

Narratives on the city: between the fear and the fascination

Narrativas sobre a cidade: entre o medo e o fascínio

Narrativas en la ciudad: entre el miedo y la fascinación

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Abstract *The author proposes to bring up a pioneer instant of experimentation of the passage from the house to the street, on the turn of the 19th to the 20th century, through the narrative of two Benjaminian types: the “physiologue” and the “flâneur”. Later, it would be the time of the columnist and the journalist to register the city, its types, habits, customs and news. Such passage from the house to the street took place with a compound of fear and allure, registered in the original perspective of such scribes who would elucidate, through their texts, some new perceptions in the imaginary of the time.*

Keywords: *History of Journalism; Literature; Urban Narrative*

Resumo *A autora propõe-se a trazer à tona um instante pioneiro de experimentação da passagem da casa à rua, na virada do século XIX para o século XX, através da narrativa de dois tipos benjaminianos: o “fisiologista” e o “flâneur”. Mais tarde, seria a vez de o cronista e o jornalista documentarem a cidade, seus tipos, hábitos, costumes, notícias. Tal passagem da casa à rua deu-se com um misto de medo e fascínio, registrada na perspectiva original de tais escribas, que elucidariam, através de seus textos, algumas percepções novas no imaginário da época.*

Palavras-chave: *História do Jornalismo; Literatura; Narrativa urbana*

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Resumen *La autora se propone a traer a la tona un instante pionero de experimentación del pasaje de la casa a la calle, en la vuelta del siglo XIX para el siglo XX, por medio de la narrativa de dos tipos benjaminianos: el “fisiologista” y el “flâneur”. Más adelante, sería a la vez del cronista y del periodista documentar la ciudad, sus tipos, sus hábitos, costumbres, noticias. Tal pasaje de la casa a la calle se dio con un compuesto de miedo y encanto, registrado en la perspectiva original de tales escribanos que aclararían, a través de sus textos, algunas nuevas percepciones en la imaginaria del tiempo.*

Palabras-clave: *Historia del Periodismo; Literatura; Narrativa urbana*

Date of submission: 18/5/2014

Date of acceptance: 18/7/2014

From the house to the street: antipathy protects us

There was a time in which to live in the streets was something at the same time new and strange and the city-dweller who ventured to trans-
pose the limits of his/her house did it with a mixture of fear and enchant-
ment. According to Benjamin (1994, p. 43), fear reflected itself in the
attitude in which the bourgeoisie had to seek a compensation for the
disappearance of the vestiges of private life in the big city, thus coming
closer to its domestic articles and accessories and fixing its mark on the
objects by adorning them, covering them, hence their house became an
appropriate redoubt against the threat of losing their identity.

In *The Metropolis and mental life* (1903), Georg Simmel compares
the subjectivity of the dweller of a small city to that of the dweller of a big
city and he concludes that the latter stimulates the blasé character, that
is the state in which the nerves accommodate themselves to the contents
and to the lifestyle in the big city and renounce to react at it. According
to Simmel (2005), the dweller of the big city, who is being exposed to
so many new stimuli (circulation of vehicles, profusion of people of the
most various types, etc.) and to the distrust of the unknown which passes
fugaciously and which is not well known, adopts a mental attitude of re-
serve, of “dullness” when facing things and people.

To the extent that the big city precisely creates these psychological condi-
tions – at each way to the street, with the velocity and the varieties of eco-
nomic, professional and social life –, already in the sensitive foundations
of mental life, in the *quantum* of consciousness it requests of us in virtue
of our organisation as beings that operate distinctions, it provides a deep
opposition with regard to the small city and to life in the countryside, with
a slower and more habitual rhythm, which more uniformly derives from
its sensitive-mental image of life. With this we understand above all the
intellectualistic mental life of the dweller of the big city, compared with
the dweller of the small city, which is rather based upon the mind and
upon the relationships which are regulated by feeling (SIMMEL, 2005, p.
578).

