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## Abstract

The article discusses the essay "Naples" (1925), co-authored by Asja Lācis (née Anna Liepiņa, married Lācis or Lāce, 1891-1979) and Walter Benjamin (1892-1940). This case study reflects *flânerie* used as a creative strategy. The narrator, a figure of urban wandering and detached observation, was implemented by the co-authors stressing the differences in the interpretation by a man and a woman - *flâneur* and *flâneuse*. They portray Naples through contrasting perspectives: Benjamin, the philosopher, views the city as a system, examining its structures and categories, while Lācis, the theatre director, approaches it as a dynamic performance. This convergence of viewpoints creates a unique narrative voice. The article sheds light on the theatrical implications used in urban exploration and proves the input of Lācis by exploring parallels in her educational experience, creative works, letters and publications. Under the influence of collaboration with Lācis, Benjamin developed the signature philosophical style and initial impulse in this essay by introducing metaphors of porosity and constellation, later developed as concepts. The paper concludes that *flânerie*, used as a strategy of exploration and narration, integrates the vitality of lived experience with theatre and philosophy to inspire fresh perspectives on seeing and being in the world, thus embodying the revolutionary avant-garde pursuit of transcending boundaries, whether artistic, ideological or cultural and reinforcing its innovative and transformative intent.

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**Keywords:** Naples, lived experience, urban theatricality, porosity, constellation, creative collaboration, *flâneur* and *flâneuse*, narrative voice

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# *Flânerie* as a Strategy: Revolutionary Ideas of Avant-Gardes in the Co-Authorship of Asja Lācis and Walter Benjamin

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## Introduction

This article<sup>1</sup> is dedicated to a close reading of the travel essay “Naples” (“Neapel”, published in *Frankfurter Zeitung* in 1925), indited in co-authorship by Asja Lācis and Walter Benjamin. The text interpretation exemplifies the concept of *flânerie* as a creative strategy. The argumentation highlights the intellectual input that can be addressed to Lācis, considering her professional education and experience as an avant-garde theatre director. Through content analyses of the essay, it is possible to highlight theatrical metaphors and references to directing methods of the time, as well as ongoing discussions about revolutionising theatre practices, which include performing in the streets and engaging the audience.

Furthermore, the article explores how the authors use *flâneur* and *flâneuse* figures. The figures of idle strollers and observers conceptualised in literary and cultural theories (Comfort and Papalas; D’Souza and McDonough; Tester) embody a detached yet engaged perspective. The *flâneur* initially originated in the urban environments of 19<sup>th</sup>-century Paris (Gluck; Wrigley) but later developed as a metaphorical figure and strived to embrace a global perspective (Edmond; Mathew). Walter Benjamin redefined the *flâneur* as a critical observer who navigates the tensions between modern capitalism and cultural production (Buck-Morss). As a theatre director and revolutionary artist, Lācis introduces the *flâneuse* as an equally potent observer and interpreter of urban life, challenging the gendered limitations traditionally imposed on the *flâneur* as a solely male figure. This unique co-authorship captures the intersection of philosophy, urban observation and theatrical innovation, blending their distinct perspectives.

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Other travel articles by the authors prove the strategy of *flânerie* as a tool for exploring modern urban life. Benjamin wrote about various eponymous locations in his essays “Moscow Dairies” (1926–1927), “Weimar” (1928), “Marseilles” (1928–1929), “Paris, the City in the Mirror” (1929), “San Gimignano” (1929), “North Sea” (about Bergen) (1930), as well as in the book *One-Way Street*, inspired by Riga and dedicated to Asja Lācis; the book itself was constructed like a street (Gilloch 24). Lācis published her travel notes on exploring Berlin and Paris in the Latvian leftist radical newspaper *Darbs un maize (Labor and Bread)* and the literary journal *Domas (Thoughts)* (Lācis, “Berlīnes teātru iespaidi”; “Parīzes ikdiena un teātri”). The initial dialogue between the two co-authors started when Walter Benjamin and Asja Lācis met in Capri in 1924 and shortly visited Naples. The fruitful collaboration integrated philosophical inquiry with performative expression. After the article was published, Benjamin visited Lācis in Riga and Moscow. In 1928, Lācis, as a Soviet official propagandist, visited Berlin and worked with Benjamin on educational theatre topics.

In this context, examining *flânerie* as a mode of engagement highlights its ability to bridge lived experience with theatre and philosophical practice. It creates a fluid space where observation and performance intersect, turning everyday encounters into reflective acts of inquiry and meaning-making. The article leads to the conclusion that the act of literal and intellectual wandering becomes a narrative device for the dissemination of avant-garde ideas.

