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The Walking of The Anti-Flâneur: The Practice of Experiencing The City in Ayhan Geçgin's Novel Named Uzun Yürüyüş

Anti-Flanörün Yürüyüşü: Ayhan Geçgin'in Uzun Yürüyüş Romanında Kenti Deneyimleme Pratiği

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Abstract The modern city is a complex structure that transforms an individual's daily experience spatially, intellectually, and sensorially. The accelerated urbanization that followed the Industrial Revolution intensified conditions such as crowding, speed, anonymity, and diversity, exerting profound effects on individuals. Consequently, the city emerged as a critical site of both observation and representation. Emerging in 19th-century Paris, the figure of the flâneur crystallized as an urban subject who regarded the city as an aesthetic object and sought to comprehend modernity by reading the streets of a city as though they were a text. However, in the 21st century, the advent of the surveillance society, digitalization, the culture of speed, and spatial disorientation has paralyzed the flâneur's capacity to generate meaning, giving rise to the figure of the anti-flâneur, a negation of its 19th-century counterpart. The anti-flâneur is a passive subject overwhelmed by the city rather than observing it, incapable of forging aesthetic or intellectual connections, and lacks a coherent sense of direction. This study examines Ayhan Geçgin's novel *Uzun Yürüyüş [The Long March]* as an example of the anti-flâneur typology in contemporary literature. The novel's nameless protagonist drifts from the city center towards its peripheries, devoid of the flâneur's observational power and aesthetic awareness. His relationship with the city is marked by dissolution, fading, and silence rather than by processes of meaning-making. Although he is initially a potential observer, the character gradually devolves into a passive subject, confined to his own body. In this regard, Uzun Yürüyüş provides a literary illustration of the individual's anonymization and transformation into an anti-flâneur within the modern urban landscape.

Öz Modern kent bireyin gündelik yaşam deneyimini mekânsal, düşünsel ve duyusal olarak dönüştüren karmaşık bir yapıdır. Sanayi Devrimi sonrası ivmelenen kentleşme süreçleri kalabalık, hız, anonimlik ve çeşitlilik gibi unsurların birey üzerindeki etkisini artırmıştır. Kent bir gözlem ve temsil alanı hâline gelmiştir. 19. yüzyıl Paris'inde ortaya çıkan flanör figürü kenti estetik bir nesne olarak algılayan, sokakları bir metin gibi okuyarak modernliği anlamlandırmaya çalışan kentli bir özne olarak şekillenmiştir. Ancak 21. yüzyılda gözetim toplumunun yaygınlaşması, dijitalleşme, hız kültürü ve mekânsal yönsüzlük gibi olgular flanörün anlam üretici yönünü felce uğratarak onun zıddı olan anti-flanör tipini doğurmuştur. Anti-flanör kenti gözlemleyen değil ona maruz kalan, yön tayin edemeyen, kentle estetik veya düşünsel ilişki kuramayan edilgen bir figürdür. Bu çalışmada Ayhan Geçgin'in *Uzun Yürüyüş* adlı romanı anti-flanör tipolojisinin çağdaş edebiyattaki yansımasının bir örneğini göstermek amacıyla ele alınmıştır. Romanın isimsiz kahramanı modern kentin merkezinden çevresine doğru sürüklenirken flanörün sahip olduğu gözlem gücünden ve estetik bilincinden yoksun biçimde hareket eder. Kentle kurduğu ilişki bir anlam üretim sürecinden ziyade çözülme, silikleşme ve sessizliğe işaret eder. Gözlemci olma potansiyeli taşıması beklenen karakter giderek gözlenen, edilgen ve kendi bedeniyle sınırlı bir varoluşa çekilir. Bu yönüyle *Uzun Yürüyüş* bireyin modern kent içinde nasıl anonimleştiğini ve anti-flanör hâline geldiğini gösteren edebî bir örnek sunar.

Keywords Uzun Yürüyüş · Ayhan Geçgin · anti-flâneur · flâneur · the city

Anahtar Kelimeler Uzun Yürüyüş · Ayhan Geçgin · anti-flanör · flanör · kent

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Introduction

The city, conceived as one of the most intricate and multilayered spaces of modernity both physically and intellectually, has become a primary locus in shaping individual existence. Among the figures that emerged with modernity in the transformation of urban space, the flâneur, an observer who approaches city life through an aesthetic and intellectual sensibility, stands out as one of the defining characters of 19th century urban culture in Western Europe. Described by Charles Baudelaire as "the painter of modern life," the flâneur emerges as an urban subject who moves through crowds, observes the urban milieu, and seeks meaning by reading the city as if it were a text. The flâneur engages with the city through a detached yet perceptive awareness. Yet, contemporary dynamics such as acceleration, digitalization, the proliferation of surveillance technologies, and the shift from anonymity to isolation have eroded the flâneur's capacity for observation. The term of anti-flâneur emerges in their wake: a passive, often disoriented figure incapable of perceiving, let alone interpreting, the urban environment.

In contrast to the flâneur, the anti-flâneur is a figure who fails to cultivate any aesthetic or intellectual rapport with the city. Though in motion, his movement is devoid of meaning. He drifts through the city without observing; he walks, but without direction; he is among the crowd yet remains alone. Within the rapidly evolving spatial configurations of the digital age, this new urban subject embodies passivity rather than the production of meaning, a burdened perceptual state in place of observation, and a surveilled existence in lieu of anonymous drift.

In this context, Ayhan Geçgin's *Uzun Yürüyüş* constitutes as a significant example in contemporary Turkish literature for its portrayal of the anti-flâneur typology. In the novel, an unnamed protagonist undertakes a long and aimless walk from the city center to its peripheries, and eventually toward the margins of the rural. He neither engages in aesthetic contemplation nor apprehends the city as an object of thought. Rather, he emerges as a subject expelled by the city, one who has lost his memory, whose language and identity have faded into obscurity. This study aims to examine the transformation of the modern urban experience as depicted in *Uzun Yürüyüş*, tracing the shift from the flâneur to the anti-flâneur and exploring the existential unraveling this transition induces in the individual.

1. The City as a Domain of Existence

The city is, by its very nature, a complex and difficult concept to define. This complexity stems from the fact that, throughout history and across different geographies, the meaning of the city has changed and diversified as a result of various social movements. Max Weber defines the city in simple terms as a relatively closed settlement composed of one or more clusters of distinct dwellings.[1] Although this somewhat rudimentary definition offers insight into the earliest forms of urban life, cities have undergone profound transformations structurally and socially from primitive societies to industrial ones. Therefore, the modern understanding of the city today entails a much more intricate and layered meaning than Weber's definition once suggested. Amid this complexity, the city emerges as a spatial manifestation of enduring social practices indicating that cities did not appear spontaneously but rather have evolved through historical processes of change and development.

