

THE FLÂNEUR EXPERIENCE AS A LINE OF FLIGHT FROM MODERNITY: BETWEEN PARRHESIA AND PHANTASMAGORIA

Daniel Perico Graciano*

Pedro Henrique Varoni de Carvalho**

Cássia dos Santos***

- **ABSTRACT:** This essay aims to analyze the emergence of the flâneur figure in the nascent artistic and media project of 19th-century modernity as an exercise of parrhesia, in the relation between what is said and the life that is lived, as described by Michel Foucault. Charles Baudelaire personifies the artist's life, in a dialectical movement between poetic force and co-optation by the market. Theoretical and methodological assumptions from Foucauldian discursive studies were mobilized in dialogue with concepts from the philosopher Walter Benjamin, such as phantasmagoria and dialectical image. The results indicate that flânerie is configured as a type of aesthetic and behavioral resistance that functions as a line of escape in relation to the antagonisms between bourgeois and workers, commodity and poetry. The flâneur, therefore, is conceived as subjectivity in historical discontinuity, representing a poetic subject in the possible space of resistance to a utilitarian logic. For this reason, revisiting it allows us to think about counterpoints to the order of productivist discourse, escaping the immediacy and acceleration of contemporary life.
- **KEYWORDS:** Flâneur; Foucauldian Discursive Studies; Parrhesia; Phantasmagoria.

Introduction

The flâneur is an invention of modernity that presupposes relationships among three elements: “city, crowd, and capitalism” (Grós, 2014, p. 175). The term emerges in the 19th century, in France, in a time of profound transformation in Paris, described in Walter Benjamin's reflections on Baudelaire (2006). The industrial revolution arrives

* Universidade Federal de São Carlos (UFSCar), Centro de Educação e Ciências Humanas, São Carlos, SP, Brasil. Doutorando. danip.graciano@gmail.com. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5269-0213>.

** Universidade Federal de São Carlos (UFSCar), Centro de Educação e Ciências Humanas, São Carlos, SP, Brasil. Professor titular. pedrovaroni@ufscar.br. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1492-4891>.

*** Universidade Federal de São Carlos (UFSCar), Centro de Educação e Ciências Humanas, São Carlos, SP, Brasil. Doutoranda. cassia.hime@gmail.com. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4112-3376>.

in the French capital and the city becomes the stage for great reforms, turning into a metropolis. Between 1800 and 1870, the population tripled, reaching 1,800,000 people (Merriman, 2014). The migratory flow from the countryside to the city, in search of jobs in the industries created a chaotic situation of poverty and epidemics. An effort of urbanization and sanitation is needed, especially during the administrative period of the Baron Haussmann, with the expansion of the municipality borders, urban planning of roads, construction of buildings, sewage systems, maintenance of green spaces etc.

The flâneur character can be thought of as a form of subjectivity, amidst others that emerged as a result of intense mutations in the urban landscape, demanding other ways of being in the world: from the bourgeois dandy to the proletarian revolutionary, without forgetting the prostitutes and gamblers. He is, in a way, a figure of resistance in the face of the heat of growing industrialization, the accelerated expansion of the metropolis, and the invasion of fire-breathing machines, whose gear teeth devoured the souls of men, women and children. An ambiguous character, in its bourgeois and bohemian dimensions, who makes use of the new forms of information available with the growth of the press and that balances between being captured by the market and a revolutionary project, which is not, as we shall see, the militancy.

To slow down when everything is speed, and everything is production. To walk with empty pockets when consumption is the rule. The flâneur himself is consumed by the crowd. “If in the beginning the street had become an interior / for him, now this interior turned into a street, and he roamed through the labyrinth of commodities as he had once roamed through the labyrinth of the city. (Benjamin, 2006, p. 85). One of the main changes in the urban structure is the creation of passages, corridors covered by metal structures and glass, miniature worlds described by Benjamin (2006): cafes, restaurants, boutiques, publishing houses, antique shops, become the space, par excellence, of flânerie. Faced with so many appeals, his commitment is to the gaze and observation.

