

Between *puer* and *flâneur*. Discovering the city

Giampaolo Nuvolati
University of Milano Bicocca

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Abstract

In the paper, two different approaches to exploring the city will be considered: that of the child and that of the *flâneur*. These are figures that, although starting from completely different perspectives, converge in reading and interpreting the urban experience through the innocence, spontaneity and lightheartedness of the child and the search for emotions, improvisation and depth of the *flâneur*. The first is oriented toward adolescence and knowledge of the world, while the second engages in a kind of regression to childhood; in this, the child and the *flâneur* seem mysteriously to meet on one of the magic streets of our cities or on a page of a book as they live a common experience.

In questo testo verranno presi in considerazione e comparati due modi di perlustrare e scoprire la città: quello del bambino e quello del *flâneur*. Figure che, pur partendo da prospettive completamente diverse, convergono nel leggere e interpretare l'esperienza urbana attraverso l'ingenuità, la spontaneità, la spensieratezza del bambino cui corrisponde la ricerca delle emozioni, l'improvvisazione, la profondità tipiche del *flâneur*. Il primo proteso verso l'adolescenza e la conoscenza, il secondo impegnato in una sorta di regressione alla fanciullezza, bambino e *flâneur* sembrano misteriosamente incontrarsi in una delle tante strade magiche delle nostre città o nelle pagine di un libro per vivere una avventura comune.

Keywords: children, *flâneurs*, city, urban studies, children's literature

Parole chiave: bambini, *flâneurs*, città, studi urbani, letteratura per l'infanzia

Child and *flâneur* as alternative to a *blasé* attitude

Giampaolo Nuvolati – *Tra puer e flâneur. Alla scoperta della città*

There are several ways of exploring the city. Each is characterised by different levels of knowledge of the natural, built up, and symbolic landscape, of improvised paths, reading capacity, and interpretation of the urban context. This essay aims to compare two different approaches to the city: the child's perspective and the *flâneur's*. The first approach is oriented toward adolescence and knowledge, the second involves a kind of regression to childhood; the child and the *flâneur* seem to meet mysteriously on one of the many magical streets of our city or in the pages of a book as they live a common adventure.

The city, with its glittering images, thousands of inputs and temptations, has severely tested metropolitan man. He, in fact, survives only if he is able to defend or select the inputs and the coping strategy to obtain this result using the brain (intelligence) rather than the heart (feelings). In other words, only where rationality and calculation control and dominate instincts and feelings can the human being preserve himself and resist in an urban environment. This attitude has been defined by Georg Simmel in his famous book *The metropolis and mental life* published in 1903 using the term *blasé*, which means detached, indifferent. Simmel (1982) states: "The essence of the *blasé* attitude lies in the blunting of discrimination. [...] [Objects] appear to the *blasé* person in an evenly flat and gray tone: no object deserves to be preferred to another" (p. 531). For metropolitan man, the safeguard of his subjectivity becomes a sort of closure, or the negation of the world around him.

In the following pages, I describe the child and the *flâneur* as possible actors in the city, who represent an alternative to the *blasé* approach to urban life. Despite being obviously removed from the point of view of maturity and acquired knowledge, they share some practices and attitudes that make them quite similar in their exploration of the city. Both, each in his own way, more or less aware, reject disenchantment; they abandon themselves to their intuitions, retrieve a creative and imaginative dimension that differentiates them from a metropolitan pragmatic acting out, based on practical calculation, if not on indifference, and on insensitivity towards stimuli.

The child as *flâneur*

The first figure analysed here is that of the child (boy/girl). The child is engaged in the discovery of the world and the interpretation of spaces, lights, and colours, of the human figures of urban life in the way they arise and are perceived by his senses. The child is a virginal, naive material, highly exposed to emotions and fears as well as to joy and enthusiasm. The city, the neighbourhood, is a natural and favourite theatre in which he can encounter the world and express himself.