As the city emerged gradually through a developmental trajectory, the influences of earlier modes of life have not entirely disappeared. Thus, our contemporary social life still bears traces, however faint, of older social formations whose typical settlement patterns include the farm, the manor, and the village. These historical residues have been further reinforced by the migration of people from rural areas, where "older" ways of life[2] remain dominant, into urban centers. Therefore, we should not expect to encounter abrupt or

[1] Max Weber. *Şehir.* trans. Musa Ceylan (Yarın Yayınları, 2010), 87.
[2] Older ways of life refer where most of economic activities depend on need-based production rather than mass-profit-making processes.

discontinuous distinctions between urban and rural personality types.[3] As a public space, the city underwent a significant transformation in character and meaning with the rise of capitalism following the Industrial Revolution differing considerably from its pre-nineteenth-century forms. Even the modern usage of the term "city" began to take shape only after the Industrial Revolution. In discussing the concept of the city, Raymond Williams underscores how common usages of the term are closely tied to the Industrial Revolution.[4] With the industrialization, cities became far more dynamic, densely populated, and crowded in a level that has never been seen before in previous eras. The city cannot be fully explained through its physical infrastructure or by an artificially imposed order; it is fundamentally an expression of a certain state of mind, of enduring traditions, and of the habitual behaviors and sensibilities that underpin them. Put it differently, the city is not merely a tangible environment, but also a reflection of the vital processes experienced by the people who inhabit it, a product of both nature and, more pointedly, human nature itself.[5]

In modern life, individuals are subjected to constant encounters and interactions, marked by the challenges posed by strangers and the unfamiliar. In this respect, the city becomes the center of a disorienting and overstimulating order, one in which individuals are frequently exposed to psychological shocks and unexpected incidents.[6] The concentration of large populations in urban areas has led to a noticeable rise in numerous societal problems, including poverty, crime, violence, hunger, and public health crises. Thus, while the city offers the individual a new existential space, it simultaneously compels them to confront a structure that challenges them through its own internal dynamics. According to Louis Wirth, for the modern individual, the city is not merely a place where opportunities for housing and employment are more abundant. It is also a dynamic center that draws in the farthest corners of the world, bringing together disparate geographies, peoples, and activities within a shared framework. In this sense, the city serves as both a shaping force and a regulatory hub for economic, political, and cultural life.[7]

As cities expanded increasingly through mechanization, they not only gave rise to new and diverse domains within working life but also transformed into arenas in which a wide array of everyday practices took shape. According to Georg Simmel observes, the city confronts individuals at every street corner with the full dynamism and diversity of economic, occupational, and social life. In this sense, it stands in stark contrast to the town or countryside, especially in terms of the sensory foundations of psychic life. As a space that is constituted by differences, the city compels the individual to attain a far greater level of awareness and consciousness than rural life typically demands from its inhabitants.[8] Thus, modern life not only transforms the individual's existence but also directly reconfigures urban experience, attributing a new meaning to how space is perceived and understood. At the same time, the individual's mental operations undergo change as well. With the rise of the modern city, the individual acquires a new gaze, an altered perceptual framework through which the urban landscape is interpreted. One mode of such interpretation is embodied in the figure of the *flâneur*.

2. The Flâneur as an Urban Observer

The *flâneur* is a figure that emerged alongside modern urban life and gained new significance within the city, particularly following the rise of capitalism in the aftermath of the 19th century. It is widely acknowledged that the flâneur is a figure specific to 19th-century Paris. However, it is important to note that the term did not have widespread usage prior to the 19th century. Until this period, its usage was generally associated with idleness or aimless wandering. From the early 1800s onward, however, the figure of the

[3] Louis Wirth. "Urbanism as a Way of Life". *American Journal of Sociology* 44, no.1 (1938): 3.
[4] Raymond Williams. *Anahtar Sözcükler.* trans. Savaş Kılıç (İletişim Yayınları, 2012), 68.
[5] Robert Ezra Park and Ernst W. Burgess. *Şehir.* trans. Pınar Karababa Kayalıgil (Heretik Yayınları, 2015), 37.
[6] Kevin Robbins. *İmaj.* trans. Nurçay Türkoğlu (Ayrıntı Yayınları, 2013), 218.
[7] Wirth, "Urbanism as a Way of Life," 2.
[8] Georg Simmel. *Bireysellik ve Kültür.* trans. Tuncay Birkan (Metis Yayınları, 2009), 318.

flâneur began to appear more frequently in literary and cultural texts.[9] "The word itself was first defined by the newspaper *Figaro* in 1831 as a male who visited all free spectacles, who made the street his salon and shop windows his furniture."[10] However, the concept of the flâneur was first articulated with a clear definition in 1863, in the French poet Charles Baudelaire's essay *The Painter of Modern Life*. Throughout the text, Baudelaire closely associates the figure with notions of "observation" and "the crowd". "Just as the bird lives in the air and the fish in water, he lives in crowds. His love, his profession, his vocation is the crowd. For the perfect *flâneur*, for the passionate observer, it is a profound joy to make one's home in the heart of the multitude, in the restless ebb and flow, in the place halfway between the ephemeral and the eternal."[11] According to Richard Sennett, Baudelaire chooses to lose himself in the crowd because it is precisely this state of loss that he finds most meaningful. He is an author who believes in the possibility of transcending the cultural boundaries imposed upon individuals in the modern city.[12]

The flâneur is not merely a detached spectator, but someone who is actively engaged with the flow of urban experience: he notices the crowds, the unnoticed objects of the city, and the mundane rhythms of everyday life that most people pass by without reflection. He thinks about what others overlook. "The flâneur is an emblematic representative of modernity and personification of contemporary urbanity."[13] Ali Artun offers a particularly evocative account of the flâneur, one that captures the conceptual essence of the term: "He takes shelter in the crowd, breathes with the crowd, is intoxicated by the crowd. He walks in disguise. No one notices him, yet he notices everyone. He is a connoisseur of human nature."[14]

Beyond questions about when the French term *flâneur* which emerged as a byproduct of urbanization was first used and by whom it was conceptualized, there also exists a degree of ambiguity surrounding its precise meaning. Although often translated into Turkish as *aylak* (idler), the flâneur diverges from this notion in several key respects. *Aylaklık*, or idleness, refers to both a failure to make use of free time and aimless wandering without occupational engagement. By contrast, the flâneur's act of strolling through the city is a purposeful activity, one that entails a conscious process of observation and reflection.[15] For the flâneur, urban wandering is a fundamentally intellectual endeavor; it is not mechanical or arbitrary but instead it possesses its own rhythm and inner coherence.

In this regard, the term "düşünürgezer" (thinker-wanderer), proposed by Ünsal Oskay as a Turkish equivalent for flâneur, proves highly fitting.[16] By combining the acts of "thinking" and "wandering," this formulation captures the thematic core of the flâneur's identity. What truly distinguishes the flâneur from the idler is his capacity to engage intellectually with his surroundings. "The flâneur becomes an idler when individuality is lost; when he loses his creativity and desire to explore and becomes part of the crowd."[17] Although these two terms are frequently used interchangeably in Turkish, a fundamental distinction remains: the flâneur does not become an abstract part of the crowd but watches the crowd as an outside observer.

The flâneur "is the 'spectator' of the modern world, as he manifests himself in the capitalist metropolises, especially Paris, strolling its streets and lovingly regarding his own image in the glass of the arcades and the

[9] Laurent Turcot. "Did The Flâneur Exist? A Parisian Overview". in *The Flâneur Abroad*. Richard Wrigley (Ed.) (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014).

[10] Jonathan Conlin. ""This Publick Sort of Obscurity": The Origins of the Flâneur in London and Paris, 1660-1780". in *The Flâneur Abroad*, Richard Wrigley (Ed.), (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 14.

[11] Charles Baudlaire. *Modern Hayatın Ressamı*, trans. Ali Berktay (İletişim Yayınları, 2013), 210.

[12] Richard Sennett. *Gözün Vicdanı: Kentin Tasarımı ve Toplumsal Yaşam*. trans. Süha Sertabiboğlu and Can Kurultay (Ayrıntı Yayınları, 2013), 149.

[13] Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson. "The Flâneur on and off The Streets of Paris", in *The Flâneur*, Keith Tester (Ed.) (Routledge, 2015), 22.

[14] Ali Artun. "Baudelaire'de Sanatın Özerkleşmesi ve Modernizm". in *Modern Hayatın Ressamı*, Charles Baudlaire (İletişim Yayınları, 2013), 210.

