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The city and the urban condition, popular subjects of art, literature, and film, have been commonly represented as fragmented, isolating, violent, with silent crowds moving through the hustle and bustle of a noisy, polluted cityspace. Included in this diverse artistic field is children's literature—an area of creative and critical inquiry that continues to play a central role in illuminating and shaping perceptions of the city, of city lifestyles, and of the people who traverse the urban landscape. Fiction's textual

Strolling Through the (Post)modern City: Modes of Being a *Flâneur* in Picture Books

Kerry Mallan

The city and the urban condition, popular subjects of art, literature, and film, have been commonly represented as fragmented, isolating, violent, with silent crowds moving through the hustle and bustle of a noisy, polluted cityspace. Included in this diverse artistic field is children's literature—an area of creative and critical inquiry that continues to play a central role in illuminating and shaping perceptions of the city, of city lifestyles, and of the people who traverse the urban landscape. Fiction's textual representations of cities, its sites and sights, lifestyles and characters have drawn on traditions of realist, satirical, and fantastic writing to produce the protean urban story—utopian, dystopian, visionary, satirical—with the goal of offering an account or critique of the contemporary city and the urban condition. In writing about cities and urban life, children's literature variously locates the child in relation to the social (urban) space. This dialogic relation between subject and social space has been at the heart of writings about/of the *flâneur*: a figure who experiences modes of being in the city as it transforms under the influences of modernism and postmodernism.

Within this context of a changing urban ontology brought about by (post)modern styles and practices, this article examines five contemporary picture books: *The Cows Are Going to Paris* by David Kirby and Allen Woodman; *Ooh-la-la (Max in love)* by Maira Kalman; *Mr Chicken Goes to Paris* and *Old Tom's Holiday* by Leigh Hobbs; and *The Empty City* by David Megarrity. I investigate the possibility of these texts reviving the act of *flânerie,* but in a way that enables different modes of being a *flâneur*, a neo-*flâneur.* I suggest that the neo-*flâneur* retains some of the characteristics of the original *flâneur,* but incorporates others that take account of the changes wrought by postmodernity and globalization, particularly tourism and consumption. The dual issue at the heart of the discussion is that tourism and consumption as agents of cultural globalization offer a different

way of thinking about the phenomenon of *flânerie*. While the *flâneur* can be regarded as the precursor to the tourist, the discussion considers how different modes of *flânerie*, such as the tourist-*flâneur*, are an inevitable outcome of commodification of the activities that accompany strolling through the (post)modern urban space.

The *Flâneur* and the Changing Urban Space

The new experiences of modernity in large cities captured the attention of writers such as Baudelaire and Benjamin who wrote of the contrasting aesthetics of everyday life in mid- to late nineteenth-century Paris, and of the original *flâneurs* who strolled the streets recording their fleeting impressions of the crowds. The term "*flâneur*" was originally used to describe the modern urban male who observed the character of urban life (Paris) from a distance, usually without directly engaging others or participating in the city's economy as a consumer (Mazlish 43). The *flâneur* would move, watch, and record his observations of the everyday activities of the working classes and the poor, the prostitutes, beggars, street children, soldiers, and police, and report back to a less adventurous bourgeois readership with a poetic journalism (White 35). The narrated classism that early *flâneurs* such as Baudelaire wrote about, was of old Paris before the massive urban renewal project undertaken by Haussmann in the 1860s in response to Napoléon III's demand for a modern Paris.

Some commentators reasonably argue that the figure of the *flâneur* is "historically and culturally bound to middle nineteenth century Paris" (Borchard 192). However, Borchard contends that "postmodern tourist" cities such as Las Vegas offer a paradoxical space encouraging on the one hand *flânerie* while, on the other, "inhibiting a detached, anti-consumer stance" (192) that previously characterized the *flâneur*. In fact, Borchard contends that many of the activities of the postmodern *flâneur* are commodified; this is particularly so in his case study—Las Vegas—where "simulacra of cities and cultures have been

commodified as tourist experiences" (210). Just as tourists may become intoxicated by mass consumption, Benjamin saw a similar sense of intoxication occurring in the mid-nineteenth century Paris arcades. Featherstone suggests that as modern cities such as Paris began to experience modernity, they began to break with "traditional forms of sociation" (64). In a similar way, postmodernity drew upon "perceived shifts in cultural experiences and modes of signification" (64). Featherstone's description of "the aestheticization of everyday life" (69)—a phrase often linked to postmodernism—captures this cultural shift and growth of consumer culture. The city is often discussed as the center of a postmodern crisis of representation with its surfeit of signs that are no longer anchored to referents, and where the artificial seems more "real" than the real. As Rob Shields puts it, the city functions as a "crisis-object," which destabilizes "our certainty of 'the real'" (227). A significant contributing factor to this "crisis" is the sense of urgency that has accompanied globalization, with its mixture of enforced commodification, spatial transformations, urban ruin, and gentrification (Featherstone 68–71). Whereas newness, progress, and development comprised the marching tune of modernity, postmodernity has arguably struck a more discordant note resulting in a multisensory dimension to cities never before experienced on such a scale.

