Imagining the flâneur as a woman

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Flânerie[1] as an activity of strolling and looking carried out by the *flâneur* is a persistent motif in literature, sociology and art concerned with urban and specifically metropolitan culture. During the nineteenth century the *flâneur* was conceptualised as exclusively male, since women were not able to walk around the city with the same freedom as men. Women were firmly entrenched in the domestic sphere and it was only lower and working class women who entered the masculine public sphere on a regular basis (Wolff 1990:35). Therefore, the experience of the city stroller of the modernist era was mainly attributed to the male and the idea of the female *flâneur* inconceivable.

In this article the *flâneur* is imagined as a woman, a radical shift from the nineteenth-century conception of the *flâneur* who merely consorted with prostitutes and shopgirls, never seeing them as equals or as having a rightful 'place' in the public arena of the city. The concept of the *flâneuse* is investigated to ascertain the possibility of her existence and presence in the city. The article thus questions the gender of the *flâneur*[2] and suggests that *flâneuse* does not have the same freedom to stroll the streets as her male counterpart as a result of the intricate connection women have with consumerism, specifically by being an object sa well as a subject of consumerism. On this account women's position in consumer society is explored from the position of the prostitute and being the object of male gaze and desire. Reference is made to selected artworks by the South African artists Tracy Payne, Celia de Villiers and Dineo Bopape to elucidate theoretical concepts brought forward in the article.

Historical and conceptual tracing of the *flâneur*

The *flâneur* garners meaning from urban space, thereby adding meaning to the space itself, and can be viewed as the symbolic representation of "modernity

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and personification of contemporary urbanity," specifically in the realm of social and literary analysis (Ferguson 1994:22). An important figure in the discourse surrounding modernity and urbanisation, the *flâneur* is and was represented as "a mythological or allegorical figure" on the streets of nineteenth century European cities (Wilson 1992:93). The origin of the concept of the *flâneur* can be traced back to the writings of Charles Baudelaire and more specifically to its further interpretation by Walter Benjamin, who identified Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1857) as the basis of the *flâneur* theory (Benjamin 1969:58). This work imbued the *flâneur* with the idea of enjoyment to be in the crowd and taking pleasure from being absorbed in the masses of people. The *flâneur* extricates aesthetic experience and existential fulfilment from the crowds in the city (Tester 1994:2), but even in distancing himself from the crowds the *flâneur* is still deeply involved with them, alternating between accomplice and oblivious observer (Benjamin 1973:174).

The emergence of the *flâneur* coincided with a period of great change in modern history, that of industrialisation and modern capitalism (Gleber 1999:vii). The city streets of the nineteenth century did not lend itself to strolling, since wide pavements were the exception and the threat of vehicles were ever-present (Benjamin 1969:36). Therefore, the arcades - especially the arcades of the Paris city streets, described as passageways lined with shops - provided the city stroller with a setting and were influential in the coining of the notion of the *flâneur* and formed the basis of the *flâneur*'s experiences. Baudelaire never described the masses or the city in which the *flâneur* is so at home, but he placed the *flâneur* in a universal urban and overcrowded environment (Benjamin 1973:170). Fascinated by the crowds of the city Baudelaire's *flâneur* loses himself in the masses of the city and becomes intoxicated with this abandonment and experiences a love affair of delight and enchantment with the city (Benjamin 1969:55). There is no antagonism or opposition towards the crowds in which he finds himself (Benjamin 1973:171). Newcomers to urban life usually experience feelings of fear and loathing when encountering the crowds of the city; however, for Baudelaire the crowds held an immersive "reservoir of electric energy" resulting in an increase of nervous stimulation in the form of shocks and collisions (Benjamin 1973:176,177). As a man of leisure, without the

responsibility of having to attend to daily affairs, the *flâneur* can indulge in aimlessly wandering the streets and "is already out of place in an atmosphere of complete leisure as in the feverish turmoil of the city" (Benjamin 1973:174,175).

The *flâneur* was privy to unexpected and unplanned sensual encounters on the streets, since the only women on the streets were prostitutes and working girls. It is here that the male gaze[3] comes to the fore, where the *flâneur* has the opportunity to consume the women on the streets without the necessity of a monetary transaction. *Flânerie* requires knowledge of the being of the city and for Baudelaire, the *flâneur* could only be a true artist if he knew the city and how to use it (Ferguson 1994:30). To be the creative artist-*flâneur* the capacity for obsessive and dispassionate observation and the ability to reduce the city to spectacle were paramount. Debord (1994:12) argues that the spectacle "is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images" and not merely a collection of images, and the *flâneur* surrenders to the spectacle.