This reserve would assume various facets: indifference, aversion,
strangeness and even repulsion. In front of these dangers of the big city,

“antipathy protects us”; “it performs the distances and the estrangements” (SIMMEL, 2005, p. 583). Thus in the dense crowd of the big city, corporal proximity makes the spiritual distance explicit. “[...] At no place somebody feels that lonely and abandoned as precisely in the crowd of the big city” (SIMMEL, 2005, p. 585). According to the author, that which at first moment could seem “dissociation” is actually an elementary form of “socialisation”, since such reserve guarantees a certain freedom to the individual; at the same time it also maintains social life.

According to Simmel (2005, p. 588), if, on the one hand, life becomes easier in the big city (comforts of the techniques, of leisure, etc.), on the other hand, it is more and more composed of impersonal contents and programmes, which would lead the individual to the challenge of conferring value upon his/her own personality in the dimensions of life in the big city. Thus, in order to save that which is more personal, it would be necessary to exaggerate the particularity so that it can be audible even to the very individual. The consequences of this attitude would be the most “tendentious eccentricities”, the “specific extravagances of the big city”, so that the individual can be different, can be outstanding and be noted in the crowd. These “extravagances, such as exclusivism, whims, preciousness, would be the only means the individual would have in order to keep for himself/herself a certain self-esteem” (SIMMEL, 2005, p. 587).

The German philosopher Walter Benjamin (1994) will also deepen the topic in his book *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, he wrote in 1939. In it he registers the individual’s leaving the bourgeois house in order to venture in the streets of Paris from the middle of the 19th century on. Benjamin would transcend Simmel’s perspective: more than opposing the mind of the dweller a the small city to that of the big city, he would seek to decipher the latter on the basis of the poetics of whom sees it from the inside. Thus, in some writers of that period, above all in Baudelaire, he rehabilitated the experience to transpose the limits no more from the countryside, but from the bourgeois house, towards the core of a more and more effervescent street. According to him, the ancient romantic landscape feeling now converts itself into the urban landscape and the Parisians turn to transform the streets

into homes. The city and the crowd as topics impose themselves on various literati of the 19th century: Charles Baudelaire, Edgar A. Poe, Victor Hugo and Marcel Proust. Many of these writers symbolically aspired to the conquest of the street.

As we notice it, the street converts itself into an element which threatens and into a muse who seduces. If the term “affectivity” designs the experience the human being has when he/she faces determined experiences of life which occur in the outside world as well as in one’s own self, pleasant or unpleasant ones, we could say that the relation with the city develops itself in this dual glance. In this article, in the pioneer narratives, we must unveil a valid field of emotions and experiences, which are incrustated in the layers of time like the “geologist distinguishes the layers in rocks” (BENJAMIN, 1994, p. 37).

The physiologue of Paris: the art to make the strange familiar

If the first inhabitants of the city saw the street with distrust, it would not last long until fear would give way to the wish to frequent it and to mix more and more with the crowd that circulates in it. “It (the crowd) lies like a veil in front of the *flâneur*: it is the ultimate drug of the isolated being. [...] it effaces all the vestiges of the individual: it is the newest asylum of outlaws” (BENJAMIN, 1994, p. 224).

Precisely the identity vestiges which, according to Benjamin (1994, p. 43), the bourgeoisie would seek so much to preserve by confining themselves in the inner part of their houses, appropriating more and more their articles and their domestic accessories, fixing their mark into the objects by adorning them, by covering them. According to the author, the bourgeoisie would do their best to produce covers and cases for their slippers, pocket watches, thermometers, cutlery and umbrellas. According to Martín-Barbero (2009, p. 78), “the *interior* takes refuge in the residence, an interior which maintains the bourgeois in his/her illusions to be able to conserve for himself/herself as a part of him/herself, the past and the distance, the two forms of distancing. Therefore it is in the in-

terior, where the bourgeois will give asylum to art and it is in art that he seeks to conserve his traces”.

Nonetheless, against the efforts of the person who felt threatened by the city, some people would surrender without reserve to it.

Unique field valid of modern experience, the city is the body in which emotions and passions, not transferable and singular experiences inscribe themselves which the poet-allegorist sings The city is a world in miniature – *monad* of modernity and like every Benjaminian monad, it is crystallisation of tensions: passage from a space which fluctuates between the interior and the exterior of *Passages*, the real and the unreal, the mercantile devaluation of everything and the new aura of the unforeseen (MATOS, 1989, p. 72).

