The second half of the nineteenth century lives in a sort of 

In the second half of the nineteenth century, a variety of apparatus spread the "field of the visible." It is, of course, the effect of the soul's

illustrated pictorial, wave of print, caricature, etc. The effect of illustrations, the multiplication of images ever wider distribution of

In societies where the conditions of production prevail,

In societies where the conditions of production prevail,

All of life presents itself as an immense accumulation of

All of life presents itself as an immense accumulation of

society, everything that was previously itself has now moved into a reproduction.
the visible,” or “an immense accumulation of spectacles,” everyday life was transfigured by the “social multiplication of images.”

Yet there remains a historiographical debate about whether this new predominance of the visible produced a crisis of confidence in the eye itself, or whether it was the coincident increase in optical research which produced this frenzy of visual culture. The same historiographic debate pervades the history of the arts; either the invention of photography produced a crisis that led to continued optical research, or the nineteenth-century obsession with optical research produced a crisis that led to photography. In order to organize the vast historical process that led to the emergence of the cinema it is necessary to enter into this debate, a dispute that festers at the roots of modernity.

In this chapter, I begin by describing the “observer” in modernity, situating the emergence of the cinema in the historical framework of precinematic mobile and virtual gazes. Such a “situated” approach to the cinematic apparatus necessitates an account of the imbrication of images in the social relations of looking. The flâneur will serve as a model for an observer who follows a style of visibility different from the model of power and vision so frequently linked with modernity—what Michel Foucault dramatically described as “un régime panoptique.” The trope of flânerie delineates a mode of visual practice coincident with—but antithetical to—the panoptic gaze. Like the panopticon system, flânerie relied on the visual register—but with a converse instrumentalism, emphasizing mobility and fluid subjectivity rather than restraint and interpellated reform.

The panoptic gaze has been invoked by feminist theorists to underline the one-way power of gendered looking, where women have internalized the voyeuristic gaze and are always subjectively “objects of the look.” As we examine divergent models of the observer in modernity, a refutation of theories of the panoptic gaze will have significant ramifications on accounts of gendered spectatorship. The panoptic gaze may indeed suggest a model for the increased priority of the visual register, but there were alternative gazes that, while still rendering the importance of the visual, produced different—more fluid—forms of subjectivity.

Gender, to follow Teresa de Lauretis’s recent formulation, “is the product of various social technologies” that include “cinema … institutionalized discourses, epistemologies, and critical practices, as well as practices of daily life” (emphasis added). And although gender seems a necessary component of debates about the role of vision in modernity and postmodernity, genealogies of the nineteenth-century observer have, as we will see, retained a resistance to the gendered subject. Once we establish the flâneur’s mobility, we will see the necessity of charting the origins of his female equivalent, the flâneuse.

MODERNITY AND THE "PANOPTIC" GAZE It is in this episteme, as Foucault would have it, that new modes of social and political control were institutionalized by “un régime panoptique.” Foucault places the panoptic model in a pivotal position in the epistemological shift from eighteenth-century empiricism to the invention of a transcendental concept of “man.” In a dramatic passage in The Order of Things, he describes this transition as “the threshold of modernity.” Foucault finds the origins of modernity in the reordering of power and knowledge and the visible.

The Panopticon Jeremy Bentham’s panopticon device (1791) provided the model for Foucault’s characterization of panoptic power and the “disciplines” of imagined scrutiny. (Discipline has been the common English translation for Foucault’s term, surveiller.) Invoked as a philosophic model for the scopic regime of power through the visual register, the panopticon was an apparatus—a “machine of the visible,” to use Comoli’s phrase—which controlled the seen-relation. In the panopticon, an unseen seer surveys a confined and controlled subject. The panopticon produces a subjective effect, a “brutal dissymmetry of visibility” for both positions in this dyad: the seer with the sense of omnipotent voyeurism and the seen with the sense of disciplined surveillance.

Foucault described the panopticon as an “architectural mechanism,” a “pure architectural and optical system” that did not need to use force because the “real subjection is born mechanically from a fictitious relation.” The panopticon structure was then, in a sense, a “building-machine” that, through its spatial arrangement, established scopic control over its inhabitants.

The architectural system of the panopticon restructured the relation of jailer to inmate into a scopic relation of power and domination. The panoptic building was a twelve-sided polygon. Using iron as a skeleton, its internal and external skin was glass. The central tower was pierced by windows that provided a panoramic view of separate peripheral cells. Light
from the outer walls illuminated each cell. The panoptic subject was placed in a state of "conscious and permanent visibility." The panopticon prison was thought of as a spatial reformatorium that could change and "correct" subjectivity by architectural means. As Foucault describes it:

The seeing machine was once a sort of dark room into which individuals spied; it has become a transparent building in which the exercise of power may be supervised by society as a whole.