## *Flânerie* in Naples

By situating their observations within the streets of Naples, Lācis and Benjamin offer a vivid exploration of the city. The stylistics of the essay blend travel notes and descriptive picturesque illuminations with philosophical reflections, capturing the dynamic interplay between two gazes. The essay’s text consists of small scenes like the montage of cinematic footage capturing controversial experiences in Naples. The *flânerie* as a form of research is presented in the text as a visually vivid cinematic montage. The description of the insights by idle wanderers reveals several layers of observation and losing awareness, understanding and confusion, reasoning and contemplation. The stream of selected scenes is like a chaotic jumble of impressions, which nevertheless succumbs to an internal dramaturgy, similar to a dream that leads forward, to reveal meaning not through rational argumentation and a clear sequence but through an internal necessary logic. The encounter of the two intellectually brilliant professionals as co-authors indicates that the text presents the observation of city life as philosophical *flânerie* or theatrical analysis through action.

*Flânerie*, as a strategy of observation and interaction, remains highly relevant to transnational models of culture, particularly when viewed through the lenses of “liquid modernity” (Bauman) and “travelling theory” (Said). *Flânerie* models a transnational approach to culture that embraces the complexity of cultural exchange, making it a vital lens for interpreting contemporary global dynamics. A “veil of ignorance” or “invisibility cloak”, which could also be the “iron curtain” (Bauman 106), illustrates the attitude towards strangers. These metaphors reflect the complexities of cultural barriers, ranging from voluntary ignorance and enforced invisibility to outright exclusion, emphasising the need for strategy – like *flânerie* – to enable more fluid, inclusive exchanges. Nevertheless, this strategy points out the transformative potential of migration and displacement experienced by the *Wanderproletariaat* or revolutionary vagabonds of the interwar period, displaced persons after World War II and the political refugees of nowadays.

The exploration of Naples by the *flâneur* and *flâneuse* challenges gender bias to approve equal and creative mutual complementarity benefits. Benjamin approaches the city with a philosopher’s precision, dissecting the architecture with social structures and emphasising the systemic and symbolic dimensions of the city. In contrast, Lācis’s viewpoint is informed by her experience as a theatre practitioner. For Lācis, Naples is not merely a city to analyse but a performance where life unfolds in spontaneous and transformative ways.

## The Opening Scene: Prologue

The essay is introduced with a vivid portrayal of a social situation in an urban environment:

Some years ago a priest was drawn on a cart through the streets of Naples for indecent offences. He was followed by a crowd hurling maledictions. At a corner, a wedding procession appeared. The priest stands up and makes the sign of a blessing, and the cart’s pursuers fall on their knees. (Benjamin and Lācis 163)

An opening scene that sparks intrigue, immediately drawing the audience into its world, is like an anecdote told for ice-breaking (Taurens 93). The story begins with a theatrically driven introduction, which can be compared to the prologue of a historical tragedy. The protagonist is captured and paraded through the streets of Naples, followed by a hostile crowd of shamers. A wedding procession moves from the corner, and a clash occurs, where two different atmospheres collide – hateful humiliation and festive joy. Both processions can be imagined as two chorus groups in a theatre performance. A peripeteia occurs in the action. The priest blesses the newlyweds, and the accusers join in receiving the blessing.

The opening scene reveals the shared theme of theatricality between the two co-authors despite their vastly different approaches to it. At that time, Benjamin was writing what he hoped would be his habilitation academic work, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama (Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels)*, while Lācis was already an experienced theatre director who had mastered the theory of staging in the St. Petersburg Bekhterev Psychoneurological Research Institute (1912–1915), Shanyavsky Moscow City People’s University (1915–1917), and Fyodor Komisarzhovsky Theatre Studio (1917–1918). She had received an exceptional education and immersed herself in the atmosphere of history-making discussions on the revolutionary renewal of theatre, exploring its political, ideological and educational significance. Her work with drama studios in Orel (1918–1920), Riga (Riga People’s University 1920–1921, Central Bureau of Riga Trade Unions 1925–1926) and in Berlin and Munich (1921–1924) with Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956) and Bernhardt Reich (1894–1972) emphasised collective creation in improvisation and mass open-air performances. Her focus on street life and lived experience resonates with her interest in pageant performance as a spectacle with the involvement of auditory. In Europe, she was seen as an emissary of the new proletarian state, embodying the successful revolution and delivering fresh insights about the Theatre October directly from its origins. The subsequent encounters between Lācis and Benjamin in Capri, Riga, Moscow and Berlin continued to evolve their shared interest in theatre and educational experimentation.

