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This theoretical and descriptive essay presents a reflection on street photography, examining its practices and artists through the concepts of the "flâneur" and "flânerie", initially discussed by Charles Baudelaire and further developed by Walter Benjamin (1969/1989). The essay is structured into three parts: the first introduces the concepts of "flâneur" and "flânerie" within the epistemological framework of the German philosopher, inscribed in studies on literature, exploring how street photography can be understood as a form of "photographic flânerie". In the second part, we examine how the principles of photographic *flânerie* shape a diverse record of the public spaces of cities and their inhabitants. The photographic *flânerie* reflects on technological advances in photographic equipment, the emergence of security and electronic monitoring in public spaces, spatial transformations driven by economic shifts in urban environments, and the varied forms of sociability associated with places and non-places. In the final part, we explore the nature of the street photography registry, arguing that it is shaped not solely by chance but also by the concept of serendipity.

Keywords: street photography, *flâneur*, *flânerie*, theory of photographic imagery, Walter Benjamin

Flâneurs-Fotógrafos e Flânerie Visual: Fundamentos da Fotografia de Rua

Neste ensaio, de cunho teórico e descritivo, pretendemos refletir sobre a fotografia de rua, enquadrando as suas práticas e os seus artistas nos conceitos de"flâneur" e "flânerie", desenvolvidos por Walter Benjamin (1969/1989) e originariamente abordados por Charles Baudelaire. A reflexão encontra-se articulada em três partes: na primeira, apresentaremos os conceitos de "flâneur" e "flânerie" a partir do enquadramento epistemológico originário do filósofo alemão, inscrito nos estudos sobre literatura, defendendo a tese da fotografia de rua ser uma forma de "flânerie fotográfica"; na segunda parte, demonstraremos como os princípios desta flânerie fotográfica vão determinar um registo heterogéneo do espaço público da cidade e dos seus habitantes. A flânerie fotográfica reflete transformações tecnológicas nos equipamentos fotográficos, formas securitárias e eletrónicas emergentes de controlo e registo das esferas públicas, reestruturações espaciais decorrentes de transformações económicas nas cidades e formas distintas de sociabilidade adjacentes a lugares e a não-lugares; na última parte, descreveremos a natureza do registo na fotografia de rua, defendendo a tese de não ser exclusivamente sobredeterminada pelo acaso, mas também pela serendipidade.

Palavras-chave: *fotografia de rua, flâneur, flânerie, teoria da imagem fotográfica, Walter Benjamin*

Introduction

This essay centres on the theme of street photography, drawing on the transposition of the concepts of "flâneur" (F) and "flânerie" (FL), initially proposed by Walter Benjamin (1969/1989). We acknowledge that this transposition may seem surprising: why examine concepts rooted in literary theory and modernity through a thinker who, despite his scholarship in art and image, both in including cinema and photography, never explicitly connected F/FL with street photography?

Walter Benjamin was a connoisseur of Paris and its neighbourhoods, where pioneers of photographic FL also wandered — figures such as Louis Daguerre, André Kertész, and Brassaï. In "Pequena História da Fotografia" (A Short History of Photography; Benjamin, 1985/1987), he even references a notable street photographer essential to this essay: Eugène Atget. However, he makes no direct connection between street photography and FL, nor between the F photographer, a link later suggested by Susan Sontag (1973/2012) in her essay "Objetos Melancólicos" (Melancholic Objects) from *Ensaios Sobre Fotografia* (On Photography). Sontag postulated that photography is the first extension of the middle-class gaze and that the photographer embodies Benjamin's literary F: a wandering observer, a *voyeuristic* visitor who discovers, surveys, and unveils the city as a picturesque reality. From this perspective, we understand street

photography as a practice of discovery or surveillance — a form of *voyeuristic* and photographic registry of urban spaces, a roaming exploration of the city that unveils realities beyond the picturesque.

Framework

The Stalking Narrator, the Hunting Photographer

While Walter Benjamin — and later, Susan Sontag — engaged with the concepts of F and FL, these were originally explored by Baudelaire in his writings on the visual arts. Among these, *Le Peintre de la Vie Moderne* (The Painter of Modern Life; Baudelaire, 1863/1883) discusses the *ethos* of the painter as a visual chronicler of modernity. This introduces the notion of a visual F that complements the literary F. However, our focus is on Benjamin's theses, as he identified distinct heterogeneities within literary FL that also resonate in the varied practices of street photography.