Prisoners were objects of an imagined scrutiny, where the internalized sense of surveillance changed the disposition of external power:

He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power... he becomes the principle of his own subjection. By this very fact, the external power may throw off its physical weight; it tends to the non-corporeal; and, the more it approaches this limit, the more constant, profound and permanent are its effects. (emphasis added)

Foucault uses the panoptic model to illustrate how, when power enters the visual register, it "tends to the non-corporeal." In the panopticon prison, confinement was successfully maintained by the barrier walls of the prison, but the subjective changes in the inmate were to be produced by the incorporation of the imagined and permanent gaze of the jailer. Bentham's panopticon was designed for other uses than the prison—the factory, the asylum, the hospital—but all of these uses were for institutions where enclosure was a priority.

Hence, the panopticon model has served as a tempting originary root for the inventions that led to the cinema, an apparatus that produces an even more "mechanically... fictitious relation" and whose "subjection" is equally internalized. Feminist theorists have invoked the "panoptic" implant as a model for the ever-present "male gaze," while "apparatus" film theories relied more on the immobility and confined spatial matrix of the prison. The prisoners in Plato's cave provide, in Jean-Louis Baudry's emphatic account, an origin for cinematic spectatorship with immobility as a necessary condition.
Expressing as in mirror sea and land,
And what earth is, and what the hath to shew—
I do not here allude to subllest craft.
By means refined attaining purest ends,
But imitations fondly made in plain
Confession of man’s weakness and his loves.
Whether the painter—fashioning a work
To Nature’s circumsambent scenery

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH, describing the panorama, in the 1805 Prelude
(Seventh Book, lines 244–257, emphasis added)

As Wordsworth notes, the panorama was not the “subllest craft” for presenting “the absolute presence of reality.” But its “spectacles/Within doors” of “every nature from all climes” used “circumsambent scenery” to create an artificial elsewhere for the panoramic spectator.

The panorama was a 360-degree cylindrical painting, viewed by an observer in the center. The illusion presented by the panorama was created by a combination of realist techniques of perspective and scale with a mode of viewing that placed the spectator in the center of a darkened room surrounded by a scene lit from above. The panorama was first patented by the Irishman Robert Barker, who took out a patent for panoramic painting in Edinburgh in 1787 and opened the first completely circular panorama in Leicester Square in London in 1792. (Recall the years of Bentham’s work on the panopticon, from 1787 to 1791.) Barker’s inspiration for the panorama came, according to an anecdote told by historian Olive Cook, in a manner worthy of comparison to Bentham’s panopticon prison:

The invention of the Panorama is usually attributed to Robert Barker, an Edinburgh painter. In about 1785 he was put into prison for debt and was confined to a cell lit by a grating let into the wall at the junction of wall and ceiling. One day he was reading a letter and to see more clearly carried it below the grating. The effect when the paper was held in the shaft of light falling from the opening was so astonishing that Barker’s imagination was set working on the possibilities of controlled light flung from above upon pictures of large dimensions.

If “controlled light” served to survey and measure the wards in the panopticon prison, in an opposite way it also served to create the visual illusions of the panorama.

MODERNITY AND THE “VIRTUAL” GAZE

The Panorama

As leisure let us view from day to day,
As they present themselves, the spectacles
Within doors: troops of wild beast, bird and beasts
Of every nature from all climes convened,
And, next to these, those mimic sights that ape
The absolute presence of reality
The panorama did not physically mobilize the body, but provided virtual spatial and temporal mobility, bringing the country to the town dweller, transporting the past to the present. The panoramic spectator lost, as Helmut Gernsheim described, "all judgement of distance and space" and "in the absence of any means of comparison with real objects, a perfect illusion was given." The panorama offered a spectacle in which all sense of time and space was lost, produced by the combination of the observer in a darkened room (where there were no markers of place or time) and presentation of "realistic" views of other places and times.

The ideology of representation in the panoramic painting must be placed in the context of the concurrent reconceptualization of the idea of the horizon and of perspective (the first hot air balloon was launched in 1783 and aerial balloonists found vistas that radically changed the landscape perspective) and the "cult of immensity" in painting, where scale was a factor in the concept of illusionist immersion. In addition, the panorama developed out of the context of earlier "screen" entertainments.

