

The Dandy on the City Stage: Social Roles, Social Spaces and Commodity Consumption

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Dandyism is a very important and significant social phenomenon in 19th century Europe, and also a means of aesthetic revolt in an urban environment. The paper focuses on how Charles Baudelaire presents his dandy's rebellion, based on aestheticism, on the city stage. Only the city produces dandies and dandies cannot breathe without the city. On "stage", Baudelaire played different dandy roles, such as the flâneur, the ragpicker, and man of letters. Walking the streets, the dandy is a member of the crowd but also isolated from it; his main duty is to observe the city and mass silently, and seek the flowers of evil.

Keywords: Dandyism, city social roles, social spaces, commodity consumption

Introduction

Dandyism relates to the English word "dandy". A "dandy" is a man who places particular importance on physical appearance, refined language, and leisurely hobbies. The word emerged in late 18th century. According to Ellen Moers, during the American War of Independence, there was a very popular song named "Yankee Doodle Dandy", written by an Englishman. This is the likely origin of the word.

Yankee Doodle came to town,
Riding on a pony,
Stuck a feather in his hat,
And called it Macaroni! (Moers, 1960, p. 41)

"Doodle" is American slang, similar in pronunciation and meaning to "dandy". The two words are associated, in the song, to "Macaroni", from the Italian word "maccarone", a kind of pasta. The song talks of a fashionable man, or playboy. Later in 1764, a club in London, named the Macaroni Club, was founded to introduce the fashionable and elegant southern European way of life to England. It became an important centre of dandyism. Richard Pine argues that

Dandyism is social, human and intellectual. It is not a suit of clothes, walking about by itself! ...It is the particular way of wearing these clothes which constitutes Dandyism. One may be a dandy increased clothes... Dandyism is a complete theory of life...it is a way of existing. (Pine, 1988, p. 17)

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Dandyism moved between England and Paris. “According to this historical model, dandyism, originally an English phenomenon, crossed the channel to France when exiled French aristocrats, schooled in the ways of London high society, found it safe to return to Paris” (Feldman, 1993, p. 1). Dandyism has a very long tradition in England and involves a hybrid of cultures. The first dandy celebrated specifically as such was George Bryan Brummell (1778-1840), an undergraduate student at Oriel College, Oxford, and an associate of the Prince Regent during the Regency Period (1810-1820). In the late 18th century, British royal power and aristocracy came under serious attack from the French revolution. The middle bourgeoisie grew in power and influence, strongly demanding new moral values that accorded with their interests. In such a turbulent social context, Brummell made his mark. Well-dressed, elegant, and brilliant, he was promoted by the Prince of Wales and became a luminary of London society. He made his name by frequently moving in social circles. A retinue of dandies formed around him and they spent time in London’s genteel clubs. Of aristocratic bearing, Brummell was annoyed by the vulgarity of the newly rising bourgeoisie and its hypocritical morality, and therefore spent much time and attention to his appearances to make himself into a work of art. He wanted to offend rather than please people. Through his delicate costume, intelligent speech and graceful behavior, he established the dandy tradition, setting a standard for later dandies. For this group, the puritan ethics of hard work, thrift, simple and plain living, only foster vulgar and dull upstarts instead of elegant souls. They deliberately adopt a pose that is indifferent, arrogant, slothful, elegant and sartorially fastidious—a metaphysical war against middle class vulgarity. Dress and witty remarks become symbols of rebellion against the unimaginative bourgeoisie.

The world of the dandy is an artistic world, in which he performs in an extraordinary way to rebel against society, and the dandy’s stage is the city. The dandy cannot live without the city because he indulges in commodities and the prosperous urban atmosphere. Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867) offered vivid accounts of Paris, which many consider the capital of 19th century Europe. Wandering through the streets and small lanes of the city, Baudelaire was a dandy in the metropolis. The importance of Paris for Baudelaire is well brought out by Lee who says, Baudelaire

Cannot live without the city, as he surrenders himself to the intoxication of its commodity world; at the same time, he is also marginalized by the city in which he is condemned to live. Thus he keeps himself at a distance from the crowd, and it is from his distanced gaze that the city is allegorized. His leisured gait is both a posture and a protest. (Lee, 1999, p. 38)