Since his emergence in the nineteenth century, the *flâneur* has been a common figure in discourses on the city in particular. As society's focus shifted from production to consumption, consumption became the main signifier of contemporary life. The *flâneur* is drawn to the spectacle of the city and the commodities on offer and he finds himself in a pervasive mass media society which consists of simulations that are not questioned by those exposed to it (Shields 1994:78). Faced with this excess of information the recipients are unable to respond and disseminate meaning from it; as such the *flâneur* as connoisseur of visual consumption "is a vicarious conqueror, self confirmed in his mastery of the empire of the gaze while losing his own self in the commodified network of popular imperialism" (Baudrillard 2001a:211, Baudrillard 2001b:13, Shields 1994:78).

Since his inception, "rapid urbanization and industrialization and an increased influence of the visual" have been determining factors in the *flâneur* 's experience of reality end being (Gleber 1999:vii). As a result, when investigating the contemporary *flâneur,* the significant effects of the visual and technology cannot be discounted as these are fundamental to the experiences and being of the *flâneur*. However, the *flâneur* has undergone a major conceptual shift in the

past century due to the massive changes occurring in urban societies. Being an integral part of the metropolitan area, the figure of the *flâneur* has been transformed in the face of dramatic changes and experiences in the global urban environment since the onset of industrialisation in the nineteenth century.

Baudelaire's *flâneur* is not confined any longer to the corporeal stroller who wanders the streets of nineteenth century Paris (Birkerts 1982:165). The *flâneur* is no longer limited to the streets and arcades of nineteenth century Paris, and "has walked into the pages of the commonplace" and contemporary urban culture (Tester 1994:1). As motif, the *flâneur* can be reconceptualised outside the parameters of the latter as he is a collection of attributes, real and imagined (Birkerts 1982:166). Furthermore, in contemporary terms the *flâneur* is used conceptually as a figure to comment on the issues of urban life without limiting him in terms of time and place (Tester 1994:16). For Tester (1994:15) "*flânerie* is existence at a pace that is out of step with the rapid circulations of the modern metropolis." Susan Buck-Morss (1986:103) contends that: "If at the beginning, the *flâneur* as private subject dreamed himself out into the world, at the end, *flânerie* was an ideological attempt to reprivatise social space, and to give assurance that the individual's passive observation was adequate for knowledge of social reality."

The figure of the *flâneur*, in keeping with postmodernism, is a diverse figure and a single definition is no longer adequate to describe his existence. According to Keith Tester (1994:1), "the *flâneur* has been allowed, or made, to take a number of walks away from the streets and arcades of nineteenth-century Paris." The *flâneur* is thus consensually viewed as both a product of the city and an author of the city in the way he experiences the city (Gleber 1997:67) and its experiences are gained from ordinary activities such as shopping, strolling and socialising, lured by the magnetism of the streets and the sensual pleasures of the crowds (Burns 2000:74). However, even though *flânerie* is subject to certain universal experiences, the contemporary *flâneur* in the urban milieu is faced with additional and unique challenges and experiences, and has been reimagined in terms of its gender.

Stereotyping gender in the city

Within the constraints of patriarchal legacies, women have been seen to represent disorder, chaos and sexuality, and men rationality and control; therefore women were viewed as not compatible with the male conception of an ordered, utopian metropolis. Yet, at the same time in the nineteenth-century the industrialised city was viewed as a site of decadence and as a "realm of uncontrolled and chaotic sexual licence" (Wilson in Massey 1994:259), which fits in with the conceptualisation of the *flâneur* as a male strolling in the city and gazing at the city as a female gendered construct. The *flâneur* has been articulated as searching for pleasure in the metropolis and taking "visual possession of the city" as "the embodiment of the male gaze" (Wilson 1992:98).

As women were not allowed to roam the city streets freely in the nineteenth century, their position in the urban milieu has been questioned ever since. Spaces are gendered and public spaces are associated with men and private spaces with women. This gendering of space becomes clear in the nineteenth century as "the rise of the aesthetics of modernity can be associated with particular spatial and social practices that privileged the male" (Van Eeden 2006:68). During this time a clear division between work and home is established and by implication, due to social norms, women are associated with the private domestic sphere and men with the public sphere (Van Eeden 2006:69). Men were, and still are, able to engage freely with the public domain and its attractions. Women's position on the streets has therefore always been marginal and their experiences limited and regulated (Gleber 1997:69).