[15] Necla Dağ. "Araftaki Flanör". *Hikmet - Akademik Edebiyat Dergisi*, no. 16 (2022): 401-402.

[16] Ünsal Oskay. "Walter Benjamin Üzerine". in *Estetize Edilmiş Yaşam*, Walter Benjamin (İnkılâp Kitabevi, 2015), 25.

[17] Ekaterina Netchitailova. "The Flâneur, the Badaud and Empathetic Worker". *tripleC* 12, no. 1 (2014): 2.

new department stores."[18] The flâneur derives meaning from urban life specifically, from being immersed within the crowd. The flâneur's existential significance derives from his mode of being-with-others within the urban social sphere.[19] Yet paradoxically, the flâneur is rarely engaged in direct social interaction. Even when surrounded by others, he maintains a detached stance, relating to them through a subject–object dynamic in which they become the objects of his observation. Walter Benjamin captures this paradoxical posture with striking precision, calling the flâneur "a solitary individual who lives within the crowd."[20]

The flâneur was a common figure of the 19th century, essential to any picture of the streets of Paris. The flâneur was the man of leisure who went into the street in search of some satisfaction for his overdeveloped sensibilities. He was, by various accounts, a gastronome, a connoisseur, an idler, an artist, and the one, the true sovereign of Paris.[21] To understand the flâneur's motivation, one must situate him within the historical and spatial context of his emergence. The figure takes shape during a period in which Paris undergoes rapid transformation: its urban fabric is being redesigned, familiar public spaces are being redefined, and everyday practices are disrupted. The flâneur's central object of observation is precisely this sweeping socio-spatial transformation.[22]

One of the constitutive elements of the flâneur's existence is movement. For the flâneur, walking is a way of life. According to Terry Eagleton asserts, the flâneur, in setting off, enacts a conscious resistance to the speed, anonymity, and directionlessness of the modern crowd. His walk is not merely a physical act, but a subtle defiance against the urban rhythm imposed by consumerist modernity. In this regard, the flâneur's slow, careful, and seemingly aimless movement becomes inherently political, a quiet rebellion that reclaims meaning, reconfigures perception, and resists conformity.[23]

3. Notes on the Figure of the Flâneur in Turkish Literature

The flâneur, as a socio-cultural figure, manifests not only in visual and performing arts but also prominently in literature. As a distinctly Western, modern, and urban type, the earliest reflections of the flâneur in Turkish literature may be sought within the Ottoman Empire's modernization trajectory. Characters such as "Felatun Bey", created by Ahmet Mithat Efendi and considered the first example of the idler type in modern Turkish literature[24] and "Bihruz Bey", created by Recaizade Mahmud Ekrem, are among the earliest examples of this type. These characters represent dandyish, indolent figures sustained by inherited wealth, disengaged from productive labor. Although they wander the city and appear in diverse social settings, they lack an articulate awareness of the urban space. These characters do not observe the city in any critical or reflective sense; rather, they are swept away by the rhythms of urban life. Their preferred locales are not dense metropolitan centers but leisure sites, promenades, and parks. Their mobility, often facilitated by horse carriages, remains disconnected from the symbolic and perceptual engagement with the modernizing city thus distancing them from the figure of the flâneur proper.[25]

Following the War of Independence, Turkish literature's primary focus shifted to Anatolian themes and realities. Yet, with the onset of the early Republican period, urban life began to re-emerge as a literary concern, once again inviting a reconsideration of the flâneur figure. Though some characters from this period exhibit flâneur-like features, few can be classified as flâneurs in the full Western sense. One partial example is Ömer, the protagonist of Sabahattin Ali's novel *İçimizdeki Şeytan* (1940). Ömer is marked by profound inner

[18] Bruce Mazlish. "The Flâneur: From Spectator to Representation". in *The Flâneur*, Keith Tester (Ed.) (Routledge, 2015), 43.
[19] Keith Tester. "Introduction". in *The Flâneur*. Keith Tester (Routledge, 2015), 8.
[20] Walter Benjamin. *Pasajlar.* trans. Ahmet Cemal (Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2014), 149.
[21] Gregory Shaya. "The Flâneur, the Badaud, and the Making of a Mass Public in France". *The American Historical Review* (109), No. 1 (2004): 47.
[22] A. Hilal Iavarone ve Pelin Dursun Çebi. "Flanörden Günümüze Kent Gezgini Karakterleri". *Mimarlık* , no. 426 (2022): 50.
[23] Terry Eagleton. *Estetiğin İdeolojisi*. trans. Bülent Gözkan et al. (Doruk Yayınları, 2010), 419.
[24] Handan İnci. "Felâtun Bey'i Tanır mısınız?". *Kitap-lık*, no. 83 (2005).
[25] Melike Kılıç. "Türk Romanında Flanör Düşüncenin Eleştirel İki Yorumu : Aylak Adam ve Aylaklar" (Master Thesis, 2017), 44, National Thesis Center (459975).

conflict and existential questioning. He is alienated from dominant social norms and struggles with a deeply introspective mode of existence. As he searches for meaning in love, solitude, and human relationships, he spirals into a constant state of emotional unrest. While Ömer's trajectory reflects key traits of the idler, a loosely defined idle type characterized by social detachment, anxious introspection, and existential drift, he nonetheless lacks the perceptual engagement with the city that would qualify him as a flâneur.[26]

Another significant reflection of the flâneur figure in Turkish literature can be found in the short stories of Sait Faik Abasıyanık. His prose frequently foregrounds idleness, urban observation, and individuals lost or dispersed within the everyday fabric of city life. These themes are not merely narrative motifs but signal a perceptive engagement with the city that resonates with the sensibilities of flâneur. His story *Hişt, Hişt..!* opens with a characteristically minimal yet suggestive line: "I was walking. And the more I walked, the more I opened up."[27] Here, walking is presented not as a mere act of locomotion, but as a process of existential unfolding a means of attuning the self to the world through movement. In another story, *Kafa ve Şişe*, Abasıyanık returns to the motif of wandering and expands on how the act of walking enables a heightened, though idiosyncratic, mode of perception:

> All day, I wandered without knowing what I was doing. I haven't known what I'm doing for a long time. Only when I wander like this can I truly see things. Otherwise, even if I keep my eyes wide open, it's no use! I can't claim that I perceive any person, object, or event in full. I tend to catch the trivial, the marginal details down to the last thread, but I miss the essential. If I were called to testify as a witness, it would be a disaster. Imagine a man pulling a knife in the street. I wouldn't notice the knife, but I'd fixate on the eyebrows of the one pulling it. I wouldn't see the gushing blood or the pain on the victim's face, but I'd catch something entirely irrelevant.[28]

Sait Faik's inclusion of characters with a flâneur like temperament in his short stories can be attributed to the fact that he himself embodies many of the behaviors and dispositions of such a type. Sait Faik exists as a city wanderer who roams through life as a curious eye, conversing with people but mostly refraining from intervening in their situations.[29] This disposition deeply informs his literary work. Another key instance of the flâneur type in Turkish literature appears in Yusuf Atılgan's novel *Aylak Adam* (1959). Until this novel, the concept of idleness in Turkish literature had largely functioned within a consumption-based framework; however, with *Aylak Adam*, idleness was, for the first time, transformed into an existential issue.[30] This is clearly seen in a passage where C. reflects while walking through the crowd:

> Suddenly, it occurred to me that he might be among the crowds spilling over the sidewalks. My unease melted away (It had been caused by the waiter. Or so I thought. I'd seen his face as he held my coat: wrinkled not from laughter, but from sneering; his eyes, what do they call them cunning? No, sleazy. If I had given him money, his hand would've clung to mine. I didn't.). I looked around with interest. The men were freshly shaven, the women freshly made up. Their faces were carefree. Even the legless beggar by the mosque wall and the newspaper boy purple from the cold and without socks looked carefree, too.[31]

In *Aylak Adam*, *flânerie* or idleness is, for the first time, constructed not from a judgmental, external viewpoint, but from an internal gaze focused on the individual's inner world. Rather than being portrayed through negative labels such as snob, heir, loafer, or drifter, as in previous narratives, idleness here reflects a sincere, intellectual, and existential search. In this regard, *Aylak Adam* is not merely a personal narrative; it also serves as a literary symbol of rebellion, which questions middle-class morality and its imposed lifestyle,

[26] Sabahattin Ali. *İçimizdeki Şeytan* (Remzi Kitabevi, 1940).
[27] Sait Faik Abasıyanık. *Alemdağ'da Var Bir Yılan* (İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2021), 79.
[28] Abasıyanık, *Alemdağ'da Var Bir Yılan*, 89.
[29] Murat Gülsoy. "Sait Faik'in Dünyasının Karanlık Yüzü". *Eşik Cini*, no. 6 (2006): 20.
[30] Asiland Sinan Karaman. *Hakan Günday Romanlarında Aylaklık ve Gündelik Yaşam* (Urzeni Yayınları, 2021).
[31] Yusuf Atılgan. *Aylak Adam* (Varlık Yayınları, 1959), 5.

and challenges established social norms. This new type of flâneur, who examines social norms from within and through an individualized distance, marks a critical rupture in modern Turkish literature.[32]

With the turn of the 2000s, the growing interest in metropolitan life made the figure of the flâneur increasingly visible. The intensified focus on metropolitan cities driven by the ongoing processes of modernization and urbanization accelerated migration flows and brought about profound transformations in individual lives. Within this context, the new human type shaped by modernity gradually diverged from the traditional idler figure and evolved into the flâneur: one who roams the crowded streets of the city and is formed within the structures of the capitalist order.[33]

In this light, the flâneur, as described by Walter Benjamin as "one who walks on foot while simultaneously generating thought through impressions of the surroundings"[34] is a figure who deepens the individual's awareness of the city, serving as both a visual and intellectual witness to modern urban life. Yet, like any figure, the flâneur has its counterpart, its reflection, or an incomplete form. The rapid transformation of contemporary urban life, the proliferation of the surveillance society, the contraction of experiential space due to digital technologies, and economic imperatives that compel the individual toward continuous productivity have all contributed to the emergence of a new urban type, which is for whom the flâneur's free and contemplative movement is no longer possible. While the flâneur transforms the city's rhythm into his own existential tempo, this new figure is subjected to -and even imprisoned by- the pace of the city. Within this context, the notion of the *anti-flâneur* arises: a figure who, despite being physically present in the city, fails to establish a reflective connection with it; who remains in motion yet lacks direction; who is observed rather than observing, and who is acted upon rather than engaging in thought.

4. A Figure Within the City, Yet Distant from It: The Anti-Flâneur

The flâneur, born in the bustling arcades of 19th-century Paris, is a child of modernity. Roaming through places rich in visual imagery, the flâneur draws nourishment from the representations of urban culture especially the streets and arcades that emerged alongside modernity.[35] Yet, today the practices of urban experience have shifted significantly. The city no longer offers the kind of spaciousness that invites observation. In this respect, experiencing the city through the eyes of the flâneur has given way to consuming it by passing through without truly seeing. In short, due to various conditions of contemporary life, the figure of the flâneur has largely been replaced by that of the anti-flâneur.

As a conceptual framework, the anti-flâneur offers a multidimensional tool to analyze the ruptures in the classical flâneur's visual and aesthetic mastery over the city within modern and postmodern urban experiences. Although not widely prevalent, the use of the concept can be observed in the literature. As far as the accessible literature reveals, the concept is defined along the axes of control, incompleteness, embodiment, and alienation in stark contrast to the sovereign subject who observes the urban space with detached pleasure. According to Lauren Elkin the anti-flâneur is a figure who, rather than experiencing the urban space as a realm of encounter, discovery, and diversity, observes it through the filters of fear, security, and control; who refuses to empathize by building walls against the other, and who lives life as an isolated monologue.[36]

In his study titled *Imperfect Flâneurs: Anti-heroes of Modern Life*, Simon Yiu-Tsan Ng defines the concept of the anti-flâneur through the "imperfect flâneur" whom he positions as the exact antithesis of Baudelaire's idealized "perfect flâneur" (the hero of modern life) thus rendering him an anti-hero of modernity. According

[32] Nilgün Tandaçgüneş. "Kent Kültüründe Modernizm ve Sonrası: "Gözlemleyen Özne" Olarak Flanörü Yeniden Okumak". in *Flanör Düşünce*, Hüseyin Köse (Ed.) (Ayrıntı Yayınları, 2012), 130.
[33] Dağ, "Araftaki Flanör," 404.
[34] Benjamin, *Pasajlar*, 92.
[35] Tandaçgüneş, "Kent Kültüründe Modernizm ve Sonrası: "Gözlemleyen Özne" Olarak Flanörü Yeniden Okumak," 99.
[36] Lauren Elkin. "Donald Trump, Anti-Flâneur". *Literary Hub*, 7.11.2016, Accessed 13.10.2025. https://lithub.com/donald-trump-anti-flaneur/

to the author, unlike the classical flâneur who can transform the city into an aesthetic landscape with a sovereign and detached gaze, this figure is a character whose existence remains incomplete, ongoing, yet never concluding, much like the grammatical imperfect tense. In this context, the imperfect flâneur (in other words *the anti-flâneur*) is an individual who has lost their mastery amidst the chaos of the modern metropolis, whose experience is fragmented, and who is confined within the mundane and the banality of everyday life. Consequently, rather than observing the city as a work of art, this figure is compelled to confront both the city's imperfections and their own inadequacies.[37]

Yasmine Ramadan's study, titled *Space in Modern Egyptian Fiction*, is another important text that approaches the concept of the anti-flâneur through the axes of exhaustion and the quest for control. In this study, the author employs the concept of the anti-flâneur when analyzing the urban excursions of the protagonist in Sonallah Ibrahim's novel *The Smell of It*. According to Ramadan, unlike the classical flâneur who glides through the streets with a sense of aesthetic pleasure or freedom, the anti-flâneur is a figure who is unable to experience any joy from his urban wanderings, has lost his agency within an oppressive system, and attempts to create a false sense of control in a world where he has none by obsessively tracking his own steps.[38]

Anne Flannery's study, titled *The Anti-Flâneur in Twentieth-Century Austrian Literature: Walking and Becoming Text*, is another text that provides a framework for defining the concept. In this study, when discussing the concept of the anti-flâneur, the author foregrounds its characteristics that rely on direct physical action (walking) rather than visual perception, thereby corporeally embodying the urban text. According to Flannery, rather than observing the city from an external, detached, and aesthetic vantage point like the classical flâneur, the anti-flâneur is a figure who reads the city solely through the act of walking; through this continuous motion, the figure dismantles their own boundaries as a subject and materializes the illegible historical and physical layers of the city within their own body, ultimately transforming into an incarnation of a text themselves.[39] Unlike the freely roaming, melancholic figure of the classical flâneur, the anti-flâneur (an urban dweller deindividualized by the city's rigid structures, locked into predetermined paths, and trapped within diminishing possibilities) is a victim of capitalist urban frameworks, a defeated subject condemned to inaction and reactivity. "The malaise of the anti-flâneur (the lumberer, the sleepwalker, the shuffler?) is that of diminishing possibilities, shrinking hopes, dissolving faith."[40] In other words, the anti-flâneur is a tragic figure who has lost the ability to experience the city with detachment, internalizing social and political deadlocks to transform the city into an entirely new and morbid cemetery.[41] All definitions and the conceptual framework converge on the premise that the anti-flâneur establishes a fraught relationship with the city. The anti-flâneur is a figure who does not wander idly through the urban space, who refuses to lose themselves among shop windows, and whose organic bond with the city has been disrupted. In this sense, by embodying the constricted sphere into which modern urban life traps the individual and by subverting the urban experience in an unprecedented manner, the anti-flâneur constitutes a new typology of the modern individual, one who has failed to declare their heroism in the modern age.

