The Transience of Travel and Time: An Exploration of *Flâneur* in Richard Linklater's *Before* Trilogy

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ABSTRACT

The primary objective of this research is to analyze and interpret the interplay between the cinematic portrayal of travel and flâneur dynamics in Richard Linklater's Before trilogy—Before Sunrise (1995), Before Sunset (2004), and Before Midnight (2013). The study explores how travel serves as a narrative device in shaping the characters' emotional landscapes as they navigate different cityscapes. The figure of the flâneur serves as a crucial framework for understanding the relationship between the individual and the city. Travel becomes a transformative act as Jesse and Céline's serendipitous encounters unfold against the expressive backdrops of Vienna, Paris, and Greece. Their wandering embodies the essence of dérive and urban exploration, moving beyond conventional tourist experiences. Additionally, this research investigates the trilogy's temporal and experimental realism, illustrating how Linklater's depiction of time and transient travel contributes to a hyper-realistic portrayal of relationships and personal growth. By situating the trilogy within the discourse of travel and psychogeography, this study offers a nuanced interpretation of how movement through cities shapes both the narrative and human emotions.

Keywords: travel; flâneur; dérive; time; realism

INTRODUCTION

In 19th-century France, the *flâneur* was a literary type essential to depictions of Parisian streets. Associated with leisure, curiosity, and idleness, the *flâneur* was like an acute observer of contemporary life (Benjamin, 1996). The *flâneur* represents a figure detached from societal norms, exploring the cityscape as an observer. Walter Benjamin and Charles Baudelaire explored the *flâneur* as an emblematic archetype of urban modernity (Baudelaire, 1972; Benjamin, 1996). It symbolizes the ability to wander freely, capturing the essence of the city through idle sauntering.

The term *flâneur*, which has been loosely defined as a fashionable male idler, a languid stroller, an expert viewer of urban signs, an artist or writer, and an avant-garde sociologist, continues to be as enigmatic and diverse as the city it is affiliated with (Boutin, 2012). Similarly, Keith Tester states that 'the precise meaning and significance of *flânerie* remains more than a little elusive' (Tester, 1994). Instead of a singular archetype, the *flâneur* manifests in various nuanced forms: the artist-*flâneur*, the poet-*flâneur*, the novelist-*flâneur*, the urban-*flâneur*, the prophet-*flâneur*, and the *flâneur/dandy* (Bautista, 2017). This research employs a comparative analysis,

situating Jesse and Céline within the archetype of the *flâneur,* to elucidate the depths of their character development as they navigate the urban landscapes of Vienna, Paris, and Greece.

Introducing a reflection on contemporary *flâneur* culture, the *Before* trilogy (Linklater, 1995, 2004, 2013) portrays walking as an urban practice that transitions from the modern *flâneur* to the postmodern wanderer. The characters, engaging in the city through walking, unveil fragmented spatiotemporal meta-codes, facilitating access to spatial knowledge about urban spaces. Drawing a connection between walking and writing and metaphorically framing the city as a discourse, the film suggests a link between the practice of walking and the act of writing. According to De Certeau (1984), the linguistic similarities and the pedestrian's competence in constructing urban reality allow the interpretation of walking as a form of writing activity. He introduces the theoretical distinction between two figures, voyeurs and walkers, drawing from Charles Baudelaire's notions of the voyeur and the *flâneur* (De Certeau, 1984). The cinematic portrayal of the walker's perspective aligns with Certeau's notion of the *flâneur*, or the urban wanderer who engages with the city at street level. Through techniques such as handheld camera shots and point-of-view sequences, filmmakers convey the tactile and proximate experience of navigating urban spaces. This perspective emphasizes the sensory and immersive aspects of urban life, capturing the rhythms and textures of the city as experienced by the walker (Faulkner, 2002). Integrating elements of psychogeography, such as the act of *dérive* and *flânerie* into the domain of fictional narratives, a connection is forged to aspects of our conscious world (Amran, 2024).

The *flâneur* has been a focus of cinema since the early silent era. In *Theory of Film*, Siegfried Kracauer notes that as early as the 1920s, how characters in D.W. Griffith's films often appeared to walk directly from the bustling city streets onto the screen (Kracauer, 1960). While the *flâneur* film has not been officially recognized as a distinct genre, its presence can be identified in several feature films that share stylistic, narrative, and structural elements of *flâneurie* (Tucker, 2020). The Tramp is arguably the quintessential cinematic *flâneur*, epitomizing *flâneurie* and nearly crossing into the realm of the *dérive.* Certeau's distinction between voyeurs and walkers offers a framework for understanding different modes of experiencing the city, with cinematic art capable of adopting both perspectives (San Cornelio, 2008). Through the voyeur's gaze from above and the walker's immersion in the streets, the *Before* trilogy conveys the multifaceted nature of urban space, exploring themes of power, intimacy, and sensory perception within the cinematic narrative. Architectural spaces and urban landscapes can have narrative qualities which link them with film and cinema (Koeck, 2013). The *Before* Trilogy, a cinematic masterpiece directed by Richard Linklater, intricately weaves the characters of Jesse (Ethan Hawke) and Céline (Julie Delpy) through a series of urban explorations. The research aims to examine the role of travel as a narrative device in shaping Jesse and Céline's emotional and psychological evolution throughout the trilogy. It seeks to analyze the *flâneur* dynamics in the films, exploring how the characters' movement through urban landscapes influences their introspection and interactions. The research demonstrates the impact of transient travel and how movement through cities contributes to the authenticity and depth of storytelling.