The "magic lantern" devices of Athanasius Kircher, Johannes Zahn, and others introduced a form of projected entertainment spectacle that relied on controlled light projected through glass slides: drawn figures of skeletons, demons, and ghosts appeared on a screen surface. In his text of 1646, Ars Magna Lucis et Umbrae, Kircher (1601–1680)—a Roman Catholic priest—published his procedures for projecting ghostly apparitions. Whether, as Musser argues, Kircher sought to demystify the "magic" of the lantern or whether, to the contrary, he trained a new legion of mystics, the eerie effects produced by these luminous projections established an early link between two potentially competing systems of subjective interpellation: religion and optics. Kircher concealed the lantern from his audiences by placing it on the other side of the screen. He could change the distance of the lantern, vary the sizes of his figures. Musser traces the roots of cinema in these forms of late eighteenth-century forms of "screen practice." These entertainments—shadow plays, phantasmascorias, lantern displays—relied on dark rooms and projected light.

Philip Jacob de Louthèbourg, a French-born painter and stage designer who came to England in 1771, had designed a viewing system, the eidophusikon (1781), which also relied on spectators in a darkened auditorium viewing an illuminated (ten foot by six foot) translucent screen, with light projected from behind. The eidophusikon spectacle produced simulations of sunsets, fog, and dawn accompanied by sound effects and harpsichord music. In Paris, a device called the phantasmagoria similarly relied on a lantern with lens to project drawings of celebrities from Voltaire to Rousseau to Marat. Étienne-Gaspard Robertison—a self-styled auteur to whom the invention of the parachute is attributed—designed a magic lantern show set in a Capuchin monastery. The phantasмагoria debuted in Paris from 1797 to 1800, traveled to London from 1801 to 1803, and arrived in New York in 1803.

Phantasmagorias, panoramas, dioramas—devices that concealed their machinery—were dependent on the relative immobility of their spectators, who enjoyed the illusion of presence of virtual figures. These apparatuses produced an illusion of immediacy referentiality. Other optical entertainments that required viewing devices—the stereoscope, the phenakistoscope—were dependent on quite different optical principles and hence produced diverse subjective effects.

Benjamin saw a direct relation between the panoramic observer and the flaneur:
The city-dweller... attempts to introduce the countryside into the city. In the panoramas the city dilates to become landscape, as it does in a subtler way for the flâneur.50

Before the advent of illustrated print journalism in the 1840s, the panorama supplied a visual illustration of places and events that one could read about in print. The panorama not only appealed to the public interest in battles and historical illustration, but also to a fascination with landscape art, travel literature, and travel itself. As Richard Aitick argues, the panorama was the "bourgeois public's substitute for the Grand Tour."51

Dolf Sternberger has emphasized that the lure of these entertainments was not in their verisimilitude with reality, but rather in their deceptive skills, their very artificiality.52 As an early epitome of the lure of artificiality, in 1823 Yorkshireman Thomas Hornor climbed the top of St. Paul's with sketching implements and telescopes and sketched London in 360-degree detail. Hornor's gigantic rendering was housed in Decimus Burton's Colosseum. The building took years to build (1824–1829) but, when finished, encased a panorama of remarkable verisimilitude: a simulated London viewed from the top of a simulated St. Paul's. The rooftop location of this panorama necessitated a new design feature: the first hydraulic passenger lift ("ascending room") carried spectators who did not wish to climb the stairs.53 The elevator was a mechanical aid to mobility; the gaze at the end of this "lift" was virtual.

The panorama was taken to Paris in 1799 by Robert Fulton,54 who had purchased the foreign patent rights. Two rotundas for the panorama were built in Paris on Boulevard Montmartre. In the interior were two paintings, one that displayed a view of Paris from the Tuileries and another that showed the British evacuation during the Battle of Toulon in 1793. The immediate city—the Paris of only blocks away—was presented to itself, but so was a distant city (Toulon) at a distant time (six years before). Sternberger has aptly named these panoramic paintings, "captured historical moment(s)."55

In 1800, the Passage des Panoramas was built to connect the Palais Royal to the panorama on Boulevard Montmartre. The cylindrical panorama building was connected directly to the Passage des Panoramas—one entered through the arcade. The panorama was lit from above by the same glass and iron skylight as the arcade. In the next chapter, we will examine the relationship between the passage—an architectural and social space designed for flânerie—and these precinematic devices for mobilizing a virtual gaze.56

The Diorama Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre, later famed for his 1839 invention of a photographic process he named the daguerreotype, began his career as an assistant to the celebrated panorama painter, Pierre Prévost. In 1823, Daguerre debuted a viewing device that expanded upon the panorama's ability to transport the viewer, an apparatus he called the diorama.57