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Jane Jacobs, a famous journalist and town planner, in her most important book published in 1961, *The death and life of great American cities*, introduces the symbolic relevance of the sidewalk: a city is safe/shared when it is lived in by many people who daily walk on its streets, in accordance with various functions and activities, giving life to public spaces. In particular, Jacobs (2009) writes the following in reference to children/young people and urban life:

A lot of outdoor life for children adds up from bits. It happens after school while children may be pondering what to do and wondering who will turn up. It happens while they are waiting to be called for suppers. It happens in brief intervals between supper and homework, or homework and bed. During such times children have, and use, all manners of ways to exercise and amuse themselves. They slop in puddles, write with chinks, jump rope, roller skate, shoot marbles, trot out their possessions, converse, trade cards, play stoop ball, walk stilts, decorate soap-box scooter, dismember old baby carriages, climb on railings, run up and down. It is not in the nature of things to make a big deal out of such activities. It is not in the nature of things to go somewhere formally to do them by plan, officially. Part of their charm is the accompanying sense of freedom to roam up and down the sidewalks, a different matter from being boxed into a preserve. If it is impossible to do such things both incidentally and conveniently, they are seldom done (p. 80).

This text highlights some interesting aspects of the relationship between children and urban space, including: a) the growing segmentation of their activities and the irrelevance of dedicated times and spaces; b) improvisation in games and exploration of the territory with a sense of pure lightheartedness; c) the multiple use and functions of the urban context, in particular the sidewalk, as a place of exchanges and contacts; and finally d) the importance of interstices, of the simple things in our daily life. All these issues refer to the idea of spontaneity and lightness typical of the children (being thoughtless, taking life as it comes) in experiencing the street in contact with adults and the city crowd, and which, in general, contrast with the rational planning of the space, based on zoning land. Jacobs dedicated most of her life to promoting this cause, especially the preservation of the social relationships in some quarters in New York, and in particular Greenwich Village.

In those years Kevin Lynch, another urban planner, introduced in his book *Images of the city* (published in 1960, one year before Jacob's work) the topic of mental maps – consisting of paths, edges, nodes, and landmarks of the city – to be considered as a guiding tool for citizens in the chaotic urban context. Mental maps respond to people's needs to bring order and establish priorities in the infinite number of elements that make up the urban landscape. The latter must be read-

ble, allowing a setting for actors who have different knowledge, competences, and experience. From children, in particular, we can expect that they represent the city through a drawing of a map that does not take into account spatial proportions, but highlights the points of interest as the most important.

In the following years, along the lines of what was observed by Lynch, a debate on the relation between the urban reality and its perception takes place and develops. Once again, this debate obviously concerns children as vulnerable subjects called to develop reference points for the purpose of orienting and moving around in the city.

In a chapter of his book *Urban Living. The Individual in the City*, D.J. Walmsley discusses the relationship between children and the city, and mentions many other authors who identify the development stages a child undergoes in gaining awareness of the environment around him:

1. The sensory-motor stage (0-2 years of age) characterised by a self-centred orientation where the infant relates everything to him/herself; during this stage the infant hardly realizes that the ball that ended up under the sofa can be retrieved by going behind the sofa;

2. The pre-operational stage (5 to 8 years) during which an egocentric vision still prevails; but it is also accompanied by the ability to set the first reference points (home, school, friends) and their connectivity;

3. The concrete operational stage (8 to 11 years) characterised by a growing attention to perspective projections by the child;

4. The formal operational stage (11 years onwards) during which a vision of the space in Euclidean terms takes shape; it is accompanied by the capacity to elaborate abstract models that are not based exclusively on previous experience.

The illustrated steps allow the now-adolescent child to access the design of the first mind maps through which he can represent his own city and neighbourhood. These maps meet not only the aim of retracing reality or functioning as an orientation tool; rather, they are intended to highlight the most significant points of the urban fabric in the light of the importance attributed to them by individuals. The landscape seen through the eyes of a child becomes a kind of *a la carte menu*, made of still exotic, unknown places, all to be explored, with possible room for choice and improvisation that does not necessarily retrace the road routes and the most consolidated reading of the space.

So characterized, children's mind maps closely recall the situationist approach and more particularly the psycho-geographic tendencies that fused together the critical aspects but also the playful one in the exploration and reinterpretation of urban places. In fact, producing drift involves strolling around without an aim or time constraint, choosing the path step by step, not on the basis of what you know, but what you see around that attracts your attention. You need to be alien-

ated and look at everything as it were the first time all the while contemplating the possibility of improvisation and game. As Guy Debord (1998) writes:

Dérives (drifting) involve playful-constructive behavior and awareness of psycho-geographical effects, and are thus quite different from the classic notions of journey or stroll. One or more persons during a certain period drop their usual motives for movement and action, their relations, their work and leisure activities, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there (p. 56).