Baudelaire explored modern city life as new themes for literary and art works; he attempted to demonstrate the confusion experienced by human intellectuals and made efforts to reconstruct values in an era full of the breakdown of morality and the collapse of values. G. M. Hyde, in “The Poetry of the City”, described Baudelaire’s contribution to modern literature:

It could be argued that Modernist literature was born in the city and with Baudelaire—especially with his discovery that crowds mean loneliness and that the terms ‘multitude’ and ‘solitude’ are interchangeable for a poet with an active and fertile imagination. (Malcolm & McFarlane, 1976, p. 337)

Paris provided Baudelaire with its amazing materials to explore the images, personality and psychology of the city, particularly the conflicts and tensions represented by tramps, beggars, old women, whores, and the like. For Baudelaire, the dandy had a sense of his own spiritual superiority which, unlike the bourgeoisie, who simply

avoid or merely pity the poor on the street and prostitutes, involves involvement, more specifically befriending them. Thus Baudelaire found materials of noble beauty and heroism for his creativity in the most mundane and degenerate aspects and types of everyday life of modern cities. The dandy submerges himself into the crowd and discovers there the beauty of the subjects and nature of urban life. Furthermore, as Walter Benjamin has noted, the anonymity of the crowd in Baudelaire's relationship to the city was one of multiple roles and masks,

Because he did not have any convictions, he assumed ever new forms himself. Flâneur, apache, dandy and ragpicker were so many roles to him...Behind the masks which he used up, the poet in Baudelaire preserved his incognito.... The incognito was the law of his poetry. (Benjamin, 1973, p. 97)

It is, then, precisely because of the crowd that Baudelaire confirmed the existence of his self. They were able to experience the existence of themselves as well as others in a shocking way, and then transmitted this shocking experience through their art work. He explored the other side of seemingly splendid and glorious Paris: a darker place of evil and strife.

Dandy: The Artist-Portrayer of Manners

In the first instance we can see that bourgeoisie society provided the dandy with an identity as a man of letters. In Baudelaire's era, the man of letters was one who sold his works for a living, though Baudelaire did not particularly want to write for money. In *The Muse Who Works for Money*, Baudelaire is simply the man of letters who sells his pen as the prostitute sells her body, and even the man of letters' participation in metropolitan life is artificial. His connection with the city is also a passive and artificial one. Just like prostitutes' make-up, it does not reflect the inner heart.

Along with the man of letters, Baudelaire assumes the other identity of dandy—the artist-portrayer of manners—which has more social and cultural color. This figure appeared in Baudelaire's *The Painter of Modern Life*, with Constantin Guys as his role model. According to Baudelaire: “The artist-portrayer of manners is a genius of mixed composition. In other words, a genius with a pronounced literary element. Observer, idler, philosopher, call him what you will” (Benjamin, 2006, p. 394). Baudelaire particularly emphasized the literary nature of the artist-portrayer of manners to correct the inadequacy of the identity man of letters. This kind of artist-portrayer of manners can be viewed as a symbol, generally referring to those who portrayed modern life. Baudelaire believed that the artist-portrayer of manners is simultaneously a dandy and not only a dandy. “Sometimes he may be a poet; more often he comes close to the novelist or the moralist; he is the painter of the fleeting moment and of all that it suggests of the eternal” (Benjamin, 2006, p. 394). While the dandy pursued aloofness and avoids the crowd, the artist-portrayer of manners, overwhelmed by an unsatisfied passion—the passion of observation and perception—joins the crowd.

Moreover, he was the ragpicker in the metropolis. In *The Ragman's Wine*, Baudelaire noted,

One comes upon a shaking ragman, who / Staggers against the walls, as poets do, / And disregardful of policemen's spies, / Pours from his heart some glorious enterprise. (Baudelaire, 2008, p. 217)

