Montreal
Architectural
Review

Between Built and Dreamt: The Contested Urbanscapes of New York City through Walking on the High Line

Ke Sun
University of Florida

Abstract

This research investigates the urban sphere beyond its physical condition and studies it as a transcendent phenomenological field that engages memory, imagination, and dream. By using the perception of Benjaminian *flâneur* as a phenomenological method to investigate the subconscious layers of New York City's urbanscapes, this research argues that the embodied experience of the *flâneur* transcends the physical urban space into a surrealist dream world. This contestation between built and dreamt asks us to rethink urban space as a sphere of precarious emergence where experiences reform from memory, poetically perceived images surface from imagination, and embodied consciousness attuned to public spheres arises from dream. The research conducts its theoretical inquiry of urban contestations through a surrealist framework that assesses the perception of the *flâneur* from a phenomenological perspective and focuses on the relationship between the High Line and New York City to investigate a particular urbanscape of contestations that challenges the boundaries between real and surreal, dream and un-dream, past and present, emergence and nostalgia. It further argues that the phenomenological experience of the *flâneur* evokes memory, imagination, and dream to transform the physicality of urban space into an atmospheric

domain of subjective consciousness. In the case of High Line, this domain finds its home in the latent surrealist world that contests the reality of the built world by instilling subjective architectural uncanniness. For the *flâneur*, the High Line becomes a place of departure that traces past experiences back to memory, a site of voyeurism that channels imagination, and a threshold between dream and reality.

Prologue: Contested Urbanscapes

The so-called "objective" studies of urban space and urbanism often fixate on the programmatic datum and physicality of inhabited cities, invariably foregoing the horizons of the ephemerality and multiplicity of the contestations among experienced and perceived urbanscapes. But built urban space is not just a permanent homogenous domain in accordance with the Cartesian understanding of spatial quality. It is a sphere of precarious emergence where experiences reform from memory, poetically perceived images surface from imagination, and embodied consciousness attuned to public spheres arises from dream. One experiences the urban space as both the spectator and the participant who is enthralled with an "enigmatic depth" through embodied consciousness. Differing from the three-dimensional Cartesian space, the "enigmatic depth" is the depth of poetic experience attuned to the built environment that induces the spatio-temporal dimension of the urban space.[1] Henri Lefebvre argues that the Cartesian concept of space is "the result neither of intellectual construction nor of sensory elaboration but which is, rather, given *en bloc* as suprasensory purity, as infinitude."[2] This research investigates the urban sphere beyond its physical condition and studies it as a transcendent phenomenological field that engages memory, imagination, and dream. It offers a humanistic approach to urbanism to reveal the latent layers of consciousnesses in the contested urban fields that are the union of body, mind, and soul.

To contextualize the contestation of multidimensional urbanscapes, the research investigates the urban sphere of New York City in general and the repurposed post-industrial ruin of the High Line Park in particular, in order to understand the depth of urban experience and the oscillating of urbanscapes between the built and the dreamt. In a collective volume *New York, New York!: Urban Spaces, Dreamscapes, Contested Territories* Sabine Sielke contends that New York City is a perpetual "divisive terrain… projected in the American cultural imaginary as Promised Land and 'city upon a hill' and as Sodom and Gomorrah,…[with] urban spaces [that] have always kept shape-shifting, creating novel dreamscapes and newly contested territories to be explored."[3] The subjective experience of New York City transforms urban

space into an amorphous domain comprised of moods, sensations, images, nostalgia, and emergence. This differing perception of urbanscapes challenges the stagnancy and permanency of the physically built world by evoking embodied consciousness.

The subjective layer of perceived urban space calls into question the reality of the built environment. This revelation of conflict and disparity between the two urbanscapes is prevalent in surrealist investigations of urban fabrics, of which Paris has been a primary case-study. Susan Buck-Morss argues that the surrealists experience Paris both "as something objective and as something dreamt," and their "fascination with urban phenomena" produces the "Surrealist" face of Paris that embodies poetic images which had "the psychic force of memory traces in the unconscious."[4] The agent that operates such transfiguration and mediates between the dichotomous urban fields is the urban *flâneur*. The peripatetic *flâneur*, historically the nineteenth-century urban stroller in Paris, leisurely traverses the city and perceives the urban sphere through embodied movement and spontaneous visual ecstasy charged with imagination.

The *flâneur*'s investigation of the city opens up the latent dream world of the urban fabric. In the essay "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century (1939)," Walter Benjamin writes that "The *flâneur* seeks refuge in the crowd. The crowd is the veil through which the familiar city is transformed for the *flâneur* into phantasmagorias."[5] Eli Friedlander describes the *flâneur*'s experiences of the arcades as a "dream configuration" that manifests a field of meaning emerging from the collective memory of the past.[6] The phantasmagorias perceived by the traditional *flâneurs* resonate with Paris's dreamscape later experienced by the surrealists who had ventured into the subconscious layer of the urban space. Using the perception of the *flâneur* as a phenomenological method to investigate the myriad conditions of urbanscapes, this research argues that the bodily experience of the *flâneur* transcends the physical urban space and enters into a surrealist dream world. The research conducts its theoretical inquiry of urban contestations through a surrealist framework that assesses the perception of the *flâneur* from a phenomenological perspective.