As an observing subject, a physiognomist of the city's stereotypes (characters and customs), the literary F was connected to his observations but distinct from the crowd, which displayed and admired goods. The city was both his home and the setting for his detached, contemplative gaze. In literature, the city he described became a space to witness and interpret, an object of inquiry and discovery. When we transpose this perspective to street photography, we can observe similar FL in the work of certain photographers. For instance, Eugène Atget (1857–1927) and Brassaï (1899–1984) exemplify this approach. Atget's urban landscapes capture Paris's architectural and human details (streets, buildings, monuments, doors, lakes, windows, shop fronts, and door handles) alongside its human figures (from car drivers and prostitutes to residents and shopkeepers; see Atget, 1899–1900; 1912). Brassaï's work (1933a, 1933b, 1933c) similarly intertwines spaces and inhabitants, as seen in his portraits of a prostitute at the corner of La Reynie and Quincampoix, the image of a light switch on Concordia and the kiss between a couple under the Double Bridge, all from the 1930s.

We highlight the recurring dimensions of representation and thematic elements in this testimonial FL. Specifically, we refer to testimony from a perspective of discovery, focusing on the portrayal of public spaces within the city and the people who inhabit them.

The Stalking Narrator, the Hunting Photographer

Beyond the FL of the testimonial record, originally rooted in the *ethos* of the passer-by, we propose another form inspired by the narrator in Edgar Allan Poe's short story “O Homem na Multidão” (The Man in the Crowd; Poe, 2015), also referenced by Walter Benjamin (1969/1989). This *ethos* is significant because it shifts the F from a physiognomist of the city to someone who now engages with the city and its inhabitants, hoping to find something through anticipation, vigilance,

and the desire to unravel its mysteries. In Walter Benjamin's (1969/1989) interpretation, the literary reference moves away from Baudelaire's Parisian F towards someone who follows another through the streets of London.

In “O Homem na Multidão”, we encounter a narrator who isolates an elderly passer-by from the crowd, a figure distinguished by his idiosyncrasies, short stature, and apparent frailty. The narrator observes and follows him through the night, ultimately concluding that this figure has a criminal aptitude, marked by an inscrutability that allows him to disappear into the anonymity of the crowd. This short story, rooted in the detective genre, signifies an ideological shift in how urban space is interpreted. In Baudelaire's literature, Paris represents the bourgeois metropolis — an emblem of novelty, fashion, bohemia, new customs, partying, nightlife, and revelry, where the F chronicler/physiognomist roam. In contrast, London is portrayed as a nebulous city where the ever-moving, indifferent, and anonymous masses circulate. It is a city of the working class, which, as Engels (1845/2008) notes in *A Situação da Classe Trabalhadora na Inglaterra* (The Condition of the Working Class in England), shares only the tacit agreement that everyone should keep to the right to avoid collisions. Edgar Allan Poe introduces a narrator with a keen, alert mind, someone who waits and watches, capable of uncovering what is hidden or disguised. In this context, the city no longer serves as the domain of the blasé wanderer but rather as a space of pursuit and vigilance. Its geography becomes that of an ambush, a hunt: the F is cornered in a certain place and no longer a curious, carefree figure lounging on a café terrace but someone alert, anticipating a decisive moment to target a subject to prey on in pursuit. The focus shifts from the physiognomies and chronicles of the city's characters to a narrative of description and pursuit. The F drifter, who, according to Benjamin, once strolled with a tortoise, has now transformed into a detective and a hunter.

From the perspective of street photography, this shift in the *ethos* of the F and the foundations of their FL has important implications. It suggests that street photography can no longer be seen merely as a testimonial record of the city's modernity but rather as something more conceptual, anticipatory, deliberate, and planned. The street photographer who most embodies this “stalker-hunter” attitude towards capturing images of people and spaces is Henri Cartier-Bresson (1908–2004). A key example of this approach is his iconic image of the back of Saint-Lazare station (Cartier-Bresson, 1932), which we regard as the most fundamental representation of this idea.

Other artists and images could also be referenced. For example, we might mention David Alan Harvey's (born in 1944) photographs of Rio de Janeiro (Harvey, 2014) and his broader work on Brazil. Additionally, Bruce Gilden's (born in 1946) snapshots of New York, which sit at the intersection of street photography and portraiture (Gilden, n.d.), are noteworthy.