Hence the relation with the city could only occur in this dual sense: strangeness and discomfort, on the one hand; reception and fascination on the other hand. On the one hand, the gestures are machine-like, the glance loses the capacity to look, “people behave as if they could only express themselves through reflexes” (BENJAMIN, 1994, p. 50), like the crowd Poe describes. However, on the other hand, the individual, who is dislocated from his/her home, which is no more comfort, finds refuge in the crowd that receives him/her. Thus the city starts to fascinate and acquires a soul. “The street has a soul”, João do Rio says in *A alma encantadora das ruas [The Enchanting Soul of Streets]* (2011). The city intoxicates, Benjamin would say.

An intoxication overcomes the person who tramps through the city streets for a long time without a goal. With every step the going gains in force; the seduction of the stores, the bistros the smiling women, grow ever narrower, ever more irresistible grows the magnetism of the next street-corner, a distant mass of foliage, and a street-name (BENJAMIN, 1994, p. 186).

To live in a city, to cross it and to translate it was the challenge that was set. Therefore the importance of “panorama literature”, which had its apogee in the 19th century, in Paris. According to Benjamin (1994, p. 33), within this genre there were the fascicles in pocket-size called “physiologies”, which dealt with the description of human types who cir-

culated in the markets of Paris, from the peddler to the elegant man, who frequented the opera. Later they would dedicate themselves to the consecration of the city and profile its streets, its panoramas (*Paris at Night, Paris at Table, Paris on Horseback*) and its customs (*Physiology of Marriage, The Physiology of Taste, The Devil in Paris...*).

On the basis of the physiologies, the petit bourgeois life – with its types, habits, customs, leisure, professions – was reviewed. The objective of the physiologues was to soften the unrest of life in the big city and therefore it had to be light and inoffensive, since the crowd frightened because of its impersonality; life was getting more and more public and the neighbour always threatening. In front of such discomfort, it was important to provide the people with a friendly image of one another and so it would be incumbent on the physiologues to know and to catalogue human nature and to guess the profession, the character, the origin, the lifestyle of the passers-by (BENJAMIN, 1994, p. 36). By doing this they showed that “life in the big city would not be the furthest as worrying as it probably seemed to everyone” (BENJAMIN, 1994, p. 37).

However according to Benjamin’s survey, the physiologues would be soon surpassed and “a great future was reserved to the literature which stuck to the worrying and threatening aspects of urban life” (BENJAMIN, 1994, p. 38). This literature, which appeared afterwards, would have to do with the crowds, but it would actuate differently from the physiologies. It would not attach so much importance to the determination of types, but to how much a type can hide himself in the crowd of the big city: “In times of terror, when each one has something conspiratorial within himself, the detective’s role can also be played” (BENJAMIN, 1994, p. 38). This is the origin of the detective story.

The detective story and the realist current: the art to make the familiar strange

According to Benjamin (1994), the detective story also contributes to the production of the phantasmagoria of the Parisian life. It does not glorify the criminal, but the territory where the chase takes place: the city.

Some examples: *The Mohicans of Paris* (Balzac), *The Mysteries of Paris* (Eugène Sue), *The London Mysteries* (Paul Féval), *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* (Poe), *The Purloined Letter* (Poe), *The Man of the Crowd* (Poe).

The content of the detective story would be the suppression of the individual's vestiges in the crowd of the big city and the use of the journalistic information in the revelation of crimes. "A man becomes the more suspicious in the crowd the more difficult it is to find him" (BENJAMIN, 1994, p. 45). The emergence of gaslight was essential for this phantasmagoria: "It is difficult to separate the phenomenon of the street as interior [...] from the gas illumination" (BENJAMIN, 1994, p. 47). Noctambulism rises, which is the attitude to roam at night without a precise aim. In Poe's tale, "The Man of the Crowd", we can follow the importance of this light for the phantasmagoria of the city and in the passers-by's faces.