The postmodern city, or "postmetropolis," argues Soja, "seems to be increasingly unmoored from its spatial specificity, from the city as a fixed point of collective reference, memory, and identity" (150). Middleton and Woods suggest that the cityscape is "constantly fluctuating, constantly under negotiation, always decentralized and structured by altering simulations" (227). Furthermore, the virtual layer of the city, comprising the telecommunications and technologies of the Information Age, ensures that "the hard materialities of cityspace seem to evaporate as the whole world (and more) is drawn into every city's symbolic zone" (Soja 151). Children's fiction has attempted a similar kind of "postmetropolis" portraying the city as dangerous, unstable, and lacking specificity. The

postmodern, futuristic city, like its contemporary referent, is envisaged as volatile, decentered, and technologically-shaped, whether it is M. T. Anderson's future city where an Internet/television hybrid "feed" provides its inhabitants with all that they ever need to know (*Feed*), or Phillip Reeve's city ravaged by " municipal Darwinism" (*Hungry Cities* tetralogy), or Julie Bertagna's "Noospace"—a New World city of cybertraders, Treenesters, and refugees (*Exodus*).

The new experiences brought about by *modernité* in cities like Paris in the mid- to late nineteenth century suggested a change in ontology of the city. When fictions are written of the (post)modern city, ontology is tampered with as the official façade of the city (the tourist's guide) is stripped away exposing, or creatively imposing, new layers of urban space and meaning. The fictional or realist account of the status of postmodern cities reflects and engenders ways of seeing and being in the city that is reminiscent of the *flâneur*. Unlike the worldly urban stroller that Baudelaire and Benjamin wrote about, a different kind of *flâneur,* a neo-*flâneur*, appears in recent picture books, which can be argued is part of a (post)modern figuration of the urban condition.

In his essay "Children's Literature and the Child *Flâneur*," Eric Tribunella advances the argument that the figure of child *flâneur* can be witnessed in children's novels, which endow the child with the trademark attributes of the *flâneur*, namely, the ability to observe, record, report:

> the protagonist does not just live in the city and walk its streets, but also subjects it to his or her critical gaze; stands somewhat apart from the crowd while in its midst; or engages in some way with writing, art, or the imagination as a means of contending with and mastering the city and modernity. (70)

Tribunella correctly points out that traditionally the *flâneur* was male, and women and children were rarely if ever conceived as taking on this role. He imbues a romantic, heroic

quality to the child *flâneur*: “The child can be used, then, in the same way as the *flâneur*—to contend with modernity through imagination, through the pleasure of novelty, and through the example set by the most vulnerable, who nonetheless survive” (88). One of the traps with romantic or heroic images of the child *flâneur* is that the roaming child becomes the imaginary locus of freedom and independence. While this imagery was one that was aptly afforded to the unencumbered male *flâneur* who was enabled by way of his social status to engage in aesthetic play, observation, and reporting, in the examples Tribunella offers, girls engage in *flânerie.* These child *flâneuses* are free to roam within limits (for example, the immediate neighbourhood or parts of the city). This romance of wandering, of *flânerie*, occurs within the traditional structures and order of the middle-class family and the operations of adult supervision and control. These child *flâneuses* explore streets that are yet to experience the excesses of Soja’s postmetropolis, which is characterized by different kinds of surveillance and panoptic practices through CCTV, police control centers, and other surveillance devices. The romance of the *flâneur,* either adult or child, is further diminished in the era of high capitalism and commodity culture. The original *flâneur* did not consume:

> They are wondering about the lives of those they pass, constructing narratives for them, they are eavesdropping on conversations, they are studying how people dress and what new shops and products there are (*not in order to buy anything*—just in order to reflect on them as important pieces of evidence of what human beings are about. (De Botton qtd. in Borchard 200, my emphasis)

In contrast, the accelerated interest in child and youth markets from the 1980s to the present and the intensification of advertising, marketing, and entertainment targeting young people now contribute to the pleasures of consumption for both young and old (Bullen & Mallan 62). While Benjamin in *Charles Baudelaire* noted the hold that capitalism had placed on the urban experience, he could not have anticipated the degree by which capitalism would infuse

the commodification of experience in the postmodern era. Harvey notes that the postmodern era is defined in part by "a shift away from the consumption of goods and into the consumption of services [including] entertainments, spectacles, happenings, and distractions" (156). The consumption of services, however, is not confined to adults as "national and transnational corporations . . . market an array of unrelated goods and services, fast food chains and junk food products" for children's consumption (Bullen & Mallan 62).

The following analysis considers how the elements of *flânerie* made popular in *fin-de-siècle* literature are reappropriated and reconfigured in the sample children's picture books as a sort of *flânerie*-styled tourism. However, in reconfiguring the *flâneur* in this particular medium, there are inevitable modifications that literally come with the territory. Unlike the wandering characters depicted in these books, many children are rarely given the freedom to wander, observe, and report in the urban space. Those who live on the streets experience a different epistemology and ontology essential for survival. My argument is therefore advanced within limits. My reading does not claim the authors intended to model their characters on the figure of the *flâneur*. Rather, it seeks out the shadowy traces of the traditional *flâneur* in a postmodern configuration to consider how modes of being for children are represented in the textual terrain. In other words, the focus is not just on what *flâneurs* do, but who they are while they are doing it. To do this analysis, the paper attempts to answer three questions: How do the selected picture books encourage *flânerie*? In what ways do the characters engage in *flâneur*-like behavior? What signs are there to suggest that the (post)modern urban space encourages a consuming tourist-*flâneur*?