To further define the phenomenological aspect of a *flâneur*'s perception, this research situates the *flâneur*'s bodily experience in its occupied conscious domain, defined by Maurice Merleau-Ponty as the phenomenal field. For Merleau-Ponty, "this field is at the disposal of consciousness and one…surrounds and envelops its perceptions," which forms "an atmosphere, a horizon…with a temporal situation" that places "the emotional and practical attitudes of the living subject (the body of the experiencer) in relation to the world in an incorporated psycho-physiological mechanism."[7] The relationship and interplay between body and mind create this atmospheric domain of perception. Monika Langer contends that Merleau-Ponty "designates perception as a phenomenal field to indicate that it is not a spectacle spread out before a disembodied mind, but rather an 'ambiguous domain' in which perspectival, incarnate subjects are situated" and where "perceptual experience can be rediscovered."[8] The phenomenal field situates the experiencer and the perceptual world in a sphere of mental consciousness in which one comprehends the urban space

through a threefold phenomenological understanding—memory, imagination, and dream. As a result, the perception of the *flâneur* transfigures the urban space into contested urbanscapes where reality and dream collide, publicness and privateness become interchangeable, and a transitory atmosphere between homely and unhomely occurs. Consequently, the surrealist perception of urban space transforms the built realm into a dream world where the urban sphere becomes contested fields of experiences that challenge the boundaries between real and surreal, dream and un-dream, past and present, emergence and nostalgia.

This research focuses on the High Line in New York City to investigate the particular contested urbanscapes between the city's built reality and its latent dream world. It argues that the phenomenological experience of the *flâneur* evokes memory, imagination, and dream to transform the physical urban space into an atmospheric domain of subjective consciousness. In the case of High Line, this domain finds its home in the latent surrealist world that contests the reality of the built world by instilling subjective architectural uncanniness. Urban and cultural theorist Christoph Lindner in his essay "Retro-Walking New York" expounds this 'uncanniness' as "an aesthetics and spatiality of defamiliarization."[9] Steven Holl's hypothetical Manhattan proposal "Bridge of Houses" (1979-1982) has imagined the High Line as a site of elevated urban villas that invites walking as a method to observe the cityscape according to a variety of scales and perspectives. Almost mythical and estranged from the urban fabric, the High Line nonetheless perpetuates its integration with the urbanscape through walking. This research accentuates this consciousness of High Line and elevates it to the theory of *flâneur* to further understand the relationship between the High Line and the city.

For the *flâneur*, the High Line becomes a place of departure that traces past experiences back to memory, a site of voyeurism that channels imagination, and a threshold between dream and reality. The mind of the *flâneur* departs from reality and seeks disparate experiences from memory (a reminiscence of another place or personal encounters) to fill the void of the present (new "memory" and perception), thus concocting a horizon of memory that shelters new reality and transcends the urban space into subjective plots and narratives. The built urbanscape unfolds into panoramas through the eyes and minds of the *flâneur*. These urban images craft a mythical urbanscape in the mental and imagined world which contests and challenges the physicality of the urban field and the reality of the built world. Imagination constructs fictious urban myths and collages the city through a new form of meaning. Friedlander investigates the conception of "dream configuration" from the perception of Benjamin's *flâneur* and argues that "the manifestation of the incorporation of an environment in consciousness" produces "dream images" that "gather the amorphous surroundings" of the environment.[10] The *flâneur* operates as an embodied dreamer who traverses the contested fields between dreaming and awakening through a transcendent ambulatory body.

Dream and Flâneur

For the nineteenth-century *flâneur*, Paris manifests itself as a surrealist dream world of "phantasmagorias." Benjamin writes that "it is not the foreigners but … the Parisians, who have made Paris the holy city of the *flâneur*, the landscape built of sheer life."[11] Through urban walking, the urban ensemble of Paris is fragmented into "dream images," and Benjamin contends that "the arcades and interiors, the exhibition halls and panoramas are residues of a dream world."[12] Continuing Benjamin's observations, Buck-Morss argues that urban objects, as "relics of the last century" are like "dream images," because they function as "hieroglyphic clues to a forgotten past."[13] As the experiencers of the city, the *flâneurs* recount past and present built realities from a historical and subjective horizon that traces their perceptions with "dream images." This recounting is imbued with individual and collective memory of the past, imagination of the present, and dream between the thresholds.

Dream images of the city divulge the transformation from the physical to the metaphorical world. Lefebvre explicates 'abstract space' as a domain that "contains much, but at the same time it masks (or denies) what it contains rather than indicating it." He contends that abstract space "contains specific imaginary elements: fantasy images, symbols which appear to arise from something else."[14] One can argue that the dream world of the urban sphere evoked through *flânerie* resonates with the notion of Lefebvre's abstract space in which images are crafted through the combination of present imaginings and past recollections. The dream world comprises fantasy images through reminiscences and imagination that transcend the Cartesian definition of space and its objective reality.

In the essay "Surrealism and the Latent Reality of Dreams," Dalibor Veselý defines dream as "a testimony of the nature of the latent world that we are capable of recalling consciously that represents a continuity between what is revealed and what is hidden, between light and shadow."[15] Dreaming is a process of making, a process of recalling, and a process of unveiling what is hidden. For the Parisian *flâneur*, the urban space harbors daydreaming, contests perceptions, and presents the physical built world as enigmatic and fragmented dream images.

