

Flaneur: A Modern Urban Figure

Flanör: Bir Modern Kent Figürü

Köksal Alver¹

Abstract

Flaneur, is one of the important figures in modern city life. A social type that exists with modernity. He is in the midst of modern relationships, urban society and consumer society. He is in the places like avenue, street, boulevard, passage, showcase. He is familiar with the objects and in contact with the people in these creations. He has associated with the crowd, disappeared in the crowd, fed by the crowd. But he is alone on his own; because at the same time, he knits his own individual world. He has the self-confident and is the one whocritizes society. Although he is fed by crowd, he could turn back to it. Flaneur which is one of the most interesting types of modern life, he is a remarkable type of modern urban life to discuss and speak about the urban problems such as, rituals, consumption, leisure, urbanism. In terms of the cultural implications of modern urban life, it is one that must be followed.

Keywords: *Flaneur, Urban, Modernism, Everyday Life.*

¹Doç. Dr., Selçuk Üniversitesi, Edebiyat Fakültesi, Sosyoloji Bölümü Öğretim Üyesi, kalver@hotmail.com.

Özet

Flanör, modern kent hayatının önemli figürlerinden biridir. Modernite ile var olan bir sosyal tiptir. Kentsel toplumun, tüketim toplumunun, modern ilişkilerin ortasında yer almaktadır. Cadde, sokak, bulvar, pasaj, vitrin gibi mekânların içindedir. Bu mekânlardaki nesnelere, insanlarla içli dışlıdır, onlarla iletişim halindedir. Kalabalıkla beraberdir, kalabalıklarda kaybolmaktadır, kalabalıktan beslenmektedir. Ama yalnızdır, kendi başınadır; çünkü aynı zamanda kendi bireysel dünyasını örmektedir. Kendine güvenen, topluma eleştirel yaklaşan biridir. Kalabalıktan beslendiği halde ona sırtını dönebilendir. Modern hayatın en ilginç tiplerinden biri olan flanör, kentsel hayat ritüelleri, tüketim, boş zaman, kentlilik gibi sorunların konuşulması, tartışılması bakımından kayda değer bir tiptir. Modern kent hayatının kültürel açımları açısından izlenmesi gereken biridir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Flanör, Kent, Modernizm, Gündelik Hayat.

Introduction

Flaneur/idle who emerges because of the conditions of everyday life in modernity, is a socio-cultural type and a social - historical phenomenon. This type plays a key role in resolving such cases of modernity, idleness, sightseeing, observation, consumption, showcase, leisure. Flaneur who raises at a particular time (19th century), in a particular place (Paris), and certain places (passages, streets), is a man of such public and public place associated with (Tester, 1994: 6). He is a prominent concept in the discussion of urbanism and modernity of the city and an important metaphor in reading, re- reading, re-writing and re-reading city such as a text study (Parsons, 2000: 3). Flaneur who feels passages, streets and avenues like its home, has important clues about both the structure of modern daily life and the modern human relations. He is an important symbol-unit released in modern life; he is an important mirror that allows to examine all social phenomena through which he passed, wandered, looked, called, touched.

Flaneur is an idle and empty travelers; an observer or a detective. In deed, the observation is his way of life (Cetinkaya, 2012: 23). He is a skeptical; continuously looks, notes, classifies. He plunges in to the enthusiasm of the city; he comes into being in the crowd with the crowd. He loses his impressions, and wants to see everything. He is as a ‘master’ who teaches the art of sight (Sennett, 2002: 278). He develops aesthetic sensibility while he is walking in the streets. “The dominant element in the flaneur is to look around the things that give pleasure. When this look around concentrates at the level of an observation, an amateur detective appears; If the same look stay limited with the meaningless look, flaneur becomes a badaud (gawking)” (Benjamin, 2002: 163).

Therefore, though flaneur an idle, layabout, he is a strict observer and recorder. It must be that, flaneur is not in a hurry, moves slowly. He reverses the perception of modern life which is oriented towards speed. He moseys, walks by enjoying; He is a ‘traveling actor’ (Bauman, 1998: 210). Why is he slow motion, looking at? Bostancı (2011) clarifies the unvisible sides of flaneur by saying, "Flaneur who penetrates, from the detailed perspective that the turtle speed allows to see, behind the brilliant showcases passage- unlike the flowed crowd- he is the person who gets the chance to see the concrete truth behind the great rhetoric of modernity." he says literally: ‘slow down’ to modern life whom speed is its own principle; ‘slow down, do not plunge into this hell of speed’.