The combination of tourist and *flâneur* is not an easy amalgam. While both participate in seeing and collecting images, the tourist's sightseeing is often part of an itinerary that carries a list of obligatory "sights," and the route taken in the act of sightseeing is often predetermined, or planned through packaged and guided tours. By contrast, the *flâneur*

adopts a less structured schedule, content in solitary strolling away from popular and prescribed routes. In exploring how the phenomenon of *flânerie* can be expanded, I begin with a group (a herd?) of unexpected nineteenth-century *flâneurs* that take to the streets of Paris in a recent picture book.

Walking Out with the Cows: The Bovine *Flâneur*

The nineteenth century was a period typified by large-scale urban projects (such as sanitation and water) as well as the construction of new transport and communication networks (railroads, photography, and printing), causing what Harvey terms as "time-space compression" (260). Modern cities like their postmodern counterparts are thick with sensory effects designed to attract the consumer, and specifically the tourist. However, the spectacle and the mode of spectatorship are particularly dominant—seeing, being seen, and surreptitious gazing. In David Kirby and Allen Woodhouse's *The Cows Are Going to Paris* we witness a turn-of-the-century Paris when a herd of bored cows decide to board a train heading for Paris, displacing the human passengers who immediately take up a bovine existence chewing grass in the "pastures and meadows" of Fontainebleau. Relishing their newly acquired freedom, the cows engage in self-reflective mockery as they moo passing farmers before dressing up in the fashionable clothes left behind by the previous passengers, enjoying the pleasures of consumption: "It had never occurred to them what fun it could be to wear French berets and other fanciful hats." Just as the human passengers make a seamless transition to acting like cows, so too the cows easily take on human behavior and specific tourist-*flâneur*-like practices. They greet everyone they meet with "Bonjour," enjoying the tickling sensation it gave their mouths, which had previously only uttered "moo." They stroll along the riverbanks, visit the Eiffel Tower, and instead of it being silver as they had expected, they find it disappointingly brown: "really brown, the rich color of the earth back in

the fields." They take the elevator to the top of the tower and observe Paris from this high position, noting that it looked like a "dream of a toy city." This momentary observation is one of many that the cows make as they stroll aimlessly through the city taking the reader on a collective tour, moving from one activity to another.

The cows impersonate the *flâneur* but instead of studying the consumer practices of others, they participate in the pleasures of consumption as good tourists: they buy souvenir "little metal Eiffel Towers," shop at Galeries Lafayette, eat at Maxim's. They also enjoy being a spectacle: the maitre d' is "so wonderstruck when he sees the costumed cows coming through the doorway that he gives them the best seats in the dining room." There is an irony here in that the cows who are usually consumed by diners are now visually consumed with equal relish.

These bovine *flâneurs* are able to move among the crowds, observing and participating in a full range of consumptive practices, despite being clearly outsiders because of their animality. Bauman considers the *flâneur* "'the pioneer onlooker', the first practitioner of looking without seeing" (133). Although the cows are never really seen, there is never what Bauman calls "skin-deep encounters." So the cows are *flâneurs* who look and are casually looked at, they are in the crowd but never of the crowd, they are distant and different from the human others but they also strangely blend in. The cows experience the joys of *flânerie* by having "the opportunity and freedom associated with city life" (Bauman 134). Bauman contends that this freedom comes not only from "the abundance of impressions on offer" but from the "liberation from oneself" (134). This is literally true for the cows who enjoy all the sensory pleasures that come with being in Paris as tourist-*flâneurs,* but their liberation from themselves is transitory.

The cows dabble in the pleasures of the city but ultimately remain true to their nature, preferring the organic over the artificial, the rural over the urban. Nevertheless, they are close

to the true *flâneur* in that they retain an implicit (inverted) classism comfortable in their belief in the inherent superiority of their species to determine their own values and pleasures. This is demonstrated in the final scenes when the cows return (without their borrowed clothes) to their "home" in the countryside where the human passengers have become so assimilated into bovine-style country life they need to be prodded by the cows before they will get back on the train. The final bucolic scene shows the cows contentedly watching the sunset pleased with their visit to Paris but happy to be home. This picture book can be interpreted as a parody of the nineteenth-century *flâneur*. The return to the countryside and home is reported not by the cows but by the omniscient narrator who speaks on their behalf providing the external audience (the readers) with an amalgam of the subjective and aesthetic elements of the poetic-*flâneur*: a sensitivity that is conveyed at some distance from the urban crowd.

The Cows Are Going to Paris works as a precursor to the texts that follow in that its return to "nature" resists modernity's project to disrupt the preexisting ontological categories of "nature" and "the city": the disruption occurs early in the book and continues to the final scene. We now move quickly from this late nineteenth-century depiction of the modern city and the imitative, parodic *flâneur* to a twentieth-century postmodern *flâneur*.