This latent dream world is innately surrealistic. According to Veselý, surrealism manifests in the continuation between dream and consciousness. He cites André Breton's remarks on the relationship between dream and surrealism: "surrealism acts as a conduction wire between the far too distant worlds of waking and sleep,"[16] to argue that the dream world is where the surrealists situate themselves. Breton further explains the production and experience of surrealism in *Manifestoes of Surrealism* and states that the "simultaneous products of the activity" (*les produits simultanés de l'activité*) that spark "luminous phenomenon" (*le phénomène lumineux*) are what induce the mood of surrealism.[17] Benjamin attributes such "luminous phenomenon" to a non-religious "profane illumination."[18] The urban images generated

by the mind of the peripatetic *flâneur* through mundane yet spontaneous walks embody such "profane illumination." For the *flâneur*, the "surrealist images" sparked from the embodied experience of the built urban sphere are essentially "dream images."

This relationship between dream and *flâneur* provides a lens through which we can read urban space as domains of transformation, atmospheres of conflict, and fields of contestation. To comprehend the dreamt perception of the *flâneur*, we need to investigate the field in which the perception forms. For architect Juhani Pallasmaa, perception, memory, and imagination are in constant interaction. He asserts that "the domain of presence fuses into images of memory and fantasy," and the urban spectator perpetually "constructs an immense city of evocation and remembrance, and all the cities they have visited are precincts in this metropolis of the mind."[19] The fusion of memory and imagination creates a phenomenal field where the experiencer, as *flâneur*, crafts a dream world that contests the objective perceptual reality.

Memory, imagination, and dream operate in the phenomenal field. Merleau-Ponty states that the "phenomenal field" is not an "inner world," and the "phenomenon" is not a "state of consciousness" or a "psychic fact."[20] Philosopher Taylor Carman furthers that the phenomenal field was "already carved out and made available and familiar to us by our involuntary bodily perceptual capabilities and unthinking behaviors."[21] He believes that the phenomenal field presents perceived things to us as "infused" with an immanent meaning. The *flâneur*'s urban perception forms "dreamt urbanscape" from embodied experiences that engage the subconscious mind infused with memory, imagination, and dream. Carman defines Merleau-Ponty's phenomenal field as "the sensory 'background' underlying our perception of isolated qualities and our formulation of explicit judgments."[22] Carman continues by arguing that "the sensory experience always has the form of a field, rather than a mere sum or accumulation of data, the perception is always essentially perspectival" and "the field is irreducibly a kind of space or place where objects and their qualities appear to us, relative to us." He notes that for Merleau-Ponty, "the phenomenal field is a transcendental condition of the possibility of our 'being' perceptually open to the world."[23] Between dream and reality, the phenomenal field acts as a mechanism that connects the ambulatory and sensory body of the *flâneur* to the perceptual built world.

To conclude, the surrealist theoretical framework of *flâneur* and dream reveals the contestations of urbanscapes between imagination and reality. The phenomenological inquiry of the relationship between memory, imagination, and dream studies the *flâneur*'s urban perception methodically. Memory, imagination, and dream emerge, exchange, and ultimately elicit the past to the present in the phenomenal field, manifesting the urban fields of conflict.

The High Line as Flânerie

Landscape historian John Stilgoe notes that American naturalist Henry David Thoreau "discovered and descried while walking—and while standing still—along the railway tracks."[24] For Stilgoe, walking along the tracks of the High Line "provides an opportunity for discovery,"[25] which resonates with the experience of incessant urban walker *flâneur*. Lindner attributes the conception of the High Line to the Promenade Plantée in Paris and describes the latter as "… 'a linear pathway for seeing and being seen' in the classic mode of the Benjaminian *flâneur*."[26] One can argue that the High Line is innately a site that harbors the *flâneur* and provides the *flâneur* with an urban sphere both physical and imaginary to observe, sense, and occupy. This research further deploys the *flâneur* as a phenomenological urban walker who connects urban fragments, dream images, and amorphous fields of consciousness through walking as method.

The High Line (2009) is an elevated linear urban park (one-and-a-half-mile-long) designed through a collaboration between landscape architect James Corner, architecture studio Diller Scofidio + Renfro, and Dutch garden designer Piet Oudolf. It rests on an abandoned freight railway in the West Side of Manhattan that connects the Whitney Museum of American Art in the south to the Hudson Yards in the north. For the urban *flâneurs* who traverse the city, it provides them with elevated pauses and parades, a voyeuristic excursion that interrupts the walks, and a panoramic experience of the urbanscape that promotes daydreaming. Walking on the High Line, the visual-sensory channels the latent world of imagination to build an alternative narrative of the architectural assemblage one would encounter along the curated, elevated urban pathway. The High Line is an urban site that carries unexpected moods through its intentional as well as unintentional urban architectural ensemble: Renzo Piano's Whitney Museum of American Art, the "Little Island" designed by Thomas Heatherwick, Zaha Hadid Architects' 520 West 28th Chelsea Condos, the IAC Building by Frank Gehry, the apartment block at 100 Eleventh Avenue by French architect Jean Nouvel, the Shed by the Diller Scofidio + Renfro and the Vessel by Thomas Heatherwick. The city is reshaped into a dream world through this collection of unexpected structures that elicits moods, provokes imagination, and evokes nostalgia. The existing ones are transformed into *flânerie* for nostalgia and memory and the intentionally designed ones act as the dream agency for the High Line to awaken the latent world, especially the one by Zaha Hadid with its interlocking chevrons of steel façade alluding to the High Ling's linearity. During the walk, the *flâneur* becomes an urban collector and, more specifically, an image collector whose mind transcends the physical built world through imagination. The High Line thus becomes a dream-walking corridor that floats above the streets of reality.

