

Flânerie across Padua

Last lesson of the class

Sociology, Places and Cultures of Sustainability, prof. Giorgio Osti

10th December 2025, starting at 17.00 from our classroom

What is Flânerie

Deriving from the French word 'Flâneur', flânerie refers to the act of strolling and wandering aimlessly.

It is a reflection and practice aiming to view (urban) environment in a special way, according to a variety of criteria: aesthetic, emotional, political and existential (among other).

It is a creative and experimental technique of knowledge linked more to arts than sciences, even if the border between the two are blurred. See for example this abstract

This chapter coins the concept of fourth space as a cinematic methodological tool for architectural design and interpretation. Fourth space deals with the in-between activities and events that socially construct space. As an extension to Edward Soja's theory of third space, which is the socio-mental and physical experience of space, fourth space illustrates the metaphysical narrative articulation of space, i.e. how individuals tell the story of such experience. Similar to cinematic images, it portrays temporal and spatial narratives that are subjectively composed by the viewers. The chapter puts fourth space into practice (...) the participants were asked to cinematically comprehend and reconstruct the reality and spatiality of the surrounding environment. Eventually, the author (/book/enhancing-education-through-multidisciplinary-film/295296)

Fourth Space Education: A Cinematic Methodology for Architectural Pedagogy, Taher Abdel-Ghani (October University for Modern Sciences and Arts, Egypt) Source Title: Enhancing Education Through Multidisciplinary Film Teaching Methodologies Copyright: © 2023 |Pages: 21, 10.4018/978-1-6684-5394-0.ch010

We are not specialist of this method and research path; our scope is to make a light lesson at the end of the course, possibly learning by amusing and vice versa.

The proposal is then a walk in the city centre of Padua, bringing with you a pencil and a notebook, or nothing, if you like, and observe the environment with special attention to:

- street furniture aesthetic
- (consumption of) sidewalks and flowerbeds
- 'central', 'marginal' and 'eccentric' people
- rainwater drains
- hanging and wall wires
- edges of doors (portals)
- many other minor aspects of a towns

Sociology usually links all these aspects to power, classes and rankings, but there are other meaning and resonance that escape to the representation of an unequal world. We can collect these impressions in our notebook or record them in some way; then, we take a tea or a coffee into the city centre bar, without the worry of having learned or having to summarise.

Urban objects to observe during a *flânerie*

1. Benches

Every bench tells a story: its shape, its materials, its engraved writing; the way it's worn reveals how many stories it's held.

2. Dumpsters and wastebaskets

Colours, stickers, improvised messages... often they're small galleries of micro-graffiti or signs of the passage of residents.

3. Manholes (*tombini*)

The metal grates have surprising designs! Coats of arms, geometric textures, old foundry trademarks: tiny works of industrial design.

4. Street signs

Some have been reinterpreted by street artists, others are crooked, faded, covered in stickers: each a micro-urban story.

5. Doors and intercoms (*citofoni*)

Materials, handles, names on the doorbell: they tell the story of different identities and times in the same neighbourhood.

6. Disused shop windows

Empty spaces that become palettes of dust, reflections, and forgotten objects. They have an almost cinematic charm.

7. Fountains and Water Features

Shapes, sounds, continuity of flow: they are like tiny urban oases.

8. Overwritten Walls and Surfaces

Torn posters, stencils, layers of colour... they are marvellous visual palimpsests.

9. Electricity or Gas Columns

Often decorated, ruined, "lived in": small boxes that are transformed into micro-sculptures.

10. Cracks and Interstices

Spaces between buildings, neglected flowerbeds, cracks in the sidewalk: they reveal the enduring nature and the effects of time.

11. Street Lighting

Old, modern, tilted, dented (*ammaccata*) streetlamps: they tell the story of an era and its maintenance.

12. Signatures of Time

Rust, mold (*muffe*), rain marks on walls, peeling paint (*vernice scrostata*)... aging is a wonderful poetic lens.

Lista 1 — Oggetti urbani “classici” da osservare

1. Segnaletica stradale
2. Panchine
3. Cassonetti e cestini
4. Lampioni
5. Fermate dell'autobus o del tram
6. Cabine elettriche
7. Portoni e citofoni
8. Tombini
9. Vetrine dei negozi
10. Piste ciclabili e rastrelliere

Typical ‘classical’ urban objects to be observed

1. Street signs
2. Benches
3. Trash bins and containers
4. Street lamps
5. Bus or tram stops
6. Electrical cabins/utility boxes
7. Doorways and intercoms
8. Manhole covers
9. Shop windows
10. Bike lanes and bike racks

Lista 2 — Oggetti urbani “poetici” o inaspettati

1. Crepe nell'asfalto
2. Ombre di alberi o palazzi
3. Poster strappati
4. Serrande decorate
5. Scritte e micro-graffiti
6. Fiori spontanei ai bordi dei marciapiedi
7. Chiazze di luce o riflessi nelle pozzanghere
8. Biciclette legate da tempo
9. Passi pedonali consumati
10. Oggetti dimenticati (guanti singoli, biglietti, elastici)

“Poetic” or unexpected urban objects
“Poetic” or unexpected urban objects

1. Cracks in the asphalt
2. Shadows of trees or buildings
3. Torn posters
4. Painted or decorated shutters
5. Writings and micro-graffiti
6. Wildflowers growing along sidewalks
7. Patches of light or reflections in puddles
8. Bicycles left locked for a long time
9. Worn pedestrian crossings
10. Forgotten objects (single gloves, tickets, rubber bands)