The following question arises: who is this flâneur? The flâneur is the one who is “absolutely impervious to the ambient productivism and the utilitarianism behind it.” (Grós, 2014, p. 179), quixotic or bohemian, bored or excited. A subversive walker, ambiguous, ambivalent in relation to the environment: he is not an anti-modern, but an alter-modern, he circumvents modernity, passes through it and deforms it, “contaminates its morbid sterility with the fertilizing pollen of other landscapes” (Graciano, 2020, p. 113). The flâneur enters the crowd, this myriad of singularities, whose greatest power is the affirmation of difference, he composes it; to exist is, in this sense, to differ, a condition of Being against the productivity imposed by modernity, which, filling the pockets of the industrialist with blood, dictates: to exist is to produce. To deny the productivity of the flow in order to affirm one’s own flow. To resist is to flow.

As early as the 19th century, the poet of *Les fleurs du mal* described the flâneur as a subject capable of resisting and subverting the ideal that the prevailing power relations imposed on space:

For the perfect *flâneur*, for the passionate spectator it is an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement the, in the midst of the fugitive and the infinite. To be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the centre of the world, and yet to remain hidden from the world — such are a few of the slightest pleasures of those independent, passionate, impartial natures, which the tongue can but clumsily define. The spectator is a *prince* who everywhere rejoices in his incognito (Baudelaire, 1965, p. 9).

It is evident that people had already walked without a set course or objective before the 19th century. However, the context was not the same. “He went on his way, following no other road than what his horse pleased to take; believing that therein consisted the life and spirit of adventures” (Cervantes, 2008, p. 26) – says the narrator of Don Quixote, in the 16th century. Was the infamous “Knight of the Sorrowful Figure” a *flâneur*? We cannot affirm that. After all, like the ancient peripatetics, he is not traversed by the industrial context, by the labyrinth of great cities, there was no line of escape in his wandering walk in relation to the demand for unbridled productivity. Benjamin summarizes the problem as follows:

In the *flâneur*, one might say, is reborn the sort of idler that Socrates picked out from the Athenian marketplace to be his interlocutor. Only, there is no longer a Socrates, so there is no one to address the idler. And the slave labor that guaranteed him his leisure has likewise ceased to exist (Benjamin, 2006, p. 163).

The figure of the idler stands out, almost as a deviation, in times of total exploitation of bodies from which surplus value could be extracted. Faced with the mechanization of production, in which speed becomes the main imperative, who was this subject who had the privilege of slowing down? It is in the practice of journalism that the *flâneur* transforms his idleness into a commodity/chronicle. As well as observing, he also has the imperative to express himself, which distinguishes him in the environment of the transforming city. Baudelaire personifies this subjectivity and its contradictions, with his poems and essays, in the “high capitalism”, as Benjamin’s reading (2006) shows us.

Considering that, the purpose of this essay is to examine the emergence of this subject in historical discontinuity as a kind of threshold: between the world that no longer was and the world that was being transformed, between experience and merchandise, the desire for revolution and art for art’s sake, a dream of freedom. It is no coincidence that Benjamin (2006) associates the *flâneur* with gamblers and prostitutes – those who defy societal norms. Baudelaire embodied this dialectical tension, offering a scathing critique of unquestioning faith in progress while ultimately succumbing to the pressures of a system that marginalizes dissenting voices. Though not a frontline fighter in the

class struggle, he found solace and resistance in the bohemian lifestyle. We can say that Benjamin observes that (1999, p. 333), “In view of the limited success of his work, Baudelaire more and more threw himself into the bargain”.

In view of this, a new question arises: what are the relationships that led to the emergence of this figure, in the context of the 19th century, as a manifestation of a contradiction inherent in the artistic project of modernity? The contradiction between the market, resistance, criticism that exposes misery and darkness, where the dominant order projects lights: a phantasmagoric expression. This is an effort to get away from a simplifying tendency to see the flâneur as a the light, observant walker, to think of him in a dialectical movement as a resistance to the new sensibilities that have arisen from the proliferation of media and the acceleration imposed by industrial capitalism. This aspect makes this subjectivity instigating for contemporary issues, and its revisiting in historical discontinuity seems productive for thinking about the place of poetry as an articulation between what is said and the way one lives, as well as restoring the experience of contemplation and a gaze that turns to the other rather than to oneself. In other words, lines of flight in relation to the increasing spectacularization of life. Thus, more than a light stroll through the streets, a stereotypical view of the complexity of this subject, what matters, for our purposes, is this contradictory experience of being simultaneously involved in the order of discourse (Foucault, 1981) of one's own time and displaced from it, an aspect that, as we shall see, finds its translation in Benjamin's concept of “phantasmagoria” (1999).