The architecture along the High Line creates a panoramic urbanscape of New York City. Heinz Ickstadt argues in his essay "Envisioning Metropolis: New York as Seen, Imaged, and Imagined," that walking provides a mode of ecstatic experience that reveals the "urban sublime" in New York City. Ickstadt uses John Marin's painting *Lower Manhattan* as an example and writes that "the ecstasy of walking over the [Brooklyn Bridge] is projected onto the bridge itself which appears to be exuberantly dancing in a burst

of urban energy."[27] The High Line is an urban site that yields similar sublimity through its panoramic experience. It is both an integrated fabric and a juxtaposition to the built urbanscape. The elevated walkway provides modes of jubilant voyeurism that produce accrued urban energy to the spectators of the city. In his essay "Hunt's Haunts: History, Reception, and Criticism on the Design of the High Line," Corner notes that the High Line intentionally slows down the experience of strolling in contrast to the "bustling context of Manhattan," and its meandering paths "create an experience that cannot really be properly captured in a photograph, or even video, ...the place must be walked, with senses unfolding in sequence and in juxtaposition."[28] The panoramic walking experience brings poetically and evocatively charged tension between the voyeur and the urban space. The relationship between the voyeur and the perceptual built world embodies a transitory urban space where dream and reality contest.

The research is intrinsically an investigation into the mind, the perception, the surreal perspective of our relationship with the urban realm in which we dwell. The transfiguration of urban space from Cartesian reality to the surrealist dream world asks us to rethink the physicality of the city we inhabit, to question the permanency of built reality, to challenge the homogeneity of urban layers. The notion of contested urbanscapes slices the urban sphere into disparate, myriad, and interconnected atmospheric experiences. These contested fields manifest multidimensional urbanscapes congruently and coexist in time, space and mind. The contested urbanscapes narrate an innately complex urban fabric comprised of the conception of *poiesis* that alludes to a city incessantly in the making.

New York City as Memory of Place

The High Line is an urban project that transforms a post-industrial ruin into an elevated urban garden that invites walking as a form of reading the city. Elizabeth Diller, one of the lead designers for the High Line, remarks that "we hope the design would foster a sense of magical disorientation and freedom from the city. ...we wanted to encourage walking."[29] Walking on the High Line, one encounters the mythical residues of post-industrial ruin, which Corner describes as "discarded, silent, and obsolete."[30] The subconscious memory of the past lingers presently in the experience of the city. For Anthony Vidler, the city transforms into an oneiric domain through the "realm of memory." He writes that "No longer are things either the result of thoughts or their simple signifiers; rather they are constituted in that ambiguous realm of memory that is at once experience and recollection of experience in such a way as to remain inseparable."[31] Memory becomes infused with imagination, induces metaphorical hermeneutic interpretations, and stresses a horizon that reintroduces the city as a temporary reading. The Friends of the High Line, a nonprofit organization that led the campaign to build the project, commissioned photographer Joel Sternfeld to document the

abandoned railway site through photographs. The preservation of the memory of the site/ruin through photographs amplifies the memory as "residual dreams" of the past. The essay "Residues of a Dream World: The High Line, 2011" argues that Sternfeld's photographs of the High Line, along with other displays of the structure in its ruin state "form a supplement to the High Line's development, evoking its precarious past to regulate its future."[32] I argue that the High Line is an urban site that begins with the memory of the past and ends with the memory of the present. It transforms the urban sphere into a contested realm of reality, imagining, and dreaming.

Sternfeld acts as a *flâneur*, strolling on the High Line site while documenting the existing condition of the future High Line and the built sphere in which it resides. Sternfeld's perception of the place finds recollections from the collective memory of the poignant and deserted post-industrial ruin, elevating it to an almost mythical rumination. Memory is not a static state, it is a phenomenological mood, a state of being, and a process that understands the relationship between the body and the environment in which the body situates, it channels the latent dream world of consciousness and transcends the body and place into a place of imagination. Adam Gopnik describes Sternfeld's "transporting experience" while walking on the High Line as "an experience of a pilgrimage more than a promenade."[33]

The memory of the place is emphasized through the experience of walking the High Line. There are five major special access locations along the High Line that provide vertical circulation and access to the elevated pathway via slow stairs and elevators. These points of entry to the elevated garden are also points of departure and exit from the urban street, providing the urban *flâneur* with unexpected perspectives of the city. From Gansevoort Street to West 30th Street, these special access locations are mapped out to integrate Manhattan historical places such as Gansevoort Market Historic District, Fulton Houses, Chelsea Piers, Chelsea Historic District, and London Terrace, to enhance the emergence of memory in the urban experience. They are conceived as "durational experiences" that take the urban strollers "to the surreal urban meadow" from the "frenetic pace of the city street."[34]