[...] the rays of the gas lamps, feeble at first in their struggle with the dying day, had now at length gained ascendancy, and threw over everything a fitful and garish lustre. All was dark yet splendid — as that ebony to which has been likened the style of Tertullian. The wild effects of the light enchained me to an examination of individual faces; and although the rapidity with which the world of light flitted before the window, prevented me from casting more than a glance upon each visage, still it seemed that, in my then peculiar mental state, I could frequently read, even in that brief interval of a glance, the history of long years (POE, s.d., p. 134).

When electric light appeared, many adepts of the genre lamented it.

Another genre, which appeared as a writing of the city, was the realist movement, which crossed the occidental literature of the 19th century and of the beginning of the 20th century. According to Ponte (2005, p. 43), this literature rose up against the idealised life of classicism and of romanticism by means of the description as a form of representation of reality. Some authors: Honoré de Balzac, Gustave Flaubert, Émile Zola, Leon Tolstoy, Henry James... described "life like it is, thus stimulating the perception of the real world, of the private crises, which were hidden in the secrets of the comfortable bourgeois homes, the public crises

which shocked the cities and the authorities” (PONTE, 2005, p. 43), this came close to the emerging journalism of the 19th century.

Between the *flâneur* and the journalist: the chronicler²

But before getting to journalism, we would have to examine a type that derived from the physiologue and that turned into the modern journalist: the *flâneur*. After all, according to Benjamin, the social basis of journalism is the *flanêrie* and we will see why.

This type has its origin in the Paris of the beginning of the 19th century, when about 30 galleries were built in the city. Benjamin (1994, p. 35), who carried out a study on this type, described the galleries as open ways covered with glass and with a marble revetment, which passed between the house blocks as if it were a world in miniature. The most elegant commercial establishments extended along these streets where people could pass, look, buy, in short, stroll.

By reading the chronicle as a metaphor of the gallery, we would say that it is this zone of contemplation of the urban space, which leaves the domestic territory of the book (the home of the word) in order to venture into the space of the newspaper, which is divided into streets. In its form the chronicle personifies the shredding of the meanings of the city dwellers, whose way of glancing is altered by the hasty movement of their steps, of public transportation, of the shop windows, of the placards, of the modern topics which are produced in the core of the street. “Naturally, my feet being tired, I got on the first tramway, which could take me home or to the Rua do Ouvidor [Ouvidor Street: the most fashionable street in Rio de Janeiro], which is where we all live”, Machado de Assis wrote in *A Semana* [*The Week*], of January 2nd 1889 (GLEDSON, 1996, p. 190).

Nevertheless nobody would have lived more in the street than João do Rio whom many people considered the first reporter of the Brazilian

² This subtitle recuperates and updates some questions this author already treated on the 10^o Encontro Nacional de Pesquisadores em Jornalismo [10th National Meeting of Journalism Research], promoted by the Associação Brasileira de Pesquisadores em Jornalismo (SBPJor) [Brazilian Journalism Research], in 2012.

journalism. Besides the fact that the very streets of Rio de Janeiro had been profiled by his pen, he described the lifestyles of those who frequented them, those who also made the pavements their homes. Similar types like him who called himself a *flâneur*, a “pedestrian of observation poetry”: “I was somehow the complex type and maybe because of this, for me every street is a living and immovable being” (JOÃO DO RIO, 2011, p. 33).

João do Rio, as a *flâneur* and a street physiologue, documented the “small ignored professions”: the gipsy, the *trapeiro* [picks up paper in the streets to sell it to the paper factories], the *apanha-rótulos* [gathers labels], the philatelist, the hunter, the reader, the tattooist, the prayer monger, the book dealer, the painter of the city, the old cab-driver.

Oh! These small ignored professions, which are integrant parts of the mechanism of the big cities!

Rio can know very well the London bourgeois’ life, the plays of Paris, the geography of Manchuria and the Japanese patriotism. But we can bet that it does not even know its own plant, neither the life of this whole society, of all these strange and exotic means, of all the professions which constitute the progress, the pain, the misery of the vast Babel which transforms itself (JOÃO DO RIO, 2011, p. 60).