However, we will not get to the contemporary in this essay. We would like to provide some basis for future movements in this direction. Our journey will be in different movements: the characterization of the flâneur in relation to the concept of phantasmagoria in Walter Benjamin and the emergence of a sensibility that would characterize “the artist's life”, starting from Baudelaire. This aspect is present in a proposal presented by Foucault (2011) in the second hour of the February 29, 1984 lecture of his last course “The Courage of the Truth”, in which, in a wandering in the course on the cynics and parrhesia in the Greek world, the thinker asks himself to what extent the truthful speech, the correspondence between what is said and the life one leads, appears in historical unfolding beyond this context. Foucault (2011) will situate this practice at certain moments, in Christian asceticism, in the revolutionaries who emerged in the process of industrialization of Europe at the end of the 18th century. There is also another practice from the same period that draws the attention of the French philosopher, something he considers singular in European culture: the life of the artist, a project of which Baudelaire is an icon. “This is the, I think, modern idea that the artist's life, in the very form it takes, should constitute some kind of testimony of what art is in its truth” (Foucault, 2011, p. 187). To live for art, in order to live from the art of living.

What we are proposing, therefore, is to put into dialog the relationships between the idea of phantasmagoria, the flâneur and the modern artist, based on the reflections of Benjamin and Baudelaire, with Foucault's provocation in drawing attention to the

need to make a history of cynicism from antiquity to the present day. It seems possible to demonstrate that in the figure of the flâneur we find a kind of intersection between the life of an artist and the revolutionary militancy that Foucault (2011) spoke of in his “Courage of the Truth”. We will also use studies that have already discussed the subject, such as an article by Ernani Chaves (2012), based on Foucault, to think about Baudelaire as a kind of modern cynic. Elucidating, as much as possible in this short space, the flâneur’s contradictory threshold between a world that no longer was and the resistance to what is announced as the discourse and practice of progress contributes to thinking about the experience of art, in particular literature, journalism and subjectivities in the modern experience.

We will divide our essay into three movements: the description of the flâneur in relation to the concept of phantasmagoria; the approach to the artist’s life, taking Baudelaire’s famous essay on the circumstantial painter; and Foucault’s February 29th lecture on “The Courage of Truth”. In the relationships between these elements and contexts, we hope to establish a critical view of the figure of the flâneur, restoring its singularity. Just as Foucault proposed the archaeology of the cynics, the figure of the flâneur reappears in future practices, such as the beatniks, the hippies, and, at other times, when a poetic voice is established as a revolutionary practice (dislocated, however, from the Marxist project), before being co-opted by the forces of power.

The fundamental question is: is there a revolutionary specificity in poetic discourse, not based on militancy, but on the price one pays for articulating the life one leads with what one says? After all, telling the truth means taking risks, as the Greek cynics taught us.

The flâneur: phantasmagoria and the modern artist

Benjamin’s interest in the figure of the flâneur is inseparable from the concept of phantasmagoria and its relationship with Marx’s idea of the commodity fetish (1990), the way in which commodities obscure the social relations that produce them¹. Benjamin identified certain blind spots in Marxist thought, particularly when considering the specificities of culture in the face of the technological advances and capital that were unfolding in the 19th century. Phantasmagoria is, in a sense, an update of the idea of commodity fetishism. The media images of modernity create a kind of fog that also transforms poetic and literary activities into commodities, displacing the boundaries between interior and exterior, mind and world, illusion and reality. Phantasmagoria would be, synthetically, the image that the commodity produces of itself. Benjamin

¹ “[...] the products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own, which enter into relations both with each other and with the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men’s hands. I call this the fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour, as soon as they are produced as commodities, and is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities. [...] This fetishism of the world of commodities arises from the peculiar social character of the labour which produces them” (Marx, 1990, p. 165).