Memory can be understood as intrinsically phenomenological. Philosopher Dylan Trigg uses Edmund Husserl's division between "the noesis of memory (the act) and the noema of memory (the what)" to explain that the memory of a place is concerned with the past and present simultaneously. He writes that "for Husserl, the 'act' and the 'what' constitutes the structure of intentionality, making in each case an inseparable union."[35] Walking the High Line, the perception of the *flâneur* processes the twofold phenomenological memory: the act of remembering and the noema of memory. I argue that the 'act' of the *flâneur*'s recollection seeks memory-images from the nostalgia of the site and the past personal experience from another time and place and imposes them upon the current situation through imagination that ultimately fills the voids of (present) absence. Concurrently, the noema processes present "memory" of the perceived built sphere of the High Line—the linear vegetated path and the panoramically wrapped urbanscapes. The 'act' and the 'what' amalgamate memory and reality to illustrate a mentally constructed urbanscape that

contrasts with the homogenous and senseless reality of the urban sphere. Memory activates "the sensible and mental reality" of the nostalgic urban field and reveals the contestation of urban conditions. Diller explains that the design language of the High Line aims to consolidate the connection between "the site's found state of dereliction" (memory of the ruin) and "the metaphor of the ruin and its association with nostalgia and dystopia."[36]

Corner further explains the relationship between perception and memory of the walk on the High Line: "Hunt develops the concept of the *longue durée*, the long duration, the slow accrual of experience and meaning over time. …Landscapes can never be properly captured in a single moment; they are always in a process of becoming, as in a temporal quarry of accrual and memory—collecting experiences, representations, uses, the effects of weather, changes in management, cultivation, and care, and other traces of layered presence."[37] Memory acts as a spatiotemporal mechanism that creates a corporeal dimension in which the perception of the urban *flâneur* who experiences the city by walking on the High Line form a phenomenal field that encompasses the sensory, body, and subconsciousness. The memory of place is a distinct spatiotemporal event, in which the "world" or field of "place memory" offsets the peripheral environment, establishing a context singular to the remembering subject.[38] The memory of a place demarcates what Trigg calls a "corporeal dimension."[39] Walking on the High line, "a revitalized lost ritual,"[40] recreates the memory through the phenomenal field in which body, perception, and city construct a spatiotemporal event that mediates between imagination, memory, and dream.

New York City as Imagination

Alberto Pérez-Gómez argues that among the "prosaic and relatively inhuman spaces of our cities," there are sites that "have a great potential to escape the hegemony of panoptic domination and technological control."[41] These sites invite imagination, cultivate atmospheric moods, and ask for surrealist interventions. They construct moments of poetics in the city that confront the datum and rationale of the built urban space, provoke new interpretations of the urban milieu, and instill imagination in the plots of the urbanscape. The High Line is unequivocally a site that embodies these potentials. Diller notes that the design of the High Line "was not driven by programming" but "evolved from a close reading of site attributes and atmosphere."[42] She attributes the programming for the Chelsea Market tunnel, part of the High Line between West 15th Street to West 16th Street as a place for congregation and social events, to the Venturi Effect, the sound, the shade, and the light conditions of the site.[43] The transfiguration of this post-industrial ruin into both a climatical atmospheric site of sound, smell, and shade, and a sensible atmosphere of moods, memory, and emotion ultimately concocts a contested field of various agents, conflicts, and experiences. Lindner notes that the High Line has "a strange of doubleness" as both "an aging ruin and

an object of newness" and "simultaneously abandoned and occupied."[44] This remark also valorizes the High Line as a field of contestations itself. The conflicts of the site provide potentials for poetic readings, mythical interpretations, and unexpected discoveries that stimulate imagination.

For Pérez-Gómez, such sites reveal "particular chasms and wounds" that would only expose their "vectors of desire" that can be appreciated by surrealists through flânerie.[45] In the case of High Line, the surrealist imagination of the city is instigated through the walks, stops, and spectating. The unique perspective of the High Line frames the city as horizontal and fragmented panoramic paintings. Gopnik writes that "the High Line does not offer a God's-eye view of the city, exactly, but something rarer, the view of a lesser angel: of a cupid in a Renaissance painting, of the putti looking down of the Nativity manger."[46] This perspective gives the sequential 'architectural ensemble' along the walks a picturesque rhythm and a garden backdrop. Each frame of the city is a still painting of both the past and the present. The architecture is the personified hero in the experienced urban plot, the signifier in the perceived urbanscape, and the monument in a particular moment of pause. The ensemble of the architectures (Whitney Museum of American Art, the "Little Island," Zaha Hadid's 520 West 28th Chelsea Condos, IAC Building, apartment block 100 Eleventh Avenue, the Shed, and the Vessel) induce poetic analogical readings of the city and disclose contentious conflicts of the urban fabric to form a *theatrum mundi* in which the experiencer, as the *flâneur*, and the urban architecture exchange roles between actors and spectators. Pérez-Gómez's word offers a portrayal of the interchangeable rapport between the High Line and the consciousness of imagined urbanscapes: it is a site that creates a "new mythology" that opens "our world to mystery," and it is a place that demands to be articulated as "the coincidence of life and death in a moment of poetic incandescence."[47]

Imagination activates memory and functions as a tool for understanding latent meanings of perception. Trigg writes that "the dynamic interplay between memory and imagination is realized in that place becomes a passive container of memory, whereas the imagination is raised to the role of active retriever."[48] He further explains Gaston Bachelard's position on dreams and claims that "through dreams, the various dwelling-places in our lives co-penetrate and retain the treasures of former days, and the daydreaming allows the past to come forth."[49] One can argue that dream is both a condition and an action. It is the result of the phenomenological reading of memory and imagination of a place, and it is an action that connects memory to imagination. In Trigg's words, "the contextualization of memory means that daydreaming becomes nothing less than a halfway house between memory and imagination."[50] Ricardo Scofidio, another lead designer for the High Line, defines the High Line as a "space for daydreaming," and he writes that "sitting in the Sunken Overlook (a moment of pause during the walking journey on the High Line) looking at the traffic requires little attention. You can just stare endlessly at the stream of traffic. Your brain is free to wander elsewhere."[51]