This study is relevant as it situates the *Before Trilogy* within the discourse of psychogeography, cinematic realism, and the literary tradition of the *flâneur.* In an era where travel is often romanticized or commodified, the study sheds light on the organic, serendipitous nature of exploration, challenging conventional cinematic representations of tourism. By examining Linklater's use of *dérive*, long conversational sequences, and real-time narrative progression, this research contributes to film studies, literary discourse, and travel studies by offering a comprehensive interpretation of travel as both a literal and metaphorical journey. Through this

lens, the study deepens the understanding of how Linklater's trilogy captures the fluidity and essence of time and relationships.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Richard Linklater's *Before Trilogy—Before Sunrise* (1995), *Before Sunset* (2004), and *Before Midnight* (2013)—explores themes of love, time, fate, and existential introspection through the evolving relationship of Jesse and Céline. The trilogy's real-time conversations, long takes, and naturalistic dialogue create an unparalleled sense of authenticity, capturing the nuances of human connection and the passage of time. Linklater's innovative approach, including a nine-year gap between films and collaborative script development with the lead actors, makes the trilogy a groundbreaking study of cinematic realism and character evolution. The *Before* trilogy has been widely studied across multiple disciplines, with scholars exploring its unique approach to temporality, narrative structure, and themes of love, nostalgia, and existentialism.

Maes and Schaubroeck (2021) argues that Céline and Jesse actively seek out and create melancholic moments, which deepen their connection. Their research explores melancholy as a central expressive element in the *Before* trilogy, analysing its presence in the characters' emotions, dialogue, and cinematic techniques. The findings state that the films' cinematic expression of melancholy enhances their emotional impact, resonating deeply with audiences (Maes & Schaubroeck, 2021). Xavier's (2021) research article explores the *Before* trilogy through the lens of Kierkegaardian existentialism, examining how its aesthetic style—long dialogic takes and open endings—engages with Kierkegaard's existential stages: the aesthetic, ethical, and irony as a transitional state. Through this analysis, the article asserts cinema's power to express existential philosophy and illuminate the challenges of romantic commitment.

A dissertation titled "Approaching Romance Differently: An Investigation into Richard Linklater's Before Trilogy and Its Relationship with the Romantic Comedy Genre" (2018) explores how Richard Linklater's *Before* Trilogy uniquely fits within the Romantic Comedy genre while diverging from conventional tropes. Rather than focusing on genre classification, it examines what sets the trilogy apart by analysing all three films as a whole; the study highlights their distinctive approach to romance, character development, and narrative structure within the genre.

Deleyto (2019a) examines the *Before* trilogy from the perspective of cosmopolitan performance, drawing on Woodward and Skrbiš's concept to analyze how film performance functions as a form of social performance. By focusing on Julie Delpy and Ethan Hawke's portrayals, it highlights the films' celebration of cosmopolitan values while critiquing their privileging of elitist, homogenized transnational relationships. The study situates the trilogy within 'cosmopolitan art cinema' and emphasizes the usefulness of cosmopolitan theory in understanding contemporary cinema's engagement with globalization (Deleyto, 2019a). Kafalier's (2016) project conducts a sentiment analysis of the *Before* trilogy using the NRC Word-Emotion Association Lexicon to track emotional shifts in the dialogues. It examines how sentiment changes across the films, explores correlations between these mood variations and reveals how emotional trajectories align with the trilogy's narrative progression.

Despite this extensive body of work, certain aspects of the *Before* trilogy remain underexplored. Much of the existing scholarship focuses on the films' character dynamics and philosophical themes. After reviewing the available studies on the *Before* trilogy, this research identifies the absence of readings that interpret the films as a nuanced exploration of *flâneur*

dynamics, *dérive*, and experimental realism. The *flâneur* is an artist who gathers mental notes during his leisurely walks, reflecting on and recording the transient moment while simultaneously being absorbed into the flux of modern life. The way Jesse and Céline's interactions with urban spaces shape their emotional and philosophical journeys has not been sufficiently examined. This study aims to fill that gap by analysing how the trilogy's temporal structure, coupled with its depiction of travelling through cityscapes, contributes to a hyper-realistic portrayal of time, relationships, and personal growth. By situating the films within the discourse of cinematic urbanism and psychogeography, this research offers a fresh perspective on Linklater's work and its significance in independent cinema.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The primary data for this study consists of the three films in the *Before* trilogy —*Before Sunrise* (1995), *Before Sunset* (2004), and *Before Midnight* (2013). The study relies on textual and visual analysis of the films to explore how travel serves as a narrative device that shapes the emotional landscapes of Jesse and Céline as they navigate different cityscapes. This research adopts a qualitative analytical approach to examine the concepts of travel, *flâneur*, *dérive* and temporal realism in Richard Linklater's *Before* trilogy.

Flâneur is a concept that originated in 19th-century Paris, referring to the act of strolling or wandering through city streets with no particular destination or purpose other than to observe and experience the urban environment. The act of walking becomes a means to achieve heightened sensibility, allowing the *flâneur* to access the sublime and weave it into the tapestry of his creations (Singh, 2024). The walker, thus, is the anonymous person walking and experiencing the city, which indicates that "walkers are practitioners that make use of spaces that cannot be seen" (De Certeau, 1984). A *flâneur* walks doubly, i.e. into modernity and away from it spatially as well as temporally (Singh, 2024). To quote, "The *flâneur's* movement creates anachrony: he travels urban space, the space of modernity, but is forever looking to the past" (Seale, 2005). While traditionally male, contemporary discussions include the female counterparts *passante* and *flâneuse.*

Multiple close viewings have been conducted to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the films' visual, narrative, and thematic elements. Key scenes, dialogues, and cinematographic techniques have been transcribed and analysed to identify recurring patterns related to *flânerie, dérive*, and the transient nature of travel. This research incorporates interdisciplinary perspectives from literary studies, urban theories and travel discourse to enrich the analysis. Additionally, it incorporates film studies methodologies, including mise-en-scène analysis and narrative structure examination, to understand how Linklater constructs a hyper-realistic sense of time and movement. The research further considers how the trilogy's long takes, real-time conversations, and naturalistic performances contribute to an experiential portrayal of travel and temporality.