Like the diaphanorama—in which translucent watercolors were illuminated from behind—the dioramic illusion relied on the manipulation of light through a transparent painting.58 Daguerre's visitors looked through a proscenium at a scene composed of objects arranged in front of a backdrop; after a few minutes, the auditorium platform was rotated seventy-
three degrees to expose another dioramic opening. The diorama was designed to construct and restructure—through light and movement—the relation of the viewer to the spatial and temporal present. A scene was transformed through the manipulation of daylight, which shifted the temporal mood. The diorama differed significantly from the panorama: the diorama spectator was immobile, at the center of the building, and the “views” were mobilized as the entire diorama building with its pulleys, cords, and rollers became a machine for changing the spectator’s view.

When the diorama opened in Paris in 1822, it displayed two distant tableaux: “The Valley of Sarnen,” a scene from Switzerland, and “Interior of Trinity Church—Canterbury Cathedral,” a scene from England. Of the thirty-two scenes exhibited during the seventeen years of its existence, ten of the paintings were interiors of distant chapels or cathedrals. As a local newspaper account indicated:

We cannot sufficiently urge Parisians who like pleasure without fatigue to make the journey to Switzerland and to England without leaving the capital."

Helmut and Alison Gernsheim extend this description of the diorama as a substitute for travel:

The many foreign views, too, no doubt had a special appeal to the general public who, before the days of Cook’s Tours, had little chance of travelling abroad.

Dioramas opened in other cities, in Breslau in 1826, in Berlin in 1827, in Stockholm in 1846, and in Frankfurt in 1852. (Thomas Cook’s first guided tours of the continent were in 1855.) There were other variations on the diorama. The plexorama, which opened in Berlin in 1832, had the audience seated in a ship and taken for an hour’s “voyage,” as the illusion of movement was created by the backcloth moving slowly across the stage. This device emphasized the equation otherwise implicit between travel and viewing scenes of the distant and of the past.

In 1839, Daguerre’s diorama on Rue Sanson in Paris was destroyed by fire. In that same year, he patented a technique for fixing images on copper plates, the “daguerreotype.” Few dioramic or panoramic paintings survive.
The illusions produced were dependent on the effects of artificial light, and many of the paintings, and the buildings which housed them, ended in flames. The “captured historical moment” could be more securely impounded on a photographic plate. Benjamin will remark on this historical coincidence; photography emerged from the ashes of the diorama.9

Both the panorama and its successor, the diorama, offered new forms of virtual mobility to its viewer. But a paradox here must be emphasized: as the “mobility” of the gaze became more “virtual”—as techniques were developed to paint (and then to photograph) realistic images, as mobility was implied by changes in lighting (and then cinematography)—the observer became more immobile, passive, ready to receive the constructions of a virtual reality placed in front of his or her unmoving body.

The Panopticon versus the Diorama Like the panopticon,90 the diorama-building was an architectural arrangement with a center position for the see with a view to “cells” or “galleries.” Yet unlike the observation tower of the panopticon, the diorama platform turned (the auditorium rotated seventy-three degrees) to mobilize the viewer. The diorama had a collective observer, a shared audience on the moving platform. Dioramas and panoramas were not directly instruments of social engineering (cf. Fourier’s phalanstery) but were, nevertheless, conceived of as satisfying a social desire or curiosity—a desire to have visual mastery over the constraints of space and time. The technology of the diorama relied on spectator immobility, but offered a visual excursion and a virtual release from the confinements of everyday space and time.

But if the panopticon was dependent on the enclosure of the look, the inward measure of confined but visible subjects, the diorama was dependent on the imaginary expansion of that look. Unlike the jail-surveyor, the diorama spectator was not attempting mastery over human subjects, but was instead engaged in the pleasures of mastery over an artificially constructed world, the pleasure of immersion in a world not present.

In the diorama, the spectator sat on a darkened center platform and looked toward the brightness of the peripheral scenes: transparent paintings where light was manipulated to give the effect of time passing—a sunset, or the changing light of the day. In the panopticon, the role of light was to instruct, to measure.91 In the diorama, light played a deceptive role. In the panopticon, there was no spatial illusion, no fooling with time.

Both panoptic and dioramic systems required a degree of spectator immobility and the predominance of the visual function.92 And it is this notion of the confined place combined with a notion of journey that is present simultaneously in cinematic spectatorship.