Corner cites landscape historian John Dixon Hunt's essays and notes that "places that gifted him the feeling of a 'great perfection' are 'haunted by undeniable spirits, wherein the environment can become landscape." He then defines that the spirits are not some mystical essences but rather human mind, imagi-

nation, fictions, and designs which make "a place of lasting presence that inevitably haunts precisely because of effects that tend to linger and escape any form of easy definition."[52] For Corner, the High Line is a place haunted by the spirits of human imagination. The urban site incorporates the city into a "haunted place" itself, and Corner describes that "the design of the site, the choreography of movement, the meandering of paths, the siting of overlooks and vistas, and the coordination of seating and social spaces are intended to reinterpret, amplify, dramatize, and concentrate these readings of the site."[53] For the incessantly wandering *flâneur*, these interventions reinvigorate the place with hauntings and imagination. The High Line connects the *flâneur*'s individual experience to the locality of the spirits.

Trigg argues that "our bodies carry the remains and reminders of a lived past, fulfilling the original meaning of the sense that we carry places with us."[54] He explains that the sense of haunted feeling for a place derives from the separation of bodily 'I,' in which the place we carry is distorted. He writes that "ordinarily, the places we carry with us sediment themselves in our bodies innocuously, establishing a fluid 'intentional arc' that reinforces the singularity of the self's being-in-the-world. Yet, as we have seen, when the "I" is confronted with what Merleau-Ponty terms 'mutilation and disablement,' a certain mode of being is forged, which thematizes a prepersonal longing for unity."[55] The "certain mode of being" is the *flâneur*'s ambulatory body that is haunted by the spirit of the place fueled with an "uncanny mood." Just as Corner claims, traversing through the High Line, the disorienting "I" is stimulated and haunted by the imagination of the uncanny atmosphere. The site harbors an "uncanny atmosphere" for the flâneur through moments of unexpected ruminations at the Sunken Overlook, the West 22nd Street Seating Steps and Lawn, and the Woodland Flyover, and through stimulations at the West 30th Street Hudson Yards' architectural fantasy, the unexpected overlook of the floating "Little Island" near the Little West 12th Street, and the other ecstatic architectural encounters along the walk. (Figure 1) The urban space "haunts" the *flâneur*'s perception.

New York City as a Dream World

The Promenade Plantée that runs from the Bastille out to the Bois de Vincennes in Paris is an antecedent to the High Line of New York. However, Gopnik argues that "the difference, evident to anyone who has walked both, is that the Promenade Plantée is a piece of Paris that happens to be about Paris—an elegant, flowered walkway looking down on elegant, flowered streets—while the High Line is a place where the discordant encounters of its city are briefly resolved, …an easement in the air."[56] As correctly implied in this comparison, Paris provides the historical and theoretical context needed to understand the dream world of New York City. In the case of the Promenade Plantée and the High Line, both elevated gardens demarcate secluded urban territories that recall the paradise of Eden (a dream world of itself) from which the reality

of the world (the built urban environment) is perceived as a panoramic landscape narrated through time, place, and emotions. The city unveils its surrealist realm through a dreamt panoramic urbanscape that speaks to us with ephemeral moving frames.

The perception of the nineteenth-century Parisian *flâneur* is panoramic experience through a dialectical spatial reading between the architectural and urban space. Louis Daguerre's Diorama in the Passage de Panoramas reduces the city into an interior phantasm that translates the panoramic experience into an "atmospheric wonder"[57] in the realm of dream and reveals the pathos of the exterior urban realm. The architecture acts as a collector of the city similar to the *flâneur*'s being an urban collector who collages urban images to construct an urbanscape through the subconscious state of dreaming.

Benjamin argues that "in panoramas, the city opens out to landscape—as it will do later, in a subtler fashion, for the *flâneur*."[58] He positions urban consciousness in the realm of dream: "our waking existence likewise is a land which, at certain hidden points, leads down into the underworld—a land full of inconspicuous places from which dreams arise."[59] Art historian Tatiana Senkevitch comments on Benjamin's writing and elaborates that "the proximity of visual experiences afforded by viewing painted panoramas of cities or navigating through real shopping arcades became essential for distilling and comprehending images in motion."[60] The city as landscape leads the *flâneur* into moments of pauses, perilous unknowns, and mythical recollections, creating an inner dream realm where the *flâneur* falls into a transcendent reverie.