THE *BEFORE* TRILOGY: A STUDY IN EXPERIMENTAL AND TEMPORAL REALISM

Linklater's *Before* trilogy, while fundamentally a love story, represents a highly experimental project that challenges conventional filmmaking practices. The trilogy epitomizes "cinema-in-real-time," with each film produced and set nine years apart, embodying an experimental realism that

transcends traditional cinematic realism and offering a "window into a stage of life" while reflecting the "possibilities and disappointments of one's 20s, 30s, and 40s," (Lim, 2013). Linklater's treatment of time, both on-screen and during production, coupled with his collaborative script development process with actors Julie Delpy and Ethan Hawke, underscores a unique form of realism that thrives within the realm of independent cinema. The *Before* trilogy's structure, with nine-year gaps between each film, challenges the idea that characters are limited to the events shown on-screen and serves as a reflection on the concept of time. It reiterates that they have continued to live their lives even though the audience was not there to witness those moments (O'Meara, 2017). Initially not conceived as a trilogy, Linklater remarked in an interview that it "just, somehow, happened" (Gama, 2022).

The concept of the "time-image" in cinema refers to a type of film where time is not represented as merely a sequence of events or a progression of the plot. Instead, time is presented directly, often with a focus on moments of stillness, memory, and the inner experiences of characters rather than on actions and movements that drive the narrative forward. The time image allows the protagonist to be suspended in time and space, resisting the pressure to conform to a traditional narrative structure. This concept can be likened to the idea of a slacker, where the act of slacking disrupts the narrative flow and loosens the sensory-motor connections (Stone, 2013). As a result, it permits "a little time in the pure state" (Deleuze, 1985/1989) to emerge on the screen.

In the *Before* trilogy, time flows in a way that seems random but is deeply connected to the characters' experiences. The films capture the essence of real-time conversations and interactions, allowing the audience to immerse themselves in the unfolding moments as if they were present. The research finds *the Before* trilogy as an embodiment of the time-image, where this approach to time emphasizes the subjective experience of the characters and the significance of their relationships over a traditional linear narrative structure. The trilogy showcases how time can be perceived and experienced in various ways, reflecting the complexity of human connections and memories. Deleuze discusses a shift from the "movement-image" to the "time-image," where "time is no longer subordinate to movement but is presented directly" (Deleuze, 1985/1989). Linklater's films exemplify this by focusing less on plot-driven action and more on the direct experience of time through the characters' dialogues and relationships. Deleuze writes about "becoming as potentialization, as series of powers" where "the before and after are no longer successive determinations of the course of time, but the two sides of the power, or the passage of the power to a higher power" (Deleuze, 1983/1986). This can be related to the evolving relationship between the characters across the trilogy, where each encounter is not just a continuation but a deepening of their connection.

Independent films often utilize continuity editing and linear narratives differently than mainstream cinema, focusing on character depth rather than technological spectacle or plot-driven goals. This spontaneity and the unfettered creative freedom evident in Linklater's filmmaking process have established him as a distinctive figure in the realm of independent American directors worldwide. Linklater's trilogy exemplifies this approach, employing continuity editing with extended long takes in mundane settings to emphasize character development over plot progression. These long takes contribute to a "fly-on-the-wall" realism, immersing viewers in the intimate interactions between Jesse and Céline (Smith, 2022). The minimal camera movement and infrequent cuts from one point of view to another enhance this immersive experience, developing a deep investment in the characters' evolving relationship rather than in plot-driven anticipation.

The extended scenes and prolonged shots prevalent in the *Before trilogy* contrast with Hollywood's conventional editing style, contributing to a form of hyper-realism that is both experimental and unconventional. This hyper-realism eschews the need to suspend disbelief by presenting Jesse and Céline as palpably real individuals. This authenticity is bolstered by the intense investment of Delpy, Hawke, and Linklater in their characters and narrative. The trilogy's production timeline further reinforces this realism. The first film, set over less than 24 hours, debuted in 1995. The second film, released nine years later, spans an evening. The third film, again separated by nine years, unfolds over less than a full day. This real-world temporal gap allows for the natural ageing of Hawke and Delpy, thereby depicting their characters' development in a genuinely realistic manner within a fictional framework. Each instalment mirrors the passage of real-time, connecting the filmic and real worlds to enhance the narrative's authenticity. As aptly said by Pellerin (2019), "Above all, the *Before* series is an exercise in real-time storytelling." These films enhance Hollywood's ability to create intellectually interesting alternatives to formulaic entertainment. Linklater's indie and studio films represent the evolving connection between both domains while also seeking an idealistic pursuit of alternatives to solely materialistic consumer satisfaction (Speed, 2007).

Additionally, Linklater's cinematic style captures the essence of *dérive,* where the characters' experiences and interactions are influenced by their environments, creating a narrative that is both spatially and temporally fluid. This approach aligns with the principles of psychogeography, emphasizing the intricate interplay between individuals and their surroundings in shaping their perceptions and relationships.