(1999) considered 19th-century Paris a “collective dream”, with its transforming landscape and its impact on new forms of sensibility.

The expression *phantasmagoria* originates in 18th-century physics studies; it refers to optical effects made possible by the use of so-called magic lanterns. Commodities use artifice to conceal their production process, and the cultural industry has become a privileged space for this purpose. The increasingly popular *feuilleton*, due to the reduction in subscription costs through the creation of advertisements, was a form of circulation for a discourse in which information coexisted with literary experiments. The charm lay in “city gossip, theatrical intrigues, and ‘things worth knowing’” (Benjamin, 2006, p. 60). The bourgeois habit of having aperitifs in cafes was filled with the daily news. Publications also became attractive to writers and artists, who began to receive significant resources for their work. “The generous fees for everyday literary merchandise necessarily lead to abuses” (Benjamin, 2006, p. 62), such as the fact that the editor had the right to define who could sign the texts.

This process of industrialization of information and entertainment indicates how *phantasmagoria* operates in its cultural dimension. Benjamin (1999) recognizes a space of resistance, in the idea of the dialectical image, capable of uncovering what *phantasmagoria* conceals; present, for example, in the allegorical form of Baudelaire’s poetry (with its opposition to the idea of progress) or, a little later, in surrealism. Future fascism, making use of *phantasmagoria*, would occur through the aestheticization of politics, whose antidote would be the politicization of art. In his book on Baudelaire, Benjamin constantly refers to the expression “*phantasmagoria*”, but the author devotes few words to its elucidation, saying that “All these products are on the point of entering the market as commodities. But they linger on the threshold.” (Benjamin, 1999, p. 13), enough to situate the way art disguises, tries to escape, but succumbs to co-optation by the market. Baudelaire’s life and work are exemplary of this effect, also because Benjamin saw in them the center of a history of bourgeois culture and, paradoxically, the revolutionary adhesion of social criticism. We have here a synthesis of the experience of *flânerie*.

For Benjamin, there is a profound change in the experience of communication, in the face of the growth of the information media that emerged as economic devices in industrial capitalism. But there is an ambiguous space of resistance, represented by the modern artist who finds a remarkable translation in Baudelaire. The *flâneur*, a bourgeois character, is part of this context and appears as a contradictory figure, since while being part of this landscape saturated with images, he maintains a distance from it and reflects on its ephemeral and illusory nature.

Behind the masks which he used to their fullest extent, the poet in Baudelaire preserved his incognito. He was as circumspect in his work as he was capable of seeming provocative in his personal associations. The incognito was the law of his poetry. His prosody is like the map of a big city in which one can move about inconspicuously, shielded by blocks

of houses, gateways, courtyards. On this map, words are given clearly designated positions, just as conspirators are given designated positions before the outbreak of a revolt. Baudelaire conspires with language itself. He calculates its effects step by step (Benjamin, 2006, p. 126).

The poet's revolutionary instrument is language. It is possible to think about the flâneur's experience from a Foucauldian discursive point of view, which means escaping a psychosocial origin and considering him as "the source of the relations of which he is only a bearer or effect" (Courtine, 1981, p. 23)². Discursive practices can be seen in this milieu in which the ability to observe the world around us, maintaining a relatively distant relationship with it, seems to be succumbing in the face of new means of communication and emerging technologies. The flâneur was short-lived, but his residual power remains as a gesture to be activated in other historical moments. Thus, this circumstantial and ephemeral figure of the flâneur is also a result of the process of intensification of the press. Hegel (1974) said that the morning newspaper becomes the new form of prayer. The spread of flânerie took advantage of the intense circulation of periodicals as instruments of a new relationship between people and the changing world that was being announced. For Benjamin, the social basis of flânerie is journalism; According to the German philosopher, in 1824 there were 47,000 newspaper subscribers in Paris; in 1836 there were 70,000; in 1846, 200,000 (Benjamin, 2006, p. 59-60).

