



Journal of European Periodical Studies

an online journal by ESPRit, European Society for Periodical Research

Strolling the Streets to Discover the Cities: Cosmopolitan Collage in the Independent Magazine *Flaneur*

Natasha Anderson

Journal of European Periodical Studies, 5.2 (Winter 2020)

ISSN 2506-6587

Content is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 Licence

The *Journal of European Periodical Studies* is hosted by Ghent University

Website: ojs.ugent.be/jeps

To cite this article: Natasha Anderson, 'Strolling the Streets to Discover the Cities: Cosmopolitan Collage in the Independent Magazine *Flaneur*', *Journal of European Periodical Studies*, 5.2 (Winter 2020), 31–45

Strolling the Streets to Discover the Cities: Cosmopolitan Collage in the Independent Magazine *Flaneur*

NATASHA ANDERSON

Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz

nanderso@uni-mainz.de

ABSTRACT

The modern indie magazine *Flaneur: Fragments of a Street*, an English-language periodical published in Germany from 2013 onwards and distributed worldwide, examines a single street of a foreign city in each issue via a creative compilation of various visual and visceral materials in order to construct multimedia fragments into a cosmopolitan collage. Owing to its incorporation of sensate components, its focus on transnational networks, and its evocation of the figure of the nineteenth-century *flâneur* in order to bring urban environments to life for its widely dispersed readership, *Flaneur* offers a focal point in the diverse expanse of contemporary independent magazine publications. In order to capture the kaleidoscopic nature of modern life, the publication creates an amalgamation of poetic text, unusual layout, visual input, and haptic interaction within its printed pages. As a result, the interaction between mosaic content and multilayered flexibility within this modern, German magazine functions as the driving force in *Flaneur's* goal to both build imagined communities across borders and establish an embodied, emotional reading experience.

KEYWORDS

Independent magazine, cosmopolitan, collage, *flâneur*, embodied reading

Introduction

How do you capture the experience of strolling through the streets of a foreign city? How do you portray the cacophony of voices and traffic, the multicoloured hues of buildings, the energy and flux of living alongside hundreds of strangers? Preserving the collage of city life on paper is at the heart of the modern independent magazine *Flaneur: Fragments of a Street*. From 2013 onwards, the English-language periodical published in Germany and distributed worldwide has depicted the beauty and diversity of urban environments from across the globe through its creative use of various visual materials to construct multimedia fragments into a cosmopolitan collage. *Flaneur* hereby implements what periodical studies researchers Tim Holmes and Liz Nice have deemed the crucial element of magazines' popularity and widespread success: the 'combination of a kaleidoscopic nature, the provision of pleasure and an ability to evolve, adapt and survive'.¹ The mosaic content and multilayered flexibility of this modern German magazine both form the core of its identity and are the key to its appeal among an international readership.

Transnational connections are a central aspect of *Flaneur*, which identifies itself as an independent or indie magazine with the goal of using 'a single microcosm to tell universal stories'.² Starting with the Kantstrasse in Berlin in 2013, the German publishing team has examined a single street in a different city for each of its eight issues. By traveling to varied locations — from Athens to Taipei, from Montreal to Moscow — the editors mesh global diversity with a focus on specific settings. Owing to its incorporation of sensate components and cosmopolitan subject matter, *Flaneur* offers a focal point in the diverse expanse of contemporary independent magazine publications. By examining the historical resonance, eye-catching content, and visceral appeal of *Flaneur*, this article explores the defining features and community-building potency of indie magazines in general. In this vein, this study employs both an affective and embodied theoretical stance while providing first a definition of indie magazines, then engaging in an overview of the journalistic team and print run of *Flaneur*, before culminating in a close reading of selected issues to highlight the visual and visceral elements of this publication. The affective approach to reading periodicals championed by Fionnuala Dillane helps flesh out the interdependence of magazines' narratives of feeling and the emotive responses of readers. Furthermore, the concept of embodied experientiality, as defined by narratology researcher Marco Caracciolo, plays a central role in ascertaining the participatory facets of the reading experience. This study thus explores via *Flaneur* how, on the one hand, the interplay of visuality and text shapes indie magazine content and, on the other hand, the meshing of change and continuity impacts indie magazine form. Through the intertwining of an international theme, a multicoloured layout, and a haptic print product, *Flaneur* exemplifies how indie magazines manage to both create imagined communities and establish an embodied, emotional reading experience via multimedia content.³

Inception of an Independent Magazine

Modern magazines appear in a wide variety of formats ranging from multicoloured monthlies and thick, annual, artistic prints to digital publications and the face-to-face

1 Tim Holmes and Liz Nice, *Magazine Journalism* (Sage: Los Angeles), p. 2.

2 'Flaneur Magazine: Fragments of a Street', *Flaneur Magazine* (2019) [accessed 4 November 2019].

3 For more information on the intersection between magazine studies and Benedict Anderson's concept of imagined communities, see: Tim Holmes and Jane Bentley, 'Specialist Magazines as Communities of Taste', in *The Routledge Companion to British Media History*, ed. by Martin Conboy and John Steel (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), pp. 273–84.

encounters of pop-up events. As a result, magazine researchers Tim Holmes and Jane Bentley assert that magazines nowadays are both a printed product and an embodied performance between readers and journalists.⁴ Independent magazines form one realization among this broad range of contemporary periodicals and are primarily distinguished by three main features: their publishing structure, their close connection to their audience, and their link to indie subculture.⁵ Indie magazines often start out as small-scale side projects of entrepreneurs, who launch unusual or innovative print runs aimed at specialized communities of interest. In contrast to the many large periodicals floundering lately due to the progressively splintered nature of the potential reading public, indie magazines have gained traction in recent years.⁶ The editing teams behind indie magazines repeatedly adjust their publications to meet their dedicated audiences' needs and thereby form more intimate connections with their readers.⁷ In addition, indie magazines are a product of the modern indie subculture. Linguistics and discourse researcher Sumin Zhao defines the core philosophies of this culture as a 'resistance to mass production and emphasis on creativity and authenticity', thereby stressing divergence from the mainstream. However, Zhao also acknowledges a paradox at the heart of this indie movement, exemplified by magazines that vocally reject capitalist consumerism while simultaneously participating in market culture in order to produce, publish, and circulate their writings.⁸