Through the advances of feminist thinking and subsequent women's rights, it is unfair to conjecture that this is the way women are still perceived in contemporary society. However, much of the advertising seen on the city streets perpetuates this ideal and leaves women confronting this gendered stereotype (Sachs 1990:4, Slachmuijlder 2000:97).[4] The position of the female *flâneur* or *flâneuse*[5] remains a contentious issue, even in contemporary times where women are perceived to be free from discrimination in principle. Feminist Griselda Pollock (1988:71) contends that: "Indeed woman is just a sign, a fiction, a confection of meanings and fantasies." Similarly Anke Gleber

(1997:72) affirms the problematic notion of the female *flâneur* by stating that she "is considered to be absent, "invisible"; she is not presumed to have a presence in the street." Janet Wolff (in Pollock 1988:71) claims that there is "no female equivalent of the quintessential masculine figure, the *flâneur*; there is not and could not be a female *flâneuse*." However, in contemporary times, where gender roles are no longer seen as being exclusive binary oppositions but rather fluid between the two poles, it is difficult to accept the notion that there can be no female *flâneur*.

Even though the female is often used as a metaphor for the city, women in general have an ambiguous relationship with the city and being present in the city. The urbanisation of people has resulted in the symbolic marginalisation and 'entrapment' of women as cities are designed to isolate women and subject them to the patriarchal system (Soja 1996:110).

Woman as commodity

Contemporary societies are characterised by a market driven economy that is dominant, if not oppressive, and filled with the excesses of the media so that public space has been taken over by advertising. Ideologically the city has become a "site of consumption" (Baudrillard 1988:19,20) and shopping "*the* defining activity of public life" (Miles 2010:8,9). Consumption has overtaken production and consumer goods; places of expenditure have developed into the main ingredients in the postmodern city; and the architecture of cities has become what and where we consume (Featherstone 1991:13, Miles 2010:1).

Entrance to the urban milieu for women emerged as cities transformed into sites of industrialisation and consumerism became vital due to urbanisation. Women's 'problematic' relationship with the city is thereby entrenched as they are "seen to 'enter' the city through the route of commerce and consumption" (Swanson 1995:89). In the city women are seen as part of the urban 'architecture', something to be observed by the *flâneur*, therefore they become part of the urban drama to be 'consumed' together with the other components of the city (Ferguson 1994:28). Women and images of women are objects of

desire due to their implicit association with commodification where consumer products are the objects of desire in the city.

Traced back to the prostitute in the nineteenth-century metropolis (Buci-Glucksmann 1986:224), women as spectacle and presence on the street, thereby as commodity, has been well-established (Van Eeden 2006:69). Women's disempowered position in the public sphere is reinforced by the presence of the prostitute on the street (Gleber 1997:72). The *flâneur* is seduced by everything the city streets offer; as such, the prostitute is part of the commodities found on the street and is an "objective emblem of capitalism" (Pile 1996:233). Tracy Payne's *Coastal resort* (1996) (Figure 1) illustrates the notion that women are treated in a similar fashion to commodity items. The broken mannequin of *Coastal resort* lies discarded amidst the debris of the city, an item that is no longer needed, without value.

Contrary to the traditions of the nineteenth century, where women are limited to the domestic sphere, the prostitute is visible on the street and is there to be purchased and consumed (Buci-Glucksmann 1986:224). The prostitute and commodity culture are analogous with each other, since both represent wares to be displayed, purchased and consumed. Buci-Glucksmann (1986:224) makes it clear that the prostitute is the precursor for the manner in which women are equated with commodities in the city and thus by association also as an object to give pleasure. Although the prostitute is often mentioned as a female equivalent of the *flâneur*, she does not have the freedom of the *flâneur* to pursue the pleasures of the street and her presence is a result of economic necessity (Gleber 1997:78). Gleber (1997:78) makes it clear that women, whether it is the prostitute, the homeless or the shopper, are not equal to the *flâneur*, and that "within the public facets of female lives, these women form nothing if not the cynically distorted female images of consumption and *flânerie* in an age of capitalist and sexist exploitation." Not only does the prostitute represent the commodified female on the street, but she is also representative of the "sexual, social and economic relations" in the city as a "reflection of sexual difference and the mainstream secure forms of masculine social identity" (Swanson 1995:85).