The philosopher used the ideas of exchange value and use value, based on Marx³, to demonstrate how this relationship is present in the type of intellectual work done by journalists, who also start to produce in their spare time, invading the time of flânerie as an idle and contemplative experience. This was the case of flânerie, practiced in the middle of the process of transforming life into phantasmagoria.

On the boulevards he spent his hours of idleness which he displayed before people as part of his working hours. He behaved as if he had learned from Marx that the value of a commodity is determined by the working time socially necessary to produce it. In view of the protracted periods of idleness which in the eyes of the public were necessary for the realization of his own labour power, its value became almost fantastic. This high valuation was not limited to the public. The high payments for feuilletons at that time indicate that they were founded in social conditions (Benjamin, 2006, p. 61).

² In the original: "La source des rapports dont il n'est que le porteur ou l'effet".

³ The use-value of a commodity its utility, its the ability to satisfy a human need. Exchange value, on the other hand, is the quantity of other commodities for which a commodity can be exchanged. In other words, use-value tells us what a thing does, while exchange value tells us how much it is worth. Exchange value is the result of the socially necessary labor time required to produce the commodity. That is, the value of a thing depends on the time and effort a worker spends producing it. For example, a loaf of bread has use-value because it nourishes, because it satisfies hunger, but its exchange value depends on the labor time required to plant the wheat, harvest it, mill it, bake the bread, etc. (cf. Marx, 1990).

In this relationship between practice and discourses, mediated by journalism, Benjamin perceives a mutation in the experience of the flâneur, robbing it of its non-utilitarian character. To prove his thesis, the philosopher collects a passage from a popular Parisian newspaper called *Le Flâneur*, which published the following passage in 1848.

To go out strolling, these days, while puffing one's tobacco... while dreaming of evening pleasures, seems to us a century behind the times. We are not the sort to refuse all knowledge of the customs of another age; but in our strolling, let us not forget our rights and our obligations as citizens. The times are necessitous; they demand all our attention, all day long. Let us be flâneurs, but patriotic flâneurs (Benjamin, 1999, p. 448).

The germs of future fascism are already present. The idea of phantasmagoria and the emergence and impossibility of the flâneur, therefore, underpin Benjamin's critique of the loss of a cultural aura in the process of technical production, including considering the communicative experience of journalism which, for the philosopher, stifled imagination and favored its corruption by market forces.

The circumstantial painter and the artist's life: Baudelaire and the progress

The flâneur's experience anticipates a visual culture that would become dominant in the 20th century. The panoramic view of the metropolis with its wealth and misery, unexpected faces, gazes that cross in silence, the predominance of sight over the other senses, soon intensified by the technological advancement of photography, cinema, and audiovisual devices, are elements that coexist to foster the emergence of a "panoramic literature" (Benjamin, 2006, p. 33), sketches that mimic the anecdotal style: a plastic and informative foreground, followed by the extensive background of panoramas. This new literary form circulated in pocket-sized books called physiologies, which portrayed everything from "the itinerant street vendor of the boulevards to the dandy in the opera house foyer" (Benjamin, 2006, p. 67). The practice became a daily discourse in the nascent publishing market.

Benjamin resorts to the idea of involuntary memory present in Proust's work (2006). In the relationship between the experience of seeing the world, as forged by the flâneur subject, and the irruption of unconscious levels of involuntary memory, lies originality. The acceleration of technology imposes voluntary memory. The advent of photography itself would have contributed to this effect: "If the distinctive feature of the images arising from *mémoire involontaire* is seen in their aura, then photography is decisively implicated in the phenomenon of a 'decline of the aura'" (Benjamin, 2006, p. 204).

The curious thing is that this idea of the relationship between image and symbolization is at the heart of a famous essay by Baudelaire (1965), entitled "The

painter of modern life”, based on his favorite artist, Constantin Guys, a Crimean War correspondent, watercolor painter, and illustrator for British and French newspapers in the 19th century. This mixture of journalist and artist is, for Baudelaire, the symbol of a modern art that is distinguished by a practice that could be thought of as *flânerie*. To see and to transmit one’s experience, privileging visual language.