The opening scene highlights the intricate interplay between individual agency and public opinion. The priest, embodying the individual or a hero, stands at the centre of a dramatic tableau, surrounded by the community – represented as chorus groups of shamers and wedding guests. Much like the chorus in Greek tragedies, this collective voice reflects societal norms, expectations and reactions to unfolding events. The narrative juxtaposes scenes of public punishment with a ritualistic festive procession, revealing the duality of societal rituals.

This scene not only captures the theatricality of everyday life but also highlights the implicit demand for participation in societal performances. Religious processions, deeply rooted in the fabric of Catholic cities, remain a visible expression of communal identity. Similarly, public shaming, once confined to physical spaces, finds a contemporary parallel in the phenomenon of cancel culture. Whether on the streets or digital platforms, these performances prescribe roles for all involved, drawing every passer-by – literal or virtual – into the unfolding drama. The city functions as a stage for performances – religious rituals, social gestures and power-play interactions.

## The Philosopher's Gaze

The dynamic and cinematic opening scene transitions into a sociological analysis that delves into the intricate interweaving of formal and informal power structures within the body of Naples – namely, Catholicism and the criminal organisation Camorra. Catholicism, while offering spiritual structure, also legitimises excesses through a dual moral code. This duality is juxtaposed with a model of parallel justice rooted in informal networks and the authority of criminal groups rather than formal legal institutions. This framework explains the sense of insecurity often experienced by travellers in Naples. Furthermore, this sociological exploration reflects the broader context of the unstable political climate and the tension between legislative pragmatism and the theoretical principles of justice, blurring the lines between legality and moral ambiguity.

The next scene in the text depicts the Congress of Philosophers and the anniversary celebrations of Naples University. The city streets are alive with a cheering crowd admiring the magnificent fireworks, while pickpockets take advantage of the chaos to relieve the philosophers of their money and documents. The 5<sup>th</sup> World Congress of Philosophers, which was held in conjunction with the university's anniversary celebrations, took place in Naples from 5 to 9 May 1924. Through a masterful display of feuilleton stylistics, the gaze of the philosopher captures an ironic scene: a group of philosophers dissolves into oblivion amidst the chaotic vibrancy of Naples. The raucous festivities overshadow their intellectual pursuits, leaving the disoriented scholars – robbed and bewildered – no better off than hapless tourists thwarted by locked museums, elusive historical landmarks and the mannerism of the city's artistic treasures.

Nothing pleases the lonely stranger: “Nothing is enjoyable except the famous drinking water. Poverty and misery seem as contagious as they are pictured to be to children, and the foolish fear of being cheated is only a scanty rationalisation for this feeling” (Benjamin and Lācis 164). Overwhelmed by the lively bustle around him, frightened by the poverty and numerous beggars, and uneasy about the potential for fraud, the philosopher perceives the city as “the shock given to day-dreaming passers-by” (165). This provokes a sense of childish insecurity and inability to survive in the face of the greedy and agile local crowd.

## Encounter

During the days of the congress, on 8 May 1924, Asja Lācis wrote a letter from Capri to her friend Elvīra Bramberga, a member of her drama studio in Riga:

I liked Naples for real – a crazy city: eternal movement, sharp, cutting noises from street vendors, donkeys and children. Street musicians play every night and sing in a completely oriental style. Hundreds of children with black mouths and fingers in their mouths are eager to gather around; their big black eyes shine with joy at the sounds they hear. All life is on the street – the doors of the narrow rooms are open. Huge wine barrels with sweet “Frisante” juice can be seen in the trattorias. I drink a lot of wine. I have great approval among the cavaliers, I think like all northerners, but I don’t like Italians. [...] Reich just left for Munich – now I’m alone with Daga. But there are many familiar faces in Capri, the sun, roses, wine, and it’s good. I am adding one orange blossom bud for you. (Lācis, 8 May 1924)

Lācis travelled to Capri for a vacation via Roma and Naples. Bernhard Reich, mentioned in the letter, had generously offered this retreat to her and her daughter Daga (Dagmāra Lācis, married Ķimele, 1919–1998) to help improve the child’s health.