To understand the rupture spatially, one must turn to Michel de Certeau's distinction between visual and bodily experience. The classical flâneur operates like Certeau's "voyeur" looking down from above, an Icarus figure who transforms the city into a transparent, readable text. The anti-flâneur, however, has lost the privilege of reading the city as an aesthetic totality; he is the embodiment of the ordinary practitioners of the city who walk "down below," blindly writing the urban text with their footsteps without ever being able

[37] Simon Yiu-Tsan Ng. "Imperfect Flâneurs: Anti-heroes of Modern Life" (PhD Thesis, 2015).
[38] Yasmine Ramadan. *Space in Modern Egyptian Fiction* (Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 36.
[39] Flannery, Anne. "The anti-flâneur in Twentieth-Century Austrian Literature: Walking and Becoming Text" (PhD Thesis, 2011).
[40] Retinalechoes. "The Anti-Flâneur in Oh Boy and Oslo 31". *Retinalechoes*, 18.06.2013, Accessed 18.9.2025. https://retinalechoes.wordpress.com/2013/06/18/the-anti-flaneur-in-oh-boy-and-oslo-31/
[41] Elizabeth Smith Rousselle. *Gender and Modernity in Spanish Literature 1789– 1920* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 71.

to read it. Because although his body moves, his mind no longer travels...[42] The flâneur's walk dissolves into a kind of stagnant motionlessness in the anti-flâneur. The anti-flâneur does not walk, not in the meaningful, reflective sense, because although the body moves, the mind no longer travels. Yet the anti-flâneur is not merely a passive urban dweller. He is also someone who confronts the city, rejects it, even harbors hatred toward it. Whereas the flâneur regards modernity with admiration and melancholy, the anti-flâneur no longer looks at modernity at all, he refuses to be engaged with it. For this reason, the anti-flâneur is related to the city through both sensory withdrawal and cognitive flight.

The anti-flâneur can also be read as a critique of the modern world. It can be seen as an objection to the flâneur's nostalgic aesthetics, his capacity to interpret modernity, and even to Benjamin's melancholic romanticism. It is because the anti-flâneur is no longer truly present on the city's streets. Though his body may be there, he cannot establish any spiritual rapport with the city; he consumes it without situating it within a reflective or intellectual framework. Rather than being a subject who observes the city, the anti-flâneur becomes an object drifting across its slippery surfaces. For him, there is no walking, but slipping; no orientation, but coincidence; no gaze, but emptiness. In short, the anti-flâneur is a figure who turns away from the possibilities of observation and drifting offered by modern urban life, one who either does not experience the city at all, or who, despite doing so, refuses to make meaning from it, existing instead in a state of sensory withdrawal or reactive inward collapse. Undoubtedly, certain social, technological, and psychological factors play a formative role in the emergence of the anti-flâneur. These dynamics are significant not only for articulating the nature of this figure, but also for illuminating the broader transformations of the modern world.

4.1. Experiencing the City in a Surveillance Society

In the 21st century, the city largely became a space controlled through surveillance. The figure of the flâneur emerged within the modern urban life of 19th-century Paris. However, in the late capitalist societies of the 20th and 21st centuries, processes such as the fragmentation of the public space, the loss of individual anonymity, and the proliferation of surveillance mechanisms have given rise to the anti-flâneur. Surveillance is recognized as one of the defining features of modernity. The dispersed and rudimentary forms of surveillance characteristic of traditional and feudal societies have evolved into more intense and systematic structures in the modern era. Advances in information technologies provide rapid and easy access to desired data, while significantly increasing the extent to which individuals are surveilled.[43]

This new reality constitutes a crucial development likely to render the flâneur obsolete, as surveillance obstructs the possibility of experiencing the city with the naked eye. Moreover, this is not merely achieved through cameras installed at specific urban locations. Modern urban dwellers, whether consciously or unconsciously, often willingly participate in this cycle. Through mobile phones, internet data, GPS tracking devices, and similar technologies, individuals have become objects whose actions are constantly monitored and whereabouts are known. David Lyon's scholarship on surveillance society is particularly instructive in this regard. Lyon argues that surveillance is not merely an instrument of state power; in modern society, it has become a normalized condition shaping every moment of everyday life.[44] Consequently, the flâneur's ability to wander the city anonymously has been nullified by surveillance systems, digital monitoring technologies, and algorithmic governance. This dynamic can be interpreted as one of the forces giving rise to the anti-flâneur, who is a figure unable to form an intellectual identification with the city and who is observed by the city rather than observing it.

[42] Michel de Certeau. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. trans. Steven Rendall (University of California Press, 1988), 92-93.
[43] İpek Sucu. "Gözetim Toplumunun Karşı Ütopya Yüzü: İktidar Güçleri ve Ötekiler". *Atatürk İletişim Dergisi*, no. 2 (2011): 128.
[44] David Lyon. *Surveillance Society: Monitoring Everyday Life* (Open University Press, 2001).

4.2. Navigating in the Age of Directed Speed

One of the most important key factor severing the flâneur's natural relationship with the city is digitalization. In other words, digital technologies play a decisive role in the emergence of the anti-flâneur. Mobile devices, navigation applications, and location-based services (such as Google Maps and Instagram) artificially map urban experience. Thus, the subjective practice of "getting lost" is supplanted by algorithm-guided navigation. Directed wandering reverses the flâneur's urban engagement since the flâneur defines his own direction or even his lack thereof, whereas the anti-flâneur's movement is externally orchestrated.

Digitalization has also transformed individuals' spatial perception. This phenomenon can be explained through Lev Manovich's concept of "navigable space." According to Manovich, this as a form of new media wherein digital technologies, and computers enable people to navigate, explore, and interact within space. Navigable space refers to virtual environments which are created by digital media and technologies and where users interact, explore and navigate. This concept underpins interactive media forms such as digital art, video games, and simulations. According to Manovich, navigable space diverges from the traditional spatial understanding tied to the physical world; within digital media, users move freely within a given "space," whether in video games, virtual worlds, or 3D computer graphics applications. Manovich emphasizes how these digital media experiences reshape spatial perceptions, reconfiguring notions of time, and space in the digital realm. In short, Manovich's navigable space concept reveals how contemporary urban experience is reconstructed through digital maps and interfaces.[45] Within this framework, the anti-flâneur is not a figure who directly experiences space but one who lives indirectly and in a directed manner through interfaces.

Contrary to the core dynamics of the modern era, slowness is another essential condition that enables the flâneur's existence. The flâneur is never in a hurry; even amidst urban chaos, he remains attentive to the city's unfolding scenes. The flâneur's solitude amid crowds and serene stillness within velocity are his defining characteristics. Conversely, modern society compels individuals toward speed. According to Paul Virilio's *dromology*, speed is not merely a prominent feature of modernity but a fundamental force shaping social structures, cultural values, and individual psychology. As speed intensifies, people become increasingly digitized and dependent.[46] Speed thus transforms social practices and the flâneur himself. More precisely, it shelves the flâneur's rhythmic urban wandering, replacing him with the anti-flâneur who either traverses the city without truly experiencing it or exists in a tense, conflicted relationship with the city, shaping their walking within this framework of practical perception.