Taking to the Streets with a Postmodern *Flâneur*

In *Ooh-la-la (Max in Love)* Maria Kalman offers readers a visual pastiche of postmodern playfulness, delightfully disrupting narrative conventions. Kalman also uses a time-honored satirical device of the naïve point of view to allow a fresh insight into Paris as the *flâneur's* playground. The role of the tourist-*flâneur* is given to Max, "the dog poet from New York. That bohemian beagle." The substitution of a dog for the cultivated male *flâneur*—an aesthete, an urban detective, a curious stroller and window shopper—deflates the *flâneur's* romanticized image by exposing its exclusionary underpinnings. Like the cows above, Max

too takes to the streets of Paris to take in the sights, “to inhale leafy lilacy Paris,” to observe, and record what he experiences in quirky poetic style. As a visitor to the city he behaves like a tourist-*flâneur* visiting the museums and art galleries to see the Mona Lisa and notes with a self-reflexive playfulness his own participation in the commodification practices of tourism: “Everyone in the world comes to Paris, runs to the museum, stands in line for five or six hundred hours and they all go ooooh ooooh ooooh and ahhhhhh.” He mocks high art: “some joker named Marcel Duchamp decided that he would take the Mona Lisa and doll her up. Which he did [with makeup, a Salvadore Dali goatee and moustache]. And the people went ooh-la-la and ha ha ha.” Max’s reflections and observations are similar to the reflective practices of *flânerie*. After walking “like crazy,” Max finally finds “It”—“the tinker toy tower. The Eiffel Tower.” From the top of the tower, Max observes the city below and thinks about “the kings and queens, poets and artists who had lived and loved in this city,” but breaks his romantic reverie by wondering “who invented the soufflé anyway? And what was he thinking?” Max’s blend of nostalgia and cynicism refuses to indulge in the idealized figure of the nineteenth-century *flâneur*, which Baudelaire suggested can be likened to “a kaleidoscope gifted with consciousness, responding to each of its movements and reproducing the multiplicity of life and the flickering grace of all the elements of life” (9). From his position high in the sky, Max looks down on the city—its colorful patterns and shapes of human activity, sites, and landmarks—but his position as tourist denies him an understanding of the inner workings of the cityspace.

Accepting an invitation to dine at “The Peach. La Pêche,” Max mocks French intellectuals: “two French bulldogs” sitting on the lap of Peach Melba “were having a terrible argument about philosophy . . . ‘Idiote, imbécile, stupide!!’ they barked at each other.” Later he travels to an out-of-way nightclub, away from the popular tourist route, where he meets the love of his life—“the incomparable Crêpes Suzette.” On their last day in Paris before they

head off to Hollywood to make Max's movie, the two dogs, dressed in elegant couture, walk arm-in-arm down the Champs Elysées leading a "Dog Day Parade," and while they walk he reads the poem he composed extolling the chic "pooch couture" befitting a "chic Paree." This elevation of the (under)dog to celebrated status ridicules the modern, aesthetic, Parisian practice—the elegant promenade along the expansive boulevard that Haussmann designed. The dogs head for Maxim's "that most marvellous spot for champagne and caviar and a little whatnot'." In this rendering of a stroll through the eighth *arrondissement*, the urban landmarks of the Arc de Triomphe in the background and the unseen Maxim's bear witness to the two dogs' perambulatory and (anticipated) gustatory journey down the boulevard. Consumption during this moment of *flânerie* is represented not only by the consumption of high fashion and soon-to-be-devoured "champagne and cavier," but also by the reader's consumption of the spectacle created by the two *flâneurs* and their performing entourage. Equally significant is the aural effect of rhyme and rhythm that lyricize the banal:

A toast to life

A toast to love

Salut! Ole!

We're off to L.A.!

The dogs' bizarre and fantastic ontological status not only invites reflection on the artificial trappings of celebrity but defamilarizes the point of view (from male *flâneur* to canine *flâneur*) with comic debunking. The source of this picture book's satirical power lies precisely within the space opened by altered versions of the urban space and practices of Paris. The figure of the dog *poète-flâneur* provides the perfect vehicle for the critique of the contemporary city, exposing the superficialities of certain class-based practices and ideologies, and mapping urban space from alternative, playfully subversive positions. The

effect is a bizarre and comical polis, drawn with a satirical humor laced with a carnivalesque, postmodern playfulness.

Paris in both *The Cows Are Going to Paris* and *Ooh-la-la* fulfills its function as a space for tourist-styled *flânerie* enticing the cows and Max to wander and observe with shops, restaurants, nooks, and crannies leading to places of entertainment and cultural activity. They participate in the cultural aspects of tourism and delight in the pleasure of a bourgeois lifestyle. Like the original *flâneurs*, they move among the crowds, initially unnoticed (even the cows) and therefore able to provide a detached observation of the everyday activities. The twinned impulse toward satire and fantasy that is discernible in these two picture books is also apparent in the next two picture books I discuss, more in *Mr Chicken Goes to Paris* but less so in *Old Tom's Holiday*. In all these examples, ontology is tampered with as the hybrid characters—partly anthropomorphic and partly true to their animality—look at the city with a defamiliarizing gaze, thereby exposing and exploring the social and cultural layers of the contemporary capital of Paris (and other cities) with iconoclastic humor.