Regarding this photographic FL, linked to the vigilant *ethos* of the F, there are several ideas worth considering:

- The decisive moment when the snapshot is captured does not occur by chance, as if the event unfolds spontaneously before the lens. The photographer is already familiar with the city space, having conducted a kind of preparatory repérage[1], during which they identify the most promising locations to "watch" its inhabitants or frame the spaces. The photographer then prepares themselves accordingly, anticipating the significant moments of "surprise" (?) or "chance" (?), episodes of sociability among the city's inhabitants in public spaces. However, it is important to emphasise that while this "decisive moment" is conceptualised and prepared by the photographer, it is not staged; rather, it is merely anticipated.

- The conceptualism and intellectualism underlying the *ethos* of the image-hunting photographer also presuppose a technical mastery of photographic technology, including image processing. The seemingly instantaneous fortunate moment is, in fact, a result of the photographer's ability to anticipate the potential of the equipment and to know how to utilise it effectively.

- While the transposition of Baudelaire's F *ethos* into street photography favours a documentary record, the transposition of Edgar Allan Poe's detective F *ethos* favours another type of record. We will elaborate on the potential for it to evolve into a visual metalanguage of "decoding/displacement", aligning with the surrealist aesthetic of *readymade*[2] objects. For now, let us emphasise how street photography results from a conscious and intentional attitude on the part of the artist towards the subject, combined with a mastery of the technical potential and limits of the equipment. On the one hand, there is a "photographic protagonism" that is decisive in the choice and manner in which the subjects are recorded; on the other, there is mastery over the potential and limits of the equipment — cameras, lighting, controls, chemical and digital processing — giving rise to different, sometimes contradictory approaches. This last parameter is very important because the accessibility of the equipment, combined with increasingly shorter learning curves, has led to a huge popularisation of this type of photography. However, it is only when this binomial of photographic activism and technical mastery is reconciled that street photography attains the status of fine art, as originally conceptualised by Paul Strand (1890–1976), in the context of straight photography. Fine art, in this sense, is a form of photographic record that emerges from both the artist's conceptualisation and personal attitude and the mastery of technique.

[1]This term was used to refer to film production adapted to the context of photographic activity: identifying locations that could be used as filming sets, in this case, for photography.

[2]The ready-made aesthetic embraces the element of discovery, displacement, and the reconstruction of everyday objects, which in turn acquire aesthetic value.

Principles of Street Photography: The Primacy of Public Space

Street photography is a type of image that records everyday life in a public space, specifically a city (Tavares, 2018). Originally, it focused on the street and boulevard in which the metropolises of London and, above all, Paris during the Second Empire were discovered, particularly the reticular urban reorganisation and grand boulevards introduced by Georges-Eugène Haussmann, who definitively redefined the physiognomy of the city between 1852 and 1870 (Benjamin, 2006/2009). That is why we propose Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre (1787–1851) as the pioneer of this type of photographic record, even before Eugène Atget. This argument is based on the series of documentary images produced in 1839 of the Pont Neuf (Daguerre, 1836–1839, 1838; 1839).

With regard to the representation of the city's public space, we highlight several possible approaches that reflect the emerging technologies for capturing images, the increasing securitisation of public spaces, and transformations in economic dynamics and social relations as they relate to the city's places. In this context, we draw on the reflections of Ilija Tomanić-Trivundža (2019) and revisit some ideas from Marc Augé (1992/2000).

Emerging Technologies and the Representation of Public Space

The technological development of cameras, now increasingly powerful for capturing snapshots, has led to the creation of devices capable of operating in challenging environments and poor lighting conditions. Discreet, portable, and small in size, these cameras have all contributed to the popularisation of street photography, which is now disseminated not only on specialised internet websites (such as Flickr) but also on social media like Facebook and, especially, Instagram. Additionally, exhibitions (including virtual ones) and photobooks (both virtual and printed) have become more frequent. These particularities had significant consequences for street photography. First and foremost, never before have public spaces — and the people who inhabit them — been photographed so extensively. From shopping centres to zoos and ferries, from streets and squares photographed in absolute *contra-plongée* (low-angle shot) or *plongée* (high-angle shot) with a drone, it seems that everything (and everyone) has been photographed. This technological development, coupled with the impact of social media on relationships and the way we perceive urban reality, has fostered the coexistence, not always peaceful, of so-called “vernacular images” of cities — more or less spontaneously produced records — with those created by photographers deliberately intending to convey specific messages. Moreover, as evidenced by our own experience as photographers, the proliferation of individuals taking photographs in public spaces, alongside both amateur and professional photographers, has led to tensions with city dwellers, who feel that their right to anonymity and control over their image is being compromised.