For the flâneur, the High Line is an open arcade that cuts through the urban fabric of Manhattan, a dream house that opens up New York City as a panoramic landscape, and an enclosed urban interior that hides its poetic atmosphere in the verticality of New York City's architectural manifestation. Corner describes the panoramic urbanscape perceived through the flâneur as the perpetual "pervasive background."[61] The experience of the "background" for the urban walker is a state between dreaming and wakening as he writes: "What I enjoy most about walking on the High Line is that I am usually on it in a distracted state, and yet it awakens me with a palpable sense of place and eventfulness."[62]

Having scrutinized nineteenth-century American literature, Dana Brand expounds on the historical connections between Parisian *flâneurs* and American *flâneurs*, and their panoramic urban narratives of American cities, specifically that of New York City. Brand describes nineteenth-century New York literary journalists as *flâneurs* and their sketches of the city as panoramic urban experiences. Brand writes that after 1835, most of the *flâneur* sketches in the literary journal *Knickerbocker* are set in New York, which had been unequivocally set in Paris and London hitherto and that "it is possible to trace the developing self-consciousness of New York as a setting suitable for the *flâneur*."[63] He argues that New York in the view of influential *flâneurs*—American journalists like Willis and Foster, becomes the new Paris.[64] He then states that "the New York *flâneurs* were always comparing their productions (narratives of perceived urban space) to panoramas, dioramas, and daguerreotypes."[65]

The experience of the *flâneur* and the images of panoramas are intertwined urban consciousnesses that craft a dreamt and transcendental reality of the urbanscape. One can understand this reality as the dream realm of the *flâneur* in which the city transfigures its architectural and urban spheres into fragmented panoramic images. Brand argues that panorama and *flâneur* "have claimed an analogous authority deriving from their respective claims to be relatively unmediated images of reality."[66]

Walking on the High Line, the tension between the architecture ensemble along the linear pathway and the moment of pause creates an interactive panoramic experience of the city's urbanscape. The "Little Island" anchors the part of the walk from Little West 12th Street to West 15th Street by provoking the *flâneur* with an unexpected visual encounter of a mythical garden from afar. The 10th Avenue Square and Sunken Overlook instills a moment of stagnancy and functions as do the pavilions in Chinese gardens that elicit rumination and daydreaming for the stroller. Traversing through the narrow Wildflower Straightaway, enveloped by the façades of skyscrapers, to West 30th Street, the Shed and the Vessel abruptly bring an unforeseen climax to the experience of the walk. (Figure 2) Walking becomes a celebrated ritual that deprives the *flâneur* of the preconceived judgment of the city and forms ecstatic yet temporal moods of sublimity in a panoramic dream world. This panoramic dream world depicts the city as so many choreographed yet capricious collages of surrealist moments. It recreates the city through moods, atmospheres, and plots that contest the reality of the city and its mundane and often hegemonic and overemphasized programmatic condition.

Conclusion

This research has argued that mentally constructed urbanscapes are ephemeral domains that engage moods, evoke poetics, and embody imagination. This transient urbanscape differs from the built reality and forms a surrealist dream world. The High Line functions as the threshold between the two contested urbanscapes for the urban *flâneur*. The surrealist body of the *flâneur* mediates between perception and the built world, between present experience and past memory, and between rationality and imagination.

From a phenomenological understanding of memory, imagination, and dream, we can begin to look beyond the built reality of urban space to discover latent urban layers of a surrealist world where dream resides. Contested and contesting urbanscapes of dream and reality manifest through these subconscious layers of urban space. The phenomenological reading of memory, imagination, and dream resuscitates the nineteenth-century *flâneur* and brings the perception of the *flâneur* to contemporary urbanism. The contestation reveals that the urban realm is not a permanent domain that only requires statistical mapping and technological intervention. It is instead a field of conflicts, contentious agents, and poetic moments.

These contested urbanscapes ask us to redefine the city as a palimpsest that embodies multiple horizons of interpretations. Lindner argues that "the extreme iconicity of the New York skyline and the opportunity provided by the park to encounter that skyline—even inhabit it—in a defamiliarized, intimate, and decelerated way is the core High Line experience."[67] The interplay between urban space and the participatory spectator—*flâneur* constructs meanings through surrealist encounters, slices of latent layers, and precarious transformations between disparate urban conditions. These contestations highlight the role of the human body and its embodied perception. It further reclaims the divinity and poetics of the place we inhabit. The phenomenological human experience is the essential measure of the potency and benefits of urbanization. The rediscovered dream world of New York City through walking the High Line is not an isolated case, for it earnestly requires us to shift our attention to the cosmically connected human bodies that occupy the built world and answer the fundamental question of the reason to build.

The body that occupies the city functions as an agent that navigates between reality and dream. The contesting urbanscapes are temporary urban spheres where the body and mind travel "to and from" through perception. The phenomenological corporeal relationship between us and our cities gives meaning to the urbanscape where we reside and where we retrace and recollect our experiences. Delightfully incessant, the dream world harbors the longing for the world between the built and the imagined, one that we cautiously comprehend and construct.

Images

Figure 1. View of the “Little Island” from the High Line © Ke Sun, 2021

Figure 2. View of the Shed from the High Line © Ke Sun, 2021

Notes

1 See essays "Phenomenological Depth and the Work of Jean-Jacques Lequeu" and "John Hejduk's Critical and Poetic Architecture" in Alberto Pérez-Gómez, *Timely Meditations, Selected Essays on Architecture, Vol.1: Architectural Theories and Practices* (Montreal: Right Angel International, 2016). Pérez-Gómez makes an analogy between Merleau-Ponty's understanding of "depth" as the spatio-temporal dimension and Plato's *chora*.

2 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Cambridge, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 1992), 293.

3 Björn Bosserhoff and Sabine Sielke, eds., *New York, New York!: Urban Spaces, Dreamscapes, Contested Territories* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang GmbH, Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften, 2015), 9-15.

4 Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 33.

5 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 21.

6 Eli Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin: A Philosophical Portrait* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 92.

7 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), 22-25.