Lācis’s letters from Capri prove that she visited Naples several times: “At the end of this week, I want to go to Naples for a day – I am drawn to this crazy city with its insane pace and the dull emptiness of its places. The street is wonderful. The street has more power than a house” (Lācis, 30 June 1924). She also mentions collecting materials about Naples:

I am still in Capri, although I travel around. I have been to Naples. It is never too long to see that city. I have been to Sorrento, Castella di Maris, Pompeii. I saw two theatres, the ancient arena. [...] I am now writing about the New Theatre Directions in Germany and collecting material about Naples. [...] The Strunke couple [Latvian artist and stage designer Niklāvs Strunke (1894–1966) and his wife Olga Strunke (1899–1986)] are also here; we live in the same house. Here at the moment are Marinetti and Vasari, Italian futurists. I met them. But their doings are already outdated. Writing in Italy is about to emerge – Pirandello – you must have heard of it. (Lācis, 18 August 1924)

Her correspondence with the editor of the journal *Domas* also confirms her involvement in writing about Naples:

Now I hasten to send you New German Theatre Direction. Naples is also ready, but in German, because I have to write several travel descriptions for a German publisher. I would like to publish it in yours first. I am sending it in German for you to read. If it is okay, send it back with a note, then I will rewrite it in Latvian. Or, perhaps, you can rewrite it in Latvian yourself. Now I am writing about the Paris Theatre and Drama. (Lācis, 1924)

One of the letters hints at collaborative intellectual pursuits “together with a philosopher”: “Then I got an invitation from a publishing house to go to Spain because they liked how I wrote about Naples together with a philosopher. We will see if I can go. Because of Daga, I probably won’t” (Lācis, 1925). This shared project highlighted their creative partnership

and the broader resonance of their reflections on Naples, which led to the invitation to Spain – a journey Lācis hesitated to take due to her familial obligations.

The letters of Asja Lācis serve as compelling evidence of her fruitful collaboration and co-authorship with Walter Benjamin. Her reflections on the city's chaotic vitality, theatricality and insane pace closely align with observations reflected in "Naples", proving her significant influence that shaped their writing. Lācis's correspondence reveals not only her active engagement in collecting material about Naples but also her keen awareness of cutting-edge cultural and artistic movements, such as Futurism and Luigi Pirandello's theatre. Her descriptions of Naples as a city where "the street has more power than a house" resonate with the tone and ideas that are deeply intertwined in her input to the co-authorship.

Under the influence of the collaboration with Lācis, Benjamin developed his signature philosophical style, with the initial impulse evident in this essay, as proven by researchers of Benjamin's work (Buck-Morss, Ingrem, McGill, Mittelmeier). "Naples", as a seminal text, introduced the ideas of porosity and constellation, which later evolved into key concepts. "Not only did they write about porosity; they did so in a porous way" (Mittelmeier 36). The essay enacts the phenomenon of porosity as much as describes it (Gilloch 36). The mutually overflowing and permeable scenes serve as visual imprints to develop *Denkbilder* (thought images). Benjamin's "theatrical turn" proceeded from primarily taking drama as a literary object of study and interpretation to enacting a kind of improvised theatre in constructing his texts (McGill 64). The argumentation is not causally arranged but rather forms a random set or a constellation of thought images akin to walking through a labyrinth of streets, entering passages, taking sidewalks or participating in a pageant spectacle. The perfect order of sense-making is achieved through other tools – drama and theatre-making.

## The Theatre Director's Entrance

A symbolic encounter between the two authors, as depicted in the text of "Naples", could be likened to a scene from a film script. At first, the footage shows a deserted cityscape: "The city is craggy. Seen from a height not reached by the cries from below, from the Castell San Martino, it lies deserted in the dusk, grown into the rock. Only a strip of shore runs level; behind it, buildings rise in tiers" (Benjamin and Lācis 165). The philosopher's perspective is panoramic, with an alienated position as secure as a fortress. From this vantage point, the city and everyday life are invisible, as if deserted or grown into the rock. However, as the texture of the text unfolds, the city begins to move, rise and climb. The city itself comes alive and assumes its agency: "Building and action interpenetrate in the courtyards, arcades, and stairways. In everything, they



preserve the scope to become a theatre of new, unforeseen constellations” (165–166). This creates a metaphor of a laboratory, where objects, relationships, emotions and attitudes are reassembled and reimagined – much like actors on stage, collaborating to create new and unforeseen constellations of meaning and interaction.

Naples is built on a volcanic cliff. The porous tuff stone is formed by eruptions, when magma splashes into the air and hardens, preserving the breath of evaporating processes. Porosity is a feature of the raw material but also the central concept of this essay. The cinematic montage of textual images allows us to see the city as a constantly evolving structure shaped by volcanic tuff stone. The cellular cliff has created houses, streets and squares resembling a network of settlements. The buildings are animated by inner movement, guiding their inhabitants along the streets and arcades, through courtyards and up and down stairs. Architecture is like the art of staging, a scenario for action and a condition for free improvisation.