THE SPIRIT OF *DÉRIVE*

A new space emerges as a result of a person's movement, altering a location that is specifically shaped by urban design. This transformed area becomes a repository for the individual's memories (De Certeau, 1984; Jang, 2015). *Dérive*, a concept rooted in the Situationists movement, is characterised *dérive* as a method of walking designed to disrupt the monotony of capitalism by ushering in novel experiences (Debord, 1956). While traditionally considered an individual endeavour, this practice extends beyond personal encounters, promoting conscientious and communal interactions. This engaged and participatory involvement draws from psychogeography, a method of examining the distinct effects of a geographical environment on the body (Lagomasino, 2020). The twentieth-century *dérive* is the contemporary cousin of the nineteenth-century idealised figure of the *flâneur* (Tucker, 2020).

The architectural spaces of the cities that make up the image of Vienna, Paris, and Greece in the film's foreground offer chances for exploration and a deeper knowledge of the concept of space and its varied interpretations in the cinema. Debord introduces the concept of psychogeography, which refers to the impact of a physical environment on individuals' emotions and behaviour. Psychogeography serves movement in a manner analogous to how psychoanalysis serves language (Debord, 1956). To clarify, much like walking unveils the influence on behaviour, emotion, connection, and belonging, the impact on thoughts, feelings, and actions is likewise unveiled through conversation (Wood, 2010). Debord establishes *dérive* as a method of experimental psycho-geographic activity, which involves drifting instead of walking, in order to establish a connection between different spatial environments.

In a *dérive*, individuals forgo their usual connections, work commitments, and leisure pursuits for a specific duration, allowing themselves to be guided by the allure of the terrain and the encounters they happen upon. It involves letting go of planned routes and embracing spontaneous encounters, allowing the individual to uncover the authentic spirit of the city. Contrary to common belief, chance plays a less significant role in this activity. In *Before Sunrise* (1995), Linklater uses the Zollamtssteg Bridge as a metaphorical threshold to initiate the journey of Jesse and Céline. The bridge represents a transitional space, where the couple steps into a liminal zone that separates and connects distinct realms—pedestrian and vehicular, mundane and extraordinary. As they cross this bridge, they stroll onto the streets of Vienna. This crossing signifies the commencement of their *dérive*, which is an urban drift, an artistic practice of intentionally getting lost in a city to observe and highlight the everyday urban practices that typically go unnoticed during a routine commute (Tucker, 2020). In *Before Sunset*, the bridges over the Seine function similarly but with a more introspective twist. The conversations beneath the bridge serve as moments of suspended time, where Jesse and Céline confront their past decisions and the alternate paths their lives could have taken.

From a *dérive* perspective, cities exhibit psychogeographical contours characterized by consistent currents, established points, and vortexes that actively dissuade entry into or exit from specific zones (Debord, 1956). *Before Sunset* is described as offering the *durée* of a *dérive*. *Durée* is a French term coined by philosopher Henri Bergson (1965), referring to the subjective, qualitative, subjective experience of time that flows, accumulates, and is indivisible. It captures the continuous flow of time and the spontaneous, wandering nature of the characters' reunion and their interactions. This movement from one place to another helps immerse a person's mind creatively in the surroundings, connecting their psyche with each step taken on the journey to explore the city (N. A. Amran & Ali Termizi, 2020).

Dérive, as a concept, allows them to engage with the urban environment and their emotions in a fluid, dynamic way, reinforcing the authenticity of their experiences. The daylight wanderings of the *flâneur*, much like the participants of a *dérive,* dismissed the rigid structure of geometrical urban planning and the quantitative metrics of functional space. Instead, they aimed to uncover new meanings and uses for the streets. The act of walking and talking in Linklater's cinema parallels the concept of the *dérive*, focusing not on concretely defining the streets but on reterritorializing them through the flow of life. (Stone, 2013). Consequently, these streets transform into a psychological landscape that visually represents the protagonists' exploration of their inner lives. In Vienna, Jesse and Céline's meandering through the cityscape without a fixed destination embodies the spirit of *dérive*. This aimless exploration contributes to the authenticity of their experience by allowing them to discover hidden gems and engage with the city on an intimate level. The Parisian setting in *Before Sunrise* further accentuates the concept of *dérive*. The characters become *flâneurs,* attuned to the nuances of the city, and their journey takes on an authentic quality as they rediscover places with new perspectives (Benjamin, 1982).

In Greece, the *dérive* takes on a more introspective tone. The characters navigate the picturesque landscapes, engaging in spontaneous conversations that reveal the complexities of their relationship in *Before Midnight*. Like *Blue Valentine*, *Before Midnight* presents a realistic portrayal of Céline and Jesse's relationship—not as a perfect union of souls, but as a balanced blend of independence and companionship (Hachard, 2013). *Dérive* becomes a tool for emotional exploration, contributing to the authenticity of their journey by allowing the characters to navigate not only physical spaces but also permeating the emotional and philosophical dimensions of the characters' experiences. Linklater masterfully captures the essence, using it as a narrative tool to

encapsulate the meandering essence of human existence within the ever-changing urban backdrop. The exploration of *dérive* in the *Before* Trilogy invites the audience to contemplate the intricate relationship between the characters and the cities, as well as the profound impact of *flânerie* on their personal and collective identities.