In *Mr Chicken Goes to Paris*, Mr Chicken negotiates the urban space through public transport, rather than strolling in the style of a *flâneur*. His rides in the taxi, atop the "bus de touristes," in the river boat, and in a crowded Metro update the *flâneur's* pedestrian perambulations and indicate the shift to an advanced modern society and to a tourist-*flâneur*. Furthermore, his journeys through the urban city appear to afford him no pleasure, despite the narrator's assurances that he "could hardly believe he was really in Paris." He tires easily and is quickly bored (after five minutes at the Musée du Louvre he is exhausted and "was thinking of sitting down and having a cake"), preferring to purchase a Mona Lisa tea-towel to looking at the original painting. He is always depicted with a grim countenance and constantly under the gaze of the crowds, who appear equally disturbed by his presence. Mr

Chicken is no ordinary chicken, but a gigantic, fearsome-looking, yellow blob with two fang-like teeth protruding from his lower jaw, with a miniscule top hat on his head. His grotesqueness draws attention and instils fear and it is only on the final endpages that readers glimpse the reportage of his visit as the public reads about him in the newspapers, and on television with headlines: “Le Monstre,” “Grand Monstre,” “Gros Monstre,” “Poulet Monstrueux.” This inversion of the *flâneur* as the one who is looked at and reported on, who doesn’t blend in, is a typical postmodern strategy to subvert conventional representation, to playfully report on the fears that accompany the outsider, the Other, who moves within the urban space.

Despite the human guises, the use of animals as *flâneur*-like characters opens up a new, non-anthropocentric vision of the city. In visiting the familiar tourist sites—the Eiffel Tower, the Arc de Triomphe, Musée du Louvre, Notre Dame—Mr Chicken behaves like a tourist, asking others to take his photograph and uses his tourist French as often as he can: “Merci, madame”; “Er, pardon me”; “Oh, yes please, er, oui! Oui!”; “Superbe!” This attempt to assimilate linguistically is ironically juxtaposed by his own embodied strangeness, which makes any attempt to be one of the crowd impossible. Like the cows and Max in the previous books, Mr Chicken goes to the top of the Eiffel Tower. But unlike the others, Mr Chicken decides to climb to the top, unaware that he displaces the spectacle of the famous landmark by becoming the spectacle that is photographed by the tourists below. He also is mistaken for Quasimodo when he stands atop Notre Dame with lightning blots flashing around him, and a frightened crowd below who point at and photograph this contemporary reincarnation. He becomes a figure of simultaneous repulsion and fascination. This inverts Poe’s depiction of the fear and menace of the crowd by replacing the menacing masses with an individual—one who is grotesque but harmless, contrasting with Benjamin's account in *Charles Baudelaire* (194). The text’s use of fantastic ontology, defamiliarizing point of view, and comic

debunking is an outrageous alternative to the human *flâneur* and the familiar human-dominated urban landscape.

In *Old Tom's Holiday* we encounter two different kinds of *flâneurs*: Angela is in transit and as befitting of the tourist-*flâneuse* she travels from place to place capturing the sites and moments on her camera; the other is her cat, the eponymous Old Tom, who is a shadowing *flâneur*, tracking Angela's every movement. Tom appears as a shape-changer in that he literally blends into the surroundings as he spies on Angela. While the *flâneur* would report his observations in writing such as was the case for the *poète-flâneur* Baudelaire (and Max), new technologies enable Angela to record and share (post)modern urban life by capturing the moment on a cell phone or digital camera as part of the urban experience of postmodernism. The photograph is used textually as a form of dislocation and for conveying temporal shifts in subjectivity. Photographs are spatial-temporal artifacts: a photograph is static and often associated with space, but inevitably temporal as it records an actual moment and event. For Roland Barthes, the photograph establishes a memory of having been there: "a new space-time category: spatial immediacy and temporal anteriority, the photograph being an illogical conjunction between the *here-now* and the *there-then*" (*Camera Lucida* 44). For the tourist, the camera focuses the gaze and the photograph is the product of this consumption of experience. By contrast, the nineteenth-century *flâneur* did not (normally) need a camera, for his eyes were the means for observing, and his pen the means for recording.

Old Tom's Holiday is one of a series of books about Angela and her scruffy, lazy, conniving cat, Tom. When Angela wins a luxury overseas holiday she decides to pack her bags and leave Tom behind. On the long flight from (presumably) Australia she gazes at a photograph of Tom and sheds a tear for leaving him behind. However, she soon gets over any feelings of remorse and on her first night away from home she stays in a "grand hotel" and unpacks "a few of her favourite things." In making the hotel room more homely and familiar,

Angela fails to see Tom peering out from inside one of her boxes. From the hotel window we can glimpse the omnipresence of the city with its imposing skyline. When Angela moves out into the city she stands out within a crowd of people in a busy street. The crowds are mostly blurs of colored outlines, smudges of pedestrians, and despite Angela's decision to get her hair done so she could "blend in" she is positioned like a human Eiffel Tower in the middle of the crowd. The represented city typifies Jameson's "saturated space" (413) as Angela becomes part of the huddled masses.