Is this not the naive viewpoint of a child? And, again, could not the situationists' maps provide true *treasure maps* for adults and children in search of surprises? A reversal of reality that leaves room for the imagination? Even with all possible distinctions, the child and the *flâneur* respond to a single need: to redesign the city based on sentimental coordinates that resist the cold regimentation of public spaces (fig. 1).

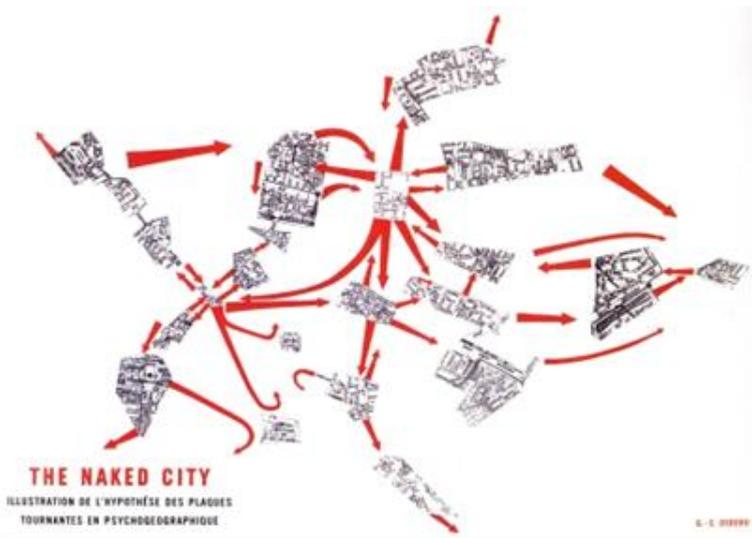


Figure 1 – Guy Debord, *The naked city*, 1958

By the same token, it should be recognised that a map, although alternative and original, always reflects the cognitive practice of the territory. Thus, emotional spontaneity, on the one hand, and rational orientation, on the other, are the coor-

dinates within which the urban child moves. The freer and more creative part and the part used for cognitive and critical learning are not easily distinguished; rather, they evoke a strong tension between the two opposite poles. Although, during the stage of individual maturation, knowledge prevails over instincts and imagination, in the child they are still sufficiently balanced and harbingers of strong emotions.

The city, explored and slowly known by the child, is also the place where traditionally the child himself and the adolescent conquer their own independence by proving themselves (Nuvolati, 2008). Dickens' little heroes, including those of *The adventures of Oliver Twist* (2001), became prematurely adult in the terrifying and foggy London of the nineteenth century, and the same is true for *The Paul Street boys* in Molnár's Budapest (2007). But today the landscape of the city and educational models have changed profoundly. Venturing into the city is increasingly difficult for a child and a source of concern for the parents. At any rate, there is no lack of intermediate solutions that try to arrive at a compromise between safety and independence. Let us take for example the walking bus organized in several Italian towns; its aim is to enable children to acquire a greater autonomy. What is it? Some parents volunteer accompany schoolchildren to school on foot. Three or four routes with relevant stops are chosen. Every day the caravans – called *Pedi-bus* (walking buses) –, walk these routes, led by two parents who collect the children standing at the stops close to their houses; those stops are identified by special markings. Parents wear reflective jackets and children wear a special bib, so as to be easily identifiable. Carers also know exactly how many and which children they will find at each stop, and they are required to carefully record the present and absent pupils. This initiative is quite meritorious and enjoys a certain success everywhere, especially from the point of view of traffic reduction, the active participation of families, and the pleasure felt by children, but we cannot state with absolute certainty that children acquire a greater degree of self-determination. Other interesting proposals are, for example, the Italian city maps that illustrate the project *Italy for kids* and, more generally, all those initiatives that invite children, alone or accompanied, to explore the real city discovering its secrets. But, in general, the art of *flânerie*, or abandoning oneself to serendipity in exploring the city, remains a very sought-after and interesting activity for a child, but a difficult one to put into practice.

The growing supply of infrastructure and services specifically dedicated to children and adolescents guarantees more secure locations, while the interstices (those, for instance, mentioned by Jacobs) between home, school, and recreational/sport centres often remain desolately empty. Among the many negative consequences, we surely find the privatization, in terms of the home, of children's play and interaction that involve a disproportionate use of technology and the creation of so-called *cyberflânerie* by children and adolescent surfing the internet. This term

means the virtual exploration of the urban reality, a denial of walking in a physical sense, and of a more authentic living in contact with the city.