Flaneur: Fragments of a Street offers a useful sample of the broad spectrum of independent magazines by encompassing all three of these key aspects. A small-scale publishing construct, the publication was launched in 2013 by the entrepreneur Ricarda Messner from Berlin-Charlottenburg, who was only twenty-three years old at the time. Messner embodies the wide spectrum of interests that marks many indie magazine founders as she established a second magazine *Sofa* three years later and currently both writes for the German *Zeit Magazin* and organizes art events. She was featured in Forbes' '2016 30 under 30 Europe: Media' list.⁹ In a 2014 interview, she explains that the guiding principle of *Flaneur* is to illuminate connections between locations, life stories, and local legends through the prism of the street.¹⁰ Messner works with lead editors Fabian Saul and Grashina Gabelmann, as well as the designer studio Y-U-K-I-K-O of Michelle Phillips and Johannes Conrad, while the project manager and main point of contact for the magazine is Estelle Lassus. The editing team customarily spends two months in the city chosen for the newest issue as part of an intensive research trip in order to

4 Holmes and Bentley, p. 276.

5 For more information on the defining features of indie magazines, please consult the headnote "Independent Magazines Today" of this trio of articles examining the role of visuality in modern independent periodicals.

6 Susan E. Thomas, 'Zeroing In on Contemporary, Independent Visual Arts Magazines', *Art Documentation: Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America*, 26.1 (2007), 40–50 (p. 40); Vanessa Thorpe, 'Smart, Cool ... and in Print: How Indy Mags Became all the Rage', *Guardian* (22 July 2018) [accessed 4 November 2019]; Conor Purcell, 'The Rise of Independent Magazines: "It's Never Been Easier"', *Irish Times* (14 May 2018) [accessed 4 November 2019].

7 Sumin Zhao, 'Selling the 'Indie Taste': A Social Semiotic Analysis of *frankie* Magazine', in *Critical Multimodal Studies in Popular Culture*, ed. by Emilia Djonov and Sumin Zhao (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2013), pp. 143–59 (p. 143). This development can be attributed to the same trend which first led to the rise of magazines as early as in the sixteenth century by targeting more specialized audiences than the general readership addressed by newspapers; see Holmes and Nice, pp. 3, 20; Holmes and Bentley, p. 281.

8 Zhao, pp. 143–44. Indie periodicals hereby demonstrate a common feature of magazines, which necessarily pander to public interests and are therefore commonly criticized 'as being too commercially focused [...] and too culturally normative'; see Holmes and Bentley, p. 273.

9 Julian Brimmers, 'On the Importance of Energy and Enthusiasm: An Interview with Publisher and Writer Ricarda Messner', *The Creative Independent* (19 April 2018) [accessed 24 March 2020]; 'Ricarda Messner, 26', *Forbes* (2016) [accessed 22 April 2020].

10 'Ricarda Messner', *Medium: Magazin für Journalisten* (2014) [accessed 4 November 2019].

gather impressions, collect anecdotes, and forge connections on local and individual levels.¹¹ In addition to sending this core team abroad, the periodical gathers drawings, interviews, comics, and poetry by local artists to tell the surprising stories of people who call the street in question their home. *Flaneur* hence balances an international reach with an interpersonal approach.

Issue	Year	Location	Cost
01	2013	Kantstrasse, Berlin, Germany	€ 15.00
02	2013	Georg-Schwarz-Strasse, Leipzig, Germany	€ 11.50
03	2014	Rue Bernard, Montreal, Canada	€ 15.00
04	2015	Corso Vittorio Emmanuele II, Rome, Italy	€ 15.00
05	2015	Fokionos Negri, Athens, Greece	€ 15.00
06	2016	Boulevard Ring, Moscow, Russia	€ 15.00
07	2018	Treze de Maio, São Paulo, Brazil	€ 18.00
08	2019	Kangding Road & Wanda Road, Taipei, Taiwan	€ 18.00

Table 1 Issue Locations and Prices of *Flaneur*, 2013–19¹²

The publication cycle of *Flaneur* fluctuates between biannual and annual rhythms, hereby exemplifying ‘the counter-cultural idea of “slow journalism”’, a central element of indie culture valuing quality of content over rapidity of print releases.¹³ As indicated in Table 1, the first two biannual issues of *Flaneur* in 2013 focused on two major cities in Germany: first Berlin, where the magazine’s publishers are located and where Ricarda Messner spent her childhood, followed by Leipzig. While issue 03 invited the reader on a transatlantic journey to Montreal, Canada, the two subsequent issues shifted the emphasis back to Europe, to the Mediterranean region, with magazines focused on Rome and Athens in 2015. Moving northeast, the capital city of Russia served as the next host city for *Flaneur* in 2016, with a new perspective on the circular layout of the cityscape around the Kremlin. After a one-year hiatus, issue 07 enlarged the bounds of the periodical’s spotlight to the southern hemisphere with São Paulo, Brazil, in its first fully bilingual issue. Whereas issue 07 juxtaposed English and Portuguese on each page, previous prints had included local languages and letters as both introductory and decorative elements on the cover, chapter headings, and supplemental materials. The most recent publication, in 2019, again broke new ground both in expanding the magazine’s focus to East Asia and in examining two streets of a city in issue 08 on Taipei, Taiwan. The new releases were continuously supplemented with a Facebook page as well as Twitter entries, which ran from 2015 to 2017. For their trips to Montreal and São Paulo, the publishing team collaborated with the *Goethe-Institut*, Germany’s

11 ‘Flaneur Magazine’; Grace Wang, ‘Behind the Scenes: Flaneur Magazine’, *Stack Magazines* (December 2016) [accessed 4 November 2019].