Women's presence in public spaces has conflated the concepts of commodity and seller, as they embody both (Friedberg 1991:421). They are "not the observers, but objects in the Panopticon of the sexual market" (Friedberg 1991:421), since they are usually the objects of the gaze in urban space (Koskela 2000:255). It is for this reason that prostitution is seen as being symbolic of the rise of consumer culture, urbanisation and the loss of nature (Wilson 1992:105,106). The prostituted body in *Coastal Resort* as a metaphor for the disorder, waste and abjection evident in an urban environment is suggested by the disarray of debris surrounding the mannequin (Wilson 1992:92). Furthermore the meticulous rendering of the model of *Coastal resort* reveals the artist's fascination with the domination of surface in a hyper-real world (Williamson & Jamal 1996:115). As a result, the fragmentation and disfigurement of the body represents the prostituted body as a commodity and a simulation of reality (Buci-Glucksmann 1986:226). *Coastal resort* is a celebration of waste, fetish, beauty and degradation, similar to the prostitute who is an emblem of the instabilities of the city (Swanson 1995:80, Williamson & Jamal 1996:115). Furthermore, the prostitute is clearly associated with the sexual, and "the public woman [is] used as a sign of urban pathology" (Swanson 1995:80).

The prostitute becomes the object of desire for commodities and power for the *flâneur* (Pile 1996:233). Conversely, the prostitute is regarded as an "unproductive commodity, without value and eroding value" (Swanson 1995:83). Buck-Morss (1986:119) is of the opinion that the sexual degradation of women and their presence on the street result in furthering the oppression of women. Koskela (2000:255) affirms this and states that "looking connotates power, and being looked at powerlessness." Renditions of woman "as object of desire and endless exchange" (Petro 1997:56) and as fragmented and abstracted become symbolic of the processes of desire and consumerism entangled in the context of the spectacle.

Woman as object

Unable to escape their position as object, women remain situated as the object of the *flâneur*'s gaze (Pollock 1988:71). They are seen as objects to be gazed

at, and find it difficult to free themselves from this association. Women cannot take ownership of the streets as they are always subject to public conventions that affirm their position as object of the male gaze (Gleber 1997:72). The commodification of women is used to stimulate desire as they are both there to be consumed as well as to be consumers (Lefebvre 2002:135). As such women are seen as being mass-produced and generally available (Buci-Glucksmann 1986:222). Women's status has been reduced to being on "constant display, exhibition and exposition as the object of male desire" and she experiences being visually evaluated and assessed whenever she roams the streets (Gleber 1997:81). However, the commodity in a culture industry has become an image and representation, which becomes the core of social life (Swyngedouw 2002:159).

The male gaze informed by the image of woman as commodity is reinforced by the "modern sexual economy" and "enjoys the freedom to look, appraise and possess, in deed or in fantasy" (Pollock 1988:79). Women are usually the objects of the gaze (Berger 1972:47)[6], they are looked at and objectified in a different manner to men as "the offensive gaze belongs to men" (Koskela 2003:301). Women have never enjoyed the freedom of the *flâneur* who has the ability to gaze without being watched in return (Pollock 1988:71).

Being the object of the male gaze[7] cannot be reversed or changed, as it is so deeply entrenched in the psyche of both men and women (Gleber 1997:74). Gleber (1997:74) argues that naturalised views that women are objects of the gaze allow "the absence of female *flânerie* [to] appear not as any individual lack or incapacitation but as a crucial blind spot of society that converges to illuminate the limitations that conventions impose on women's lives." Furthermore, Gleber (1999:177) maintains that "confronted with a social environment in which they cannot be present as undisturbed observers, as they themselves are made the 'natural' objects of observation, women are excluded at once from public present and spectatorship." Looking for pleasure is informed by the societal model of active male and passive female where women signify "to-be-looked-at-ness" (Mulvey 1989:19).

Women in shopping malls

As Buci-Glucksmann (1986:228) maintains, women are intricately linked to consumption, both as those who are responsible for shopping and being a metaphor for commodity, as an object to be consumed. The feminisation of consumerism, especially shopping, ensures the continual dominance of the patriarchal gaze (Friedberg 1991:422). Her identity is thereby reduced to erotic commodity, an object to be appraised and purchased.

Van Eeden (2006:72) is of the opinion that the liminal or in-between spaces of the department stores of the nineteenth century encourage "a culture of sexual display" analogous to the display of wares in the stores. In the context of the latter, it is clear that shopping is a continuation of the prostituted female body as a commodity. Shopping malls have become "icons of urban space" as a result of the radical changes in the ontology of capitalism that reflects a complete embracing of consumerism and are also sites of social interaction (Koskela 2000:246, Van Eeden 2006:61). The purpose of the shopping mall is not only to make economic transactions convenient, but rather a space associated with leisure and the search for pleasure, thereby making shopping an experience (Featherstone 1991:103, Miles 2010:7,99).