Regarding the photographers themselves, the proliferation, repetition, adaptation, and imitation of certain images have contributed to transforming them into voyeuristic or tourist clichés, accompanied by the melancholy and disenchantment stemming from the sense that everything has already been photographed. Concurrently with these phenomena, tensions have also emerged between amateur and professional photographers over what street photography should be, forcing the latter to explore increasingly original and disarming themes or to adopt surprising, unusual, and complex technical approaches. In this quest to surprise, we present the explanatory records of the street photography genre on the *Amateur Photographer* website: drag shots, unusual snapshots, reframing, and unexpected colour compositions ("Take Your Best-ever Street Photos", 2019).

The Securitisation of Public Space

Tomanić-Trivundža (2019) also notes an interesting thematic transformation in street photography as a genre. The representation of public spaces in cities by photographers has been increasingly challenged by the constant stream of images generated by surveillance cameras belonging to State institutions, private companies, and security agencies. This trend is not new: the rise of non-human surveillance images further contributes to the excessive representation of public spaces, where everything seems to be exposed. Interestingly, the visual omnipresence is paralleled by a growing legal restriction on the freedom to create images, with photographers facing increasing scrutiny and threat of legal action.

What is notable about this situation is the emergence of certain street photography projects that demonstrate how artists have managed to navigate these constraints while simultaneously renewing the original spirit of literary FL. These projects transform photographic wandering in the city into a virtual FL, driven by the click of a mouse, leveraging surveillance and mapping technologies like Google Street View. Such projects use these images to their advantage as a means of accessing urban life. Examples include Michael Wolf's work on Paris and later on Manhattan (Orlandi, 2019; Wolf, 2010), as well as Mishka Henner's *No Man's Land* from 2012 (Albers, 2015). Tomanić-Trivundža (2019) notes that Michael Wolf championed the virtues of virtual FL as a means of avoiding the clichéd representations of cities, specifically Paris in this case. While the theme of the city remains consistent, the original spirit of FL and the literary F has not disappeared. Instead, it has been renewed, functioning as an attempt to reinstate the role of the human eye in the process of capturing images. It is important to remember that the photographs in these projects are "selections"; they represent a metatextualisation of public space derived from a process of cutting out segments of the continuous flow of originally produced images. These works should be regarded as products of a social and political interpretation of public space, even if the photographer did not directly take them. That is one of the reasons these projects have faced criticism, with the artists being accused of inadequacy because, although the FL is photographic, it remains virtual, mediated, and is therefore considered unoriginal, inauthentic, and voyeuristic.

Impacts of Economic Transformations on Public Space

Other notable street photography projects should also be mentioned. The late neoliberalism, marked by economic and financial recessions in the early decades of this century, have led to a reconfiguration of FL and street photography projects in relation to some cities in Europe and the United States, such as Detroit (Kane, 2016). They reflect the transformation of public spaces in cities, highlighting abandoned, peripheral, stigmatised, decaying, and neglected areas. While virtual FL can be seen as a response to the increasing securitisation of public spaces, involving surveillance and the blurring of the limits between public and private, these projects revive the traditional FL that originated in physical wandering. But, they do so in a more grounded manner, focusing on locations that exemplify the effects of neoliberalism on urban landscapes. The photographic FL does not abandon the city but instead shifts its focus to alternative spaces — factories, abandoned mills, schools, hospitals, and other forgotten public buildings — that bear the marks of economic decline and societal neglect.

We are referring to street photography projects that focus on ruined infrastructures and buildings, a style known as UrbEx (or UE). Notable examples include works by Paul David Smith (n.d.) or Jan Steel's project (Gampat, 2015), as well as images shared on certain Facebook pages, such as "Lugares Abandonados Urbex Portugal" (Abandoned Places Urbex Portugal; https://www.facebook.com/groups/lugaresabandonadospt), or more established sites like Detroiturbex (https://www.detroiturbex.com). These projects are melancholic reflections on the past and marginalisation, blending the exploration of physical space with visual registry, often referred to as the"hacking of places" (Tomanić-Trivundža, 2019, p. 5301). They invite viewers to reflect on the connection between past and present, as well as on unrealised possibilities for urban development. However, these projects have also faced criticism. UrbEx is sometimes described as the "pornography of ruins" (Tomanić-Trivundža, 2029, p. 5304), as it can present a lustful, exploitative, and sensationalist perspective of ruins, often depicted in a displaced, aestheticised, and fetishised manner.