Baudelaire’s question in “The painter of modern life” is to reflect on the emergence of the modern artist. The poet sets out to establish a historical and rational theory of beauty, consisting of an external and circumstantial element (fashion, morality, passion) and something of the order of the immutable that traverses all historical times. Baudelaire then introduces us to the character of Constantin Guys (identified in the essay as “C.G.”), “the man of the world”, one who is in every way different from the provincial artist type, crude, a skilled craftsman and specialist, but of average intelligence. What differentiates the “man of the world” from others is extreme curiosity, he is a kind of “child man”, a sort of genius for whom no aspect is dull, with eyes always attentive to the eternal novelty of life. This man could be confused with the dandy, but differs from him in not being bored or insensitive, in being sincere but not ridiculous. The “man of the world” is the cosmopolitan and has two qualities that make him stand out: the ability to see and the ability to express. He seeks to extract the poetic element from fashion and extract the eternal from the transitory; his genius seeks and captures beauty.

Each era has its bearing, its gaze, its gesture, Baudelaire tells us (1965). The act of *flânerie*, of contemplating life, is complemented by the form of expression that is used, especially, as we have seen, with the expansion of the press in the mid-19th century in Europe. C.G. produces his sketches, watercolors, and drawings of scenes from life with extreme skill and quantity. He covers the war and exposes the contradictions of the fat officers on their horses, he portrays the figures of the dandy, of women, of the pomp and circumstance, courtesans. With his drawings, which have a layer beyond the visible and the genius to record the vision in an articulated way as memory, the artist breaks with posed portraits, a common practice in the old forms of art. His creation is not mimetic, but results from observation and the imposition of his individual mark, although he does not sign any of the works published in the newspapers. Baudelaire’s text (1965) has features that allow us to identify, in C. G.’s universe, the center of bourgeois culture, with its morning newspapers, its clothes and habits. The appreciation of this view of the present is articulated with the description of an artist’s life, a man of the world, cosmopolitan, with the freedom to express his genius in the periodicals, to exercise his curiosity by trade.

Constantin Guys’ drawings can be thought of as dialectical images, insofar as, by eschewing mimetic, realistic art, they lay bare the effect of phantasmagoria, while at the same time recording the habits of the present, on the verge of the transformation into the regime of photographic images. There are phantasmagoric elements reminiscent of the effects of the magic lantern, planes of vision that isolate the object portrayed, amidst the fog.

Figure 1 – Untitled. Constantin Guys



Source: Wikimidea.commonss.

Baudelaire's essay (1965) about Constantin Guys reveals the idea of a chronicle of bourgeois life, with its euphoria over modern art and a 'man of the world' who personifies the artist's life suggested by modernity. The flâneur poet recognizes in the painter the privileged observation of someone who wants to remain anonymous and, at the same time, be a chronicler of bourgeois life, at a time when art is succumbing to the new modes of commodity in capitalism. "In order to have shoes, she sold her soul; But the Good Lord would laugh if, in the presence of that vile woman, I played the hypocrite and acted lofty – I, who sell my thought and wish to be an author" (Baudelaire, qtd. in Benjamin, 2006, p. 66).

This point of view is also present in Baudelaire's poetic and essayistic production, which oscillates, according to Benjamin, between poetic allegory and the conspiracy that was being plotted in the popular revolts of the French 19th century, such as the February Revolution of 1830 and the workers' and socialist uprisings of 1848. The degradation of life imposed by the industrial rhythm is also a recurring theme for the poet.

It is impossible not to be gripped by the spectacle of this sickly population, which swallows the dust of factories, breathes in particles of cotton, and let its tissues be permeated by white lead, mercury, and all the poisons needed for the production of masterpieces...; the spectacle of this languishing and pining population to whom the earth owes its wonders, who feel hot, crimson blood coursing through their veins, and who cast

a long, sorrowful look at the sunlight and shadows of the great parks (Baudelaire, qtd. in Benjamin, 2006, p. 102-103).