THE BAUDELAIREAN OBSERVER, THE “MOBILIZED” GAZE OF THE FLÂNEUR Baude- laire, of course, provides an eloquent testimony of the observer in modernity.93 As poet and art critic, Baudelaire positioned himself in the midst of a nineteenth-century city, Paris (and later Brussels), wandering through its panoptica of glass streets, cafes, theaters, brothels, parks, and passages, collecting images that he would record in newspaper reviews and prose poems. In the famed essay of 1863, “Le Peintre de la vie moderne,” Baudelaire extols the work of the artist Constantin Guys as “the painter of modern life.”94 “Modernity,” Baudelaire explains in this essay, is that part of art “which is ephemeral, fugitive, contingent upon the occasion; it is half of art, whose other half is the eternal and unchangeable.”95 But the essay was less a celebration of Guys than it was a paean to the flâneur who provides a vivid example of “the impassioned observer”:

To the perfect spectator, the impassioned observer, it is an immense joy to make his domicile amongst numbers, amidst fluctuation and movement, amidst the fugitive and infinite. To be away from home, and yet to feel at home; to behold the world, to be in the midst of the world and yet to remain hidden from the world—these are some of the minor pleasures of such independent, impassioned and impartial spirits, whom words can only clumsily describe. . . . the observer is a prince who always rejoices in his incognito.96 (emphasis added)

To Baudelaire, this “perfect spectator” was resolutely male, an observing “prince” who was allowed the paradoxical pleasure: to be at home away from home, in the midst of the world and yet hidden from it, impassioned and yet impartial, here and yet elsewhere. The Baudelairean observer was a (male) painter or a (male) poet—a flâneur—whose mobility through the urban landscape allowed him access to the public sphere of the streets and to the domestic realms of the home. He had a fluidity of social position, a mutable subjectivity. In Paris Spleen, Baudelaire describes the “mysterious drunkenness,” the “art” of “enjoying a crowd,” as a privilege available only
to "l’Homme des foules." Yet, as Baudelaire insists, these pleasures were not available to just any man, but to one with "the love of masks and masquerade, the hate of home and the passion for roaming" (emphasis added).

While Baudelaire’s flâneur is mediated through his textual constructs (vividly central to the Tableaux parisiens section of Les Fleurs du Mal), the flâneur was not a fiction. An 1841 edition of Les Français: Encyclopédie Morale du Dix-neuvième Siècle provides a physiognomy of "Le Flâneur" as "une personification toute française." To Baudelaire, the flâneur was an archetypal Parisian, a poet whose language traced the texture and chaos of urban life.

Yet Baudelaire’s aesthetic is symptomatic of the nineteenth century’s ambivalence toward new forms of visual culture. Although he was actively extolling the mobile gaze of the flâneur "always travelling across the great human desert"—celebrating observation and spectation—Baudelaire was equally vehement in his polemic against photography, the new technology for recording these observations. Baudelaire’s scopophilic preference was for an unaided urban mobility—the pace of the flâneur through the chaos of urbanity; Baudelaire’s scrophobhasia was directed at the apparatus for recording these observations. Baudelaire, champion of the flâneur, was polemically opposed to the flâneur’s apparatusal replacement, photography; he was a partisan of a mobilized but not virtual gaze.

In The Salon of 1859, Baudelaire decried photography as "art’s most mortal enemy" and suggested that it harms the viewing public to view copies of nature, not works of imagination. Baudelaire’s complaint that photography was but a "cheap method of disseminating a loathing for history" underscores his insistence on the fluidity of the (male) urban subject not being contained or confined, not fixed. The passion for roaming contradicted the "fixing" of the visual image into a photographic record. The movements of the Baudelairean flâneur produced a "mobilized gaze," a moving nowhere, neither here nor elsewhere. Yet Baudelaire did not embrace the visual mobilities offered by photography. Photography offered a mobilized gaze through a "virtual real," changed one’s relation to bodily movement, to the act of looking, to history, and to memory. The Baudelairean flâneur was a male whose social mobility was replaced by the virtual mobilities produced by the photograph. As Susan Sontag records:

In fact, photography first comes into its own as an extension of the eye of the middle-class flâneur, whose sensibility was so accurately charted by Baudelaire. The photographer is an armed version of the solitary walker reconstituting, stalking, crusing the urban inferno, the voyeuristic stroller who discovers the city as a landscape of voluptuous extremes.

The photographer, an "armed version of the solitary walker," could produce "virtual" visual records of his flânerie.

Nadar (Félix Tournachon, 1820–1910) was an exemplary prototype of such a flâneur. A caricaturist, art critic, balloonist, the inspiration of the character in his friend Jules Verne’s The Journey from Earth to Moon, Nadar’s photographs captured such "voluptuous extremes." Nadar took his camera above Paris in a balloon (1858), into the sewers and catacombs (1861), and coaxed studio portraits from Sarah Bernhardt, George Sand, Alexandre Dumas, and even Baudelaire.