Extensive links between flaneur and the crowd have being established. The crowd is his home; wherever the crowd is, flaneur is there. He is a man of the

crowd, he is in the crowd but he is not one from the crowd. The crowd is a haven for him. At the passages resembling a miniature city, streets or avenues; flaneur watches the objects like a detective in a kind of volatility and transience in the crowd without showing his identity. However, does not interfere with what is happening, he just observes at a distance (Çubuklu, 2004). According to To Baudelaire (2003: 211) who establishing a relationship between the crowd and flaneur "how the bird lives in the air, the fish lives in the water, and he lives in crowds. His love, work, power is: crowds. As an excellent and desirous observer, keeping place in the middle of population, tidal movement between temporary and everlasting is a great pleasure for flaneur. Stay away from home but to feel at home anywhere; to be in the center of the world, to observe, to be hidden from the world- a few of small pleasures of free minds, which the language is insufficient to describe, could be listed in this way. He is an observer, a *prince* enjoying wandering around everywhere incognito... Lover of eternal life falls into the crowd as into a bottomless water cistern. He could be compared with a mirror which is as big as the crowd itself or a kaleidoscope which is fitted out by consciousness: a kaleidoscope which reproduces frivolous elegance of all the elements, the diversity of life. He is an ego which is not satisfied with outside except himself: The ego which always expresses the outside unstable, describes more vivid images than the unruly life. "Crowd or mass always bewitches him. It is "a pleasure to dissolve his own existence in the mass which turned into the amiss and phantom limb and to get lost in the mass of modern times itself. He leaves his willpower to the the stack and the mass, he coalesces with this stack" (Sarı, 2012: 291).

Flaneur adopts a kind of re-action with his presence and actions. He is closely linked with some values, and indifferent some values of the society/life in which he circulates . For example; flaneur, who is as a distinct from the individuals who has a regular work and home/family life, has a nature which is boring at home, comfort at the streets and public spheres, stands against to the disciplinary understanding of a work ethic and a planned time (Çubuklu, 2004). In addition, he is critical the life of a bourgeois who gave his life to the idea of progress and financial accounts. "Bourgeois could hardly spare time himself because of his busy work; whereas, all the time is free for flaneur. Tramping of flaneur, as if, is a kind of demonstration against the modern division of labor which rationalizes the time through specialization" (Artun, 2003: 35). However, his position is not strong enough and continuous as much as the structure (the modern capitalist society) which causes himself to be born and gives rise to the emergence as a figure. Therefore, flaneur is the determining instead of

determined and could go forward on desired road at desired way. Does flaneur, who is the aware of this, select game as the remedy? Judging by Bauman (1994: 142-146), the aim of pointless, tramps of flaneur is the only game; flaneur is a player and the goal of the game is the game itself. Flaneur is a traveling/traveler actor; and he carries his game next to wherever he goes. The aim of his game is: to invent other games, to see the other players and to make the world a game. Flaneur's job is to rehearsal of the world as a theater and of the life as a game. In this way, he makes fun of some values of the capitalist society in which he lives. May be, since he has no such a concern to build a new culture, he concentrates just on the game itself. He has no concern to build great ideals; he picks up his own way, ritual and style, the results are limited to only their own.

Flaneur stays away from the division of labor which is one of the most important signs of social life/the modern world (Durkheim's basic key concepts of modernism). The thing that flaneur protests is: the understanding of the division of labor as well as the pursuit of trade, the consumption of themselves for this cause. However, flaneur, he likes turtles pace of making progress, he wants to take place progress like a turtle, as well as approaches to progress ironically. However, as Benjamin says (2002: 148): the last word is not flaneur's; but Taylor's words 'end to the flaneur' which became motto: Rattier, in 1857, could have written in *Paris n'existe pas* as the following: 'Once upon a time, flaneur whom we everytime come across at pavements and in front of the display windows, the one who is bad hat and doing nothing else but looking around, constantly running after cheap thrills, do not know anything else but only paving stones, horse-drawn street cars, and the type of gas lamps,... Now becomes farmers, wine merchant, fabricator, candy maker, iron and steel industrialist.'

