranger to himself and that the self was pluralistic: "Each of us is several, is many, is a profusion of selves." (Pessoa 2003: 325) and so inextricably part of the city his heteronym felt he was that "My consciousness of the city is, at its core, my consciousness of myself." (Pessoa 2003: 329)

If one was not many, the self was split. This is how Paul Morel felt in D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* and the author himself accounted for the development of the novel's plot in terms of that. The novel ends with the mother dying because she realized she caused the split in both her sons, and the last picture of Paul the reader gets is when "he walked towards the faintly humming, glowing town, quickly." (Lawrence 1994: 464) That last line suggests that, despite its mechanical rhythms of routine existence and its artificial and thus potentially illusive haven, the city ultimately conveys a sense of community and safety.

Boredom, alienation and exile

Everyday life in big cities, with its mechanical patterns and routine, may give a sense of boredom and alienation, and in its most extreme manifestations, a sense of exile in one's otherwise familiar context. Modern characters in real life and in literature often feel estranged from themselves, from their environment and from each other.

All the modernist writers abhorred the monotony of everyday existence, which induced a sense of incarceration and a desire to escape the arresting city. James Joyce's Dubliners feel trapped in a paralysed city, and Stephen Dedalus in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* explains to Davin that

> *When the soul of a man is born in this country there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight. You talk to me of nationality, language religion. I shall try to fly by those nets. (Joyce 1993: 220)*

Pessoa explains his own sense of boredom, which he calls "tedium", through a loss in the modern individual of any relation to transcendence, any support in faith and any creative and imaginative zest:

> *Tedium…Those who have Gods don't have tedium. Tedium is the lack of a mythology. For people without beliefs, even doubt is impossible, even their scepticism will lack the strength to question. Yes, tedium is the loss of the soul's capacity for self-delusion; it is the mind's lack of the non-existent ladder by which it might firmly ascend to truth. (Pessoa 2003: 230)*

As James Duffy in Joyce's "A Painlul Case" speaks about himself in the third person, which is the sign of a strange detachment from oneself, and as he has no attachments, Bernardo Soares in *The Book of Disquiet* feels there is "sweetness" in "having neither family

nor companions, that pleasant taste as of exile in which the pride of the expatriate subdues with a strange sensuality our vague anxiety of being far from home.” (Pessoa 2003: 175)

Fashion, art and spectacle

In Baudelaire’s *The Painter of Modern Life* there is a whole chapter praising cosmetics, fashion and artificiality, in which he argues that nature commands our instinctual gestures and actions like eating and drinking, and even more importantly our criminal acts, while philosophy, religion and art incline us to do good and aspire for beauty:

> *Everything beautiful and noble is the result of reason and calculation. Crime, of which the human animal has learned the taste in his mother’s womb, is natural by origin. Virtue, on the other hand, is artificial, supernatural, since at all times and in all places gods and prophets have been needed to teach it to animalized humanity, man being powerless to discover it by himself. Evil happens without effort, naturally, fatally; Good is always the product of some art. (Baudelaire 1995: 32)*

An admirer of the dandy, a keen observer of the subtlest aspects of modernity and its urban spirit, Baudelaire pleaded for the capacity of art and ‘*maquillage*’ to correct nature’s imperfections. By using cosmetics, women lift themselves above nature, making “divine their fragile beauty.” (Baudelaire 1995: 33) According to Baudelaire, the basic colours of ‘*maquillage’* black and red are also the artificial ‘tricks’ which give women a touch which is more than just charm and which he calls “the mysterious passion of the priestess.” (Baudelaire 1995: 34)

All the modern spirits see the spectacular life in the city as a show. More often than not, since he paces the streets incognito, being part of the crowd without interacting with the others, the *flâneur* is a spectator. A whole cohort of characters in the novels of Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, E. M. Forster, Pessoa, Breton, Kafka, take their worries, anxieties, frustrations, memories and thoughts to the streets, rehearsing them, recombining them as they take their walks with an almost mechanical regularity. Having been away to India for five years, Peter Walsh is an enthusiastic spectator of the whole show of London:

> *Admirable butlers, tawny chaw dogs, halls laid in black and white lozenges with white blinds blowing, Peter saw through the opened door and approved of. A splendid achievement in its own way, after all, London; the season; civilization. (Woolf 1996: 61)*