13 Thorpe.

cultural institute, and its worldwide network. The outward spiral of the global focus of this periodical, with its multiple oceanic crossings in between individual issues, is traced in the world map of Fig. 1, accentuating the nomadic nature of the magazine. In terms of continental distribution, the majority of issues is located in European cities, with five out of eight issues as of today, while one Asian metropolis has been featured, and one issue each for North and South America.¹⁴

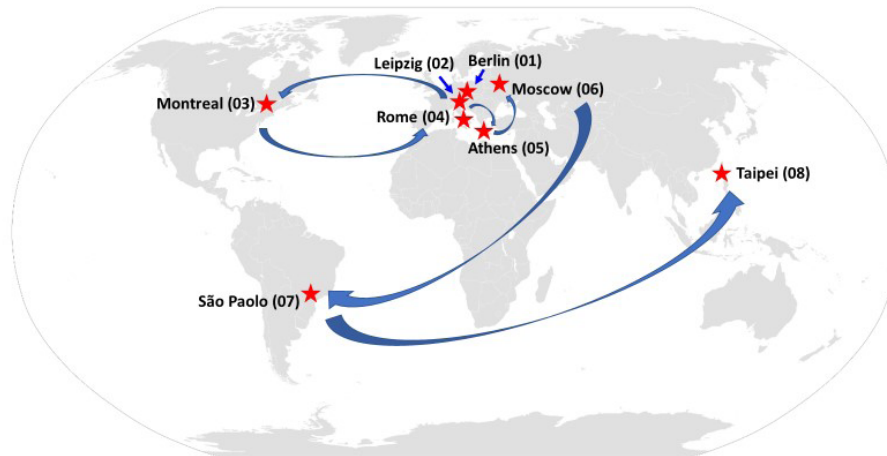


Fig. 1 Map of issue locations with issue numbers of *Flaneur*, 2013–19. Location and movement design by Natasha Anderson (2020). Data from ‘Shop Magazine’, *Flaneur Magazine* (2019) [accessed 4 November 2019]; map outline from Wikimedia Commons (2006)

The network of stockists, bookstores, and magazine sellers offering *Flaneur* is even more expansive than the range of host cities featured so far, stretching across the capital cities and major metropolises of twenty-seven countries on five continents to ensure that the magazine can be purchased all across the world. While the largest number of stockists collaborating with *Flaneur* is located in Germany, the Netherlands, the UK, and the United States, the economic connections of this publication span the globe, reaching to Australia, Lebanon, and Ukraine, to name but a few. This widespread web of distribution and circulation represents a central pillar of independent magazines, which rely financially on dedicated subscribers and often can only be purchased from specialized stores or magazine providers such as the online subscription service Stack Magazines.¹⁵ To showcase the success of *Flaneur*, its original print run of 1,000 copies for the first issue rose to 6,000 by the publication of issue 06 in 2016. On *Flaneur*’s website, the issues on Leipzig, Montreal, and Taipei are even listed as sold out.¹⁶

The Appeal of Idling and the History of the *flâneur*

Already on the opening pages of the magazine’s first issue, the magazine evokes the image of the nineteenth-century *flâneur* by offering a brief overview of the history of the term.¹⁷ The publishers of *Flaneur* focus on the French poet, translator, and literary

14 ‘Shop Magazine’; Thorsten Glotzmann, “‘Flaneur’ Magazine: The Poetry of the Street”, *Goethe Institut* (2016) [accessed 4 November 2019]; Brimmers.

15 ‘Shop Magazine’; Thorpe; Glotzmann.

16 ‘Shop Magazine’; Glotzmann.

17 Glotzmann.

critic Charles Baudelaire, who first popularized the concept of the idle man-about-town in his 1863 article ‘The Painter of Modern Life’. In his study of modernity, he describes this luxuriously ambulatory figure as a ‘painter of the passing moment’, a ‘passionate spectator’, and an ‘observer of life’. By means of these descriptions, Baudelaire portrays the *flâneur* as an ideal of modernity, a casual wanderer fully immersed in the present and bringing to light the subtleties and intricacies of everyday life through his acute observations. Additionally, Baudelaire associates the *flâneur* with a cosmopolitan worldview because an innate receptivity and global awareness allows this ambler to grasp the complexity of the world as a whole, much like ‘a kaleidoscope gifted with consciousness [...] reproducing the multiplicity of life’. The figure of the *flâneur* not only gathers impressions with the sensibility of an artist but is keenly attuned to the inherent intricacy and chaotic energy of the urban environment.¹⁸

The modern *Flaneur* magazine directly links to this nineteenth-century image by presenting a mosaic of impressions as if through the eyes of a pedestrian. Throughout the pages, the reader discovers wonders of the urban landscape hidden in plain sight. It is an unhurried, luxurious approach — a counterweight to the speed and stress of the digital age. The street becomes a source of vitality and a place of reflective repose where one can lose oneself in the act of observing the vibrant, ever-changing collage of ordinary life. As historian and French language researcher Aimée Boutin describes, *flânerie*, or the act of embodying the qualities of a *flâneur*, is an immersive practice that engrosses all senses while slowly strolling and methodically scrutinizing the urban environment. This ‘multisensorial’ involvement with metropolitan surroundings blurs the boundaries of within and without for the perceptive ambler in the same manner as the different issues of *Flaneur* magazine draw the reader into the textual, visual, and haptic experience of exploring foreign locations.¹⁹ Consequently, *Flaneur* not only offers artistic content and cosmopolitan insights, but also prescribes a lifestyle that values a calm and casual philosophy with a love for the everyday aesthetic of the vibrant cityscape. This independent magazine enacts its indie cultural ideal of placing quality above quantity by creating a space within its pages for readers to escape the hassle of modernity. This publication thus invites its audience to participate in establishing a shared practice of taking time to appreciate and reflect on the world around them.²⁰