At the same time, the availability of recreational centres, shopping centres, gyms, parish halls emerges. These are intended as protected, semi-public places, or having some form of selection at the entrance in order to avoid, or tend to limit, unpleasant situations, thereby negating the thrill of adventure. The emblem of this safe, family-like structure that distinguishes the use of the environment by the younger populations is the row of parents' cars waiting for their children at the exit of schools, or outside apartment buildings where children visit their friends, or where they take private lessons; we can include the exit of sport fields, discos, cinemas, in an increasing *horror vacui* (fear of emptiness) that corresponds to children's hyper-activity; but it also reveals the fear of *terrain vagues*, uncertain spaces/times that interrupt the continuity of habits and punctuate our lives in the city.

The sign of continuity between child, adolescent, and *flâneur* is located in the beginning of the fragment entitled Zoological park, taken from Benjamin's *Berliner Kindheit um 1900 (Berlin childhood around 1900)* (1973), and quoted by a great number of critics as the consecration of *flânerie*, of the spatial-temporal wandering:

Not to find one's way about in a city is of little interest. But to lose one's way in a city, as one loses one's way in a forest, requires practice. For this the street names must speak to one like the snapping of dry twigs, and the narrow streets of the city center must reflect the time of day as clearly as a mountain valley. I learned this art late in life: it fulfilled the dreams whose first traces were labyrinths on the blotters on my exercise-books. No, not the first, for even before these there had been another which outlasted them. The way into the labyrinth which did not lack its Ariadne, led over the Bendler Bridge, whose gentle arch was my first hillside. Not far from its foot lay the goal: Friedrich Wilhelm and Queen Luise. They towered up from their round pedestals among the flower beds as if spellbound by magic curves that a watercourse had inscribed before them in the sand. More than to the monarchs themselves, however, I headed for their pedestals, because what was happening upon them, though not clear to me, was nearer in space. That there was something special about this labyrinth I have since recognised in the wide, banal forecourt, which in no way revealed that here, only a few steps from the avenue for the droshkies and carriages, sleeps the strangest area of the park. I already had an inkling of this very early. Here or not far from here must have been the bed of that Ariadne in whose proximity I first grasped, never to forget it, what only later come to me as a word: love (p. 9).

Throughout, the book weaves together, memories and *déjà vu*, artefact and intangible signs, place names and domestic spaces, into a thin and melancholic thread that ties the poet to his childhood in Berlin, as privileged time and place of

emotions, which the poet himself is perpetually searching for through forms of awakening (Benjamin, 2012). So, Benjamin is not only accompanied by a simple longing; it is a remembering that is a sort of presage, and, as we know, it is a sad presage, given the tragic death of the philosopher. Because childhood is a crucial time in which man comes to understand the world, in which feelings, wonders, and surprises are stronger and inadvertently forge our unconscious, and from time to time re-emerge piercing and tearing the protective fabric of rationality, of logic on which we rely as we grow. A return to childhood, thus, becomes a backward journey in time, but one that projects us toward the future through reacquired skills needed to question the life meaning, as if it were the first time, and to rediscover the tragedies. In this sense, the child is an unaware *flâneur* who understands the world with an intensity that will never be allowed in the coming years, but we can recall it through memory. Hence, the double bond that regulates the relationship between the child and the *flâneur*: on the one hand, the experience itself of being a child wandering in the city and, on the other hand, the opportunity to refresh emotions and update them when one becomes an adult.

Romano (1996) writes “The *puer* is a master to others because he points, opens the way, but he can not take the chance to pick up” (p. 45). The fullness of the primary experience that goes back to childhood is unique. This virginal experience (*Erlebnis*) is destined to wear out over time through repetition, the old man’s habits, the wise man in whom order and stability prevail (*Erfahrung*, or accumulated experience), as do disillusionment and melancholy (Hillman, 1988).

In chasing the figure of the *puer aeternus* (eternal child), the *flâneur* also opposes the standardization and redundancy of consumption and the exploitation of the daily life. His is a last statement of purity and spontaneity, exposing himself to a game that is an end in itself, in a context like the city that, ironically, continually forces us to make prudent, rational, well-considered choices.