The Places of Public Space

These urban ruin photography projects suggest alternative ways of relating to the public spaces of cities, challenging (or at least complementing) those shaped by the neoliberal context, which often leads to a stereotypical representation of urban spaces. However, their focus on architectural landscapes, often to the detriment of human ones, prompted the need to explore other alternative contributions to street photography that also represent the inhabitants, capturing the diverse forms of sociability arising from late modernity. To achieve this, we revisited Marc Augé's (1992/2000) dichotomy of place/non-place to examine how it manifests in street photography. Places are public spaces where societal relations and group identity are formed (and continually recreated). In contrast, non-places are spaces where individuality and a form of instrumental or contractual social relations are predominant (Augé, 1992/2000).

Place is defined as a space of memory, relational, group, historical, existential, or anthropological significance, from which one speaks, the *locus* from which the subject uses language and realises themselves as the subject of enunciation (an “I” always addressing a “you”). It is, therefore, the *topos* of language, memory, and mythologies from the perspective of narratives. On the other hand, the non-place is a teleological, utilitarian space, overdetermined by objectives and cost/benefit relationships. Marc Augé (1992/2000) categorised non-places as clinics, hospitals, traffic points and temporary occupation (hotel chains, holiday clubs), places of transit (streets, motorways), supermarkets, petrol stations, airports, and the means of transport themselves (carriages, car interiors, aeroplanes). They are not meant for socialising or interacting but for passing through, affirming individuality and the ephemeral, as they satisfy individual needs. They are topologically reticular and geometric, well-defined (for example, a station). These are places of visuality, spaces that are seen and meant to be seen, as in hospitals, where pathways are marked on the floor. They are characterised by a denotative, instrumental, and prescriptive language, such as signage, a language of identity and identification. To be accessed, they require a form of registration, such as an ATM receipt, a train, plane, bus, toll, or parking ticket, or a supermarket receipt. Non-places also include a rhetorical discourse that evokes places, but exclusively in the form of a utopia filled with idealised representations of identity affirmation of the subject's self in an imagined, dreamlike setting (as seen in advertising discourse).

These anthropological configurations of public space — encompassing both the "city" as the nerve centre and the heart of cities — as well as other urban territories — such as shantytowns and the outskirts — are the subject of a form of FL, on which street photographers project positive or negative axiologies of values. This results in more or less euphoric or dysphoric, hopeful or pessimistic depictions. A few references are worth mentioning in this context. The representation of urban spaces is addressed by photographers of American Street Photography, who focus on a young nation with an identity still under construction in the 20th century. While some references in the history of photography have concentrated on landscape representations of untouched America, nature that remains inhospitable and wild (such as Ansel Adams, 1902–1984), or on the conceptual purism of still life (as seen in Edward Weston, 1886–1958), other photographers, such as Robert Frank and those associated with the American Street Photography movement, have focused their work on capturing the essence of American life during the recession, World War II, and the emerging consumer society. Robert Frank's project *The Americans* (first published in France in 1958), which focuses on the streets and spaces of cities, is an essential reference. One example worth highlighting is “Men's Room Railway Station” (Frank, 1955), a photograph capturing a shoeshine boy at a urinal. The apparent spontaneity of Frank's portrayal of city life finds a more contemporary counterpart in some of Bruce Gilden's images of urban sociability. For instance, his photographs of the seafront in Coney Island, New York ("An Interview With Bruce Gilden – Spontaneity, Elegance and Being Yourself", 2010) offer a striking insight into

public spaces. However, Gilden's work also delves into the non-places of transit within cities, as seen in his 1984 series on New York (Gilden, 1984).

While continuing to explore the representation of places within the city, we would like to emphasise a few additional references, specifically Elliott Erwitt (1928–2023), who captured the atmosphere of the city (Erwitt, 1974); Ralph Eugene Meatyard (1925–1972), whose work delved into mysticism, identities, and identification, with a strong focus on portraiture (Meatyard, 1964); and Lisette Model (1901–1983), who anticipated a fascination with portraying the city's inhabitants through the lens of the strange, the stigmatised, or the bizarre (Model, 2021). From these references to photographic FL in urban spaces, we can perhaps also recall the photographer most associated with the "luminous" and positive depiction of community in the American city: Helen Levitt (1913–2009), known for her portrayal of children (J. Smith, 2018).