In order to achieve this meticulous investigation of the urban lifestyle, each issue of *Flaneur* is tailored to reflect the unique atmosphere of the chosen street. By accentuating the diversity of locations featured in *Flaneur*, the magazine merges the appeal of innovation offered by what the periodical researcher Fionnuala Dillane terms the ‘polyvocality of an individual issue’ with the ‘serially reinforced, distinctive, singular identity’ of the publication as a whole. While the design of each issue varies widely, the common elements of a multitude of photos, artistic blends of art and text, as well as the prominent title on the cover make *Flaneur* recognizable in its many different iterations. Dillane argues that this interaction creates a ‘dynamic interplay of sameness and difference’, as exemplified by the way *Flaneur*’s cover designs foreground the local

18 Charles Baudelaire, ‘The Painter of Modern Life’, in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. and ed. by Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon Press, 1964), pp. 1–40 (pp. 5, 9, 15).

19 Aimée Boutin, ‘Rethinking the Flâneur: Flânerie and the Senses’, *Dix-Neuf*, 16.2 (2012), 124–32 (pp. 125–26) [accessed 11 November 2019].

20 *Flaneur* hereby goes against the grain of the mainstream while simultaneously incorporating modern trends because, in recent years, the figure of the *flâneur* has experienced a renewed surge of popularity. One such example is an art exhibition at the Kunsthalle Bonn in Germany in 2018, which displayed paintings of cityscapes and even invited the journalistic team of *Flaneur* to describe how this innovative magazine was founded.

ambiance through a distinctive blend of photography, colour, and composition.²¹ For instance, the bright blue background intermixed with swirls of rainbow hues on the cover of the Athens issue from 2015 references the underground river flowing beneath Fokionos Negri, a street in the Greek capital city. In comparison, the golden title and graceful design of issue 4 in the same year mirrors the stately buildings overlooking the Corso Vittorio Emanuele II in Rome. On this cover, the stately marble interior and golden ornamentation of the photographed room contrast sharply with the simple electric fan in the middle of the image, visualizing the juxtaposition of antiquity and modernity in the eternal city. As a third example, the stark colours and bold script of issue 07 reflect the urban beauty and vitality of the Rua Treze de Maio in São Paulo. The brilliant red pigment of the text teeters between invigorating and unsettling, while the person shown in the center of the photograph adds a degree of intrigue by facing away from the camera, thus inviting the reader to open the magazine and discover more.²² The various realizations of *Flaneur's* title pages present individual localities by means of different eye-catching compositions of colour and images, yet all communicate the vibrancy of metropolitan life in equal measure.

This balance between highlighting the unique aspects and underlying similarities of each city is extended both geographically and temporally. In the foreword for issue 02, lead editor Fabian Saul draws attention to parallels between the urban life of the issue's host city Leipzig and the expansion of metropolises throughout history encompassing Alexandria, Rome, London, and New York.²³ Through this merging of the contemporary and the chronological, the individual and the international, *Flaneur* aims to revive the nineteenth-century tradition of grasping the soul of a city as a pedestrian. The magazine consequently concentrates on the embodied experience of walking the streets and observing the ever-changing cityscape. Because the setting is explored on an interpersonal level, where the sensations of perambulation take center stage, rather than through the removed lens of a travel guide, the magazine aims to leave a lasting impact upon the reader's understanding of the city. Grashina Gabelmann, one of the two lead editors of the independent magazine, elucidates in a 2016 interview that strolling through a city in the tradition of the *flâneur* can be an eye-opening experience: 'Once you begin to look around, you see yourself reflected in others. The at times alienating experience of being in a city becomes more intimate. Everything slows down as you zoom into gestures, facial expressions and reactions. It's soothing. You're not actually alone.'²⁴ The observer can feel connection without constraint and freedom without alienation. Studying strangers in an urban crowd becomes a method of recognition and reinvention for the engaged individual while balancing unity and anonymity.

Reading as Cosmopolitan Collage

Via its creative content, *Flaneur* first and foremost constructs a cosmopolitan collage. Collage is an intrinsic part of the magazine genre, in which publications act as a form of 'curatum ... [or] a body of work gathered together from disparate sources but with a specific purpose' that brings together disparate elements of text, typography, illustration, and advertisement into a coherent whole.²⁵ *Flaneur* transforms the mode of combining

21 Fionnuala Dillane, 'Forms of Affect, Relationality, and Periodical Encounters, or "Pine-Apple for the Million"', *Journal of European Periodical Studies*, 1.1 (2016), 5–24 (pp. 6–7) [accessed 9 November 2019].

22 'Shop Magazine'. For references of *Flaneur's* multicoloured covers, visit the magazine's [website](#).

23 Fabian Saul, 'Promises of a Metropolis', *Flaneur*, no. 2 (2013), 3.

24 Wang.

25 Holmes and Bentley, p. 275.

multimedia components into the central aesthetic and philosophy of the periodical, as underscored by the provocative opening text of issue 07:

Raw as you are, you do not present yourself in a narrated form. [...] Is it okay to write in fragments? We could trim and order until the wildernesses of our worlds are visitable gardens, but that would not be true. First we must notice and acknowledge all the little pieces and then we must collect and revitalize them. Then they can live side by side.²⁶

The passage is displayed on a ripped piece of paper torn into two pieces and haphazardly arranged side by side against a vibrant, rainbow background. The unsettling yet beautiful visualization reflects the message of the text, which praises the authentic and aesthetic value of employing dissimilar pieces of information in magazines. This emphasis on fragments concurs with the very title of the magazine, *Flaneur: Fragments of a Street*, and celebrates the use of broken sentences, incomplete thoughts, and disharmonious words. Rather than try to organize these textual particles into a false symmetry, the magazine emulates realistic speech by accentuating the disjointed structure that permeates everyday life. For the publishers of this periodical, veracity lies in the collage of impressions pieced together from the cityscape, bringing together snapshots of streets, splinters of artwork, and snippets of residents' voices. The flaws and fissures that appear in this disorderly mosaic leave space both for creativity from contributing artists and personal interpretations from readers. The publishers of *Flaneur* thus evoke a central tenet of indie culture — that a genuine representation of reality reflects the coarse and commonplace imperfections of everyday life — as their magazine celebrates the honest beauty of broken pieces arranged into a vivid and creative new whole.²⁷