The *flâneur* as child

The word *flâneur* presents several origins and uses. Some derive the term from the Scandinavian (Norwegian in particular) *flana*: running steeply here and there; others contend that it derives from an Irish word that corresponds to *libertine*. This definition is found in the *Encyclopedie Larousse* of the 19th century, in reference to *flâneur*, which primarily means a lazy person, a loafer (Wilson, 1992). Any Italian-French dictionary translates the verb *flâner* with: to stroll, to wander. In many Italian regions when one talks of someone who loiters all day one says *fa flanella*, that is, someone who leads a life without too much worry. The concept of *flâneur* was born in the mid-nineteenth century to designate a *dandy*, a poet, an intellectual who

used to walk among the crowd in large cities and critically observed its behaviour, as described by Benjamin in his essay *Passages* (2002) referring to Paris. Today this notion piques the interest of social sciences and philosophy, but is also addressed in literature and cinema, for its ability to identify a particular practice of travelling and exploring places, a reflective relationship with people and spaces. Therefore, it was applied to the metropolis: especially at the dawn of the twentieth century. Large cities represent the more typical form of Modernity and promise individual liberation, but they also allow us to glimpse forms of approval and standardization, of discomfort and anonymity. Benjamin, Simmel, and Kracauer would be great interpreters of these traits. Benjamin (2002) states:

An intoxication comes over the man who walks long and aimlessly rough the streets. With each step, the walk takes on greater momentum; ever weaker grow the temptation of shops, of bistros, of smiling women, ever more irresistible the magnetism of the next street corner, of a mass of distant foliage, of a street name. Then comes hunger. Our man wants nothing to do with the myriad possibilities offered to sate his appetite. Like an ascetic animal, he flits through unknown districts – until, utterly exhausted, he stumbles into his room, which received him oddly and wears a strange air (p. 466).

He is speaking of the *flâneur*, the poet who gets lost in the crowd, the dweller who walks in his own city with the hope of grasping the *genius loci*, the hidden soul of the place. In the course of urban modernization it was a topic of great interest; then at the end of the twentieth century this figure is back in fashion in those societies afflicted by a process of massification of human behaviour and in the meantime characterized by examples of strong personalization of the way of travelling, living, and relating to places (Tester, 1994; Jenks, 1995; White, 2001; Hallberg, 2002; Debat et al. 2009; Nuvolati, 2014). The rediscovery of the *flâneur* was added to the rediscovery of walking, of slowness as a philosophy of life and pace of narrative (Solnit, 2002; Sansot, 2005; Gros, 2009). Walking is not only understood as going on foot, but as a process of discovery, expiation, sacrifice, and commitment.

The *flâneur* is an essential figure in the representation of the urban space. And this is true from two points of views: either as actor-spectator of the public space or as both narrator and interpreter of the places he passes through. His presence in the urban context strongly puts into question the most usual pathways meant for other types of people: from pedestrians walking hastily to their workplaces to the tourists engaged in planned tours, and businessmen who divide their time between working and visiting the city. The *flâneur* is the person who, through his literary and artistic works, redesigns and gives value (more or less consciously) to the same spaces in an unusual way, by creating original pathways, valuing marginal

places, demystifying sacred icons, and creating provocations. The *flâneur's* double face, as object and subject of urban choreographies, presupposes a complex reading with a series of consequences in terms of the re-symbolization of urban spaces.

As is known, the figure of the *flâneur* is characterized by a bundle of contradictions and oxymorons that makes it difficult to define and read this character. Here I will not take into account these features, as they have been widely discussed in other essays (Nuvolati, 2006, 2013). Instead, I focus my attention on one of these aspects, namely, the ingenuity of the *flâneur*, his desire to explore the unknown, to indulge in the urban maze like an enthusiastic child, like a *puer* able to become *senex*, a wise man capable of understanding how much he can dare in his exploration and when it is time to get retreat. The fusion of *puer* and *senex*, which are archetypal figures sharing a mythological matrix and the attention of psychoanalysis, remains a constitutive trait of the *flâneur*, that is, the individual able to synthesize, from time to time, the primordial longing for discovery, in the most instinctive ways, and the courage needed the search and for interpretative wisdom. The urban *shock* and the strategies to cope with it are an inherent part of the *flâneur's* adaptation to his context. Dickens (2008) writes of his *childhood* wandering in London:

Thus I wandered about the City, like a child in a dream, staring at the British merchants, and inspired by a mighty faith in the marvelousness of everything. Up courts and down courts – in and out of yards and little squares – peeping into counting-house passages and running away (p. 16).