In its rapid global deployment of "armed walkers," photography transformed the "field of the visible." (Between 1865 and 1866, Samuel Bourne took photographic equipment along to record his travels in the Himalayas; John Thompson recorded his travels in China in 1873; Matthew Brady made historic records of the battles of the Civil War.) The fugitive present became a captured virtual presence.

As we consider these changes in the "field of the visible," it is worth addressing Jonathan Crary’s recent challenges to the history of "techniques of the observer" in the nineteenth century. In Crary’s polemical rereading of the history of perception, the perceptual paradigm of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century camera obscura typified a system of "representation, cognition and subjectivity" which is "fundamentally discontinuous" from the models of perception for the nineteenth-century observer. Crary maintains that the dominant perceptual assumptions surrounding the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century observer—that the camera obscura presented a "real" and "true" representation of the world and that optical apparatuses were the source of their produced effect—gave way, in the nineteenth century, to a physiological optics that describes the subjectivity of vision. This produced, in Crary’s account, a dramatic epistemological shift from apparatically-produced subjectivity to a "corpooreal subjectivity," where the body was "the active producer of optical experience."
But to Crary, the “body of the observer” is not a gendered body. He analyzes the discursive context of visual apparatuses, not their social function. He begins:

an observer posited . . . as . . . the autonomous producer of his or her own content. This essay seeks to describe some of the features of this new kind of observer and to suggest how his or her formation in the nineteenth century was imminent to the elaboration of new empirical knowledge of vision and techniques of the visible. (emphasis added)

Despite the initial and pronounced pronoun inclusion of the gendered subject (his or her), Crary backs away from a sexualized or gendered notion of psychic functioning when he discusses the body of the observer. Crary’s observer is in a paradoxical position, simultaneously experiencing the mobility of images (“new abstraction and mobility of images”) and the rigidity of images (“disciplining . . . the observer in terms of rigidly fixed relations to image and apparatus”). Crary doesn’t expand upon the implications of these dialectically opposed forms of observation. And yet, the combination of the mobility and rigidity of images seems to offer the foundation for a paradigm shift to a more fluid subjectivity further from the positioned body of the observer.

THE GENDER OF THE OBSERVER: THE FLÂNEUSE

The moment the look dominates, the body loses its materiality.

LUCE IRIGARAY

And if the eye which moves is no longer fettered by a body, by the laws of matter and time, if there are no more assignable limits to its displacement—conditions fulfilled by the possibilities of shooting and of film—the world will be constituted not only by this eye but for it.

JEAN LOUIS BAUDRY, “Ideological Effects of the Basic Apparatus”

Our society is characterized by a cancerous growth of vision, measuring everything by its ability to show or be shown and transmuting communication into a visual journey.

MICHEL DESCETEAU, The Practice of Everyday Life

The above epigraphs imply very different theories of the body and the visual. For Irigaray “the look” replaces the body, separates itself from it, and renders the body immaterial. Baudry describes the cinema as an apparatusal prosthesis, a substitute for the eye without a body. DeCerteau metaphorizes a social body, victim to the unstoppable growth of the visual function, which has metastasized into all aspects of everyday life. But in each of these cases, the act of seeing—perception through the visual register—is described in terms of its displacement of the body. Although the above theorists may at first seem dissimilar, they all hail from a French “epistemé” and their theories converge along the assumption that the body is a fiction, a decorporalized subjectivity sliding fluidly among a variety of positions. I want to pose a historical framework for the origins of this form of subjectivity, whose “mobility” is routed through the “virtual.”

As the gendered French noun designates, the flâneur was a male urban subject, endowed with a gaze at an elusive and almost unseen flâneuse. The flâneur could be an urban poet, whose movements through a newly configured urban space often transformed the female’s presence into a textual homage.

In “A une passante,” one of the most famous sonnets of Les Fleurs du Mal, Baudelaire evokes the fleeting sight of a woman in the modern city. Amid the deafening noise of the street (la rue assourdissante), a majestic but mourning woman (une douleur majeure) passes by (une femme passe). It is here that the flâneur meets, in an eye-line match, the gaze of a woman. In such a momentary fascination her gaze is returned, but only momentarily, and then lost.

A flash . . . then night! O lovely fugitive,
I am suddenly reborn from your swift glance;
shall I never see you till eternity?