In order to further illuminate the transnational cooperation and authentic interaction with locals that fuels the composition process, the magazine features multilingual texts in most of its issues. These range from supplements in Italian on the final pages of issue 04 to Mandarin translations in the newest issue on Taipei. As a result, *Flaneur* captures an immersive experience by letting the page reflect the intermixing of diverse tongues found in the urban environment. At the same time, the co-founder of the magazine Ricarda Messner asserts that the English text allows readers from an international background to connect with foreign cities, as the epiphany that 'these streets contain so many different stories that are universally relatable' ties together the worldwide network of readers and writers.²⁸ The core of the magazine's linguistic appeal is the play of language via both prose and poetry. In issue 04 on Rome, the street Corso Vittorio Emanuele II gains spatiotemporal depth stretching back through the centuries in Fabian Saul's collection of anecdotes, which juxtapose emperors and prime ministers, popes and poets, long-dead gladiators and modern tourists. Alternatively, a single location can gain complexity through a resident's activity, thus letting space become saturated with motion and intention. In the photo essay 'Pesce Coordinata', the artist Carlo Gabriele Tribbioli literally unfolds the elaborateness of a single task in both pictures and captions by documenting the details of his fishing enterprise on the shore of the Tiber river across a triple fold-out page. The assortment of perspectives featured in this issue are unified by an overarching, elegant layout and pale colour scheme evident throughout the magazine. Pictures of ancient, marble statues sit beside interviews of denizens and literary quotes to merge past and present in a palimpsest

26 Grashina Gabelmann and Fabian Saul, 'Narrative', *Flaneur*, no. 7 (2018), 3.

27 Zhao, p. 148.

28 Brimmers.

of an ever-changing city. The amalgamation of personal stories in such various formats enables *Flaneur* to celebrate chaotic creativity and kindle an atmosphere of intimacy.²⁹

While issue 04 conveys the grandeur of Rome, issue 07 goes even further in emphasizing the energy galvanizing the modern environment of São Paulo. By depicting both English and Portuguese on every page, the text stands in dialogue with itself and foregrounds the cross-border communication captured within the magazine. For example, an interview with a local artist transitions from a description of his work procedure into an almost philosophical rumination on the similarities between the Portuguese word *tradição* meaning 'tradition' and the term *traição* for 'betrayal'. In another contribution, lines of poetry akin to a flow of consciousness unspool across the page to show the rapid pace of urban life, while simultaneously inviting the reader to decelerate and unpack the tangled thoughts.³⁰ Above all, the distinctive, metropolitan atmosphere is imparted via visuality. Bold background designs, large pictures, and historical photographs juxtaposed against modern-day images decorate the pages, creating a patchwork of colours that is vibrant, at times even overwhelming and confusing. As depicted in the covers featured on the magazine's [website](#), the polychrome saturation of *Flaneur* forces the reader to slow down and search for information. The entire page is filled, from topic lines written in the margins to words layered over graphics, as evidenced in the sample pages shown in the 2018 interview of Ricarda Messner by *The Creative Independent*.³¹ Throughout the magazine, clear-cut borders of geography, layout, and thought blur as text, typography, and design fuse into one.

Reading as Visceral Experience

Flaneur transforms reading into a visceral experience through its incorporation of diverse visual, haptic, and interactive elements. What first strikes the reader upon encountering the periodical is its weight. With individual issues ranging from 110 pages in the first issue to 290 pages for issue 07, the magazine has the heft and appearance of a museum art catalogue brimming with colourful photographs and scholarly contributions. Diverging from the lightweight, glossy form of weekly or monthly magazines, this periodic publication exhibits a sense of artistic authority and permanence. While the content highlights the vibrancy and vitality of the lived experience captured on the page, the magazine itself promises endurance. In contrast to digital reading material, the magazine is here to stay, to grace a coffee table or adorn a bookshelf, but, above all, to not fade away into the amorphous ether of the ever-evolving Internet. Following the model of the nineteenth-century *flâneur*, the publication's hefty format expects a greater investment of time from the reader to meticulously inspect the text, images, and layout in order to derive the full benefit from the indie magazine.

The individual pages, moreover, have noticeably different qualities, ranging from thick paper to smoother, indented pages. As Zhao argues, the increasing ubiquity of digital media opens up opportunities 'for magazines to explore the affordances and semiotic resources that are unique to print media, such as tactile texture'.³² The engagement of the audience with the page brings the magazine to life by asserting its materiality and presence. This brings the far-away places explored in *Flaneur* close enough to touch

29 Fabian Saul, 'Traces of Resistance', *Flaneur*, no. 4 (2015), 130–40; Carlo Gabriele Tribbioli, 'Pesce Coordinata', *Flaneur*, no. 4 (2015), 96–99; Cecilia Canziani and others, 'Questione Romana', *Flaneur*, no. 4 (2015), 16–51.

30 Grashina Gabelmann and Fabian Saul, 'Alessandro Marques', *Flaneur*, no. 7 (2018), 89–91; Camila Svenson and Pétala Lopes, 'Marcela', *Flaneur*, no. 7 (2018), 258–68.

31 'Shop Magazine'; Brimmers.