Freud seems to comment on Dickens' account as he states: "As well, the poet does what the child does by playing. He creates a fantasy world that he takes seriously and charges it with large amounts of emotion, while distinguishing it from reality" (Freud, 1976, p. 376). But, as just mentioned, in this regression to childhood the *flâneur* can match that powerful reflection, a way of looking at the world and himself that, in the end, saves him from the drama of the fatal fall. In his wandering from condition to condition, he is melancholic and hedonistic, lonely and at the same time he likes the crowd; he loves to hide in the crowd, even if he is fully aware of his own difference. He is like a naive child who loves to be carried away by the magic of the crowd and rides its wave. It comes as no surprise that the figure of the *flâneur* has always found its place in the city, and even more in the metropolis, his favourite exploration field. It is exactly there that life is renewed through the succession of surprises and unexpected events, which give rise to a sense of bewilderment and wonder.

The paths of the child and the *flâneur* cross on the street or in a book

Although the affinity between the child and the *flâneur* has been the object of Baudelaire's and Benjamin's reflections, there is a lack of literature on the theme.

It unfolds on a double track in the child and in the *flâneur*: fantasy, *rêverie*, day-dreaming, and creativity, but also rationality and continuous awareness of the context. Of course, the direction is reversed: in the child we witness an increasing movement towards forms of awareness and wisdom, and in the *flâneur* a regression to the childhood stage. Calvino's *Marcovaldo* (2011) could be emblematic of this very condition as the protagonist is sensitive, naïf, and at the same time full of fantasy; as he discovers the city, he seems to assume a series of childlike and poetic dimensions. The city, in its many aspects and situations, is the privileged place where the trajectory of the child and that of the *flâneur* are actualized and intertwined. In a series of epiphanies, the city appears to both figures as unknown and, therefore, subject to interpretation. Both figures are astonished, full of awe and wonder. In such a situation, the urban context, while real, is disrupted and made into an excuse for dreaming visions and fantasies. Baudelaire (2004) observed that: "The child sees everything in a state of newsness; he is always drunk. Nothing more resembles what we call inspiration as the delight with which a child absorbs form and colour" (p. 284). Benjamin too speaks of the *flâneur* and his capacity for wonder as being similar to that of a child. Perhaps not coincidentally, the figure of the *flâneur* appears in the zoological park of his childhood in Berlin (Schiavoni, 1996). In particular, Benjamin (2012) makes the following observation about children:

[Children] are irresistibly attracted by waste material produced in factories, in homes or gardens, by tailors' or carpenters' shops. In these waste products, they recognize the face the world of things turns to them, and only for them. In waste they do not reproduce the adults' work, rather they tend to put the material in a mutual, new and discontinuous relationship. In this way children build their own object world by themselves, it is a little world inside the big one (pp. 89-90).

These words strongly recall the attitude of the *flâneur* poet who draws inspiration from the fragment, the sign with which to capture reality through imagination. What the world rejects becomes a key element for understanding the world itself. The *flâneur*, described by Baudelaire (2004) as a "botanist of the sidewalk", can only venture into the maze of the city in search of the meaning of things in the same way the child ventures into the city in search of things themselves. The relationship between botany and *flânerie* is a recurrent theme in literature. Roncarati and Marcucci (2012), referring to Filippo de Pisis as a botanist *flâneur*, describe the

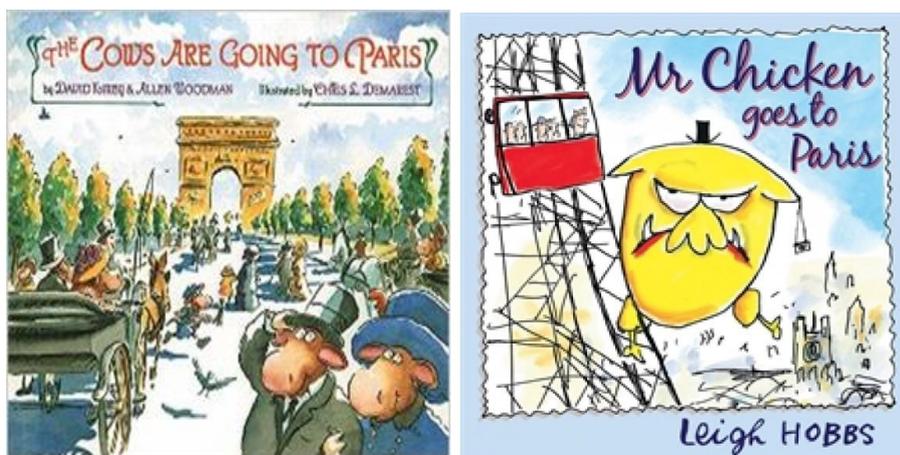
Ferrarese painter's passion for cataloguing plants linking this activity to his wandering in Ferrara and other territories:

De Pisis, wandering in the city of Ferrara, was enchanted by its parks created next to the aristocrats' palaces and gardens and guarded behind stringent wooden doors or iron gates. He used to observe everything carefully and with curiosity in order to understand any details which anybody would neglect and fix them by written words as soon as he got back to the private *bedrooms* (p. 60).