Baudelaire constantly renounces his economic condition, showing solidarity with the emerging figure of the working class. This is, as we shall see from here on, an exercise in parrhesia.

Bohemianism, revolution, the flâneur, and the artist's life

This panorama of the relationship between the transformation of art and the communicative experience, which is at the center of Benjamin's thinking in the book on Baudelaire (2006) allows us to advance a little further in Foucault's proposal to think about Greek cynicism, the courage of truth, in historical discontinuity, in subjectivities forged in the 19th century, with Paris as its stage: revolutionaries, militants, conspirators, and artists.

The ancient cynics described by Foucault (2011) renounced material comfort, covered themselves with a cloth that served as both a blanket and a roof, and carried an empty bag. Nomads, they prized freedom to distill harsh, aggressive, critical words about the conduct and convictions of the common citizen. They exercised parrhesia, the speaking of truth, inseparable from the way one lives. Foucault (2011) uses the example of the cynics to seek to constitute the conditions of truthful speech, the courage of truth, and returns to the Platonic dialogues to illustrate Socratic parrhesia. To speak of the soul's being in Alcibiades and to give a style to existence in Laches, Foucault's concern is with alethurgic forms, the ethical transformations of the subject. This seminal work by Foucault, according to Frédéric Gros (cited in Foucault, 2011, p. 344):

[...] sets out again the triptych of his critical work: a study of modes of veridiction (rather than an epistemology of Truth); an analysis of forms of governmentality (rather than a theory of Power); a description of techniques of subjectivation (rather than a deduction of the Subject).

In this detour from the ancient world, Foucault (2011), in his February lecture, carefully refers to his notes as a draft for a possible work and dwells on three future moments in which the courage of truth appears in Western history: in post-medieval Christian asceticism, particularly in the figure of Saint Francis, in the revolutionaries of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and in a certain artistic life in nineteenth-century France.

Regarding the revolutionary, Foucault (2011) is interested in the way in which life poses itself as revolutionary activity or revolutionary activity poses itself as life. He identifies three major domains: secret societies (associations, conspiracies), militancy, a visible form of organization that seeks to impose its objectives in the social and political

field, and, most importantly for him, militancy as a life-long testimony, “in the form of a style of existence” (Foucault, 2011, p. 184). It’s about the search for another possible life. For Foucault (2011), secret societies dominated the struggles of the nineteenth century, with the most visible aspect appearing in the last third of the nineteenth century, with the institutionalization of trade unions and political parties. The scandal of the truth of revolutionary life shows its marks in the middle of the century. This is the period that coincides with the eruption of an anti-Platonic and anti-Aristotelian art, “reduction, laying bare the basics of existence; permanent refusal and rejection of every form of established art” (Foucault, 2011, p. 185), paradoxically, an anti-cultural status, giving rise to a barbaric truth. “And if this is not just in art, in the modern world, in our world, it is especially in art that the most intense forms of a truth telling with the courage to take the risk of offending are concentrated” (Foucault, 2011, p. 189). It is this emergence of a singular existence, in which there is no longer a distance between the artist’s life and the truth expressed in his work, that interests the philosopher. In an art that was also changing, to the extent that it was leaving behind its aspect of imitation or ornamentation in order to seek to uncover, excavation.

For Ernani Chaves (2012), Foucault (2011) identifies in Baudelaire the central figure as an attitude and gesture of modernity, aligning himself, in this sense, with Benjamin’s thinking (2006). Beyond the individual dimension, it is important for our purposes to think about the *flâneur* subject in this context, this panoramic, non-mimetic art that sought to excavate the visible in order to lay it bare, as in the drawings of Constantin Guys so vividly described by Baudelaire.

It is in bohemianism, as described by Marx (2023), that conspiracies were formulated and where the Paris Communes of the nineteenth century were plotted, and it was on this resistance that power intensified as a discourse, in the breadth of the *feuilleton* and news media, as a bourgeois civilized habit that would co-opt/buy poetry. “Baudelaire had to be prepared for unethical practices. He was dealing with publishers who counted on the vanity of sophisticated people, amateurs, and beginners, and who accepted manuscripts only if a subscription was purchased.” (Benjamin, 2006, p. 65). To these movements, Baudelaire reacts like an ancient cynic, seeking to lay bare the process and leading a wandering life, moving from house to house to escape rents, trying not to succumb to what would be most valuable to him: his poetry.