Flaneur offers a convenient position to analyze modernity, modern society and the relations of the modern city (Ferguson, 1994: 22). Flaneur emerges as a new type in Europe, is a product of modernity. He is the viewer of the modern world, modernism. The objects which he looks at, the places which he walks around are the products of modernism: metropolitan cities, streets, arcades, shops. Therefore, the emergence date of flaneur has been taken place with capitalism as well (Mazlish, 1994: 43). As it is, flaneur is an invitation to the modernity and includes the follower in modernity. Flaneur has emerged in the chaotic and confusing ambience of the 19 century's rapid industrialization and growth of the city. So he is in contact with the themes of modern capitalist society (Parsons, 2000: 19). Capitalism is the preliminary of the flaneur's scene in which he is

walking around. Although flaneur's stance seems to deride the main values of capitalism, he is not completely far away from it. Because capitalism has led flaneur to observe and to tramp in a swooned mood; The objects put in front of people by capitalism are motivated by this process. Both passages, windows, streets and products, goods displayed in these venues are the main items which lead to flaneur's tramp. The duration, in which these items can be brought forward by polishing, made the object visible has been started by capitalism. As Benjamin says that the world of commodities and the crowd of customers poisoned idle. The idle has the imprints of the egotistical individuality of capitalism and meaningless of meta form. The passages are ultimately a customers and consumer environment (Çubuklu, 2004).

Flaneur is a key concept to understand the modern city (metropolis in particular). The city is his being field, the main venue in where he exhibits himself, the main reason to carry himself from one shop-window to another, from one passage to another, from one item to another. City is the ground of idleness; he exists there, finds himself in, breaths there. Rural and village are the places where the idleness is not/could not be. Flaneur reads the city like a text from a distance, and the inside (Ferguson, 1994: 31). Flaneur has transformed the city into the desert: He delays time, freezes time and lives eternal freedom. He spends the time wastefully, because he becomes independent from the place in fact (Bauman, 1994: 140).

Flaneur's experience in city is often to roam, to look and walk in the city. "Flaneur is an urban explorer. He measures by the yard up to the furthest corners of metropol; he observes, evpurates and saves memory archives all aspects of modern life with great love. He resides, breathes in the crowds, gets exhilarated crowds. He tramps incognito, nobody can recognize him, but he realizes everyone. He knows people very well. He chooses the heroes of modern life. His heroes are also be his companions... He does not melt while he is taking different shapes, but he reinforces the individuality again each time. As a detective; he tracks down the traces which is covered by crowd" (Artun, 2003: 33). Flaneur who tramps the city, performs a city ritual. What is happening in the city is registered by him. He contacted with the city, he has found himself in 'visual encounter' (Sennett, 2012: 105) with the city.

The place of the crowd in which flaneur enjoys losing himself is the city. Flaneur walks in crowds like floating in the sea. In this sense, metropolis gives the opportunity to flaneur observing modernity; complexity, detail, diversity and

captures other elements here. So in a sense, modernity is hidden by landscapes of metropolis (Frisby, 2003: 13); Flaneur is an passionate audience of these landscapes. Metropol is the concentration point of social differentiation, complex social networks, as well as place of crowds and communities whom limits are undefined. The image of the labyrinth symbolizes both metropolis and the whole of society (Frisby, 2003: 33). “In the eyes of flaneur, metropolis is a infinite demonstration whose watching is luscious; a world of dazzling images, seductive dreams, the World of fantasias: Fantasmagoria. At first, brilliant passages, which he assumes them his home, until late at night. The places which use gas lamps at first. The centers revival of street life, night life. Cradles of modern everyday life culture. Scenes in which eating, drinking, clothing etiquette, pleasure, charm, fashion, luxury, are being offered to the world. Shop windows, bars, bistros, panoramas, wax sculpture museums, exhibitions” (Artun, 2003: 35). In this sense, following flaneur means to explore the structure of the modern city at the same time. Modern city are equipped with ‘cultural sites’. While people are walking around the city, they could not withdraw themselves from visiting such sites; shopping malls, indoor shopping arcades, museums, exhibitions, entertainment venues. These sites attract the crowd/stack, is decorated by full of commodities which is prepared and shown for crowd. And the crowd could not withdraw itself from that ornaments, that glimmer, that complicated attractiveness. In a sense, cultural tourism works inside the city (Featherstone, 1998).