8 Monika M. Langer, "The Phenomenal Field," in *Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of Perception: A Guide and Commentary*, ed. Monika M. Langer (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989), 15-20.1989

9 Christoph Lindner, "Retro-Walking New York," in *Deconstructing the High Line: Postindustrial Urbanism and the Rise of the Elevated Park*, ed. Christoph Lindner and Brian Rosa (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2017), 94. Lindner cites Amita Sinha's comments on the High Line that defines the structure as "the idea of beauty in terms of the strangely familiar" and argues that it evokes the realm of what Anthony Vidler terms the "architectural uncanny."

10 Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin: A Philosophical Portrait,* 101-2.

11 Benjamin, *The Arcades Project,* 880.

12 Ibid., 13.

13 Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing*, 39.

14 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 311.

15 Dalibor Veselý, "Surrealism and the Latent Reality of Dreams," trans. Peter Stephens, *Umeni / Art* 56, no. 4 (August 2008), 325-32.

16 Ibid.

17 André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), 37.

18 Walter Benjamin, *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 2: 1927-1934*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 209.

19 Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses* (John Wiley & Sons, 2012), 67-68.

20 Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception,* 57.

21 Taylor Carman, *Merleau-Ponty* (London: Routledge, 2019), 64.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid., 65.

24 John R Stilgoe, "Steganography Photographed," in *Walking the High Line*, ed. Joel Sternfeld (New York: Steidl Pace McGill Gallery, 2001), 31-45.

25 Ibid., 42.

26 Lindner, "Retro-Walking New York," 95.

27 Bosserhoff and Sielke, *New York, New York!,* 24.

28 James Corner, *The Landscape Imagination: Collected Essays of James Corner 1990-2010*, ed. Alison Bick Hirsch (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2014), 345.

29 James Corner Field Operations and Diller Scofidio + Renfro, *The High Line: Foreseen and Unforeseen* (New York and London: Phaidon Press, 2020), 13.

30 Ibid.

31 Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 203.

32 Michael Cataldi et al., "Residues of a Dream World: The High Line, 2011," *Theory, Culture & Society* 28, no. 7–8 (December 1, 2011): 358–89, https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276411425834.

33 Adam Gopnik, "A Walk on the High Line: The Allure of a Derelict Railroad Track in Spring," in *Walking the High Line*, ed. Joel Sternfeld (New York: Steidl Pace McGill Gallery, 2001), 49.

34 James Corner Field Operations and Diller Scofidio + Renfro, *The High Line: Foreseen and Unforeseen*, 160.

35 Dylan Trigg, *The Memory of Place: A Phenomenology of the Uncanny* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2012), 48.

36 James Corner Field Operations and Diller Scofidio + Renfro, *The High Line: Foreseen and Unforeseen*, 172.

37 Corner, *The Landscape Imagination*. 345.

38 Trigg, *The Memory of Place*, 57.

39 Ibid., 55.

40 James Corner Field Operations and Diller Scofidio + Renfro, *The High Line: Foreseen and Unforeseen*, 174.

41 Alberto Pérez-Gómez, *Timely Meditations, Selected Essays on Architecture, Vol.2: Architectural Philosophy and Hermeneutics* (Montreal: Right Angel International, 2016), 121.

42 James Corner Field Operations and Diller Scofidio + Renfro, *The High Line: Foreseen and Unforeseen*, 176.

43 Ibid.

44 Lindner, "Retro-Walking New York," 100.

45 Pérez-Gómez, *Timely Meditations, Vol.2,* 121.

46 Gopnik, "A Walk on the High Line: The Allure of a Derelict Railroad Track in Spring," 49.

47 Pérez-Gómez, *Timely Meditations, Vol.2*, 121.

48 Trigg, *The Memory of Place,* 66.

49 Ibid., 65.

50 Ibid., 66.

51 James Corner Field Operations and Diller Scofidio + Renfro, *The High Line: Foreseen and Unforeseen*, 175.

52 Corner, *The Landscape Imagination*, 341.

53 Ibid., 304.

54 Trigg, *The Memory of Place*, 302.

55 Ibid.

56 Gopnik, "A Walk on the High Line: The Allure of a Derelict Railroad Track in Spring," 52.

57 Benjamin, *The Arcades Project,* 533.

58 Ibid., 5-6.

59 Ibid., 875.

60 Richard Wrigley, ed., *The Flâneur Abroad: Historical and International Perspectives* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 172.

61 James Corner Field Operations and Diller Scofidio + Renfro, *The High Line: Foreseen and Unforeseen*, 175.

62 Ibid.

63 Dana Brand, *The Spectator and the City in Nineteenth Century American Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 71. During 1853, New York City hosted an international exhibition called the Exhibition of the Industry of All Nations in which it featured a glass and iron building—the New York Crystal Palace—to compete with the similar one built in London's 1851 Great Exhibition.

64 Ibid., 77.

65 Ibid., 74.

66 Ibid., 54.

67 Lindner, "Retro-Walking New York," 101.

About the Author:

Ke Sun is a Ph.D. candidate in Architectural History and Theory. He has taught Architectural Theory courses at the University of Florida School of Architecture. Sun's doctoral research deploys a phenomenological investigation of contemporary cities through the theoretical framework of surrealist flânerie. It theorizes the flâneur from nineteenth-century Paris, conceives of the flâneur as a spatial figure so as to understand humanistic urbanism, and argues that the phenomenological perception of the flâneur harbors a dream world in the built environment that contests the reality of the built urbanscape.