32 Zhao, p. 147.

for the audience while adding nuances of meaning to the act of reading. The reader's embodied experience is enhanced by flipping through pages that vary in accordance with the images depicted. For instance, issue 04 on Rome includes small, paper insets almost akin to postcards that divide the magazine into different parts. Changes in page size give the reader pause while perusing the periodical and concomitantly organize the publication. As a further example, issue 07 on São Paulo utilizes glossy photos for selected articles in contrast to the heavy, matte paper that dominates the rest of the publication. These glossy pages feature high-quality photographs of different cuts of veal, capturing the texture of the meat in excruciating detail on an unblemished white background. The clean, smooth surface of these pages contrasts jarringly with the gory snapshots of meat implying the vitally important cattle industry of Brazil.³³

Furthermore, *Flaneur* offers a host of complementary materials to strengthen the bonds of imagined community among the magazine's global readership.³⁴ Online supplements provide an additional glimpse of city life through blog posts and so-called 'Unprintables' featuring videos and music. Audiovisual components that cannot be captured in ink are shared with the audience via digital means. *Flaneur's* regularly updated homepage offers an overview of its most recent publications and associated stockists, while its Facebook page announces lectures, workshops, and get-togethers in Berlin and London that celebrate the release of new issues. The magazine's online presence aids in both 'cultivating a virtual community of taste' and reinforcing a communal identity. By hosting special events, *Flaneur's* publishers bring together their readers scattered across various countries in order to transmute the transient bonds of an imagined community into the physical experience of face-to-face encounters.³⁵

As an additional example of activating reader interest, gaps are deliberately left in the narrative to invite the audience to participate through creative interpretations and self-insertions. This relates to narratology researcher Marco Caracciolo's theory of experientiality, in which he delineates the active engagement of readers with narratives. Openings in the text encourage readers to 'project' themselves 'into the empty deictic center in order to fill a gap the text has left' for them to find, allowing the narrative to remain supple and encourage imaginative encounters with the story.³⁶ This procedure plays a central role in the guiding philosophy of *Flaneur*, based on the creativity inspired by fragments and the importance of communal interaction. As Dillane argues, periodical networks go beyond flows of finances, nodes of people, and trajectories of material exchanges to also include ephemeral — yet vitally important — affective engagements. Appeals to corporeal experience within the magazine, as well as corresponding embodied and emotional responses among readers, build bridges between producers and recipients.³⁷ For instance, the preparatory note for issue 02 on Leipzig highlights the emotive resonance of *Flaneur* by stating that the examination of a single city mirrors the exploration of the self. The introduction argues that amid the disharmonious energies of modernity, a coherent identity has become a 'phantom of the modern world' and 'a fabrication. One of its own making. By one's own will, one cobbles together what is left behind. [...] Out of the past promises, a new city grows slowly'.³⁸ In this text,

33 'People of the Corso', *Flaneur*, no. 4 (2015), 56–57; André Penteado, 'Treze de Maio Photographs', *Flaneur*, no. 7 (2018), 225–238 (pp. 228–29).

34 While the concept of imagined community as introduced by Benedict Anderson originally refers to the formation of national identities, the cross-border circulation of periodicals expands the potency of communal bonds to networks of dispersed individuals united through print and common interests.

35 Holmes and Bentley, p. 280–81.

36 Marco Caracciolo, *The Experientiality of Narrative: An Enactivist Approach*, Narratologia (De Gruyter, 2017), p. 169.

37 Dillane, pp. 5, 7, 9–10.

38 Saul, 'Promises', p. 3.

a discussion of identity morphs into a study of an urban landscape. The rebuilding of Leipzig at the end of the Cold War thus becomes an echo of the individual musing on the meaning of personal identity amid the hectic confusions of modern life. Reading and reflecting upon the self are depicted as two sides of the same coin. *Flaneur* thus draws readers into the participatory project of constructing a new understanding of a city and coincidentally reinventing themselves through transformative insights.

By weaving together historical afterlives and modern aspects, literary depth and visual zest, as well as haptic materiality and multimedia diversity, *Flaneur* aims for an impression of unpredictability. Each issue illuminates the unexplored recesses of a different city to excite its audience anew. The balance of incorporating change and disrupting expectations is a vital component in engaging the reader by creating a productive tension between the familiar identity of a magazine and the innovative appeal of new issues.³⁹ This shifting between recognition and reinvention also applies to communal interaction such as panels at magazine conventions, interactive workshops in art museums, and get-togethers to announce the publication of new issues. One example of such face-to-face interaction is the launch party *Flaneur* hosted at the end of August 2019 to celebrate the release of the newest issue on Taipei, which won two Stack Awards for Magazine of the Year and Art Director of the Year. This Flaneur Festival offered exclusive lectures by the artists and local contributors to the magazine on such diverse topics as tea production, democracy in Taiwan, and the potency of ‘publishing as a tool of activism’. It received funding from both German and Taiwanese government organizations such as the ‘Goethe-Institut, the General Assembly of Chinese Culture, the cultural department of the Taipei Representative Office and the Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen’.⁴⁰ The August 2019 get-together encouraged transnational encounters and exchanges among all participants as the event was free of cost and engaged all senses, with local dishes, multimedia performances, music, karaoke, and stargazing in order to transform the imagined community of the magazine into a visceral and memorable experience.⁴¹ This is how a reciprocal cycle emerges between the print and interpersonal sides of the magazine, with the affect generated in the print medium fueling emotive encounters within the relational networks and vice versa. As Fig. 2 visualizes, the interplay of affect and community creates a feedback loop which both strengthens the transcontinental, communal ties of *Flaneur*’s readership and reinforces the visceral experience that forms the crux of the magazine’s appeal.

Above all, the experience of engaging with *Flaneur* is a journey of discovery that invites readers to participate in observing, analyzing, and understanding the urban landscape. In a 2016 interview, lead editor Fabian Saul reinforces this central philosophy by stating that *Flaneur* seeks first and foremost to create a sense of ‘empathy’ connecting people across geographical, cultural, and linguistic borders. The magazine encourages its audience to not just survey but immerse themselves in a city by knitting emotional bonds with a foreign environment and identifying themselves with the residents they encounter. Saul explains that the periodical aims to awaken compassion and cosmopolitan awareness in readers by ‘[f]inding the universal in subjective stories and making those stories go beyond their geographical setting, in an attempt to highlight the common struggles of the human experience’.⁴² He stresses that the central purpose of the magazine is an

39 Dillane, p. 12.

40 ‘Stack Awards 2019’, *Stack Magazines* (2019) [accessed 17 November 2019]; ‘Flaneur Festival’, *Do You Read Me?!* (30 August 2019) [accessed 17 November 2019]; ‘Flaneur Festival’, *Haus der Kulturen der Welt* (2019) [accessed 17 November 2019].