Baudelaire notes the commonalities of the poet and ragman: the same “glorious enterprise”, and a precarious existence in the city. Poets collect what the city discards, like ragmen, and the process of writing poetry is similar to the process of working with trash in the city, so as to uncover the murky corners of capitalist society. Another

role similar to the ragpicker, as Benjamin notes, was that of a detective: “the watchfulness of an observer who does not take his eyes off a miscreant. Thus the detective sees rather wide areas opening up to his self-esteem” (Benjamin, 1973, p. 41). Like a detective, Baudelaire tries to uncover all the good and evil in the prosperous city, especially the true nature of humanity and society. Landscape provides a very vivid picture, he evokes a living and breathing city. He hears buildings and birds singing and compares window lamps to stars. He considers the city a timeless place, passing from season to season with ease. It is also a space of dreams and fantasy, where the author found “pools of alabaster,” “bright horizon in blue,” and “a fairy palace” (Baudelaire, 2008, p. 167) at night. Paris becomes an enchanted city, where even a beggar is a beautiful princess. For instance, Baudelaire admires the erotic beauty of a homeless woman in *To a Red-Headed Beggar Girl*, especially her “two breasts as undisguised” (Baudelaire, 2008, p. 169). She is not dressed in rags but rather in the gown of a queen, complete with pearls formed from drops of water.

The Flâneur: The Main Identity of the Dandy

Apart from several different roles mentioned above, Baudelaire’s dandy was mainly demonstrated by a flâneur, a dandy in the metropolis, and a whole lifestyle. Certainly the role of the man of letters is transformed, in large part due to the arcades, to become a flâneur. The flâneur wanders cities, experiences and observes city life and the development of the modern city. For the flâneur, “moving” is very important, both physically and psychologically, without producing anything, without any purpose except as a silent revolt against the money-seeking bourgeoisie. This was well appreciated by Benjamin who wrote that “Baudelaire knew what the true situation of the man of letters was: he goes to the marketplace as a flâneur, supposedly to take a look at it, but its reality to find a buyer” (Benjamin, 1973, p. 34). Thus assimilation into the bourgeois world, originally a financial necessity, is counter-posed by a certain kind of freedom and autonomy which involves deploying the very idleness which the bourgeois world tries to negate

On the boulevards he spent his hours of idleness which he displayed before people as part of his working hours...In view of the protracted periods of idleness which in the eyes of the public were necessary for the realization of his own labor-power, its value became almost fantastic. (Benjamin, 1973, p. 29)

Obviously, this so-called leisure is nothing but a disguise created by the mechanisms of a capitalist commercial economy, which nevertheless fails to conform to the mechanism required by that economy, and yet facilitates a new kind of commodity (thus enabling commercial transaction to exist in the end product), Baudelaire’s poems.

As a flâneur poet, Baudelaire spent most of his time wandering Paris, but unlike the common citizens strolling only in the colorful and splendid downtown area, he walked throughout Paris. From his poems, we know that some scenes, such as those of ruined districts, declining factories, and the misery of workers, affected him very much. His dissatisfaction with society and disappointment with life provided him with much material for his writing. The Parisian Scenes in *The Flowers of Evil* is a giant panorama of mid-19th century Paris. In *Landscapes from Parisian Scenes*, Baudelaire described such a scene:

My two hands to my chin, up in my attic room, / I’ll see the atelier singing a babbled tune; / The chimney-pipes, the steeples, all the city’s masts, / The great, inspiring skies, magnificent and vast. (Baudelaire, 2008, p. 167)

The entire city is a panorama and Baudelaire is the only observer.

Through wandering, and with his own imagination and consciousness, he discovers the flowers of evil in the city. Therefore, the ugliness that most people dare not face becomes the most important element in his poems and plays an indispensable role in his urban narration. Look at the leading roles that Baudelaire carefully selects: the female beggar with red hair and prostitutes, the seven old men and the little old woman, the peasant and scavengers, and the skeleton and carrion. In elegant and noble Paris, most people turn a blind eye to them and avoid them like the plague, but Baudelaire is sympathetic to them. Therefore, wandering is a way of life, but also a way of protesting against modernity. The city is full of illusions, and while the typical bourgeois looks away, the poet takes the opportunity to slide into the city's refuse and marginalized who form a kind of subconscious. By exploring the wretched, the poor, the desperate, the criminals, the sexual deviants, the drunkards, and drug addicts, the poet explores nightmares and fears. However, what he sees are ghosts pulling passengers' sleeves during daytime. These hideous and eccentric images are themselves living indictments of the modern metropolis. And they are everywhere in metropolises like Paris or London. Strange faces and identities constitute the special background of city life. In these environments, every person is then swallowed by the bustling crowd to fade away. For example, Baudelaire described a woman in his poem *To a Woman Passing By*:

One lightning flash...then night! Sweet fugitive
Whose glance has made me suddenly reborn,
Will we not meet again this side of death?
Far from this place! Too late! Never perhaps!
Neither one knowing where the other goes,
O you I might have loved, as well you know! (Baudelaire, 2008, p. 189)

In this excerpt, the word moment cannot be ignored. Seeking momentary, fleeting feelings was the aesthete's main task in the city. For Baudelaire, love was fleeting in the modern city—and ultimately impossible—as lovers could only catch a glimpse of each other in the streets. In the poem, Baudelaire conjured a beautiful woman, and the speaker tries to express his love with one look. They make eye contact, but it is quickly broken, as they must each head their separate ways. The encounter is tragic because they both feel something, yet they know that their next meeting will be in the afterlife, as death looms at the poem's end.

The Flâneur and His Visual Consumption

With momentary and fleeting sensation, Baudelaire's dandyism is a kind of visual consumption in the role of the flâneur in Paris. To pursue beauty and fulfillment, the dandy, walking at the margin in city though, could not breathe without consuming. The flâneur, as the lifestyle of Baudelaire, but also as the special pattern consumption, was an early symbol of consumption, reflecting Thorstein Bunde Veblen's concept of conspicuous consumption, Leo Lowenthal's idols of consumption and the "society of the spectacle"; all relate to society's greater focus on visual consumption. Walking in the crowd, the flâneur's eyes connect with others in the city. Here Baudelaire's sonnet *To a Woman Passing By* appears again: a charming woman, wearing a widow's yashma, secretly and voicelessly enters Baudelaire's field of vision. Focusing on the apparently mundane aspects of life and sensitive to temporary idiosyncrasies, the sonnet reveals that the most profound experiences of city life lie in the passing of strangers. As Benjamin explained,

The delight of the urban poet is love—not at first sight, but at last sight. It is a farewell forever which coincides in the poem with the moment of enchantment. Thus the sonnet supplies the figure of shock, indeed of catastrophe. (Benjamin, 1973, p. 125)

With the development of high technology in a capitalist world, in which human labor is a commodity and money dominates, the view-sight function of crowds degenerates. All are in suspense as they observe “an enormous crowd in which no one is either quite transparent or quite opaque to all others” (Benjamin, 1973, p. 49). Interpersonal relationships in big cities are distinguished by a marked preponderance of the activity of the eye over the activity of the ear. The main reason for this is the public means of transportation. Therefore, Baudelaire described modern society’s transitional, temporary, occasional aspect. These brief and light images leave only a false fragment, which means the loss of images to signify function: only the subject can define the object, and only the watcher can define the watched. Undoubtedly, this way of watching stresses the “modern”. This characteristic is the primary condition in *The Painter of Modern Life*.

While industrial society brings a new feeling of panic and remoteness, modern cities bring chaos, noise, and rolling images. In Baudelaire’s eyes, the entire world had formed a storage room of images and symbols, hinting that images can substitute for reality, and that direct sentiment had become a kind of feeling that used images as bridges. The arcade provided sites of consumption and shelter for dawdling the dandy, and a place for displaying luxurious commodities as well. Benjamin emphasizes that

This consumer subjectivity not only established a series of looks at the displays of goods and the detail of the shop interiors, but also invited the consumer to look at themselves amidst this spectacle—often literally, through catching sight of their reflection in a mirror or shop window. A self-monitoring look was implicit, then, in these ways of looking. (Hall, 1997, p. 334)

The dandy engaged in the visual art of “mutual watching” in front of transparent windows. During the process of careful watching, the dandy ignored the value of exchange referred to by Marx, as the purpose of their consumption was the exhibition itself and the pleasant sensation produced by window shopping.

In the soul of the commodity which Marx occasionally mentions in jest existed, it would be the most empathetic ever encountered in the realm of souls, for it would have to see in everyone the buyer in whose hand and house it wants to nestle. Empathy is the nature of the intoxication to which the flâneur abandons himself in the crowd. (Benjamin, 2006, p. 55)

Jacques Lacan’s theory of mirror image may provide some foundation for this assertion. Although the dandy did not purchase any commodities, he consumed the culture behind the commodities through the way of watching. By establishing his subjective characteristics, the dandy revealed the process of mutual mirroring between people and commodities.