Regarding the photography of non-places, in which the city is depicted as a space of passage and its inhabitants as transient figures, fleetingly seen or glimpsed in its wake, we suggest the work of photographers such as László Moholy-Nagy (1895–1946; n.d.), with his formalist approaches to squares and crossroads, which anticipate abstractionism, and Boris Ignatovich (1879–1976; n.d.), during his constructivist phase (1920–1930). More contemporary examples include Daidō Moriyama (2018; "Influences: Daido Moriyama", 2019), particularly his project on *Tokyo* (2017), or, more notably, *Rush Hour, Train Station* (2024), which serves as a key reference for understanding the concept of "non-place". This work paradoxically represents the massification of individuals, blending it with an ideological and stereotypical portrayal of idealised subjectivity. Perhaps the most poignant references in street photography to non-places, images reflecting the dissolution of families and societal ties and their replacement by forms of itinerant experience, which have transformed individuals into passers-by or drifters, is found in the work of Farm Security Administration photographers. The project was part of the activities supporting the Keynesian measures implemented by Franklin Roosevelt's "New Deal" in the 1930s, illustrating the marks of the Great Depression and the impact of agricultural technologies on both rural life and the revitalisation of small towns. We suggest some of Dorothea Lange's photographs, not the well-known portraits of resting families, but those depicting stations, warehouses, and roads with advertising billboards where the forced drifters travelled, walked, or crawled ("The Depression Era Photography of Dorothea Lange", 2024). Although this project was "commissioned" by the Farm Security Administration, its testimonial nature and the "wandering" character that gave rise to it mean we must include it within the realm of street photography.

Nature of the Registry

The rationale behind street photography within the context of FL gives it a set of specific characteristics that help to distinguish it as a form of seemingly casual expression.

A Metalinguistic Expressiveness

The photographer wandering through cities transforms street photography into a distinctive form of visual metalanguage. By this, we refer to a "photographic translation and commentary" that arises from decoding the signs found in urban spaces and among their inhabitants — a record of both mobility and the capturing of decisive moments. It results from personal observation and movement, imparting an inconstant, "bouncing" quality to the visuality. This is shaped photographically by a succession of varied viewpoints (the images of this itinerary). Thus, street photography is more than a single, isolated image of a particular place or moment within the city; it can be understood from the broader perspective of the photographer's journey. Implicitly or explicitly, it carries a narrative foundation that reflects not only the photographer's viewpoint on the city and its people but also the paths taken. The narrative emerges through the evidence of contact points and the way the photographer arranges the selected photographs — whether by guiding the viewer's path in an exhibition or shaping a sequence in a photo book. Approaching street photography in this light means seeing it as more than a collection of isolated snapshots; rather, it is a "visual syntagm" — a symbolic reconstruction of a journey, an urban route, and a series of deliberate choices.

The meandering path and route are fundamental aspects of street photography, distinguishing it from other forms of visual representation focused on public space. For instance, it contrasts with paintings like Manet's (1832–1883) *Os Pavimentadores da Rua Mosnier* (The Pavers of Mosnier Street; Manet, 1878), Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec's (1864–1901; *Toulouse Lautrec and Moulin Rouge*, n.d.) depictions of Parisian nightlife in salons, cafés, cabarets, and scenes of prostitution, which prefigure Brassai's photographic work; Louis Michel Eilshemius's (1864–1941; 1910) nocturnal landscapes of New York; or Edward Hopper's (1882–1967) *Nighthawks* (1942; Gormandy, 2022). The distinction lies in the fact that street photographs are always a metonym for the F photographer's wanderings, contrasting with the painter's immobility as they set up an easel to capture the landscape. Additionally, street photography reveals the distinct characteristics of the photographic medium itself: the mastery of the lens, the orthogonal format of the camera (portrait or landscape), the control over film (or digital sensor) sensitivity and size, post-processing techniques, choices around presentation (whether printed or digital), and, finally, the nature of the publication (its dimensions and type of support). Whether street photography emphasises a "snapshot" or an entire "journey", it consistently reflects both a mobile observation and, in the best tradition of straight photography, an expressiveness arising from the mastery of the camera's specific mechanical, optical, and electronic elements.