As Angela travels from city to city she fails to notice Tom's presence, yet she is reminded of him by the things she sees, which take on an isomorphic resemblance to Tom—sunset, hedge, ancient pot, artwork, even a Yeti. She photographs sites and wildlife, intent on capturing the *here-now* to later show to Tom as *there-then* evidence. Angela's developing disengagement with the places she visits is given a tragic-comic sense: she is depicted despondent and alone in restaurants and other venues; at the same time, we are aware that Tom is lurking nearby disguised as part of the landscape or enjoying the pleasures of consumption. The simulation game that Tom plays can be read in terms of the postmodern crisis of representation as there is a blurring between the real and the simulated. Furthermore, Tom's ability to realize himself in many forms and in many ways expresses postmodernism's desire for continual reinvention, to explore new possibilities and new ways of being. Angela sees only through her camera and remains oblivious to Tom's presence or subterfuge. Unlike an earlier *flâneur,* Eugène Atget, an "obsessed photographer" (White 41) who documented premodern Paris, Angela does not share her photographs or offer the reader a reflective viewing position from which to read the city she captures with her camera. As with the previous examples of tourist-*flâneurs*, Angela is an unreflective consumer of city life who is happy to spend money on services such as dining at expensive restaurants, taking in the tourist attractions, and walking away with her snapshots.

Angela’s dispassionate observation of the people and places she encounters is similar to Benjamin’s point in *The Arcades Project* that the *flâneur* is apart from time and place, an outsider. But while Angela abandons herself to high capitalist, consumer pleasures, her pleasure-seeking is transitory. Throughout the book we observe Angela as she moves in and out of spaces—internal and external. The cities she visits are never named, but their identity is suggested by their familiar cultural identifiers such as the London double-decker bus, Big Ben, the Great Pyramid, the Trevi Fountain, and so on. These unnamed yet recognizable places and the solitary figure of Angela capturing the photographic moment serve as testimony of her *being there*, a stranger in the land. Her growing estrangement is evidenced in the shift from the portrayal of Angela's enthusiasm at the beginning of her travels to a more tragic, melancholic figure, who is constantly objectified by surveillance—Tom’s ever-vigilant gaze. Tom rules the home and now he exerts a patriarchal order outside the home. And as the title reminds us, it is *Old Tom’s Holiday.*

We can draw a parallel here between Angela’s emotional transformation and the transformation of public spaces of the nineteenth century by commodification. As Benjamin records, the public spaces of the city gradually diminished in status to growing private commerce, generating new cultural experiences such as those offered by the Parisian arcades and the department stores. These places linked strolling, looking, and purchasing. And into these sites emerged the *flâneuse,* specifically women of the middle and upper classes who now enjoyed a freedom that previously was a male preserve. Angela embodies the *flâneuse* spirit, but in a perverse way she also bears resemblance to the displaced male *flâneur* at the turn of the century whose experiences of the modern city resulted in a profound nostalgia—a sense of loss for an earlier form of life that had passed.

Angela’s freedom to indulge in a ludic, carefree, aestheticized existence becomes constrained by her nostalgia for Tom. Initially, she experiences true *flânerie* at home in the

crowd, being absorbed by others, deriving an aesthetic sense of being that comes from moving along incognito, and therefore not (yet) being fully exposed to the feeling of isolation. As the text moves toward its disclosure of the lurking Tom, the poetic effect of metonymy operates, sequentially linking the items Angela observes (which are reminiscent of Tom) to Tom's appearance when he literally falls on top of her from his hiding place in a hotel ceiling light. This linear association moves the narrative toward its conclusion—"a holiday for two." A similar metonymic association is apparent in *The Cows Are Going to Paris*, where sensory experiences stand in for home—the brown earth color of the Eiffel Tower souvenirs, the smell of perfume that "reminds the cows of the sweet fragrance of wild flowers," and taste of the "*casserole de l'herbe*," which is "every bit as good as the fresh grass of the countryside." These associations of home are the impetus for the cows' return. The conclusion conveys the dual pleasure in "going to" and "coming home": "they know that there is something just as fine about coming home." In both picture books, the *flâneur/flâneuse* figure is an ambiguous one who is intoxicated by the sights and objects it encounters, but tires of them and wishes for a return to the familiar. This state of mixed emotion and desire is similar to what a tourist experiences when the excitement of the trip begins to fade.

The images of the well-known city icons that Angela photographs would be familiar to many readers as they are ones that are constantly reproduced on television and movies. In effect, the alluded-to cities of London, New York, Rome, and so on, comprise an urban mediascape where reality and representation are indistinguishable. What Angela (and through her the reader) experiences is already known from other images of these sites available through global telecommunications. Thus the real cities are displaced by representations. Unlike the specific details of "the locations and routes taken by the characters" in the books discussed by Tribunella (81), there are no detailed descriptions or place names. Instead, the

text resorts to photographed spatial tokens to give a sense of *thereness*. By not giving any specific locations, and having nameless streets and places, we are left with globalized urban spaces depicted in rough watercolor outlines that draw attention to their transparency.