With the accelerating pace of modern life, art’s value began to give way to exhibition value, and various cultural products began to appear on the street. Consumer desire was developed by modern media and advertising, mesmerizing consumers through a process of inducement and metaphor. Consumers might forget that the final goal of consumption is to fulfill desire when using these commodities and services under pressure from rapid increases in consumption efficiency. The target of consumption now is not to meet real needs but rather to keep meeting the perceived needs that are created and induced. In other words, people do not consume value but rather symbolic meanings. Pierre Bourdieu argues that

Consumption is, in this case, a stage in a process of communication, that is, an act of deciphering, decoding, which presupposes practical or explicit mastery of a cipher or code. In a sense, one can say that the capacity to see (voir) is a function of the knowledge (savoir), or concepts, that is, were, programmes for perception. (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 2)

This can explain the flâneur and his visual consumption. The flâneur is involved in a “process of communication” provided by consumption culture, and form visual patterns to explore consumptive places and commodities to find something that they love. Therefore, visual consumption by the flâneur involves staring and watching advertisements or show windows, and this both satisfies and entices. The pleasure of shopping does not only come from the possession of commodities but also from the aesthetic enjoyment and psychological satisfaction in the process of consumption.

The words Paris, flâneur, and dandy appear to establish the same image in 19th century—a group of people who consume without producing. Compared with the crowd who indulged in commodities, the dandy was always alert and clear-minded. In his eyes, the noisy streets and luxuriant commodities were aesthetic objects through which he tried to find something meaningful in life. The dandy was a representative of aesthetics and philosophy, and also a consumer of images in early consumerist society. He loitered in prosperous markets and streets in the flâneur role, watching his surroundings, but dissociating themselves from the environment.

It can be seen that the relationship between the flâneur and the market was complicated, and the market was his final dwelling places as he walked from one shop to another, staring at the goods. Looking at those new commodities within the arcades and department stores, the flâneur felt some degree of satisfaction. When the flâneur walked late at night, he preferred to stay in department stores to watch everything wildly:

The crowd is not only the newest asylum of outlaws; it is also the latest narcotic for those abandoned. The flâneur is someone abandoned in the crowd. In this he shares the situation of the commodity...The intoxication to which the flâneur surrenders is the intoxication of the commodity around which surges the stream of customers. (Benjamin, 1973, p. 55)

This explanation firmly connects with the concept of “commodity fetishism” developed by Marx. David Frisby in *Fragments of Modernity* notes:

If the flâneur’s leisurely appearance as a personality constituted for a brief period a protest against the division of labor which makes people into specialists and against their industriousness, then his abandonment and ultimate submersion in the crowd suggested that he had already succumbed to the world of commodities, either as a commodity himself or as a consumer. (Frisby, 1985, p. 252)

The dandy’s commodity worship mainly involved watching, and the value of exchange referred to by Marx was put aside; the exhibition value and the dandy’s “window shopping” process was the core value.

The Relationship Between the Flâneur and the Crowd

So what is the exact relationship between the flâneur and the crowd? In *The Painter of Modern Life*, Baudelaire described it thus:

For the perfect idler, for the passionate observer it becomes an immense source of enjoyment to establish his dwelling in the throng, in the ebb and flow, the bustle, the fleeting and the infinite. To be away from home and yet to feel at home anywhere; to see the world, to be at the very centre of the world, and yet to be unseen of the world. (Baudelaire, 1972, p. 399)

The key point here is the emphasis on the special quality of the flâneur as a hero of modern life—he throws himself into the crowd while at the same time tries to get away from it. Employing Benjamin’s idea again, the “deepest fascination of this spectacle lay in the fact that as it intoxicated him [the flâneur], it did not blind him to the horrible social reality” (Benjamin, 1973, p. 59). This involves the relationship between “crowd” and “public space” in modern urban life. However, the flâneur in the work of Baudelaire is always self-contradictory in relation to the crowd: the flâneur does not merge with the crowd but maintains a necessary collusion with it. The flâneur is located “at the centre of the world and at the same time hidden from the world (Benjamin, 1989, p. 145).”