The jointly created experience in “Naples” provides lively scenes saturated with philosophical insights and steeped in theatricality. The gazes of the director and the philosopher are intertwined, complementing each other. The philosopher sees the city as a system of unexpected juxtapositions: “the jumble of dirty courtyards” shifts to “the pure solitude of a tall, whitewashed church interior”. The encapsulation of the private existence within “four walls among wife and children” is contrasted with “the baroque opening of a heightened public sphere” (166).

In turn, the director’s perspective reveals the city through theatrical terminology. The city is a theatre, and not a court or bourgeois one, but the people’s theatre. Just imagine – as if – a director of agitational and educational theatre gave a task to actors: the challenge of breaking the fourth wall. This technique, where performers directly address the audience, involves an awareness of the presence and dissolution of the imaginary barrier that separates the stage from the spectators. Different worlds exist side by side and simultaneously. “Translating cities” as a metaphor (Taurens 15) exchanges the cognitive value of the experience of difference. The way to reflect this is not through rational argumentation but by forming imagelike descriptions to create a constellation, arranging a kaleidoscopic montage.

## The City as a Theatre Stage

The expressions such as “a passion for improvisation”, “a high school of stage management”, and “simultaneously animated theatres” (Benjamin and Lācis 167) are adopted from theatre terminology and practice to describe city life. Gateways resemble stage arches, and staircases and roofs function like multilevel scenography sets. Lācis, in her articles about theatrical life in Germany, mentions the revolving stage that

makes it possible “to change scenes one after another at kaleidoscopic speed” (Lācis, “Berlīnes teātru iespaidi”). The director’s gaze captures the city as a multiplicity of simultaneous stages for action throughout the urban space. Moreover, balconies and windows reveal what is happening in the pores of apartments, reminiscent of theatre lodges, where someone watches the action unfold. At the same time, acting and watching – “dual awareness of participating” (Benjamin and Lācis 167) – also refers to theatre methodology. Actors play roles to embody characters, but they must also be aware of their position and able to step out of character to pose a question to the audience. This double awareness is also crucial in group improvisations – actors improvise and lead the scene to its outcome, collaborating without prior arrangement.

Asja Lācis, educated in pre- and revolutionary Russia and experienced in directing German political theatre, recognised the need to revolutionise theatre. The idea of proletarian theatre, which emerged from the popular theatre in Tsarist Russia (Swift), is based on a radical amateur approach – not mimicking professionals but developing simple and demonstrative acting (Milohnić 106). One of the authorities of Proletkult theatre, Platon Kerzhentsev (real name Lebedev, 1881–1940), in his influential book *Creative Theatre* (*Tvorcheskij teatr*, 1918), argued that theatre should cease to be a place of entertainment and inaction for the audience. The proletariat must seize the opportunity to display its theatrical instinct. “It is not so much necessary to play for the popular audience as to help this audience play itself” (Kerzhentsev 68).

“Art on the streets!” was the slogan of revolutionary artists. Another important figure, Nikolai Evreinov (1879–1953), derived his theatre philosophy from concepts such as theatocracy, will to the theatre, director of life, and actor for themselves, forming its theoretical, pragmatic, and practical parts in his *Theatre for Oneself* (*Teatr dlja sebja*, 1915) (Evreinov 114–408). As a result, there is an expressive affirmation of the theatrical instinct of human beings: everyone plays theatre for themselves. Human beings orient themselves in the world, mimicking the environment. The power that moves the individual is the aspiration to transform into the better self. The revolution demanded that, along with a passion for acting, directing and drama, avant-garde aesthetics should not be a privilege of the elite (Kleberg). This pathos echoes in “Naples”, asserting that everyday life in the streets is “a high school of stage management” (Benjamin and Lācis 167). Life itself is a great school of directing.

## The Porous Labyrinth

“Naples” conjures up theatrical scenes of street life: an artist draws with crayons, and a moment later, this work of art has already disappeared into the stream of pedestrians; vendors’ carts offer music, sweets and toys like small mobile stages; someone makes

money by performing tricks with pasta; newspapers sellers recite loudly; vendors advertise their products and play out the auction as the art of haggling (Benjamin and Lācis 169–170). Mundane life becomes a show with the participation of artists, passers-by, buyers, sellers, cheaters, beggars and tricksters. Trade borders on a game of chance, with the excitement of buying and selling, side by side with playing tricks and lottery addiction. A toothpaste seller, with a mysterious gesture, wraps sold items in green or pink paper as if presenting a good fortune lot. Bazaars with jumbled piles of goods seductively laid out, while department stores display tightly packed multiplicity: “Only in fairy tales are lanes so long that one must pass through without looking to left or right if one is not to fall prey to the devil” (170). The more precisely the details of the scenes are described, the more the real becomes permeated with magical bliss as if participating in an enormous theatrical pageant.