4.3. Anxiety, Isolation, and Cognitive Overload

The psychological world of the anti-flâneur is defined more by isolation than anonymity, and more by a bombardment of stimuli than by observation. While the flâneur oscillates within a relatively prosperous urban environment, the anti-flâneur may experience pressures stemming from social, political, personal, and other axes. Sometimes, this pressure can also be self-imposed from within. Consequently, the practice of experiencing the city changes. The anti-flâneur must cope with the multitude of stimuli that the city imposes upon him. For this reason, the anti-flâneur cannot establish the philosophical relationship with the city that the flâneur does. For the anti-flâneur, the city is not only a space of experience but also a contested terrain of struggle.

The fact that the city serves as a battleground is also related to the fluidity of space. In this era characterized by Zygmunt Bauman as "liquid modernity,"[47] the city itself is fluid. Identities, spaces, and relationships are not fixed; they are in perpetual flux. The anti-flâneur emerges as a subject who loses orientation within this flux and becomes alienated from self-recognition. This is because the city has ceased

[45] Lev Manovich. *The Language of New Media* (MIT Press, 2002).
[46] Paul Virilio. *Open Sky* (Verso, 1997).
[47] Zygmunt Bauman. *Akışkan Modernite.* trans. Sinan Okan Çavuş (Can Yayınları, 2017).

to be a place where individuals construct identity and form collective affiliations, transforming instead into a flow zone where one becomes isolated, consumes, and passes through swiftly. In the contemporary world, the city does not afford opportunities for inward reflection and observation; rather, it consists of brief, intermittent stimuli that compel reaction. This condition obstructs the anti-flâneur's capacity to form a deep engagement with the external world. Distracting billboards, noise pollution, and mobile screens continuously disrupt the individual's perception, leading to cognitive fragmentation. Within this framework, the anti-flâneur is a figure striving to defend his attention rather than simply wandering through the city, progressively distancing himself from introspection and authentic experience, ultimately surrendering his mind to the urban environment.

5. Tracing the Anti-Flâneur in Ayhan Geçgin's *Uzun Yürüyüş*

Uzun Yürüyüş, Ayhan Geçgin's fourth novel, was published by Metis Publishing in 2015. The novel is formally structured in two main parts, entitled *The City* and *The Mountain*, each comprising a series of numbered subsections. These two parts are interlinked through the continuous movement of a walking protagonist. The city (*şehir*) and the mountain (*dağ*), or more precisely the "urban" and the "rural," are spaces that are interconnected, but to a certain extent contain contradictions against each other. It is evident, however, that Geçgin's narrative emphasis lies primarily on the section titled *City*, which not only spans more pages but also contains the core of the protagonist's experiences. While this does not suffice to classify *Uzun Yürüyüş* strictly as an urban novel, the centrality of the city in shaping the protagonist's journey lends it a structurally and thematically prominent role.

Echoing the Kafkaesque tone often found in the short stories of Oğuz Atay[48] *Uzun Yürüyüş* begins in a somber register and unfolds within a persistently bleak atmosphere. In this novel, Geçgin constructs a literary figure of the anti-flâneur, while simultaneously engaging with a range of socio-political events in Türkiye's recent past including the Gezi protests, the proliferation of hydroelectric power plants, the Kurdish issue, and the presence of Syrian refugees. At the center is an unnamed protagonist who wanders first through the city's peripheries and later toward more remote rural landscapes. Though he occasionally introduces himself with different names (Erkan in one episode, Mahmut in another) his anonymity is integral to his existence. He is a figure devoted to walking, yet without the reflective detachment or leisurely gaze of the flâneur. Rather than observing the city, he yields to it, allowing the act of walking to absorb and define his life. This act is not aimless; it is a conscious decision. Even if this decision casts him into a space without direction, it is an exercise of will. Geçgin's protagonist is not passive. He retains the agency to return home but chooses not to do so. Far from inert, he is a character defined by volition.[49]

The unnamed protagonist appears first searching for a way out of a city without exits, then advancing along highways, dried-out streambeds, and narrow goat paths, with a pink hat salvaged from the trash on his head, a wooden staff in hand, and feet swollen from walking.[50] This physical exhaustion and center-to-periphery drift are not merely spatial relocations but bodily practices of experiencing the city. The protagonist's walking mirrors Certeau's assertion that "the act of walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to language or to the statements uttered."[51] Against the capitalist speed and visual dominance of the city, the anti-flâneur produces a tactical "speech act" through his suffering body and swollen feet. At first glance, this walk may evoke the classical image of the flâneur, yet in essence, it represents an inversion of that figure. Rather than observation and aesthetic gratification, the protagonist's walk is marked by stillness, aimlessness, and cognitive dissolution. His experience of the city unfolds physically within

[48] Murat Gülsoy. "Uzun Yürüyüşün Menzili". *K24*, 30.07.2015, Accessed 19.06.2023. https://www.k24kitap.org/uzun-yuruyusun-menzili-262.
[49] Gülsoy, "Uzun Yürüyüşün Menzili."
[50] Nurdan Gürbilek. *İkinci Hayat* (Metis Yayınları, 2020), 77.
[51] Certeau. *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 97.

its confines, but mentally in detachment. This disjunction provides ample evidence to conceptualize the character as an anti-flâneur.

5.1. Constructed Bond with the City: Drift and Disorientation

The unnamed protagonist of *Uzun Yürüyüş* seeks to fulfill the desire we all feel at some point in our lives to "leave everything behind and retreat to a solitary, ascetic life atop a remote mountain".[52] The novel opens with his decision to set out: "He prepared himself. He packed a few belongings into his small backpack. In the morning, he thought, 'I will wake up early and set off. It will be a long walk'."[53] We know little of the character's past. He is a figure who "lives with his mother in a two-room and one-living-room apartment on the ground floor of a building"[54] and seldom ventures beyond the confines of his neighborhood. Indeed, he lacks not only the inclination to step beyond this limited zone, but even a mental framework through which to conceive the world outside. Though he regards his life within this small perimeter as a kind of imprisonment, he struggles to form any connection with what lies beyond it. At the root of this difficulty lies the mental image he holds of the outside world.

> Although he was born and raised in this city, he felt neither a familiarity with the city itself nor with its inhabitants. Perhaps the world he once knew had already vanished. At times, he felt compelled to turn to someone and ask: "where am I, what city is this, who are all these people?[55]

When he finally leaves home to begin his aimless journey, it becomes clear for the reader that what he abandons is not merely a place of residence. The protagonist also sheds his identity, his selfhood, and the full weight of his past: "He asked himself: What used to be I? The answer: I was a prisoner here, in this house where I spent my years."[56]

From the opening lines of the novel, it becomes evident that the protagonist is about to embark on a journey; yet as the narrative progresses, it also becomes clear that he has no concrete plan regarding where he is headed, how he will get there, or even whether reaching a destination is part of his intent. Although his stated objective is to escape the city and keep walking until he finds a vast plain or a quiet mountainside[57], what truly accompanies him along the way is the existential questions he poses to himself. These questions, largely left unanswered, haunt him throughout the journey. He eventually confesses: "I feel lost within my own thoughts."[58] It is fair to say that the walks he takes after leaving home are devoid of purpose, direction, or destination.