The emergence of shopping malls as an extension of the department store drastically changed the ontology of the *flâneur* in its generic derivation. According to Benjamin (1969:54), the bazaar or department store is the final retreat for the *flâneur* and "he roamed through the labyrinth of merchandise as he had once roamed through the labyrinth of the city." In the mall, as in the department store, there is no longer distance between the *flâneur* and the commodity and his aloof approach to the city is compromised by being the observer as well as the observed (Ferguson 1994:35). It is here where *flânerie* is feminised and the *flâneuse* becomes part of the process of commodity exchange. Women in the public sphere are associated with consumption rather than production and their presence in shopping malls is ubiquitous (Van Eeden 2006:71). The shopping mall is emblematic of "physical domination of consumption upon the urban fabric" (Miles 2010:98). It is in the shopping mall where women conform to the constructs associated with *flânerie* as they are

afforded a sense of anonymity and the freedom to roam without a goal in mind (Van Eeden 2006:72).

Celia de Villiers's use of shoes[8] in *Post-human consumerism* (2009) (Figure 2) is emblematic of the erotic object[9] and plays on the desire that is created by the culture industry (De Villiers 2009:34). The shoe is no longer valued for its use as De Villiers has altered the original that it cannot be worn, and it becomes a fetishistic object of desire (Dreyer 2009:25). Accordingly the arrangement of shoes is a reflection of the manner in which the media creates desire for objects by means of display and the way the latter manipulates artificial ideas surrounding women (De Villiers 2009:34). The negation of the use-value of the shoe is in keeping with the constrained position of the *flâneuse* on the streets of the metropolis, as it focuses attention on the inability of the *flâneuse* to function in the same manner as her male counterpart.

Dineo Bopape illustrates this concept of the aimless roaming of the *flâneuse* in her video *Dreamweaver* (2008) (Figure 3). The rather oversized glasses remind of blindness and refer to the inability of the protagonist to find her way in the city. She creates the impression that she is groping in the dark, without knowing what her purpose in this environment entails. The mind can therefore not attain the knowledge that is necessary to reach its end goal or *telos* (MacIntyre 1990:5). In addition, the protagonist's metaphoric blindness alludes to the false sense of security the independent woman fosters when strolling the streets. Bopape (in Bosland 2008:114) states that the protagonist is "multi-sexed" and the "figure become[s] androgynous" as it is combining masculinity, the beard and white y-front underpants, with femininity, the presence of breasts. She thereby negates the idea of gender stereotypes where women are the object of the gaze. However, the dress made of stuffed plastic bags reinforces the female aspect of the figure, as women are typically associated with shopping.

Even though *Dreamweaver* is not overtly an objectification of the female, it reaffirms a scopophilic notion of looking as well as solipsism. The viewer is a secret spectator of the dancer, thereby evoking voyeurism and by watching her experience pleasure by using her image as an object of sexual stimulation (Mulvey 1989:18). The artwork depicts woman is the passive, consumed object

of desire as well as the active consumer in a (blind) search of goods. In contemporary times shopping is still seen as a female activity, even though the traditional notions[10] of the woman as gatherer and being excluded from the world of commerce are no longer irrefutable. Shopping is gendered as female due to the fact that in the department stores and bazaars of the nineteenth century women were both the shop assistants and patrons (Van Eeden 2005:61). Women's tentative freedom from the constraints of the patriarchal system is facilitated by the "privilege of shopping" (Friedberg 1991:421). Shopping is seen as being part of domestic labour and a leisure activity related to femininity and a system of false needs (Van Eeden 2005:61,62).

Shopping is not only an activity to obtain goods but also a leisure activity or means to escape the confines of patriarchal domesticity. It is responsible for the increasing visibility of women on the streets as well as shopping malls being aimed at female consumers (Van Eeden 2006:75). According to Ferguson (1994:27), women cannot disconnect themselves from the attraction of the city, specifically in the activity of shopping. Shopping undermines the "posture of independence" that identifies and defines the (female) *flâneur* (Ferguson 1994:27). It becomes an intense engagement and integration with the urban environment, therefore the objectivity and neutrality required from the (female) *flâneur* is no longer possible (Ferguson 1994:27).

Women's restrictions on the street

Yet, due to women's position in society,[11] they cannot enjoy the same freedoms as men. The female stroller has to continually assert her position as *flâneuse* on the street in order not to be perceived as the object of the male gaze, thereby further negating the possibility of having the disinterested attitude of the *flâneur* during his aimless walks along the streets (Gleber 1997:76).

Women on the streets have traditionally been the *victims* of the gaze and are "absent as subject and yet overpresent as object" and this seems to be the case even in contemporary times (Petro 1997:43). Even though female *flânerie* is limited by women's vulnerable position in the city, it does not mean that women are not pursuing a sense of freedom from oppression in the streets of the city.