32 THE MOBILIZED AND VIRTUAL GAZE

THE MOBILIZED AND VIRTUAL GAZE 33
In another poem from *Les Fleurs du Mal*, the flâneur meets the gaze of a woman whose presence in urban space is equated with the lure of the commodity:

> Your eyes, lit up like shops to lure their trade . . .
> Or fireworks in the park on holidays,
> insolently make use of borrowed power
> and never learn (you might say, “in the dark”) what law it is that governs their good looks.
> [Tes yeux, illuminés ainsi que des boutiques
> Et des feux d’artifice dans les fêtes publiques,
> Utilisent insolentement un pouvoir emprunté
> Sans connaître jamais le loisirs de leur beauté.]79

"Lit up like shops to lure their trade," the eyes of Baudelaire’s *femme" make use of borrowed power." In this imagery, the woman is almost a shop mannequin, whose gaze is made of "borrowed power" seized, one assumes, from the lure of the luxury item in a shop window as if in a triangulated bid for seduction. The flâneur becomes an easy prototype for the consumer, whose perceptual style of "just looking" was the pedestrian equivalent of slow motion. But Baudelaire did not consider the power of the woman’s gaze to the shop window—a gaze imbued with the power of choice and incorporation through purchase. It was as a consumer that the flâneuse was born. *Les Fleurs du Mal*, Baudelaire’s collection of reveries on Parisian flânerie, was the cornerstone of Benjamin’s massive and incompletely worked on modernity, his study of the Paris arcades. The poems of *Les Fleurs du Mal* recorded "the gaze of the flâneur" on "Paris—Capital of the Nineteenth Century." Benjamin’s flâneur was a palimpsestic construct: a textual flâneur taken from the Baudelairian city of the middle nineteenth century as well as an actual flâneur—Benjamin himself, roaming the arcades and cafes of Paris in the 1920s and 1930s. For Benjamin, the flâneur "who goes botanizing on the asphalt" was the quintessential paradigm of the subject in modernity, wandering through urban space in a daze of distraction. The arcades of Paris, dank sites of both the textual and actual flâneur, represented a symptomatic urban space, readable in a *Kulturkritik* of urban subjectivity.81

The crowd was the veil from 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.82 (emphasis added)

Traffic and the decline of the arcade killed the flâneur and his perceptual patterns of distracted observation and dreamlike reverie. But it was the (male) flâneur who was at home in this privatized public space. As Susan Buck-Morss has stunningly detailed, if women roamed the street they became “streetwalkers,” prostitutes, carnal commodities on sale alongside other items in the arcade.83 Women were objects for consumption, objects for the gaze of the flâneur, or the poet who, like Baudelaire, would notice women as mere *passerby*.84

And as the work of Baudelaire and Cray suggests, most theories of the "observer" in the nineteenth century are either ungendered or resolutely male. Even though nineteenth-century perceptual theories may not have addressed sexuality, once we assess the cultural uses of perceptual apparatuses—the function that they serve in the experience of everyday life—then the question of gender in the "body" of the observer becomes a far more pertinent aspect in the arrangements of social power.

As a familiar idiom of feminist methodology, when the question of gender is posed to (otherwise normative) theories that evade sexuality, a new set of questions begins to appear. It was precisely while these changes in the observer were occurring in the nineteenth century that women were changing their social role and were allowed a new and more public access to mobility through urban space. As consumers, women had a new set of social prerogatives in which their social powerlessness was crossed with new paradoxes of subjective power.

In a challenge to the histories of modernity or modernism which evade the issue of sexuality, Griselda Pollock has argued that any such account of nineteenth-century art history "ensures the normalcy of that position leav-
ing it [sexual difference] below the threshold of historical investigation and theoretical analysis." In Pollock’s critique, a class-aware art critic such as T. J. Clark may describe modernist paintings that “imply a masculine viewer/consumer” but, as she points out, Clark neglects to address the presence of female observers or the absence of female artists, both factors that offer a more precise account of the sexual politics of modernism.

Clark discusses the oscillation between two divergent painterly representations of woman in the nineteenth century—the femme publique (woman of the streets) and the femme honnête (the respectable married woman). As we will see, to find the origins of a female observer—a public woman who was neither a femme publique nor a femme honnête—one has to turn to new spaces that appeared in the mid-nineteenth century, public spaces such as the department store or the amusement park, spaces where women could exist outside of these two narrow definitions. The flânerie was the nineteenth-century version of a female observer, whose gaze was mobilized in these new public spaces of modernity.