CINEMATIC *FLÂNEUR*

In modern cinema, the concept of the *flâneur* is often employed as a narrative device to explore the nuances of urban life and human relationships. The *flâneur* represents the urban experience with all its aspects: he is an urban stroller, a street artist, an accidental gaze, and an amateur detective (Grøtta, 2015). The film's approach to depicting the cities of Vienna, Paris, and Greece goes beyond superficial aesthetics, diving into the pulse and rhythm of each locale. Linklater skilfully intertwines the historical and cultural elements of each city with the character's experiences, providing a multi-layered tapestry for the audience to unravel. Whether it's the grandeur of Vienna's architecture or the intimate corners of Paris, the cities become active participants in the storytelling process. Jesse and Céline, their intertwined paths intricately shape the spaces they inhabit. The cities become more than mere backdrops; they transform into living canvases where the characters' shared experiences weave a narrative within the urban landscape. De Certeau (1984) states, "Their intertwined paths give their shape to spaces. They weave places together. In that respect, pedestrian movements form one of these 'real systems' whose existence in fact makes up the city."

In Wim Wenders' *Wings of Desire (1987),* Berlin is captured from the viewpoint of angels observing the city, imbuing the narrative with a voyeuristic quality. This is also evident in *Caresses (1998)* set in Madrid. These films share a common approach: they initially present a panoramic view of the urban space before focusing on the interpersonal relationships that unfold within it (San Cornelio, 2008). Linklater's *Before* trilogy follows a similar tradition where the cityscapes of Vienna, Paris, and Greece serve not only as a backdrop but also as an integral part of the characters' experiences and interactions.

Benjamin recognized that the camera is a powerful means by which we can gain a new perspective on architectural and urban spaces, where moving images are particularly pertinent to capture the 'aura' or spirit of places and cities (Koeck, 2013). Film landscapes are additionally landscapes of sound and movement, as well as landscapes of image. They are also often landscapes focused on human interactions, not only on situations of earth and rock and flora and even sunlight (Harper & Rayner, 2013). Landscape was to silent film what music is to sound film: it is a multifaceted vehicle for the expressive interpretation of emotions. But if landscape can fulfil this function, it is because—like music—it is "the freest element of the film, the least burdened with servile, narrative tasks, and the most flexible in conveying moods, emotional states, and spiritual experiences" (Eisenstein, 1987, p.217). To extend and deepen our perception of the environment would be to continue a long biological and cultural development which has gone from the contact senses to the distant senses and from the distant senses to symbolic communications (Lynch, 1960). For the *flâneur*, the city transforms into a landscape. More accurately, the city divides into its dialectical opposites: a landscape that unfolds before him and a parlour that envelops him (White, 2001).

The *Before* Trilogy stands as a cinematic canvas where Jesse and Céline's roles as *flâneurs* unfold with depth and complexity. Through shared wanderlust and emotional symbiosis, the *Before* Trilogy becomes a cinematic exploration of urban wanderlust and emotional landscapes, offering a nuanced understanding of the relationship between individuals and the cities they traverse (Linklater, 1995, 2004, 2013). Despite their distinct roles, Jesse and Céline share a profound sense of wanderlust. This shared wanderlust becomes a narrative thread that binds their individual roles, showcasing a contemporary reinterpretation of the traditional *flâneur- flâneuse* dynamic. The perambulatory engagements of the *flâneur/flâneuse* with the urban landscape may take diverse paths over time, but the contributions presented in the special issue foresee their movements and endeavour to forge a path towards a heightened, sensorial interpretation of modernity (Boutin, 2012). Conversely, "even the world's physical geography had been completely processed into images of a reality that human beings had rarely seen but in accordance with which they lived their lives" (García-Mainar, 2023)

Jesse and Céline are given plenty of time and space to reflect and take in their surroundings, which forces them to face the "abyss of their existence" outside of their narrative (Stone, 2013). This is consistent with the *flâneur's* inclination to stroll through cities and observe life without regard to its practical details. Long shots and scenes in which Jesse and Céline just exist for a split second—such as when they are floating down the Seine or jam-packed into a listening booth—emphasize their status as observers or "seers." They are compelled to use these opportunities for reflection rather than cliched action, reflecting the *flâneur's* involvement with their environment via an aesthetically pleasing and intensely personal prism. While "space" implies a detached, map-like view from above, "place" refers to the personal, immersive experience of the *flâneur* walking through the city streets (Lefebvre, 2006). The *flâneur's* view is seen as participatory and subjective, involving direct engagement with the surroundings, making landscapes feel inhabited and meaningful rather than empty or threatening. David Rimmer's approach in his film *Real Italian Pizza (1971)* is described as that of a participant *flâneur,* who engages with the landscape subjectively, blurring the line between the structural film aesthetic and personal experience (Lefebvre, 2006).

The cityscape, particularly the arcades of Paris, served as a stimulus for evoking forgotten memories of bygone eras (Benjamin, 1996). As aptly said, "It is the material culture of the city, rather than the psyche, that provides the shared collective spaces where consciousness and the unconscious, past and present, meet" (Buck-Morss, 1986). Through Jesse and Céline's wanderings, Linklater provides a lens through which the audience can contemplate the urban environment and its impact on the human experience. The characters' wandering and examining the city allow for unexpected and meaningful experiences to unfold, emphasizing the importance of embracing the unexpected in life Suganthy & Karunanithi, 2024). Whether it's the bustling streets of Vienna or the picturesque alleyways of Paris, each location enriches the film with its own unique ambience and character.

PARIS - *BEFORE SUNSET*

The figure of the *flâneur* has been instrumental in the study of the cinematic city because Charles Baudelaire's perception of urban life shared similarities with what we now consider 'cinematic' (Baudelaire, 1963). Baudelaire's understanding suggests a lasting parallel between how the urban citizen perceives modern city life as they stroll and how artists and their audience perceive it as a

contingent sensory experience (Phillips & Vincendeau, 2018). Both notions involve a fractured and fragmented mode of vision that disrupts the traditional sense of space and time unity. For the city walker, this disruption occurs through the dynamic relationship between their moving body and the diverse attractions of the Parisian street. Conversely, for the cinematic spectator emerging in the late 19th century, this disruption is facilitated by the eventual mobility of the camera and the fragmentation of space and time achieved through editing techniques (Charney & Schwartz, 1995).