The dandy is enchanted by passing love, but most of the time the crowd is just the embodiment of loneliness. “Multitude, solitude: equal and interchangeable terms for the active and fertile poet. He who does not know how to populate his solitude, does not know either how to be alone in a busy crowd” (Baudelaire, 1989, p. 21). Baudelaire’s sense of loneliness comes from the very crowd. The dandy wanders within the crowd while dissociating himself from it: such rootlessness inspires him to write as a means of exploring the heart of Paris, to rip open its skin and reveal the shocking ugliness. If examining this city’s ugliness is the aim of Baudelaire’s poetry, then the dandy’s rootless sense of loss and loneliness is the overall tone.

Benjamin notes:

The allegorist’s gaze which falls upon the city is rather the gaze of alienated man. It is the gaze of the flâneur... The flâneur still stood at the margin, of the great city as of the bourgeois class. Neither of them had yet overwhelmed him. In neither of them was he at home. He sought his asylum in the crowd...The crowd was the veil from behind which the familiar city as phantasmagoria beckoned to the flâneur. (Benjamin, 1973, p. 170)

The “gaze of alienated man” signifies the flâneur’s alienation from the world. By merging with the alienated mass, the flâneur resists the allurements of the bourgeoisie; he abandons himself in the crowd and tries to stand at the margin of the city. The poet’s gaze is resistant to cruel reality. Of course, this kind of confrontation is not comfortable, and the dandy wants to compromise and go back to his original class. However, the increasingly complicated society and reality win the poet over; the mask of the dandy in the crowd enables Baudelaire to find real refuge and identify himself in the city.

Baudelaire has a strong attachment to this city for his psychological or even physiological needs. He loves the streets, showcases, parks, ladies, and prostitutes. He is undeterred by the effects of modernism, because they can, to the maximum extent, maintain his carefree and leisurely creation and his disposition. Such a mental state is achieved, however, after he is totally abandoned by mainstream society. Baudelaire, immersed in busy Paris, is greatly surprised and shocked by the crowd, with which he maintains a strange relationship. Sometimes he devotes his whole heart to it, sometimes he drifts away with others, and sometimes he just stands alone in desolation. In such a city, it is the crowd which captivates him most.

Baudelaire’s flâneuring relates him with the metropolis, and yet he is isolated from the city, and the crowd too; these dimensions are important aspects of the city’s charm. However, in the crowd, people are cold towards each other, reducing the possibility of communication. If the flâneur walks the street, there is also the crowd. *The Man of the Crowd* is not only an accomplice of street reason, but also a spokesman for bourgeoisie life in his hasty, mechanical, and daily walks. Edgar Allan Poe’s novel *The Man of the Crowd* (1840) neatly illustrates the relationship between the crowd and the flâneur. In this work, the narrator on the street sees a person apparently

committing a crime. The narrator then follows this person until his quarry disappears in the crowd. However, nothing happens at the end. This story illustrates the relationship between the flâneur and the crowd—that of simultaneous attraction and rejection. In the story, the narrator is like a detective and a flâneur. The dandy regards the mass as shelter, and we perceive his desire to shed the literati's reserve and relax the mind and body, or even experience the thrill of transgression. That is why the flâneur shows much enthusiasm for the arcade; this energy is derived from large, busy crowds on the street.

For Baudelaire, the crowd does not only mean happiness, but also pain. Such mental conflict is always part of Baudelaire's work: on the one hand, by living in the crowd, the dandy searches for the significance of existence and inspiration for his literary creation; on the other, the economy, the bourgeoisie and urban life in modern society weaken the original sense of home. It is difficult to build a stable pattern of emotional communication. In energetic, large crowds, others are merely transient guests; people part forever at the very moment of acquaintance, arousing a strong feeling of loneliness in Baudelaire. In the poem *To a Woman Passing By*, about his love for a woman passing by, he expresses his pain of being unable to find a faithful friend in crowds. This presents a shocking experience of alienating metropolitan life. As people in modern society must quickly respond to new phenomena that appear in metropolitan life. The crowd is one particular phenomenon of modern society. People passing in the busy and noisy crowd have to face the reality that things quickly appearing will disappear in an instant, a shocking experience. When expressing his melancholy and desperation born of not being able to keep hold of this transient life, Baudelaire also reveals his thoughts on the meaning of existence, the loneliness of the individual, and also the coldness between people in modern metropolitan existence.