In this collection of fragments, leaves, little flowers, and blades of grass, we undoubtedly find the childish gesture of everyone who, greedy for knowledge and inspired by feelings, approaches nature and picks up a four-leaf clover in order to let it dry between the pages of a poetry book.

Art and play, fantasy and fairy tales intertwine and make of urban sites the favourite places for storytelling, tales of experience. And if the child found in children's literature – in the texts and in the shapes and colours of the illustrations – a source for satisfying his curiosity, the *flâneur* (a grown-up child) at the end of his wandering in turn produces a story. So the meeting of the child and the *flâneur* does not materialize only through the physical exploration of places, but, as Tribunella (2010) suggests, it is also achieved by the narrative working like a magic ball that combines reality and fantasy. The author, in particular, cites some classics of children's literature set in New York – including Elizabeth Enright's novel *The Saturdays* published in 1941 – where the protagonists are children who move in the city as though they were *flâneurs*, and comes to the conclusion that this form of literature responds to different needs. Not only does it have educational value for children called to become imaginatively aware of the city, perhaps by exploring it as little heroes or detectives, it also satisfies the need of adults to assume a naïf look in order to reread and rewrite the urban space in an imaginative manner. On the same wavelength we find an article written by Kerry Mallan (2012) who cites illustrated stories – including *The Cows Are Going to Paris* by David Kirby and Allen Woodman published in 1991 and *Mr Chicken Goes to Paris* by Leigh Hobbs in 2009. In these tales funny animals, like cows, dogs, and hens visit, like tourists-*flâneurs*, the cities thereby making the figure of the *flâneur* less serious than the one described by Tribunella; rather, they recount comic and confusing situations that invite the young reader to perform the metropolitan *flânerie*. Reflecting the adventurous instincts of young and adult readers, children's literature seems, however, to substitute two lacking elements: the impossibility for the child to live concretely the experience of the young *flâneur* in the city because of traffic, safety concerns, etc., and the impossibility or great difficulty for the adult to break away from a rational, responsible, and cognitive way of reading the city (figs. 2 and 3).

Giampaolo Nuvolati – *Tra puer e flâneur. Alla scoperta della città*



Figures 2 and 3 – *The Cows Are Going to Paris; Mr Chicken Goes to Paris*

Conclusion

In this paper, I have compared the child and the *flâneur* as they represent two crucial figures for rethinking the relationship between knowledge and the emotions of the urban experience. Since they are marginal figures as regards more standardized and instrumental behaviours, they combine instinct and creativity with cognitive urgency and orientation in spaces. Furthermore, they respond to a basic human need for an affective relationship with the city, consisting of discoveries, serendipity, impressions, joys, and troubles felt intensely in childhood, which are to be safeguarded like a treasure in adult memory.

Walking randomly in the city, especially on the part of children, seems to be more difficult today than it was in the past, but the figure of the *flâneur* too, despite some attempts to make him relevant today, seems to belong in some ways to the nineteenth century. Yet the future of cities is played out on citizens' freedom of movement, even the weaker individuals, like children who are gifted with great fantasy in perceiving urban emotions. From this perspective, urban policies can play a key role in creating the infrastructural opportunities (streets and trails to walk through and stand in) and in making children and adults sensitive to the idea of a more vagrant involvement in the city.

We have also seen that, where wandering through the city can be complicated, the writing of places (*flâneur*) and the reading of places (children) can reveal particularly useful exercises to a slow approach to the concrete urban experience in its most original forms.

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Giampaolo Nuvolati is Professor of Urban Sociology. Director of the Department of Sociology and Social Research at the University Bicocca of Milan. His main interests are the quality of urban life, the resident and non-resident metropolitan populations and their conflicts, the relationships among city, sociology and *flânerie*.

Contact: giampaolo.nuvolati@unimib.it

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