The semiotic foundations of this photographic metalanguage can be understood as the outcome of a "personal decoding": the photographer's sense of being able to isolate the "reality" of the city — capturing a deeper "being" that exists beyond the visible urban facade (a mere "seeming"). The F photographer approaches

the city and its inhabitants as a text, selectively highlighting certain signs and thus expressively displacing them. This approach can take a testimonial form, with Eugène Atget as the paradigmatic photographer, or a more conceptual one, capturing the unnoticed detail, the fortuitous moment, the serendipitous and the fleeting — qualities exemplified by Henri Cartier-Bresson, with Elliott Erwitt as an additional notable reference. It is essential to clarify that this metalanguage of evidence should not be conflated with other forms associated with visual records in news media (such as photojournalism) or descriptive records (for example, images from social science research in fields like sociology or anthropology; Bateson & Mead, 1942). Although, like scientific photography and photojournalism, the photographic depiction of the city involves processes of selection and emphasis — and is thus a conscious, intentional record — it remains inherently subjective. This type of photography is driven by intuition and a distinctly personal engagement, shaped by the photographer's sense of the city's spaces and inhabitants, the paths he follows, and the impressions that resonate with him. This is unsurprising, as it originates from the foundational characteristics of the original artistic and literary forms of FL, as explored by figures such as Charles Baudelaire and Walter Benjamin. Street photography is a visual metalanguage that not only captures the urban but also, as Tomanić-Trivundža (2019) highlights, results from a visual epiphany — an inspiration or intuition for seizing the "decisive moment". Thus, it transcends mere documentary recording. The outcome is a form of visual textuality that can be somewhat obtuse, offering the viewer speculative and partial knowledge. It calls upon the viewer's hermeneutic skills to recognise, interpret, or respond to the questions the images raise, whether explicitly or implicitly. Street photographs are statements that always demand active participation from the viewer.

Notwithstanding this obtuse characteristic, it is important to emphasise how street photography aligns with certain aesthetic approaches found in surrealism and Dadaism through its dynamic of focusing and displacing the cityscape. Those movements, too, were defined by a subjective process of "extraction", "displacement", and subsequent "reconstruction". In particular, we are referring to the aesthetic principles found in the works of Man Ray (1890–1976; *Man Ray*, n.d.), who was influenced by the ideas of Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968). Specifically, we highlight Duchamp's concept of the ready-made, a process of displacing everyday objects.

An Ostensibly Casual Expressiveness

The principle of the ready-made photograph is only possible when it captures what has been termed a "decisive moment". This concept arises from a mindset associated with a "subjective awareness of perception", which was central to the literary F, as discussed by Walter Benjamin and also found in surrealist artists. It involves "hypersensitivity" when recording the fortuitous. Just as artists like Marcel Duchamp were adept at recognising and reinterpreting objects beyond their everyday functions, uses, and status, the same can be said for street

photographers in their sensitivity to capturing the fleeting moments of urban landscapes and city dwellers.

The understanding of this "subjective awareness of perception" can be gauged from Henri Cartier-Bresson's position on candid photography. The artist believed that the decisive moment involved not only what he considered to be the ability to perceive an urban event in a fraction of a second, a kind of killer instinct for documentary recording, but also the sensitivity to recognise its meaning. The result is not only a photographic expression but also a personal interpretation of what lies beyond the surface of an urban manifestation. It is, therefore, the product not only of thorough and targeted private observation but also of a willingness (ideological and psychological) to prepare and anticipate what will unfold in the city while being aware that what has happened cannot be repeated, recreated, or staged. There is a dimension here that arises from the combination of immediacy with a reflective and personal attitude. While chance plays a fundamental role, its expressiveness is not that of a random capture (as if an unexpected event were to erupt before the lens) but rather that of a "pleasant surprise" — the outcome of exhaustive preparation that enables the photographer to anticipate it. Tomanić-Trivundža (2019) referred to this as "serendipity". Therefore, two underlying forces shape street photography: one that captures chance as pure randomness and another that sees chance as a pleasant surprise, one that is expected and anticipated, prepared for, and calculated.

To discern this dichotomy between chance and serendipity, we present two images by Henri Cartier-Bresson. In the realm of preparation and serendipity, we propose that of the *Cyclist* from 1932 (Havlin, 2018). In the realm of simple chance, we propose *Rue Mouffetard* (Cartier-Bresson, 1954), featuring a child with two bottles of wine. In the first photograph, the artist anticipated the decisive moment, which appears surprising within the frame. What is interesting in the context of this reflection is the way in which this image, alongside the one from 1932 — that of the subject jumping over a puddle at the back of Saint-Lazare station (Cartier-Bresson, 1932) — is often scrutinised in terms of the precepts of its composition. At the opposite end of the spectrum is the image of the little boy in *Rue Mouffetard*, where chance triumphs over serendipity. While this image of the child is filled with spontaneity not present in the other, it is less successful in terms of composition and the reflexive intent that gave rise to it. The photographer was there; he just captured it.