41 ‘Flaneur Festival: Fragments of a Street Taipei’, *Flaneur Magazine* (30 August 2019) [accessed 17 November 2019].

42 Wang.

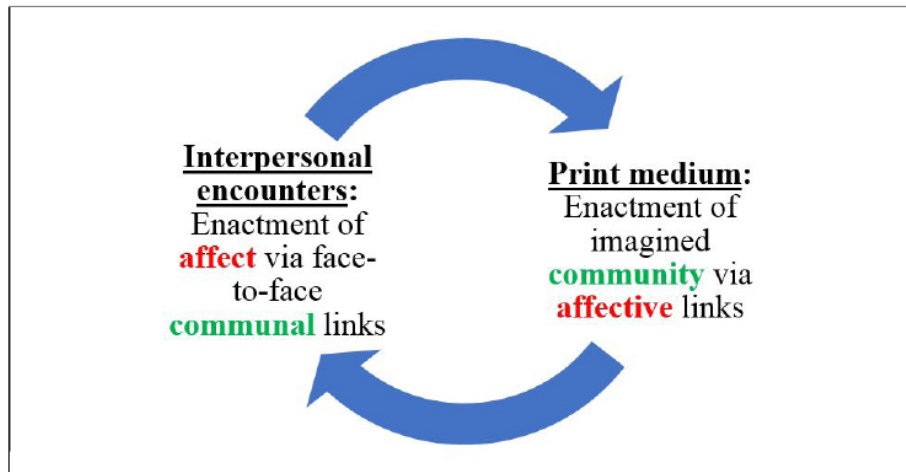


Fig. 2 Cycle of affect and community

intensive and personal deep dive into a city that can be simultaneously wholly alien and hauntingly familiar for the reader. The collocation of visceral descriptions and philosophical reflections serves to awaken this sense of recognition within the reader, as exemplified in the opening pages of issue 07, which simulate the external and internal experience of walking through the Brazilian capital city:

And while the heat leads us up the hill, layer by layer, Treze de Maio reveals itself. We know there is a long way to go as we walk down the street with samba and music from the Northeast humming in the background. [...] Perhaps the process of engaging others is how we might eventually see the whole.⁴³

The sights, scents, and sounds of São Paulo are woven together into a tapestry of sensation that stimulates the reader's visceral imagination. As Caracciolo argues, textual references to embodied experiences activate readers' sensate memories and thereby stimulate an immersive and memorable reading involvement.⁴⁴ In addition, the arrangement of the photographs throughout the magazine mimics the movement of the eye roving across the streetscape. In one section of issue 07, the assembly of several snapshots creates a visual essay documenting the photographer's walk without any complementary text interrupting the pictorial composition.⁴⁵ While the individual images initially give an ambience of fragmentation, the steady progression of pages recreates the sensation of an unhurried stroll. The reader can study passing pedestrians, peek over garden walls, and glimpse into open doorways as if standing shoulder-to-shoulder with the travelling journalist. No story is given, no context, just brief impressions and the lingering question of who that stranger may be. The identity of the figures is left a mystery for the reader to solve, thus spurring the audience to activate memory and imagination. The ambiguity in *Flaneur* offers openings for the readers to insert their own interpretations and speculations, perhaps even identify with the unknown figures. Whenever readers step up to fill a gap left purposefully by the team of writers, editors, and photographers, they make the magazine their own. This narrative strategy personalizes the periodical for the audience by encouraging active engagement with the content. In sum, the magazine

43 Grashina Gabelmann and Fabian Saul, 'Arrival', *Flaneur*, no. 7 (2018), 4–5.

44 Caracciolo, *Experientiality*, p. 169.

45 Felipe Russo, 'Treze de Maio Photographs', *Flaneur*, no. 7 (2018), 36–45; Viva Meyer, 'Treze de Maio Photographs', *Flaneur*, no. 7 (2018), 86.

sparks a celebration of variety while reflecting the difficult yet compelling search for coherence amid the barely tamed chaos of the city.

Conclusion

As displayed by this detailed look at *Flaneur: Fragments of a Street*, modern independent magazines utilize the unification of differences as the cornerstone of their identity. By means of both multifaceted content and serialized form, indie magazines seek to surprise their readers with intensive insights while continuously kindling the interest of their audience. *Flaneur* exemplifies this strategy via the interplay of varied visuality and artistic text in order to capture and communicate the complexity of metropolitan life, all within the familiar framework of a serial publication. Throughout its print run, the content-rich magazine has assembled a cosmopolitan collage of seemingly spontaneous sights, snippets of sounds, snapshots of feeling, and fragments of sensation into provocative and unique patterns that distill the essence of diverse cityscapes. In each of its eight issues focusing on settings scattered across the world, *Flaneur* encourages a global perspective that balances the indie goal of portraying an unvarnished reality with the nineteenth-century *flâneur*'s ideal of perambulatory observation. Without zooming in on well-known tourist attractions, the magazine explores the backstreets and hidden corners of cities in order to find authenticity in the mosaic of urban life and to promote a vicarious sensation of traveling the world. By both simulating visceral experiences via photography and offering interpretive openings throughout the text, *Flaneur* demonstrates how indie magazines encourage their readers to imaginatively interact with the publication in order to heighten the personal connection between medium and recipient. Moreover, *Flaneur*'s digital supplements and face-to-face events illustrate how modern independent magazines successfully employ affective and embodied facets of participatory engagement to unite transnational communities of authors, artists, and audience spread across several continents. While the magazine's website does not indicate any plans for upcoming publications, other corners of the world still wait to welcome Messner's team. Will the next issue feature avenues of Africa or Australia? Will the periodical explore in the tradition of the nineteenth-century *flâneur* the boulevards of Paris? No matter where the journey takes the curious reader, the magazine promises a cosmopolitan approach with artistic and literary content. Just as a collection of different streets together forms a vibrant city, so does the kaleidoscopic combination of diverse fragments constitute the unique appeal of *Flaneur*.