Before Sunset situates the film in a particularly dynamic vein of modern romantic comedy progression while simultaneously identifying it as a cultural text of its period. Paris is set up as a recognizable geographical setting but also as the quintessential fictional space for travel romantic comedy. The film's message of tolerance and international romance is strengthened and made more credible by the use of a "realistic" portrayal of Paris as the comic travel setting where the lovers are transformed. It is not the foreigners but they themselves, the Parisians, who made Paris into the Promised Land of *flâneurs,* into a landscape made of living people, as Hofmannsthal once called it (White, 2001).

The way the trilogy is structured is more than just a realistic way of depicting a brief connection between a man and a woman. These films portray modern relationships by emphasizing the present moment over future plans, prioritizing self-reflection and discussions about love over tangible actions or commitments. It focuses on conversations about sex rather than the act itself and prefers walking and talking over physical intimacy. The brief nature of this encounter, coupled with the cinematic techniques that enhance its sense of realism, underscores these themes. Based on more passionate or sensual interactions, this intellectual kind of relationship develops into one that has a strong imprint on the characters. This is the kind of self-analysis romance that Woody Allen introduced to the screen in the 1970s, but it has changed and transformed over time. As aptly said, "Talking in *Before Sunset* is not just sexy, it is also much safer" (Deleyto, 2019a).

In *Before Sunset*, both walking and talking, along with national identity, are eroticized; the film deliberately eschews the technological sophistication of the postmodern era, preferring instead physical travel and face-to-face communication. This old-fashioned approach highlights a more human side of globalization, which contemporary cinema, especially mainstream productions, seems to have forgotten. Their time spent together precisely aligns with the film's duration, which is approximately eighty minutes. In *Before Sunrise*, ellipses were employed to condense approximately twenty hours of actual time into a ninety-five-minute film. However, in *Before Sunset*, Linklater challenges himself by completely eliminating the use of ellipses and instead opts for a continuous camera presence, following the two characters as they explore various locations in Paris, starting from the bookshop on the banks of the Seine and concluding at Céline's apartment. The rigorous formal tactics, in addition to the real-time conceit, are integrated into the film's discussion on love, desire, and modern relationships. Image analysis develops from urban analysis "when the real world is transformed into an image and images become real" (Agamben, 2007).

SHAKESPEARE & COMPANY BOOKSHOP

The film begins with Jesse giving a book reading at Shakespeare and Company, a historic English-language bookstore in Paris. Céline appears among the audience, marking their first encounter since *Before Sunrise.* Céline appears when Jesse says, "And it's all obvious to him that time is a lie" (Linklater, 2004, 06:12:00), which shows his awareness of the fluid and subjective nature of time. The bookstore symbolizes the confluence of intellectualism and emotional resonance. The

utilization of long takes, close-ups and deliberate absence of quick edits throughout the book reading serves to accentuate the gravity and nostalgia of their reunion (Fig. 1). Paris has always been the model city for the *flâneur* (Tucker, 2020). The chosen setting serves to emphasize the deeply held connection between the characters and the world of literature and memory, anchoring their rekindled relationship within a realm of collective cultural and intellectual importance.

FIGURE 1. *Before Sunset* - The Shakespeare & Company Bookshop Scene

STROLL THROUGH THE STREETS OF PARIS

These cinematic spaces are characterized by fluid camera movements that are temporally structured by immersing into and being influenced by the flow of life. For instance, the uninterrupted tracking shot that follows Jesse and Céline down a Parisian street is temporally bound to the duration it takes for them to walk the street. This temporal movement aims at facilitating communication and continually forms and dissolves spatial and temporal collages, as seen in Jesse and Céline's interactions with objects and passersby. The sequence has been constructed using a succession of follow-focus tracking shots that follow the protagonists as they walk. Shot/reverse shots are employed anytime the characters pause momentarily. This is a highly conventional application of pattern for the viewer: the different compositions and edits create a sense of uninterrupted flow that is authentic rather than manufactured. The transitions between the various tracking shots serve to inform the viewer that the story encompasses the entire length of the streets the characters are strolling. These shots indicate that the characters are moving from one actual street to another and that no part of their journey has been excluded from the viewer's perspective. In an extended sense, the street is not merely a space for fleeting impressions and chance encounters; it is a dynamic arena where the flow of life inevitably asserts itself. Jesse and Céline leave the bookstore and walk down Rue Saint-Julien le Pauvre. During the conversation between Jesse and Céline about his book and how their past has been portrayed in it, the film effectively portrays their current relationship through "the dialogues, the actors' naturalistic performances and a specific use of film grammar" (Deleyto, 2019b).