> I keep talking as if I have a will, as if I am determined to do something, but I have no strength. Here I am, drifting on the slowly shifting earth, like a piece of land afloat on the sea, like an island.[59]

We may observe that, in *Uzun Yürüyüş*, Ayhan Geçgin constructs drift and directionlessness not only as physical deviation but as existential disintegration. In this sense, the novel's unnamed protagonist may be read not as a subject who maps the city, but rather as one who is dissolved within it. Rather than contributing to urban memory, he seems to wish for its complete erasure. He does not recall the names of neighborhoods, nor does he retain any memory of the people he encounters. This state of forgetting and unremembering constitutes one of the core features of the anti-flâneur. The walker within the city cannot always maintain an aesthetic or intellectual distance from the objects he encounters; instead, he simply dissolves into them.

[52] Gülsoy, "Uzun Yürüyüşün Menzili."
[53] Ayhan Geçgin. *Uzun Yürüyüş* (Metis Yayınları, 2015), 11.
[54] Geçgin, *Uzun Yürüyüş*, 14.
[55] Geçgin, *Uzun Yürüyüş*, 27.
[56] Geçgin, *Uzun Yürüyüş*, 12.
[57] Geçgin, *Uzun Yürüyüş*, 15.
[58] Geçgin, *Uzun Yürüyüş*, 48.
[59] Geçgin, *Uzun Yürüyüş*, 23.

Although *Uzun Yürüyüş* presents walking as an urban practice, the form in which this walking is experienced is not engaged with the visible, surface layer of the city. Geçgin does not place his protagonist amid the city's luminous avenues or its bustling throngs. Unlike the flâneur, who aestheticizes the multitude, Geçgin's character symbolizes the individual's erasure within the crowd as the crowd often appears to him as nothing more than a meaningless mass: "He looked at the crowd and asked himself, what kind of crowd is this, what kind of world is this?"[60] Even when physically among people, he maintains a distanced relationship. While the crowd functions as one of the possible terrains for the flâneur's self-fashioning, it is something to be avoided for the anti-flâneur. In this respect, the protagonist's walk becomes a tragic expression of a subject who finds neither spatial nor social belonging in the capitalist city and is thus left alone reduced to nothing but his body.

Geçgin deliberately avoids placing his character in contact with crowds. Instead, he sends him off on a journey with no map, no plan. The protagonist remarks: "This is all I have to think about, to go forward, to reach the end of the line, maybe from the end of the line (if there is one) to cross the other side."[61] What he encounters is the facades that can be called the other side of the city. Indeed, although he walks through several central districts on the Anatolian side of İstanbul (Üsküdar, Kadıköy, Moda, Fikirtepe), he never allows himself to be absorbed into the rhythm of the city, nor does he ever fully surrender to a reconciled, harmonious mode of urban walking.

> The place was teeming with cars and people crammed, suffocatingly packed. In the middle of the square, subway construction continued in a vast pit, encircled by iron railings nearly twice the height of a man. The mosque minarets were entangled with the towering, swiveling arms of cranes reaching into the sky. He was swept along by the crowd. Then, he walked toward the side streets or perhaps was spit out into them.[62]

One of the most fitting expressions to describe *Uzun Yürüyüş* is being expelled. The protagonist sets foot in the city, but each time the city pushes him out. He spends time in relatively tolerable areas, buys food, sustains himself until his money runs out. Once penniless, he begins scavenging for food in the garbage. He forms involuntary connections with waste pickers, beggars, and Syrians fleeing war. Being an anti-flâneur is also closely tied to one's spatial positioning within the urban fabric. Geçgin's character walks through İstanbul's peripheral, forgotten, functionless zones. Throughout the novel, he is surrounded by a landscape of absence: abandoned railway tracks where no trains run[63], monolithic urban structures, tightly stacked buildings, towering business complexes, hotels, enormous shopping malls, vast construction sites[64] and the constant drone of highway traffic.[65] In other words, Ayhan Geçgin has his protagonist drift across the city's outer edges randomly, aimlessly, without leaving a trace. This condition of trace-lessness eventually renders the protagonist not only spatially marginal, but ontologically faint, blurred, even evanescent.

> Maybe, he thought, "there is no path beneath me, behind me, or ahead of me; perhaps I am simply wandering within a labyrinth whose paths are shaped by my own footsteps.[66]

The anti-flâneur disintegrates not only through his body, but also through his language. In the novel, we frequently encounter repetitions, absences, and silences in the narrator's voice. He often hesitates to verbalize what he sees, and perhaps gradually loses the capacity to do so altogether. Whereas Benjamin's flâneur assigns names and meanings to everything he encounters in the arcades, Geçgin's character, by contrast, rarely attributes meaning to the events unfolding around him or he does not name them. He

[60] Geçgin, *Uzun Yürüyüş*, 27.
[61] Geçgin, *Uzun Yürüyüş*, 19.
[62] Geçgin, *Uzun Yürüyüş*, 20.
[63] Geçgin, *Uzun Yürüyüş*, 50.
[64] Geçgin, *Uzun Yürüyüş*, 79.
[65] Geçgin, *Uzun Yürüyüş*, 90.
[66] Geçgin, *Uzun Yürüyüş*, 54.

is simply subjected to them. This narrative strategy imbues the novel with a palpable sense of linguistic attrition. Even the character's inner voice is constrained; more often than not, it is images, sensations, or voids that take precedence over words. This stylistic choice renders the protagonist's relation with the city not only physically fragmented but also linguistically ruptured. Such a disarticulated relationship with the city manifests as the most explicit form of the character's cognitive estrangement from the life he lives.

5.2. The Meaninglessness of Walking and Alienation

In *Uzun Yürüyüş*, walking is not merely a bodily motion or spatial activity; it is also an expression of social, political, and existential alienation. For the novel's unnamed protagonist, walking becomes a form of escape from everyday life, from socially imposed roles, and from the very structures of language. Yet this act of escape distances him not only from the city, but also from himself. Although he attempts to frame his walking within a meaningful and rational context, it ultimately leads him back to unresolved questions that echo throughout the novel. The question "Which war am I fleeing from?"[67] is far from rhetoric. While the protagonist can identify and articulate the conditions shaping the lives of beggars, immigrants, or refugees who are the figures with whom he seeks identification, he is unable to name the conflict that defines his own dislocation. This absence of meaning deepens as his walking continues, dissolving any sense of coherent selfhood.

Marx asserts that an individual's alienation and, more broadly, any relationship one has with oneself cannot be understood in isolation; it only acquires meaning and visibility through the relationships formed with others. According to Marx, internal conflicts, identity crises, and states of alienation are not merely inner psychological phenomena but emerge and are shaped within social interaction. Human beings can only comprehend and express themselves within the relational fabric of intersubjectivity.[68] The alienation depicted in *Uzun Yürüyüş* resonates with this Marxian idea of "being-in-relation," yet it does so on a more fundamental, pre-social level. The narrator is excluded from any mode of production; he holds no social, professional, or cultural identity. This state of non-belonging imbues his walking with existential weight. Walking becomes a form of withdrawal from the systems through which the external world produces meaning a kind of practice of forgetting the self.