The authors deeply immerse themselves in the porous flesh of the city. They peer into overcrowded apartments in working-class quarters and rooms crammed with beds. They wander through streets full of carts, people and fires. They linger in gateways, observing the household bustle in front yards and spectators leaning out from windows and balconies. They savour fresh seafood amid the hustle and bustle of the market, hastily drink espresso in taverns and acquire skills in the local language of gestures (171–173). Towards the end of the essay, like awakening from a vivid dream, the much-repeated saying “*Vedere Neapoli e poi Mori*” – is humorously reinterpreted as a misunderstanding. The expression, “To see Naples and die”, paraphrased in the essay (173), hints at an expanded horizon of interpretation. While traditionally romanticised as an affirmation of the city’s beauty, the essay invites readers to consider it in an ironic light.

## Conclusion

In a world increasingly defined by challenges of migration, the concept of the *flâneur* and *flâneuse* remain relevant as symbols of engagement and creativity. The collaborative journey of Lācis and Benjamin offers a model for reimagining the relationships between the centre and periphery, artist and audience, and tradition and innovation. Their work proves that when intertwined with the dynamism of lived experience, art and philosophy can inspire new ways of seeing and being in the world. The dual perspectives of Lācis and Benjamin do not dilute the effectiveness of their analysis; instead, they introduce dramatism and conflict, creating a deeper and more immersive experience by confronting the ignorance of uncomfortable social realities.

A close reading of “Naples” illuminates the extent to which Asja Lācis contributed to the conceptual and thematic foundation of Benjamin’s reflections, positioning her

as an influential figure in his work and reinforcing the collaborative nature of their study of Naples. *Flânerie*, as a practice of involvement in the city and a strategy for writing, also helps with interpreting and understanding. The process of walking and descriptive visualisation of street life scenes are used as textual form. The pace of the written text reflects the buzz of streets – stopping points of the contemplation process mark cells of the explored system – and includes not only descriptions of mundane events but also an analysis of the functioning of society. A panoramic picture for understanding opens up behind the sudden stops. The habits of Neapolitan citizens are captured through conscious involvement and, at the same time, the observation of this immersive experience. The descriptive part of the essay is closely intertwined with the authors' gazes, reflecting on the visible, tangible and contemplated reality. The kaleidoscopic structure of the text evokes a cinematic quality, resembling a flowing and crumpling video sequence.

Dramaturgically, the essay's structure follows a classical principle of form with a prologue, a conflict outline and a challenging path, which leads to an open ending without a didactically expressed morality. The text reexamines and reviews the tangle of impressions, arranging them in a constellation of mutual relationships. The thought images are linked to the events of everyday life in the city and the visual impressions of wandering. The porous volcanic rock on which the city is built represents a fractal structure that transitions from material – its natural physical form – to architectural, social habitat and textual forms.

Furthermore, porosity is more than a metaphor but a system of exploration to merge philosophy with lived experience. The fluid nature of boundaries in the interior and exterior of architecture, private and public social life, day and night time, leisure and labour, trade and gambling reflect habits and social structures of constant interaction. The city functions as a stage for performances of religious rituals, processions, social acceptance or public shaming gestures and for interactions of trade and cheating.

Public spaces resemble theatre sets, blending reality with spectacle. Improvisation permeates daily life, from theatrical street performances to spontaneous celebrations. The performance of urban life is highly relevant for contemporary discussions on urbanism, social cohesion and cultural resilience.

This interdisciplinary approach to urban observation, in the broader sense of avant-garde projects, foresees breaking boundaries, be they artistic or ideological. The avant-garde of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century sought to dissolve distinctions between high and low culture, centre and periphery, and theory and practice. The text of "Naples" embodies this ethos by presenting the city as a fluid and hybrid space. The intertwined gazes of *flâneur* and *flâneuse* mark the co-created liminality of the cityscape, enabling fluid transitions and transformations. The revolutionary avant-garde implications

involve the contributions of other artistic movements or figures who also influenced the cultural landscape of the time by challenging the traditions and opening up boundaries. The essay's mosaic-like structure reflects this hybridity, combining philosophical musings with vivid descriptions of everyday life. This method aligns with the avant-garde's commitment to fragmentation and polyphony.