Women are in the position to go beyond the limits of being a mere object of the gaze especially when acting with a sense of independence (Lauter 1985:80). However, women are unable to be completely at ease in the metropolis, especially at night when the level of danger rises and as a result are unable to "indulge their full fascination with the metropolis" (Gleber 1999:176,177). Furthermore, the *flâneuse* is usually the victim of discrimination, harassment and the fear of crime, whether these are justified or not in her surroundings. Bopape repudiates the mainstream ideas regarding female objectiveness as the protagonist is not presented as someone to be desired as she does not conform to society's concepts of attractiveness. Moreover the glasses suggest that she is blind to the ideals of society. She conforms to Lauter's statement that women need to part with conventional ideas in order to undertake a journey in the public sphere (Lauter 1984:95).

Although women can overcome their vulnerability, women are still at a disadvantage and marginalised as a result of their innate relationships with commodification and physical limitations and the consequent danger of assault and harassment. Even though woman's position as a *flâneuse* is contested in the city, women have relative freedom in the liminal spaces of shopping malls to engage in the pleasures of looking, socialising and strolling (Wilson 1992:101). Women are thus more likely to engage in *flânerie* in the shopping mall, which is seen as a 'safe' area. The mall allows women to escape from the confines of the domestic sphere as set upon them by a patriarchal system (Van Eeden 2006:63). Moreover it affords women a relatively safe environment to wander at will even though privacy is reduced as a result of the intense use of surveillance as a system of control and exclusion. For this reason, the perceived dangers of the street are kept at bay in the mall (Friedberg 1991:424). Window shopping affords women with an escape from the domestic sphere as well as the opportunity to compare and evaluate goods (Van Eeden 2006:73).

Gleber (1997:74) states that: "Despite women's formal equality and democratic rights, the uncommented, uninhibited, and unobserved presence of a female person in the streets is in no way acknowledged as a self-evident right." Women's movement in the city is thus restricted to a much greater degree than

that of men and there is a marked difference between their respective experiences which is not readily quantifiable

Closing

The spectacle of the metropolis is an overwhelming phenomenon and its influence on the *flâneur* is significant. Considering women's position in society it can be contended that their empowerment is not real as it is based on the false desires of the spectacle. As such the characterisation of the *flâneuse* should be differentiated from the *flâneur*, although the two types mostly reveal commonality. Women mostly function as *flâneuses* in the semi-public space of the shopping mall and for them to entertain the idea of complete freedom and independence whilst venturing on the streets to engage in the activity of *flânerie* they need to break "with the values that confine them within ordinary life" (Lauter 1984:95). She has to realise a new subject position, someone who becomes a "new figure of a resistant gaze" (Gleber 1997:84). This position must be in opposition to the traditional roles of women and their reality as images to be looked at and to be offered on the streets as a visual commodity (Gleber 1997:84). However, as Gleber (1997:75) maintains:

> As long as a woman's movement in the streets involves facing more forms of intrusion, surveillance, and violence and requires more self-determination and self-confidence than a man's, female *flânerie* does not really come into its own. As long as the empowered position of the male gaze prevails, females are unable to move at will.

In light of the problematic position of women in the public spheres of the city, this article posed the question whether a *flâneuse* can indeed exist. Women's continuing oppressed position has been investigated and the conclusion can be reached that women are still not enjoying the same freedom on the city streets as men due to a variety of reasons. Women's presence on the street is equated with pleasure, whether to be consumed or be the consumer, and the feminisation of consumerism continues women's position as object of the gaze that is magnified by their socialisation as being the object of the gaze. Therefore women's disempowerment in the public space of the city streets entails a continuation of the figure of the prostitute whose presence on the streets was accepted in the nineteenth century as a commodity to be consumed.

ENDNOTES

[1] *Flânerie* as activity is more than just strolling and is articulated by Rob Shields (1994:65), as "more specific than strolling. It is a spatial practice of specific sites: the interior and exterior public spaces of the city." *Flânerie* is specifically concerned with the city and the *flâneur* is characterised by walking in the city. The journey is the essence of his existence on the streets as walking is "an elementary form of [the] experience of the city" (De Certeau 1984:93).

[2] The *flâneur* is a concept first associated with Western Industrialised cities, specifically European cities. For this reason the article considers only a Western paradigm of thinking regarding the *flâneur* and the city. Furthermore the position of women in the city and society as a whole is considered to be where women have the same legal rights as men and are not seen and treated as second class citizens.

[3] The male gaze refer to the idea that men are the bearer of the look whereas women are objects to be looked at. Male pleasure and knowledge is embedded in this process of 'looking'. The gaze should not be confused with voyeurism as voyeurism is concerned with gaining sexual pleasure from watching others secretly, thus invading their privacy.