FIGURE 2: *Before Sunset* - Stroll through the Streets of Paris Scene

Paris, the land of novelty and distraction, is the great city of the *flâneur* – that aimless stroller who loses himself in the crowd, who has no destination, and who goes wherever caprice or curiosity directs his or her steps (White, 2001). As they continue their walk, Jesse and Céline meander down Rue Galande, a street known for its medieval architecture. The visual focus on the street's unique architectural features, such as its old buildings and narrow pathways, underscores the beauty and complexity of both the setting and the characters' evolving dialogue. Céline takes hold of Jesse's arm and directs him, "Let's go this way," as they proceed down the narrow, pedestrian street of Rue Galande (Linklater, 2004, 15:50:00). Up to this point, the continuity of their route is maintained. However, they abruptly find themselves across the Seine in the neighbourhood known as Saint Paul's Village. The couple then turns onto Rue Des Jardins Saint-Paul from Rue de l'Ave Maria (Fig. 2). This is another narrow street, with the Paroisse Saint-Paul Saint-Louis Church prominently visible in the distance. Continuing their walk, Jesse and Céline navigate the bustling Rue Saint-Paul in the Marais district, surrounded by the lively ambience of the city. Dynamic camera movements and the inclusion of background activity capture the lively ambience of the street.

LE PURE CAFÉ

Jesse and Céline sit down at Le Pure Café. The café provides a pause in their journey, offering a place for candid and revealing conversation in a more relaxed, intimate setting. It is a moment where time seems to slow down, allowing Jesse and Céline to reflect on their lives after *Before Sunrise.* The café is a quintessential Parisian space, representing a cultural hub where people gather to converse and reflect. It offers a moment of respite and intimacy, contrasting with the bustling streets and more transient locations previously seen. This aligns with the film's themes of intellectualism and emotional depth, highlighting the characters' connection to Parisian culture.

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FIGURE 3. *Before Sunset* - The Café Scene

The café setting allows Jesse and Céline to sit face-to-face, providing an intimate environment where they can share more personal thoughts and memories. The use of static shots and two shots emphasizes the direct interaction between Jesse and Céline (Fig. 3). This approach allows the audience to focus on their dialogue and expressions without the distraction of frequent cuts or camera movement. Close-up shots capture the subtle nuances of their facial expressions, conveying the emotional weight of their words. Medium shots are used to establish the setting and their physical proximity, emphasizing the intimacy of the moment. The lack of background music creates a sense of immediacy and realism, drawing the audience into their intimate dialogue. This grounding in realism reflects the *flâneur's* connection to the urban environment, emphasizing the authenticity of the characters' experience. The act of having coffee and cigarettes, a transient pleasure, contrasts with the enduring nature of their conversation and connection.

PROMENADE PLANTÉE

The elevated view of the city from the Promenade Plantée mirrors the elevated nature of their conversation. Just as the park offers both a literal and figurative elevation from the urban environment, their discussion rises above mundane concerns, diving into the philosophical and emotional layers of their relationship. Wide shots and natural soundscapes create a sense of openness and serenity (Fig. 4). The elevated park thus serves as a metaphor for their attempt to gain a clearer, more reflective perspective on their lives and connections. The representation of the city facilitates in-depth analysis of its diverse elements on philosophical and artistic planes, creating a sense of recognition and understanding, as our perception of the environment we inhabit is intricately shaped by a multifaceted interplay of factors, encompassing economic dynamics, technological advancements, architectural aesthetics, ambient sounds, infrastructural developments, and ecological considerations (Toprak, 2016).

FIGURE 4. *Before Sunset* - Promenade Plantée Scene

Céline's remark, "Memory is a wonderful thing if you don't have to deal with the past" (Linklater, 2004, 34:15), encapsulates a longing for the simplicity of remembrance without the burden of unresolved emotions. This statement reveals her desire to cherish the positive memories while avoiding the pain associated with past mistakes and regrets. Without memory, our conscience would be, in a sense, reborn every moment, completely ignorant of the past. And there would be nothing to us except the present (Bergson, 1965, 2007). Her subsequent comment, "It no longer has that sad ending of us never seeing each other again" (Linklater, 2004, 34:40), reflects an optimistic shift in her outlook. The memory of their past encounter is now tinged with the hope brought about by their present reunion. This reflects how the *flâneur* is in search of experience, not knowledge. For the *flâneur*, the experience remains pure and raw (White, 2001). Jesse's response, "I guess a memory is never finished as long as you are alive" (Linklater, 2004, 34:45), suggests that memories are dynamic, continually evolving as long as one lives.

CANAUXRAMA CRUISE

Jesse and Céline walk along Quai de la Tournelle by the Seine River, deepening their conversation as they stroll by the water. The flowing river serves as a visual metaphor for the passage of time and the continuity of their connection. The characters become *flâneurs*, attuned to the nuances of the city, and their journey takes on an authentic quality as they rediscover places with new perspectives (Benjamin, 1982). While on the stroll, Jesse takes Céline on the Canauxrama, a tourist boat cruise that the couple takes from Quai de la Tournelle to Quai Henri-IV. As they sail underneath Pont de Sully, Pont d'Austerlitz, and Notre Dame, their conversation shifts to past regrets and missed opportunities. Paris is a world meant to be seen by the walker alone, for only the pace of strolling can take in all the rich (if muted) detail (White, 2001). The gentle movement of the camera captures the fluidity of their conversation, emphasizing the seamless flow of their emotional exchange.

FIGURE 5. *Before Sunset* - Canauxrama Cruise Scene

Jesse's decision to take Céline on the Canauxrama further elucidates his *flâneur* tendencies, as this spontaneous shift from walking to cruising represents a continuation of their exploration of the city. Their deviation from the plot's development captures the *flâneur's* innate estrangement from traditional social roles (Fig. 5). As *flâneurs*, they immerse themselves in the urban landscape, moving fluidly through different modes of experiencing the city. The cruise offers a new vantage point, enhancing their engagement with Paris's historical and architectural richness. The sight of the majestic cathedral is a cause for reflection on the fleeting nature of beauty (Harris, 2021). Céline says to Jesse in (Fig. 5), "You have to think that Notre Dame will be gone one day" (Linklater, 2013), an accurate prediction, as it turned out.