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## Povzetek

Tema članka je esej »Neapelj« [orig. nem. »Neapel« – op. prev.] (1925), ki je nastal v soavtorstvu Asje Lācis (roj. Anna Liepiņa, por. Lācis ali Lāce, 1891–1979) in Walterja Benjamina (1892–1940). Gre za študijo primera, ki uporablja flanerstvo (fr. *flânerie*) kot strategijo pri ustvarjanju. Pripovedovalca, torej figuro pohajkovalca po mestu in oddaljenega opazovalca, sta soavtorja zasnovala tako, da pridejo do izraza razlike v interpretaciji s strani moškega in ženske – flanerja (fr. *flâneur*) in flanerke (fr. *flâneuse*). V eseju je Neapelj prikazan s protistavo dveh vidikov: filozof Benjamin mesto obravnava kot sistem ter pri tem preučuje njegove strukture in kategorije, gledališka režiserka Lācis pa na mesto gleda kot na dinamično predstavo. Pogleda se zlijeta v edinstven pripovedni glas. Članek osvetljuje pomen raziskovanja mest za gledališče, prispevke s strani Lācis pa dokazuje z raziskovanjem vzporednic iz njenega izobrazbenega ozadja, ustvarjalnih del, pisem in publikacij. Pod vplivom sodelovanja z Lācis je Benjamin razvil svoj značilni filozofski slog; zametke najdemo v tem eseju, saj je v njem uvedel metafori poroznosti in konstelacije, ki ju je pozneje razširil v koncepta. Članek se zaključuje z ugotovitvijo, da flanerstvo kot strategija raziskovanja in pripovedovanja združuje vitalnost žive izkušnje z gledališčem in filozofijo, cilj pa je navdihniti sveže poglede na to, kako videti in bivati v svetu. Z drugimi besedami, utelešati revolucionarni cilj avantgard – presejanje umetniških, ideoloških oziroma kulturnih meja – ter jih s tem podpirati v njihovih inovativnih in transformativnih prizadevanjih.

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**Ključne besede:** Neapelj, živa izkušnja, gledališkost urbanega okolja, poroznost, konstelacija, ustvarjalno sodelovanje, flaner in flankerka, pripovedni glas

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# Flanerstvo kot strategija: revolucionarne ideje avantgard v soavtorstvu Asje Lācis in Walterja Benjamina

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Članek »Flanerstvo kot strategija: revolucionarne ideje avantgard v soavtorstvu Asje Lācis in Walterja Benjamina« obravnava esej »Neapelj« (1925), ki sta ga skupaj napisala Asja Lācis (roj. Anna Liepiņa, 1891–1979) in Walter Benjamin (1892–1940), in sicer kot študijo primera, ki uporablja flanerstvo kot strategijo pri ustvarjanju. Pripovedovalca, ki ga poseblja figura pohajkovalca po mestu in opazovalca, soavtorja v svoji interpretaciji oblikujeta s protistavo pogledov flanerja (moškega) in flanerke (ženske), pri čemer pride do izraza različnost njunih gledišč. Posledica te dvojnosti je inovativen esejski pristop, pri katerem filozof Benjamin preučuje Neapelj kot sistem struktur in kategorij, gledališka režiserka Lācis pa mesto interpretira kot dinamično predstavo. Pogleda se zlijeta v edinstven pripovedni glas, v katerem se prepletata analiza in imerzija. Dejstvo, da Neapelj raziskujeta tako flaner kot flanerka, omogoča enakovredno in ustvarjalno dopolnjevanje v obojestransko korist in s tem pomeni izziv spolni pristranskosti. Interdisciplinarna metoda eseja sledi načelom avantgardnih gibanj zgodnjega 20. stoletja, ki so si prizadevala za preseganje starih in ustvarjanje novih tradicij pa tudi za brisanje ločnic med visoko in nizko kulturo, teorijo in prakso, centrom in periferijo.

Pričujoča raziskava osvetljuje pomen raziskovanja mest za gledališče, s poudarkom na pomembnih prispevkih s strani Lācis. V argumentaciji namreč izpostavi intelektualni prispevek, ki ga lahko povežemo z Lācis glede na njeno strokovno izobrazbo in izkušnje, ki jih je pridobila kot avantgardna gledališka režiserka. Z analizo vsebine eseja članek izpostavlja gledališke metafore in omembe režijskih metod tedanjega časa, vključno z razpravami o revolucioniranju gledaliških praks, na primer z uprizarjanjem na ulicah in vključevanjem občinstva. Ključno vlogo Lācis pri oblikovanju esejskega pristopa dokazuje z raziskovanjem njenega izobrazbenega ozadja, ustvarjalnih del, pisem in publikacij. Citati iz njenih pisem, ki jih hrani Latvijski narodni literarni in glasbeni