> Is there any place for everyone under this vast sky? Is there any place for me? Once I thought I had a purpose. I thought I was heading somewhere. But now I have lost the direction of my life. I no longer know where I came from or where I'm going.[69]

Since the dynamism that underpins the protagonist's walking lacks a genuine ontological ground, most actions apart from walking remain suspended in a kind of empty oscillation. At the same time, the near-total absence of information about his past, his family, ideological stance, or affiliations is enough to position him merely as a presence. He is a rootless, nameless figure. The streets he wanders, the homeless people he occasionally speaks with, the vacant train tracks, his erratic drifting from place to place uncertain of what to do all render it difficult to ascribe any coherent meaning to his walking. Moreover, what appears to be a free act gradually turns into a force of entrapment. According to Sartre, that freedom is a form of condemnation because the act of choosing always carries within it a burden of necessity, and every choice, in the end, opens onto nothingness.[70] In other words, the subject constitutes himself through his choices, but this very condition of choice simultaneously confronts him with a profound existential void. The protagonist's experience closely mirrors this Sartrean notion of freedom. He does not know what he is searching for; he does not know where he is heading and perhaps freedom is not even what he truly seeks. A brief dialogue

[67] Geçgin, *Uzun Yürüyüş*, 37.
[68] Karl Marx. *Yabancılaşma.* trans. Kenan Somer et al. (Sol Yayınları, 2013), 29.
[69] Geçgin, *Uzun Yürüyüş*, 110.
[70] Jean-Paul Sartre. *Varlık ve Hiçlik.* trans. Turhan Ilgaz and Gaye Çankaya Eksen (İthaki Yayınları, 2011), 199.

he has with a man upon reaching the rural outskirts of the city powerfully reveals the mental vacuum into which he has drifted.

> "The desire for freedom brought you here," he commented, "that's how I understand it. Is that right?"
>
> He turned the word over and over in his head. "Not freedom," he said, unable to make a connection between the word and himself.
>
> "Isn't it? What is it then?"
>
> "A life," he replied, "I think I was looking for a life."
>
> "That's it. You put it that way, I put it this way, they are the same thing. If life is not free, it is not life."[71]

Uzun Yürüyüş does not allow us to follow the protagonist's walk along a coherent or traceable path since he is far removed from the flâneur's practice of observing and decoding the city. In *Uzun Yürüyüş*, the flâneur's position is inverted: the observing subject becomes the object of observation. Even when he momentarily appears as a subject, his experience of the city never transcends a vague and unresolved quest.

> He went down to the shore. For days, he walked the length of the coast three times. Three times, he retraced his own steps. I'm looking for a way, a way out, he said to himself. But perhaps all the roads had already been crossed, trampled countless times, riddled with holes. If that were the case, then perhaps what remained for him was to walk the road once again himself, with his worn, dust-covered shoes and feet swollen several sizes after the soles had split.[72]

What the protagonist seeks is not a vision of the city, not even a symbolic trace of it. He does not interpret the city; instead, he becomes part of a city that is interpreted by others. The protagonist's walks are an opening towards nothingness; each step involves forgetting rather than remembering, erasure rather than identity.

As noted earlier, alienation in *Uzun Yürüyüş* does not merely manifest as an internal or psychological retreat. The protagonist's estrangement from both the city and himself also unfolds through his relationship with language. Throughout the novel, language appears not as a tool for communication, but as a burden, something opaque, even absurd. His inner monologues are often fragmented, disjointed, and marked by hesitation. He opts for silence over speech, vagueness over naming. "An act as fundamental as speech, accessible even to a mute child, becomes an impossibility for the unnamed character, illustrating a profound rupture between self and world"[73] His waning faith in the representational capacity of language estranges him not only from expression but also from thought itself. And this distance from thought obstructs his ability to understand the city, to view it with the detached gaze of an interpreter.

It is also possible to read *Uzun Yürüyüş* as a silent political narrative. The protagonist's inverse relationship with language (his persistent silence) signals not only a personal retreat but also a condition of social exclusion. The construction sites, derelict buildings, highways, and spaces beneath overpasses that accompany him throughout the novel materialize this state of marginalization. These are not merely transitional zones within modern urban planning; they are zones that have come to belong to the invisible, to those deemed the "others" of the city. In other words, they are not spaces of the flâneur, but of the anti-flâneur sites that only such a figure might be drawn to.

While the flâneur maintains a detached yet interpretive relationship with the urban fabric, the protagonist of *Uzun Yürüyüş* insists upon the impossibility of such a relationship and on rendering that impossibility visible. In this novel, walking is not a mode of being in the city, but a practice of being erased from it. The nameless protagonist is not a descendant of Benjamin's aestheticized flâneur, but a spectral

[71] Geçgin, *Uzun Yürüyüş*, 147.
[72] Geçgin, *Uzun Yürüyüş*, 53.
[73] Seren Üstündağ. "Barışçıl Olmayan Eve Dönüş: Son Adım ve Uzun Yürüyüş Romanlarında Dil ve Dünya". *Monograf*, no. 9 (2018): 203.

reflection of the city's castaways. His movement is neither one of seeing nor being seen; it is merely the mute circulation of one who no longer exists.

Conclusion

The modern city is not only a physical space but also an intellectual one that reshapes the individual's identity, experience, and forms of belonging. This study has explored the contemporary transformation of urban acts such as observation, movement, and meaning-making through Ayhan Geçgin's *Uzun Yürüyüş*, taking the figure of the flâneur, a modern urban archetype, as its point of departure. Our key conclusion is that while the modern city produces the flâneur, it also generates his counterpart: the anti-flâneur. Unlike the flâneur in Walter Benjamin's arcades, who observes the city with aesthetic awareness, Geçgin's nameless protagonist is engaged with the city in a passive, voiceless, and directionless manner. Thus, the anti-flâneur is not merely the opposite of the flâneur but emerges as an urban subject bearing the ruins of modernity and embodying the alienated condition of the contemporary individual.

The fact that the protagonist of *Uzun Yürüyüş* walks without direction, gazes at the city without interpretation, speaks without grounding his thoughts (and often chooses silence) offers significant clues for defining him as an anti-flâneur. This figure has lost the flâneur's role as "observer" and "interpreter," and instead becomes one who is "acted upon," one who is exposed. His engagement with the city is not aesthetic or intellectual, but a form of disorientation shaped by contemporary forces such as surveillance, acceleration, and cognitive overload. In this sense, the anti-flâneur ceases to be a subject and instead becomes an object molded by the city, at times rendered invisible. *Uzun Yürüyüş* constructs precisely the aesthetics of this invisibility, erasure, and dissolution. Geçgin's narrative is striking in how it expresses the existential void brought about by the neoliberal urban condition, not only thematically, but also formally. The novel's character dissolves not only in the city, but also in language. Silence, ambiguity, and lack of direction complete his transformation into an anti-flâneur, both as a psychological and discursive figure.

This analysis demonstrates that the figure of the flâneur in literature has undergone not only a historical but also a critical transformation. The city through which the 19th-century flâneur once wandered as a space of freedom has become a domain of surveillance and indifference; meaning-making has given way to experiential loss. In this context, the concept of the anti-flâneur should be regarded as a useful tool for interpreting contemporary literary characters and for exposing the socio-psychological consequences of modern urban life.

The anti-flâneur can be examined not only as an individual figure but also through class, gender, and ethnicity. The urban experiences of groups such as migrants, refugees, the unemployed, and the urban poor can be meaningfully analyzed within the framework of anti-flâneur typology. Additionally, a more systematic study of characters in Turkish literature who turn away from the urban center toward the periphery or the rural can offer new perspectives on the relationship between city, space, and individuality.

Ultimately, *Uzun Yürüyüş* is a novel that questions what walking itself means in an era where the intellectual journey of the flâneur has come to an end. The anti-flâneur figure may be read as the textual and conceptual projection of this questioning. The nameless protagonist of the novel does not merely embody a directionless physical movement; he also represents an era that has lost both its meaning and its direction. In this sense, *Uzun Yürüyüş* is a compelling text that, through the lens of individual experience, invites a critical reconsideration of modernity's relationship with the city, the body, and language.

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