The text that deals most explicitly as an example of postmodern life and culture is *The Empty City.* This is a global city, which could be anywhere in the Western urban imagery. *The Empty City* also moves away from reproducing a consumerist fantasy of pleasures of tourism to an affinity with the traditional *flâneur*. However, the un-named boy who is at the center of the story is a *flâneur* by default. Whereas the other examples show how the tourist-*flâneurs* indulge in consumerist goods and services, *The Empty City* is explicit in laying bare mass consumer culture. It illustrates a shift from the phenomena of high art and cultural heritage in the previous books (the art galleries, the museums, the cathedrals, iconic landmarks) to the popular and everyday cultures that comprise contemporary city lifestyles. It also foregrounds a playful exploration of transitory experiences and surface aesthetic effects, which often characterize postmodernism.

In *The Empty City* the postmodern urban space is represented in terms of its excess of signs, gaudiness, and by an eclectic mix of styles, ethnicities, and different architectures. This is a book of surfaces, where an array of colorful sights greets the eye and jostles on a surface without depth of significance. It is similar to what Featherstone terms a “no-place space” (97) which, unlike the other cities discussed, does not provide a strong sense of place and collective identity that mark its history, famous buildings, and landmarks. The story follows the experiences of a young boy who goes to the city with his mother, gets lost for a short time, and is reunited with her. In this short space of narrative and temporal time, the child moves from experiencing the city in limited ways, strictly controlled by his mother, to becoming an independent explorer of the city discovering the interesting things it has to offer. The interlude between being in the masses and being a solitary explorer opens up a *flânerie*

that Benjamin had feared would not be possible due to high capitalism and the presence of "arcades" or shopping malls that would transform urban life and gravely endanger the *flâneur*. I suggest that the compression of time and space in this transition recovers the true *flâneur's* aimless wandering where time was irrelevant (Tester 15).

On the opening double page, the text shows the unhappy looking boy being taken by his smiling, enthusiastic mother across a busy street, an experience that is focalized from his point of view: "Dragged through the busy city. Teeming with people going places they want to go." The boy's observation accords with Tribunella's point about the *flâneur* being "critically attentive to the world around him as he walks, a critical observer of the city and its people" (64). The moving mass of crowds is a walking advertisement of the benefits of shopping, with people wearing technological and fashion accoutrements, and an eclectic range of clothing, carrying shopping bags and take-away beverages. Jameson's point that "postmodernism is the consumption of sheer commodification as a process" (x) clearly applies here. And in that process the individuals *become* a spectacle, to see and be seen. The boy seems a reluctant *flâneur,* but he nevertheless observes and reports, enabled because of his anonymity and separateness from the crowd. His observation extends to a musing of consumerist desire: "Do they all have Mums too? Mums who won't let you visit your favourite shop?" The urban space is dominated by shops and commuters with signs directing shoppers to bargains and places to shop. When the boy and his mother reach their destination "Up the escalators and into the biggest shop in the city" we see a jubilant figure of the mother with arms outstretched in a moment of sheer bliss of reaching her destination and goal: "To look at crockery." This image evokes Benjamin's "dream-worlds" of arcades and department stores that were like "temples in which goods were worshipped as fetishes" (Featherstone 72). The boy, however, is unable to share his mother's enthusiasm and appears downtrodden and defeated.

Bored with having to wait for his mother to finish her shopping, the boy decides to move up the down escalator and finds himself in a space that has been emptied of people, and shops with no visible shopkeepers or customers. It is a space that is mediated by diffuse cultural images—shop names, advertising, displays, promotional signs. Prior to this he is a small child in a busy, spatially-disoriented, alien space filled with adults. Now alone in an empty urban space he finds he has options in terms of places to explore and things to do: "Eat a burger? Listen to loud music? Eat lots of chocolate? Be a [store] dummy?" The options tantalize and invite a leisurely consumption of the signs themselves. He settles on visiting a toy shop called "Mr Crazy's." The toy shop offers a refuge from the postmodern hyperspace of the city where the boy lacks the capacity to locate himself and feel at ease. However, the toy shop is itself a pastiche as it is filled with artifacts from the past. Despite the nostalgia it evokes, and one that would be missed by the boy given his age, he nevertheless seems happy and content to play with the toys. In contrast to the frenetic pace of the city streets, time in the shop appears to be static and frozen in past decades: an old tool set, a copy of *Blue Beard*, dinosaur toys, hot air balloons and vintage gliders, an old steam train fill the space in a random, floating display that lacks organization and defies gravity. These isolated, disconnected material artifacts do not form a cohesive whole nor are they linked by any historical or temporal order. As part of the postmodern era, however, Mr Crazy's offers an apparently endless choice and range of consumer goods aimed at the child market. The narrator focalizes the boy's alternating states of joy and sadness: "It is totally filled with . . . STUFF! So much you cannot decide. And who would you show it to anyway?" (emphasis in the original). The illustrations track the boy's alternating emotional states and reflective comment.