It is interesting to ascertain here that the art to describe human types as the physiologues in Paris did or João do Rio himself in the Brazilian context, converted itself into a journalistic genre which has been present on the pages of the newspapers until today: the profile. According to Vilas Boas (2003), it is a short narrative/descriptive which focuses on the protagonist of a story and which appeared in 1930, when the newspapers and the magazines were concerned with portraying human figures. At the end of the 1930s, the newspaper *New Yorker* contracted Joseph Mitchell, who became important in profiling, like João do Rio and his “small ignored professions”, stevedores, Indians, workers, fishermen, farmers... Although at present time the profiles are almost always directed at media celebrities, there are still people who rehabilitate anonymous types by seeking some grandeur in the trivial.

Like Ricardo Kotscho (1986, p. 46) did by describing “an old clown”:

In a narrow toilet which was improvised as a dressing-room, he calmly followed his ritual: with a knitted T-shirt and underpants of lacework, he paints his face with the care with which one prepares oneself for the première. Then he washes his hands, puts on big slovenly almost worn out shoes, puts on the blue and green stamped shirt, the hula hoop trousers, the bowtie – literally a butterfly [gravata borboleta: butterfly tie]– and arranges his ears, his big trump – a complicated engine coupled with a syringe, which soon will make him scandalously weep, gushing water on the children.

Kotscho's art to profile comes close to João do Rio's unpretentious act by bringing to light Brazilian figures that lived at the margin, like the "strolling musicians":

Strolling musicians! There was a moment in which all disappeared, dragged by a sudden whirlpool. The cafés lived without the classical harps and in the streets, from time to time, a barrel organ appeared. Why? Have they been absorbed by the singing-café which were dominated by the marvels of the gramophone — this wonder of the 19th century, which is still a calamity for the 20th century? No. It had only been a sudden pause in the traffic of the cities (JOÃO DO RIO, 2011, p. 111).

It is in the city that such types live. And it is in the city that the chronicler/journalist, as a *flâneur*, seeks the input in order to produce his chronicle or profile in order to sell them afterwards. As we said it before, the very Benjamin (1994, p. 225) declared that "the social basis of the *flânerie* is journalism. It is as a *flâneur* that the man of letters addresses the market in order to sell himself". His workforce would be the time he spends contemplating the boulevards. The new experiences in the city are his raw material. The spectacle of the city intoxicates him and converts itself into merchandise for the consumption of this crowd by means of the flying pages of the newspaper.

The modern city and the new means of mass communication helped to change the aesthetic glance of contemplation into distraction. The mobility of the glance and the oscillations between immersion and distancing help to develop an attitude in which the urban landscape starts to be perceived as fragmented and allegorical, at the same time as daily life un-

dergoes a process of aesthetisation. Thus the much commented distracted nature of modern experience has its precursor in the movable glance of the *flâneur* (FEATHERSTONE, 2000, p. 195).

A glance, which is used again by the journalist.

As we see, the physiologue and the *flâneur*, as well as the pioneer form of the journalist (the chronicler), cross the city and let themselves be absorbed by the collective (“Streets are the dwelling place of the collective”). It was they, by longing to profile the current life of the cities, who transformed the walls into desks and the newsstands into libraries (BENJAMIN, 1994, p. 194).

Walking in the streets of the modern city and trying to document it is the physiologue’s, the *flâneur*’s, the chronicler’s and the journalist’s task. They developed what Certeau would define as the rhetoric of walking, which would be similar to the speech act. “The act of walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to language or to the statements uttered” (CERTEAU, 1994, p. 177). Arantes (2000) also sees similarities between the walker’s steps and enunciation, since both link disconnected and fortuitous points of the landscape by ordering differences and constructing meanings.

In the same way, according to Certeau (1994, p. 177-178), the walker updates the spatial order which is composed of possibilities and prohibitions. He transforms each spatial signifier into another thing by selecting, by deviating by updating the places, their permissions and interdictions. “Walking affirms, suspects, tries out, transgresses, respects, etc., the trajectories it ‘speaks’” (CERTEAU, 1994, p. 179), hence it cannot be reduced to its graphical design. Thus walking would be a space of enunciation, which would make the author see parallelisms between the linguistic enunciation and the pedestrian enunciation. This enunciation would create “something discontinuous, whether by making choices in the signifiers of the spatial ‘language’ or by displacing them through the use he makes of them” (CERTEAU, 1994, p. 178).