muzej, jasno kažejo na plodno sodelovanje in soavtorstvo z Walterjem Benjaminom. Njena razmišljanja o življenja polnem kaosu, gledališkosti in norem tempu mesta so zelo podobna refleksijam v eseju »Neapelj«, kar dokazuje, da je močno vplivala na njuno skupno pisanje. Njen prispevek je očiten tudi iz dejstva, da je za opis dinamičnosti mesta uporabljen gledališki okvir, v katerem se Neapelj preobrazi v oder za rituale, geste in predstave. V eseju je mestni prostor prikazan kot živi spektakel, v katerem se prepletajo verski obredi, ulične procesije, interakcije pri trgovanju in spontana praznovanja, realnost pa se prepleta z gledališkostjo.

Članek za preučevanje pripovedovanja zgodb v eseju uporablja analizo opisanih prizorov. Začetni prizor je podoben uvodnemu delu predstave; primerljiv je s prologom zgodovinske tragedije, odraža pa gledališkost vsakdanjega življenja. Benjamin in Lācis flanerstvo uporabita za transformacijo pohajkovanja in opazovanja v pripovedno strategijo. Z ritmom zapisanega besedila odslikavata hrup neapeljskih ulic, pred ključnimi trenutki refleksije pa uporabita kontemplativne premore. Premori delujejo kot celice poroznega sistema in nam omogočajo panoramski vpogled v življenje Neaplja. Posledica hibridnega pristopa je kinematografska in kalejdoskopska struktura eseja, ki mesto prikazuje kot fluidno in fragmentirano sekvenco živih izkušenj. Članek raziskuje flanerstvo kot način angažiranja; izpostavlja, da flanerstvo lahko poveže živo izkušnjo z gledališko in filozofsko prakso ter tako ustvari fluiden prostor, kjer se prepletata opazovanje in predstava, vsakdanja srečavanja pa postanejo refleksivna dejanja raziskovanja in ustvarjanja pomena. Mozaična esejska struktura, ki združuje živahne opise vsakdanjega življenja s filozofskimi vpogledi, ponazarja avantgardno vizijo preseganja meja – umetniških, ideoloških oziroma kulturnih.

Ključna tema eseja je poroznost, metafora za strukturo Neaplja od njegovih vulkanskih temeljev do arhitekturne in družbene ureditve. Poroznost označuje konceptualno in fizično realnost, v kateri se odraža igriva interakcija med zasebnim in javnim prostorom, dnevom in nočjo, delom in prostim časom ter trgovanjem in hazardiranjem. Zaradi poroznosti mesta jasnih ločnic ni več; poraja se polje nenehnega stika in improvizacije. Ta okvir ne predstavlja le temeljev za filozofske vpoglede v eseju, temveč tudi za njegov gledališki slog, saj so javni prostori podobni odrskim, vsakdanje življenje pa se odvija kot predstava. Neapelj je predstavljen kot hibriden in fluiden prostor, v katerem nam soavtorska pogleda flanerja in flanerke razkrivata liminalne prostore tranzicije in transformacije.

Etika sodelovanja, ki prežema skupno delo Benjamin in Lācis, je prispevala k transnacionalnemu širjenju revolucionarnih avantgardnih idej; poleg tega je izzivala asimetrije med periferijo in centrom ter različne oblike spolne pristranskosti. Članek izpostavlja tudi, kako je njuno sodelovanje vplivalo na Benjaminovo intelektualno pot. Pod vplivom Lācis je Benjamin razvil svoj značilni filozofski slog, saj je v »Neaplju«

prvič vpeljal metafore, kot sta poroznost in konstelacija, ki ju je pozneje razvil v temeljna koncepta. V jedru teh idej je povezanost fragmentov – odraz zavezanosti avantgarde polifoniji in hibridnosti.

Članek se konča z ugotovitvijo, da flanerstvo kot strategija raziskovanja in pripovedovanja združuje dinamično živo izkušnjo z gledališčem in filozofijo, cilj pa je navdihniti sveže poglede na to, kako videti in bivati v svetu. S tem uteleša transdisciplinarni pristop, pri katerem se prepletajo umetnost, filozofija, gledališkost in živa izkušnja. Ne gre torej le za metodo, ki ji uspe ujeti bistvo Neaplja, temveč tudi vzpostavlja okvir za sodobne razprave o urbanizmu, odpornosti kulture in družbeni koheziji.

*Prevedla Urška Daly*