Conclusion

Drawing on Walter Benjamin's theses about the writer and the F narrator, as well as literary FL — briefly referenced by Susan Sontag — we have shown that it is possible to conceive the specificity of street photography as a photographic FL. From this perspective, two fundamental approaches could be identified. One of a documentary nature, created by a F photographer whose *ethos* aligns with Baudelaire's as a writer: a figure who meanders through the city at a

deliberate, almost contemplative pace, recording, describing, and observing typical figures within the human landscape. On the other hand, there is street photography shaped by the ethos of the narrator described by Edgar Allan Poe in “O Homem na Multidão” — a photographer who approaches the city and its inhabitants through pursuit and surveillance, strategically planning their routes and surprising those they capture. These two lines of force underpin the literary FL, with distinct implications for the expressiveness of street photography: either a documentary record or an anticipated decisive moment. We have selected two artists to represent these extremes: Eugène Atget for the documentary approach and Henri Cartier-Bresson for the “stalker” or “hunter” vocation, capturing the life of cities and their inhabitants.

Regardless of these two ontological lines of force, we have also demonstrated the existence of a diversity of possible practices. Some arise from the not-always-harmonious coexistence of vernacular images of cities and their inhabitants with works produced by amateur or professional photographers. Others present interesting photographic productions that seek to rescue the archetypal literary FL from the domain of Google Street View's technological gaze. Confronted with electronic images, photographers such as Michael Wolf and Mishka Henner have navigated, with “a simple click of a mouse”, through the constant stream of surveillance and virtual control images of cities, abstracting and displacing significant moments that have led to ruptures with stereotypical, tourist-driven portrayals of spaces. In addition to these projects, others focus on the shift in photographic FL towards the "dead" spaces of cities (such as Detroiturbex): photographic coverage of areas overtaken by urban restructuring, degradation, the ageing of spaces, and the death of inhabitants. We have also highlighted intriguing photographic approaches to the forms of sociability within cities, which define them as heterogeneous and dynamic territories — constantly evolving — comprising both places (as seen in the photographs of Robert Frank) and non-places (for instance, in Nicholas Sack's [n.d.] work on London's financial district).

In the final part of this reflection, we revisited concepts from semiotics and art history to define what we identified as structural features of street photography. We demonstrated how it functions as a visual metatextuality, a deeply personal photographic translation of cities and their inhabitants. It is characterised by a truth-revealing dynamic that uncovers both what is implicit — something that will be “clarified at the decisive moment of the shutter release” — and what is displaced. This dual process is inherently subjective, leading to a record that is sometimes obtuse, demanding hermeneutic activism from the viewer. Despite this, the displacement of a moment, space, and subject within the city brings street photography closer to certain aspects of surrealism, particularly the ready-made currents. Just as Duchamp elevated a urinal to the status of museum art, Cartier-Bresson transformed a simple leap over a puddle at the back of a station into a work of art. Complementing this process of displacement are two fundamental dynamics in street photography, which Walter Benjamin had already described: on the one hand, the more documentary style of street

photography, where the process of displacement is linked to a testimonial record of pure chance; on the other, a type of photography that is also displaced but conceptual, embodying serendipity, in which the recording of chance, while being a "surprise", has been prepared, anticipated, and "hunted", yet not predicted. These two lines of force are reflected in various references. In documentary street photography, we identified Eugène Atget and Brassai and in the "hunt for the decisive moment", Henri Cartier-Bresson. Even within this photographer's work, we observe intriguing disparities that occasionally lead to a conceptual formalism, where the fortuitous moment unfolds — as seen in the image of the Cyclist mentioned earlier (see Havlin, 2018) — and at other times leading to a documentary immediacy, where the artist, caught off guard by chance, had only enough time to press the shutter, as in the photograph of the boy carrying the bottle of wine on *Rue Mouffetard*. These two types of images highlight two distinct ontological approaches to street photography: one that involves a planned route, where decisive moments are actively "hunted", and the other that arises from simply wandering through the city with a camera.

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