[4] Advertising in general tends to revert to traditional stereotypes of women and fails to portray women consistently in diverse roles and situations, thus failing to keep up with the changes in women's position in society at large (Slachmuijlder 2000:97).

[5] Although the term '*flâneur'* is a generic term it cannot be comprehended outside of its genderised origination, which was essentially male. Therefore the feminising of the term needs to be indicated as 'female flâneur'. The term '*flâneuse*' is a neologism.

[6] Women are still the object of the gaze even though they are able to resist the oppression of the sexualised gaze by means of direct eye contact and technologically mediated looking (Koskela 2003:301).

[7] Norah Vincent (2006) confirms this notion by her social experiment where she presented herself as a man to society for a year. As she walks the streets disguised as a man, she realises that she is now afforded some sense of respect by not being stared at. She mentions that "as a woman, you couldn't walk down those streets invisibly. You were an object of desire" and the stares of the men assert their dominance over the women passing them in the street (Vincent 2006:2,3).

[8] The purchase of shoes far beyond obvious need is seen as a quintessentially female weakness in popular thinking.

[9] Foot fetishes are traditionally explained by Sigmund Freud who claims that the reason for such fetishes is that the foot resembles the penis; however, Dr VS Ramachandran, a neuroscientist, claims that it has nothing to do with the anatomical shape of feet, but rather is a result of brain mapping as described by Dr W Penfield (Ramachandran & Blakeslee 1999:26).

[10] According to Van Eeden (2006:73,74), shopping is gendered female based on the nature over nurture and nurture over nature theory. Nature over nurture dictates that since prehistoric times women have been responsible for gathering around the home, thereby making them biologically better at shopping. Nurture over nature states that patriarchy excludes women from the commercial sector and confines them to the home and they are therefore consumers.

[11] In a South African context the position of women is even more precarious, since violence against women, specifically sexual violence, is rampant (Hart 2011:sp, Jewkes, Sikweyiya, Morrell & Dunkle 2009:sp). In my opinion, even though violence against women is more likely to take place in the private sphere of the home, the fear of such crime spills over to women's presence in the public sphere.

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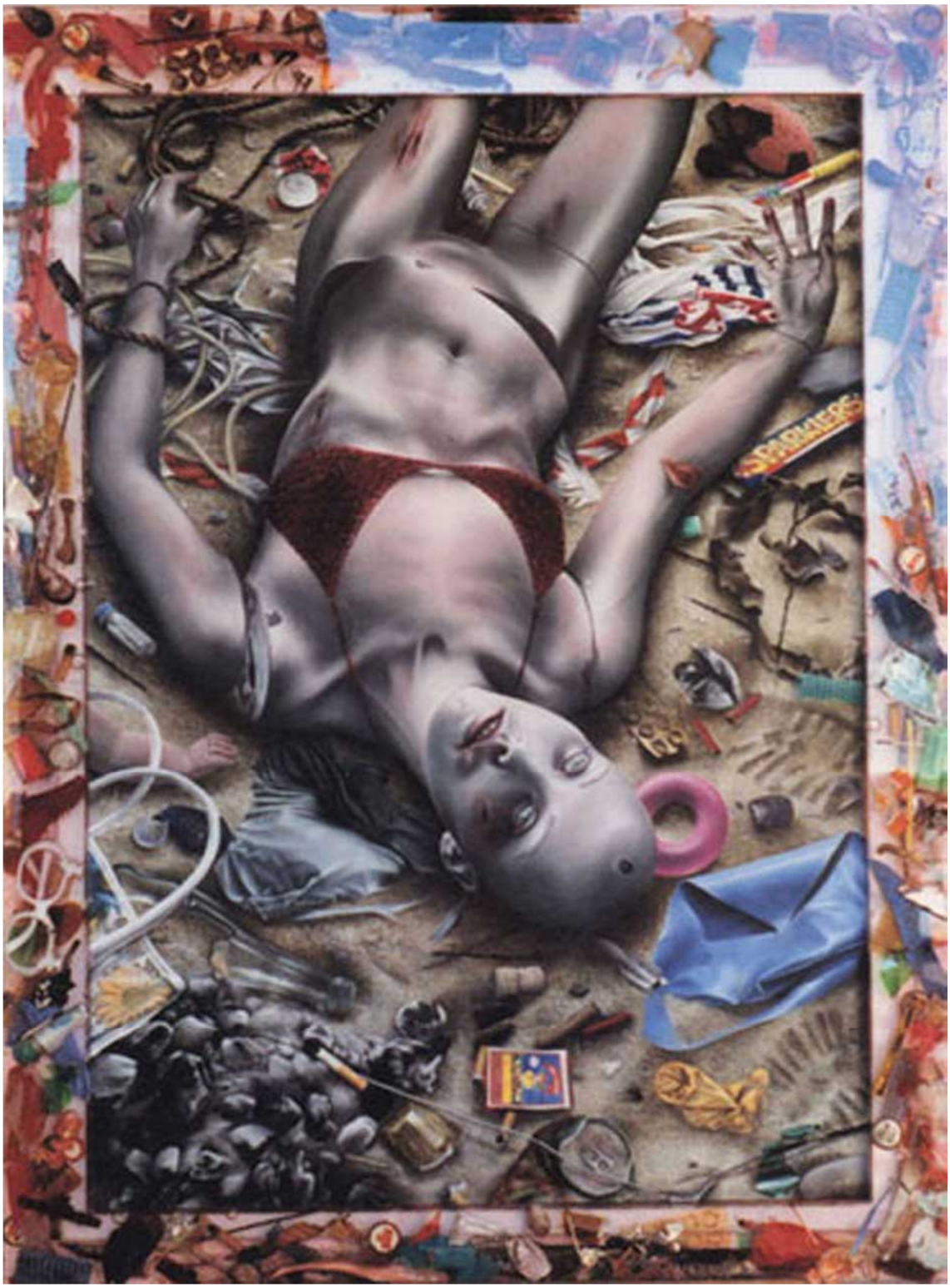