Natasha Anderson is a Doctoral Research Fellow in the Department of English and Linguistics, examining the Victorian visceral novel reader in a project funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG), at the Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, Germany. She earned her MA in American Studies at the University of Mainz, and attained her BA in English and History at the University of Stuttgart. She spent a year abroad on scholarship at Marymount University in Virginia, USA, and represented the University of Mainz at the Institute for World Literature 2019 at Harvard University. She recently organized the virtual international workshop "Connecting the Dots": Conceptualising "Trace" in the Nexus of Novels and Readers' Sensory Imaginings' and presented at international conferences in Athens, Greece; Dublin, Ireland; as well as Bonn and Passau, Germany.

Bibliography

- Baudelaire, Charles, 'The Painter of Modern Life', in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. and ed. by Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon Press, 1964), pp. 1–40
- 'BlankMap-World6 – Maps of the World', *Wikimedia Commons* (12 November 2006) [accessed 17 November 2019]
- Boutin, Aimée, 'Rethinking the Flâneur: Flânerie and the Senses', *Dix-Neuf*, 16.2 (July 2012), 124–32 [accessed 11 November 2019]
- Brimmers, Julian, 'On the Importance of Energy and Enthusiasm: An Interview with Publisher and Writer Ricarda Messner', *The Creative Independent* (19 April 2018) [accessed 24 March 2020]
- Canziani, Cecilia, and others, 'Questione Romana', *Flaneur*, no. 4 (2015), 16–51
- Caracciolo, Marco, *The Experientiality of Narrative: An Enactivist Approach*, Narratologia (De Gruyter, 2017)
- Dillane, Fionnuala, 'Forms of Affect, Relationality, and Periodical Encounters, or "Pine-Apple for the Million"', *Journal of European Periodical Studies*, 1.1 (2016), 5–24 [accessed 9 November 2019]
- 'Flaneur Festival', *Do You Read Me?!* (30 August 2019) [accessed 17 November 2019]
- 'Flaneur Festival', *Haus der Kulturen der Welt* (2019) [accessed 17 November 2019]
- 'Flaneur Festival: Fragments of a Street Taipei', *Flaneur Magazine* (30 August 2019) [accessed 17 November 2019]
- 'Flaneur Magazine: Fragments of a Street', *Flaneur Magazine* (2019) [accessed 4 November 2019]
- Gabelmann, Grashina, and Fabian Saul, 'Alessandro Marques', *Flaneur*, no. 7 (2018), 89–91
- , 'Arrival', *Flaneur*, no. 7 (2018), 4–5
- , 'Narrative', *Flaneur*, no. 7 (2018), 3
- Glotzmann, Thorsten, "'Flaneur' Magazine: The Poetry of the Street", *Goethe Institut* (2016) [accessed 4 November 2019]
- Holmes, Tim, 'Magazines and Promotion', in *Promotional Culture and Convergence: Markets, Methods, Media*, ed. by Helen Powell (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 173–90
- , and Jane Bentley, 'Specialist Magazines as Communities of Taste', in *The Routledge Companion to British Media History*, ed. by Martin Conboy and John Steel (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), pp. 273–84
- , and Liz Nice, *Magazine Journalism* (Sage: Los Angeles)
- Meyer, Viva, 'Treze de Maio Photographs', *Flaneur*, no. 7 (2018), 86
- Penteado, André, 'Treze de Maio Photographs', *Flaneur*, no. 7 (2018), 225–38
- 'People of the Corso', *Flaneur*, no. 4 (2015), 56–57
- Purcell, Conor, 'The Rise of Independent Magazines: "It's Never Been Easier"', *Irish Times* (14 May 2018) [accessed 4 November 2019]
- 'Ricarda Messner', *Medium: Magazin für Journalisten* (2014) [accessed 4 November 2019]
- 'Ricarda Messner, 26', *Forbes* (2016) [accessed 22 April 2020]
- Russo, Felipe, 'Treze de Maio Photographs', *Flaneur*, no. 7 (2018), 36–45
- Saul, Fabian, 'Promises of a Metropolis', *Flaneur*, no. 2 (2013), 3
- , 'Traces of Resistance', *Flaneur*, no. 4 (2015), 130–40
- 'Shop Magazine', *Flaneur Magazine* (2019) [accessed 4 November 2019]
- 'Stack Awards 2019', *Stack Magazines* (2019) [accessed 17 November 2019]
- Svenson, Camila, and Pétala Lopes, 'Marcela', *Flaneur*, no. 7 (2018), 258–68

- Thomas, Susan E., 'Zeroing In on Contemporary, Independent Visual Arts Magazines', *Art Documentation: Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America*, 26.1 (2007), 40–50
- Thorpe, Vanessa, 'Smart, Cool ... and in Print: How Indy Mags Became all the Rage', *Guardian* (22 July 2018) [accessed 4 November 2019]
- Tribbioli, Carlo Gabriele, 'Pesce Coordinata', *Flaneur*, no. 4 (2015), 96–99
- Wang, Grace, 'Behind the Scenes: Flaneur Magazine', *Stack Magazines* (December 2016) [accessed 4 November 2019]
- Zhao, Sumin, 'Selling the 'Indie Taste': A Social Semiotic Analysis of *frankie* Magazine', in *Critical Multimodal Studies in Popular Culture*, ed. by Emilia Djonov and Sumin Zhao (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2013), pp. 143–59