To be a good hikers of flaneur is not in vain. “Another form of self-discovery traveled through a city, like surrealists, is to tramp in streets, random, uncontrolled... A cityfolk can walk a distance for a particular purpose, but sometimes it works for enjoy and does not prevent to stop his steps. Although hikers, sometimes, walks around with a map on his hands to get to know the places to where perhaps he can return back more aware in the future, he tries to discover the city by creating his own personal way. Flaneur, who does not recognize any limit except the attractiveness of the city, walk around in that way. He leaves his habits, the used to routes, he goes beyond them, forgets them” (Breton, 2008: 101). Idle who is the one just enjoy it. As Benjamin says that: urban world is flaneur’s home. “The street becomes the property of flaneur, how an ordinary man feels himself in his own walls as his home, flaneur feels himself at home in the facades. Bright glazed company signs are nearly a wall ornament as an oilpaint of a bourgeois’ hall walls; walls are the notebook on the desk; newspaper kiosks are libraries; the balkonies of cafes are bay windows facing

the street from where he leans after he has finished his Works” (Benjamin, 2002: 131).

Flaneur/idle who emerges at the cultural world as a result of modern urban relationships itself is a unit, a sample or even a symbol character. To follow and analyze him also means to see and explore the relationships of modern city, spaces and the change in space idea, specific aspects of mass society, the tide of modern daily life.

References

- ARTUN, A. (2003) “Baudelaire’de Sanatın Özerkleşmesi ve Modernizm”, Charles Baudelaire, *Modern Hayatın Ressamı* içinde, İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul.
- BAUDELAİRE, C. (2003) *Modern Hayatın Ressamı*, Çev. Ali Berktaş, İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul.
- BAUMAN, Z. (1994) “Desert Spectacular”, *The Flaneur* içinde, Ed. Keith Tester, Routledge, New York.
- BAUMAN, Z. (1998) *Postmodern Etik*, Çev. Alev Türker, Ayrıntı Yayınları, İstanbul.
- BENJAMIN, W. (2002) *Pasajlar*, Çev. Ahmet Cemal, YKY, İstanbul.
- BOSTANCI, N. (2011) *Kuma Yazılanlar*, Özgür Yayınları, İstanbul.
- BRETON, D. L. (2008) *Yürümeye Övgü*, Çev. İsmail Yerguz, Sel Yayınları, İstanbul.
- ÇETİNKAYA, H. (2012) “Devletsiz Düşünce”, *Flaneur Düşünce* içinde, Der. Hüseyin Köse, Ayrıntı Yayınları, İstanbul.
- ÇUBUKLU, Y. (2004) “Gözlemeden Tüketmeye Aylaklık”, *Virgül*, Sayı: 70, Şubat.
- FEATHERSTONE, M. (1998) “The Flaneur, The City and Virtual Public Life”, *Urban Studies*, Volume: 35, Issue: 5/6, May.
- FERGUSON, P. P. (1994) “The Flaneur on and off the streets of Paris”, *The Flaneur* içinde, Ed. Keith Tester, Routledge, New York.
- FRISBY, D. (2003) “Georg Simmel: Modernitenin İlk Sosyoloğu”, *Modern Kültürde Çatışma* içinde, Georg Simmel, İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul.

MAZLISH, B. (1994) “The Flaneur: from spectator to representation”, *The Flaneur* içinde, Ed. Keith Tester, Routledge, New York.

PARSONS, D. L. (2000) *Streetwalking the Metropolis*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

SARI, A. (2012) “Flaneurün Edebi Etiyolojisi: Dünya Edebiyatın Flaneurlük”, *Flaneur Düşünce* içinde, Der. Hüseyin Köse, Ayrıntı Yayınları, İstanbul.

SENNETT, R. (2002) *Kamusal İnsanın Çöküşü*, Çev. Serpil Durak-Abdullah Yılmaz, Ayrıntı Yayınları, İstanbul.

TESTER, K. (1994) “Introduction”, *The Flaneur* içinde, Ed. Keith Tester, Routledge, New York.