Figure 1: Tracy Payne, Coastal resort, 1996.
Pastel on paper, trash and cast resin frame. 115 x 84.5 cm.

(Williamson and Jamal 1996, 116).

333x451mm (72 x 72 DPI)

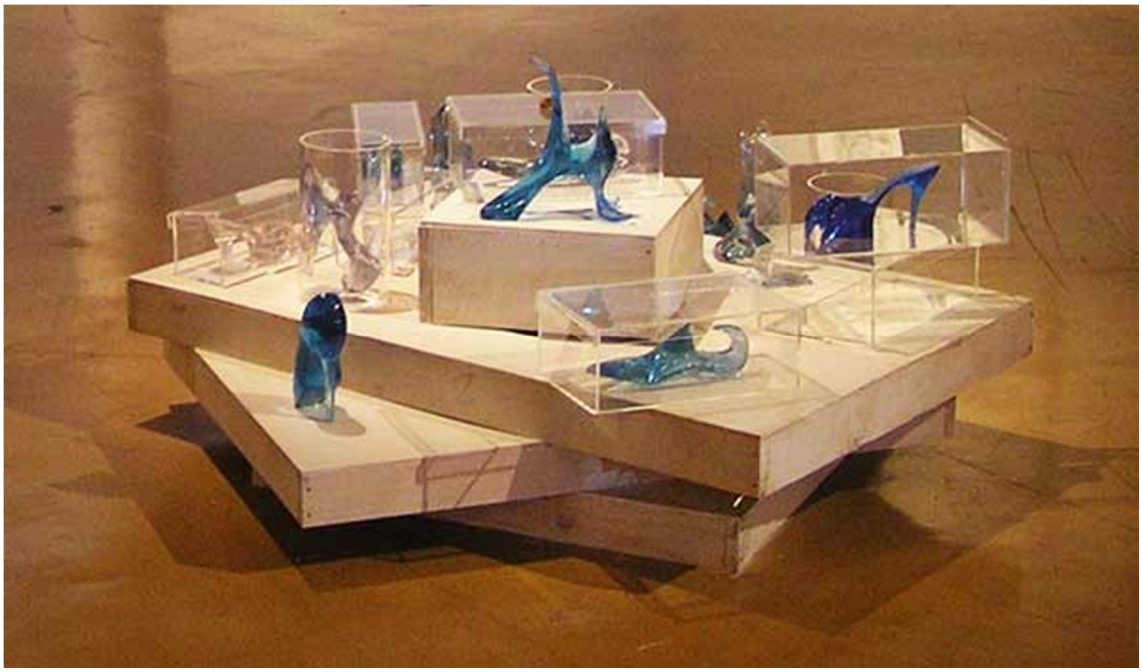

Figure 2: Celia de Villiers, Post-human consumerism, 2009.
Resin casting, plexiglass. Dimensions variable.
(Dreyer and Lebeko 2009, 35).

211x123mm (72 x 72 DPI)

Figure 3: Dineo Bopape, Dreamweaver, 2008.
Video. 7 minutes 53 seconds.
(Dreyer and Lebeko 2009, 51).

413x515mm (72 x 72 DPI)