Benjamin (2006), considering Marx, describes the taverns of Second Empire Paris, many of which were located on the outskirts of the city and were more accessible to the proletariat because they were free from the wine taxes that were levied in the capital. In this environment, described by Marx in a review published in a newspaper in 1850, there is a difference between occasional conspirators and professionals. This is the space of bohemianism. Baudelaire identifies with this environment and, although he is involved in contradictions, such as supporting the usefulness of art to later proclaim art for art’s sake, he makes it a kind of center of his expression. In a letter to his mother in 1854, he said he would never join the police’s hired literati (Benjamin, 2006). This bohemian environment, a kind of intersection between the revolutionary and the artist,

made possible Baudelaire's singular expression as a chronicle of contradictions, escaping the control of saying and finding his truth.

Conclusion

There are lines of possible approaches between Foucault and Benjamin. Both share a discontinuous view of history. The German philosopher affiliates himself with Marxism, but with an important shift: he does not reserve his sympathy for a single class, the working class, but seeks to reflect also on the lumpenproletariat, the pariah, the deviant, the men in the bohemian tavern, the prostitutes, the gamblers.

The concept of the dialectical image is essential for thinking about the space of resistance and the value that Benjamin (1999; 20069) gave to the figure of the flâneur in the context of the capitalist transformation of Paris. Benjamin preferred the image to the concept, his dense and poetic form of expression valued the former, thought of beyond visual representation, but rather the set of elements that cause a sensory impact: from texts to objects, or the architectural changes that originated the arcades, for example. For the philosopher, nothing that has happened historically can be considered closed. The dialectical image reflects contradictions and tensions because it causes other temporalities, past and future, to erupt in the present. It is a matter of indicating "the precise spot in the present my historical construction would take as its vanishing point" (Benjamin, 1999, p. 69).

The brief survival of the flâneur, as a character of the passages, soon succumbing to the force of the commodity and its ghostly strategy, is illustrative. Today this image of the past of the constitution of the poetic subjectivity, idle, unproductive, the one who casts a different gaze on modernity, the flâneur, launches us into other possibilities of re-signifying art and the artist's life as the courage of truth. There was a time of passage when it was possible to create dialectical images that pointed both to the past and to the future, without taking their eyes off the present. This is the greatest legacy of the flâneur subject, and it is from it that we must move forward.

GRACIANO, Daniel Perico; CARVALHO, Pedro Henrique Varoni de; SANTOS, Cássia dos. A experiência do flâneur como linha de fuga da modernidade: entre a parresia e a fantasmagoria. *Alfa*, São Paulo, v. 69, 2025.

- *RESUMO: A emergência da figura do flâneur, no nascente projeto artístico e midiático da modernidade no século XIX, é analisada, neste ensaio, enquanto exercício da parresia, na relação entre o que se diz e a vida que se leva, conforme descreve Michel Foucault. Charles Baudelaire personifica a vida de artista, num movimento dialético entre a força poética e a cooptação pelo mercado. Foram mobilizados pressupostos teórico-metodológicos dos estudos discursivos foucaultianos em diálogo com conceitos do filósofo Walter Benjamin, tais como*

fantasmagoria e imagem dialética. Nossos resultados indicam que a flânerie se configura como um tipo de resistência estética e comportamental que funciona como linha de fuga em relação aos antagonismos entre burgueses e operários, mercadoria e poesia. O flâneur, portanto, é pensado como subjetividade na descontinuidade histórica, representação de um sujeito poético no espaço possível de resistência a uma lógica utilitarista e produtivista. Motivos pelos quais sua revisitação produz sentidos no contemporâneo.

- **PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Flâneur; Estudos Discursivos; Parresia; Fantasmagoria.

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Received on 22 de June, 2024

Approved on 18 de October, 2024