Despite the dandy's and flâneur's use of, and dependency upon, the city and the crowd, the urban huddle and noise always distressed and shocked Baudelaire. Baudelaire liked to separate himself from the crowd, to be a solitary soul, and express his discontentment and revolt. Although surrounded by urban civilization and the masses, the flâneur is a bystander cool-headedly observing the world. The flâneur seems to be interested in everything but does not pay close attention. Ignored and neglected, they embody fear and mystery. When strolling, they keep learning, thinking and verifying. They encounter all kinds of adventures, enjoy convenience, and investigate the city like outsiders.

The flâneur is lonely, unquestionably, but this loneliness is not about being sad and solitary—it is “lively”, a kind of aesthetic and rebellious symptom. The flâneur weaves his way through the crowd or wanders the city, and loneliness is much preferred by them. The flâneur does not follow rules, but instead formulates his own; he is without any clear destination in mind, is seemingly less rushed than others, and does not talk of benefits or producing commodities. He forever observes the crowd and events on the streets. When exploring the marvelous spectacle of the city, he is botanizing the asphalt. Janet Woolf argues that “the flâneur is the modern hero; his experience, like that of Guys, is that of a freedom to move about in the city, observing and being observed, but never interacting with others” (Benjamin, 1989, p. 146). This is a very vivid picture of the flâneur, the dandy life enabled Baudelaire to shed conventions and burdens, to light-heartedly pursued his ideas. The dandy does not abide by the material values of the bourgeoisie. It is their natural instinct to resist controls and restrictions.

The flâneur is also not bound by established conventions, laws and prejudice, which he always resists. He views things in a detached and objective way. In the 19th century, cities were further standardized, with more administrative regulations. City development increased the loneliness of the flâneur. Loneliness was not

predestined, but a product of institutionalization and resulting from city development. Ostensibly, the flâneur leads a leisurely life in the city; he seems to successfully gain his space and avoid being swallowed up and rendered impotent by the crowds.

In every kind of society, settling down is normal; wandering is considered abnormal and potentially dangerous. “Wandering about” not only signifies movement in space, but also a certain living realm and lifestyle, reflecting the dandies’ mental state and personal characteristics, and a means by which the call of unrestrained hearts is answered. The dandy is not subordinated to any political or mental entity; he is never satisfied with what he has gained. He neither sticks to old conventions nor discovered settlement. Unceasingly seeking truth in the world, he never rests his soul. From this point of view, the dandy is destined to be vagrant and marginal. He never feels he belongs to the world. Wherever he is, no matter what he is—professional conspirer, man of letters, ragpicker, or flâneur—he is still a marginal person in the city.

Conclusion

To conclude, a city is a kind of special aesthetic space, created as people move through it, interweave their stories, and experience daily life. According to de Certeau, walking in a city constantly forms innovative routines not based on identity, nor knowledge and right. Steve Pile describes, in *The Body and the City: Psychoanalysis, Space and Subjectivity*,

The city becomes a ghost town of memories without a language to articulate them because walking is a transient and evanescent practice. The proper spaces created for the city by the view from above—whether embodied in the visual regimes of the panoptic gaze or cartography—are interrupted. (Pile, 1996, p. 226)

A city is a stable text in the eyes of dandy. He walks around the city without purpose, he observes everything without revealing a real identity, and his unstable situation stems from his relationship with the city. The flâneur in a city can be interpreted as a text or a kind of lifestyle, as visual culture is very important in modern society. Like Benjamin, who believes that the flâneur’s stroll is about urban culture, De Certeau also argues that a walk in the city combines action with metaphor. A stroll is a diversified aesthetic practice and a form of street culture. Strolling—walking about—creates an opportunity to experience and observe the city; a unique route brings the fragments of streets together. The flâneur integrates sight, hearing, touch and memory, opening up a new world in the original urban space.

The flâneur searches for symbols of modernity and aesthetic objects. He describes and constructs the city. A flâneur is not bounded by his identity and living environment, and is distinguished from others through his behavior. The flâneur has a free and easy temperament, an elegant and relaxed attitude, travels around freely, and regards life as a game. The flâneur, through random walks, plays “hide-and-seek”, and investigates the city as he pursues the freedom of uncertainty. To the flâneur, a walk in the city is about discovering beauty through a poetic outlook and filtering text. The practice of strolling emphasizes aesthetic experience and pleasure.

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