Time takes on a particular understanding in postmodernism. Time for the traditional *flâneur* meant nothing, as the leisurely pursuit of the task of *being* a *flâneur* was the only

thing that mattered. When the boy steps out of the busy urban space and into a compressed time-space zone, he enters a heterotopic world that exists in parallel to the world he has momentarily left behind. It is at this juncture in space-time that the boy *flâneur* is transformed into a desiring consumer-subject, one who visually consumes the spectacular display offered in Mr Crazy's toy shop. The toy shop, like the arcades that so fascinated Benjamin and other *flâneurs,* is an inviting place for the stroller and would-be consumer. In transforming from *flâneur* to consumer, the boy is connected to the other characters who equally enjoy the commodification of the urban experience. Once the boy retraces his steps and goes down the escalator he is reunited with his mother. Time between being lost and the return is beyond measure but is simply the space between the crowded and empty city: the here and there spatialities the boy encounters. Being lost is part of the postmodern urban condition, as Jameson has explained with respect to moving through disorienting city buildings and shopping centers. Within a short space of time the boy experiences dual modes of being: the alienation in a postmodern urban consumerism and the pleasure in the commodification experience. However, the boy does not purchase anything and thereby enjoys the freedom of being a *flâneur*: seeing everything that tantalizes, but enjoying a visual consumption. The intensification of the moment is experienced as a loss of reality whereby signifiers float in isolation, cut-off from the possibility of meaning. We can read this same kind of loss of reality and floating, disconnected signifiers in the book's title, *The Empty City*: even the qualifier "empty" suggests an emptying out of meaning, a void. Paradoxically, the depicted city is saturated with images that are cropped, collaged, titled, and captioned. As such they reflect back to the reader a sense of the familiar everyday world of signs that often pass us by unnoticed. The boy, however, takes them in and enjoys the aestheticized experience that comes with the freedom to wander, gaze, and play. The montage of torn and incomplete images, alongside epigrammatic statements such as "Now lowest price ever

offered" and "welcome back" lack meaning and completion. Only the child finds spaces away from the hubbub for quiet exploration and reflection. For example, he ponders the inner workings of the escalators with an existential questioning: "How do they work? Steel lines melting round and round. Up and down. Then back to where they start again. Start again?"

The Empty City is a fitting final text for this discussion as it exemplifies what proponents of postmodernism have observed, namely "the major shift in culture taking place in which existing symbolic hierarchies are deconstructed and a more playful, popular democratic impulse becomes manifest" (Featherstone 107). Gone are the images of the Eurocentric centers of culture, the arts, and fashion that the previous texts referenced, and in their place is a wider range of symbolic experiences on offer, courtesy of an increasingly globalized and generic world city.

Conclusion

The texts discussed in this article can be seen as drawing on the traditional literary figure of the *flâneur* to create unexpected *modes of being* a *flâneur/flâneuse* in the contemporary city. The various ontologies—anthropomorphic, tourist, postmodern—expand the phenomenon of *flânerie* to encompass imaginative departures. Picture books in general, and specifically these examples, are well suited to accommodating elements of fantasy and satirical subversion, which show the influences of the cultural and artistic developments of postmodernity and ontological experimentation. The character of the global or postmodern city also encourages the development of flexible, multifaceted textualities. The figure of the tourist-*flâneur* invites speculation about the possibilities that come with the freedom to roam, observe, and report in an environment that is often designated as unsafe and alienating. While the child *flâneur* is given only limited coverage in this selection, it is through the animal substitute that we are able to enjoy the parodic play, and the fantastic mode supports the defamiliarization of the

city experience. The enterprising cows, Max the beagle poet, and the grotesque Mr Chicken stroll through the urban space with a naïve point of view that is less strategic or intentional than that of the traditional *flâneur*. While their wanderings do not necessarily provide readers with insight into the everyday activities of the common people, they do engender a fantasy and satirical subversion of the traditional *flânerie*.

These characters wander the city (such as Paris, or an unidentified globalized world city), but unlike the traditional *flâneur* or those child-*flâneuses* that Tribunella writes of, these neo-*flâneurs* (except the boy) fulfill a complementary dual existence of being both tourist and *flâneur*. They do not roam with the same purpose of the *flâneur* to simply observe, reflect, and report. On the contrary, in their *naïveté* they unwittingly debunk the romantic "free" *flâneur* of these other examples. Despite being outsiders, they attempt to blend in, like tourists do, by imitating local practices and language. And, like tourists, their attempts at being inconspicuous often fail. The medium of the picture book also conspires to reveal their conspicuousness providing the reader with a privileged epistemological position and showing up these neo-*flâneurs* as absurdly comic. This parodic tone works to disrupt the seriousness of the endeavor of *being* a *flâneur*. This disruptive ontology inverts the way in which a *flâneur* experiences his existence by being the spectacle and the one who is seen (and reported on, as in the case of Mr Chicken). The crowds are variously repulsed or admiring of these characters, or in the case of Angela and the boy, they appear unaware of their existence (except when Angela is a paying customer). Only the boy emerges as a true *flâneur* among this group of comic tourist-*flâneurs* who succumb to the lures of tourism and consumerism in unfamiliar cities. The boy explores his own urban environment within a space of unmeasured freedom. He may not experience the seriousness and self-importance of the traditional *flâneur*, but he is able to describe the dynamic character of urban life as a detached observer,

to stroll aimlessly along the unpopulated alleyways and spaces, and to enjoy the visual consumption of the commodities that tantalize.

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