The female flâner, the flâneuse, was not possible until she was free to roam the city on her own. And this was equated with the privilege of shopping on her own. The development in the late nineteenth century of shopping as socially acceptable leisure activity for bourgeois women, as a "pleasure rather than a necessity," encouraged women to be peripatetic without escort. Department stores became a central fixture in the capitalist city in the mid-nineteenth century. In Paris, Bon Marché opened a store in 1852, Macy's opened in New York in 1857, and others followed. Only gradually did these grand magasins begin to employ women as shop clerks, allowing the female to be both buyer and seller. It wasn't until the closing decades of the century that the department store became a safe haven for unchaperoned women.

The flâneuse appeared in the public spaces—department stores—made possible by the new configurations of consumer culture. The flâneuse was empowered in a paradoxical sense: new freedoms of lifestyle and "choice" were available, but, as feminist theorists have amply illustrated, women were addressed as consumers in ways that played on deeply rooted cultural constructions of gender.

The impossibility of a flâneuse has been forcefully argued by Janet Wolff. Wolff describes a modernity that was predominately identified with the public sphere of work, politics and urban life—realms that were exclusively male. In her account, the literature of modernity accepts the confinement of women to the private sphere, and hence fails to delineate women's experience. Certainly the literature that Wolff surveys—Simmel, Baudelaire, Benjamin—describes the experience of men in the public sphere from which women are invisible. Wolff wants to produce a feminist sociology that would supply the experiences of women, but it seems important also to turn to some literary texts by female "modernists." As Pollock has shown with Beatrice Morris and Mary Cassatt, paintings by nineteenth-century women provide vivid illustration of women in urban spaces. And, although Wolff does mention that consumerism is a central aspect of modernity and that the establishment of the department store in the 1850s and 1860s created an arena for the public appearance of women, she does not consider the female consumer as an important figure.

Yet it is precisely here that I find the origins of the new social character, the flâneuse. Shopping, like other itineraries of the late nineteenth century—museum- and exhibition-going, packaged tourism and, of course, the cinema—relied on the visual register and helped to ensure the predominance of the gaze in capitalist society. The department store that, like the arcade before it, "made use of flânerie itself in order to sell goods," constructed fantasy worlds for itinerant lookers. But unlike the arcade, the department store offered a protected site for the empowered gaze of the flâneuse. Endowed with purchase power, she was the target of consumer address. New desires were created for her by advertising and consumer culture; desires elaborated in a system of selling and consumption which depended on the relation between looking and buying, and the indirect desire to possess and incorporate through the eye. The department store may have been, as Benjamin put it, the flâneur's last coup, but it was the flâneuse's first.

THE "MOBILIZED" AND "VIRTUAL" GAZE In the nineteenth century, a wide variety of apparatuses turned the pleasures of flânerie into a commodity form, negotiated new illusions of spatial and temporal mobility. Unlike the confinement of the panoptic system, many protocinematic devices negotiated spatial and temporal illusions. In short, all of these forms depended on the immobility of the spectator, a stasis rewarded by the imaginary mobilities that such fixity provided.
While the nineteenth-century observer may well have been offered the illusion of mobility, it was at first only a spatial mobility. The illusion of temporal mobility became more effectively produced in cinematic spectacle. Such imaginary flânerie produced a new form of subjectivity—not only decorporalized and deregulated, but detemporalized as well. And these new pleasures—more possible, more public—were available to women for the first time.

Hence, as Crary has indicated, we can trace the subjective shifts produced by apparatuses that separate the referent from the experience and locate perception in the "body" of the observer. In chapter 2 we will examine the even further severing of experience from referent, extending the illusion of spatial mobility into the illusion of temporal mobility. For the cinematic observer, the body itself is an fiction, a site for departure and return.

As we turn to a consideration of the architectural and social contexts—arcades, department stores, exhibition halls—the timeless spaces that encouraged flânerie, we can begin to correlate the nineteenth-century instrumentalization of flânerie into "commodity-experiences" with the emergence of cinematic "time machines" that extended this mobility in a virtual fashion.

Modernity is marked by the paradoxes of industrial growth; as the expansion of the city destroyed nature, the desire for parks and gardens increased. The city itself redefined the gaze. New means of transportation provided an unprecedented urban mobility; the broadened boulevards produced unimpeded forms of urban circulation, shop windows invited passersby to engage in imaginative new sites of looking. The flâneur's movements through urban space were, in the rhetoric of de Certeau, "pedestrian speech acts." Such a "rhetoric of walking" was also transformed to the textual constructs of literature of the nineteenth-century city.  

Benjamin will serve as our initial guide through this critical passage; his work on flânerie and the arcade, on the commodity and memory, on the cinema and photography as "mechanical reproduction," provides a preliminary Baedeker to the transformations between the nineteenth century and the present.