Jesse talks about why Céline didn't show up to their agreed meeting years ago and how life would be different if she had. This conversation happens when they are underneath or passing by a bridge, which serves as a metaphor for the liminality of their situation. The transient space under the bridge acts as a crossing threshold, where possibilities and alternate realities are contemplated. Along with them, the audience is encouraged to float along, feeling disoriented and inspired to consider their own lives. Linklater employs these characteristics of the *flâneur* to undermine narrative control over space and promote thoughtful interaction with life and time.

Jesse and Céline speak of love in pointedly disillusioned terms, describing it variously as "an escape for two people who don't know how to be alone", arguing that, contrary to popular belief, "there's really nothing more selfish" (MacDowell, 2013). They also apply what we might call this 'prosaic-realistic' attitude to their own budding relationship, wondering aloud on many occasions what they would inevitably come to find aggravating about one another if they had the opportunity to experience "the temporality of satisfaction" (Shumway, 1991).

LITERAL AND EMOTIONAL JOURNEY TO COUR DE L'ÉTOILE-D'OR

Jesse and Céline get down and walk along Quai Henri-IV, a less crowded section of the Seine. They get into the car, waiting to take Jesse to the airport. But he insists on dropping Céline off at her apartment first, delaying his departure. The transition from Quai Henri-IV to Cour de l'Étoile-d'Or is not just a physical journey but an emotional one. The *flâneur's* journey shifts from the external streets of Paris, surface-level pleasantries to the internal landscapes of Jesse and Céline's depths of their emotional truths. The car ride juxtaposes the temporal continuity of their physical journey with the emotional discontinuity of their relationship. The intensity of this moment is reflected in their unfiltered exchange, laying bare the emotional turmoil and unresolved tensions that have simmered beneath the surface.

The camera remains tightly focused on Jesse and Céline, employing close-ups and medium shots to capture their facial expressions and body language. This deliberate choice emphasizes their emotional states and the rawness of their dialogue. The confined space of the car serves as an intimate framing device. Céline claims she doesn't romanticize things much anymore, but her cynicism is a fragile defence mechanism that quickly falls apart when the conversation turns honest and personal. She has an emotional meltdown and describes how her love life ranges from "deadened to manic depressive" (Deleyto, 2019b). The slight shakiness of the handheld shots reflects the instability and emotional turbulence of the character. The lack of landscape or background shots keeps the focus squarely on the characters, drawing the audience into the immediacy of their interaction.

CÉLINE'S APARTMENT

Céline's apartment represents a shift from the bustling streets of Paris to the quiet, personal confines of her home, signifies a move from the external to the internal, from public personas to private selves. The apartment is a fixed, intimate space filled with her personal belongings, reflecting her tastes, history, and identity. The use of long takes and close-ups in the apartment scenes emphasizes the intimacy of the setting (Fig.6). Deleuze links the affection image to the close-up and defines it as a vehicle for the absorption of a tendency to expression prior to a movement that "replaces the action which has become momentarily or locally impossible" (Deleuze, 1985/1989). These techniques allow the audience to focus on the subtle nuances of Jesse and Céline's interactions, capturing their expressions and body language in detail. The unembellished, lived-in look of the space makes the scenes feel genuine and relatable.

FIGURE 6. *Before Sunset* - At Céline's Apartment Scene

In this concluding phase of their mutual seduction, music becomes central: not only the love song, the waltz, Céline has written for Jesse but also the music of Nina Simone, who had recently passed away in France after a prolonged self-imposed exile from the United States. The film's advocacy for tolerance is subtly highlighted by downplaying Simone's more abrasive activism, instead focusing on the open sensuality of her performances, which is comically impersonated by Céline, who, still performing, becomes more sexually assertive than she had been throughout the film. Temporary contentment and impending physicality, evoked by the presence of a cultural icon from another era, mark the film's end and make Jesse's immediate return to New York and to his wife and childless urgent. Linklater concludes the film with a fade-out on a shot of Céline dancing, juxtaposed with a reverse shot of Jesse's longing gaze with an expression of their desire to spend time together beyond the confines of the film's runtime (Sanders, 2016). Even in its seemingly hurried closure, the film remains hesitant to transform its exploration of intimacy and seductive dialogue into something more definitive. Certainly, the *Before* trilogy is characterized by its openness, epitomizing an aesthetic approach to relating to the world that embraces the renunciation of finality (Xavier, 2021).

CONCLUSION

The research reveals a profound exploration of *flâneur* dynamics, *dérive*, and experimental realism, emphasizing the intricate relationship between characters and urban landscapes. The trilogy's structure, with its nine-year intervals, challenges traditional cinematic realism, offering a hyper-realistic portrayal of time, relationships, and personal growth. The cities of Vienna, Paris, and Greece transcend their roles as mere settings, becoming integral to the narrative and reflective of the characters' emotional landscapes. The concept of the *flâneur* and the practice of *dérive* are pivotal in understanding how Jesse and Céline's experiences and interactions are shaped by their environments. Linklater's innovative approach to time and his collaborative script development process enhances the authenticity and depth of the trilogy, making it a seminal work in the realm of independent cinema and a significant contribution to the discourse on psychogeography and cinematic realism. This research primarily focuses on the depiction of *flâneur* dynamics, *dérive*, and experimental realism within Richard Linklater's *Before* trilogy, thus presenting several limitations. Since the research is rooted in a specific interpretive framework, which may not encompass all the nuances and subtleties present in the films, additionally, examining audience reception and interpretation across different demographics could offer valuable insights into the films' impact and relevance.

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