Peter’s eyes take in the show of the urban civilization of London, with its punctual and alert doctors, reliable men and women, he concludes that it is “really very tolerable” and then “he would sit down in the shade and smoke.” (Woolf 1996: 62) Contemplating the city, its passers by or crowds of people, its parks and its shops, everything enveloped in the smoke of the cigarette is the *flâneur’s* pastime. This double consumption of kinetic impressions and narcotics may account for the “intoxication of great cities” (Benjamin 1995: 61)

In Pessoa’s fragmented prose, the self watches the film of its own life in the city:

> *For me, since I’ve stopped hoping or not hoping, life is simply an external picture that includes me and that I look at, like a show without a plot, made only to please the eyes – an incoherent dance, a rustling of leaves in the wind, clouds in which the sunlight changes colour, ancient streets that wind every which way around the city. (Pessoa 2003: 169)*

Heterogeneity, pluralism and hybridization

Pessoa's heteronyms and his *Book of Disquiet*, the collage/montage of fragmented prose in Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project*, most of which is a collection of quotations, are instances of heterogeneity, pluralism and hybridization.

Desmond Harding notices that:

> *If nineteenth-century urban novels explored the isolation of the individual from the idea of historical community in negative terms, the twentieth-century city went one step further by sundering the very notion of historical continuity in favor of unhistorical miscellany. (Harding 2003:11)*

Harding further argues that for the modernist writers the city became more than a setting, as a matter of fact they saw it as a collage of the characters' impressions of it, or even as the protagonist of their poems, novels, plays or short stories. Key modernist texts such as T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, James Joyce's *Dubliners* and *Ulysses* weave their characters' destinies around the hybrid and protean urban environment, which may trap them, fascinate and attract them, horrify or repel them. In so doing, the modernists challenged "the idea of the metropolis as an essentially static, fixed, and, ultimately, knowable object." (Harding 2003:11)

The crowd itself, a composite of individuals, is a hybrid and protean entity. In Poe's "The Man of the Crowd", it is a spectacle. Once an individual is singled out and then pursued along the labyrinthine streets of London, that mysterious individual proves to be as unreadable as the city itself.

Conclusions

Tracing a history of the idea of the city, Desmond Harding argues that Rome was the epitome of the urban space in the ancient times; in the Renaissance, the cities "were often depicted in harmonious iconographic terms in all their civic historical roots." (Harding 2003: 10) In contrast to the Renaissance model of the orderly urban space, the modern city, which was largely the result of the Industrial Revolution, "is set adrift from its cultural past, an amorphous entity that often eluded representation." (Harding 2003: 10)

The modern city, ambiguously attracting, fascinating and repelling their dwellers at the same time, intoxicating them physically with their industrial fumes and bombarding their brains with their myriads of stimuli, bred the restless and slippery figure of the *flâneur*, whose ultimate destination was the arcade, a city in miniature and an artificially created paradise of consumerism. The convoluted and polyglot style of Walter Benjamin's *The Arcades Project* sheds light on Paris as the epitome of modernity: a city of fashion, iron constructions, art, spectacle, but also a mysterious underground architecture of catacombs, boredom, routine, alienation and exile.

The city's labyrinthine space of streets and arcades baffled the mind and the eye, and most of its representations are kaleidoscopic images. Largely drawing on Baudelaire's keen observations on the transitory nature of modernity and its stage, which is the city, Walter Benjamin reflected on it in a book which, as its translator in English notes, transcends "the conventional book form" and tears to pieces "pragmatic historicism – grounded, as this always is, on the premise of a continuous and homogenous temporality." (Benjamin 2003: xi)

Benjamin blasted homogenous temporality in order to reflect on the heterogenous and hybrid space of the city. Likewise, the stream of consciousness novels of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce, T. S. Eliot's poem *The Waste Land*, with their collage/montage of angles of perception and voices, undermined the representation of time and space as homogenous. Pessoa's heteronyms and his fragmented prose in *The Book of Disquiet* reinforced the sense that modern existence in the modern city may be "factless" but immensely rich in impressions. As Bradbury accounts for the city, "in much Modernism it is the environment of personal consciousness, flickering impressions, Baudelaire's city of crowds, Dostoyevsky's encounters from the underground, Corbière's (and Eliot's) *mélange adultere du tout* (adulterous mixture of everything)." (Bradbury 1978: 100)

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