In the same direction Featherstone (2000, p. 186) points out that the *flâneur* would not only be the one who perambulates across the city. The

flânerie would be a reading method in order to extract meanings from the city and also a method of writing, of text construction. Something Benjamin understood very well, since he did not only investigate the city, but he also used it as an organising principle of his material: “The text is the city” (FEATHERSTONE, 2000, p. 186). In *One Way Street*, Benjamin would lead this premise to the extreme by mounting his book with a series of aphorisms which remind the streets of a city: “petrol station”, “optician”, “antiquities”, “number 13”, etc.

And if, in Paris, panorama literature acquired status, in Brazil, the chronicle would appear in order to appease the senses and to configure itself as an agile writing, copied from the fragmentation model, now directed at the streets, synchronised with modern times.

Hence the city turns to be rehabilitated by the chronicler, who acts like a *flâneur*. And the chronicle would allegorise in its very form (fragmented, ephemeral, distracted) and also in the topics it documents, the modern experience of whom overcame fear in order to conquer the street at last.

And it was like this that the physiologues, the *flâneurs*, the chroniclers and the journalists documented the significance and the essence of the street in modern times by taking Machado de Assis’ suggestion literally: “We shall not be ashamed of living in the street; it is much fresher” (ASSIS *apud* PAIVA DE LUCA, 1998, p. 232).

Final considerations

When we think that affectivity, the main object of this edition, comes from the Latin *affectus*, which means to touch, to affect the spirit, this article sought to examine the spirit or mental life (according to Simmel) and the experience (according to Benjamin) of whom dared to transpose the limits of his home in order to venture into the street. A street, that, if, at a first moment, threatened and caused distrust, turned to enchant. Not without passing by the pen of the first scribes of the city (first the physiologue, then the *flâneur*), who would assume new configurations (such as the chronicler and then the reporter) and would be tireless in

the art of profiling types, tribes, habits, customs, fashions, transportation, all that which is represented on the multifaceted scene of the big cities.

The pioneer genres, sometimes as dense as Baudelaire's poetry, sometimes as frivolous as the physiologies of Paris, as well as their derivations (the detective story and the realist current which lead to the *fait-divers* news or to the modern journalistic profiles) are attempts to mitigate the risks and the threats of life in the big cities by translating them, by bringing their lanes and obscure depths to light. By examining the city, mapping its design, bringing to light its hidden face, these "scribes of minute things" maybe seek to mitigate the threat which is subscribed in the territory at the same time strange and familiar which is the space of the street.

If they succeed in conquering it some day, maybe it comes back, in present time, and does not belong to us anymore. At the turn of the 20th to the 21st century, we turn to seek refuge in the intermediate space of the shopping centre, the late-modern gallery, a controlled world in miniature. Against the chronicle of the boulevards, the detective chronicle gives an outlet to the facts of a city the urban violence of which is increasing. The sensationalist news which disputed the space of the opinion – and which sought to be an anaesthetic succedaneum of the fear of the crowds and of the automatism of the big cities – in the first newspapers, figures again in the profusion of sensationalist publications and in the programmes of detective story coinage directed at the crowds.

The utopia of the conquered and vanquished city gives way to deterritorialisation.

The city becomes polycentric, it loses its unique centre as a reference and the suburbs, already multiplied, aggregated themselves in a continuous and surrounding mass, a new arrangement which is moulded to the city-corridor, to the circuit zones, to the liberation of the fluxes of people, of cars, of business, of information, of pictures (SILVA, 2009, p. 105).

A city like this turns to threaten again. And the *reporter-flâneur* "re-treats" and gives way to the manager of the information in real time, who accumulates all the stages of the journalistic production and does no

more live in the streets, but retires to private life, ravaged by the frenzy of the instantaneous, in his study or at home. In the domesticated space of the four walls, he receives information coming from the decision centres by means of the releases (texts sent by the press officers), from the articles of the national or international news agencies, from the cyberspatial information of the data bases, from social networks without necessarily being the main witness of the events.

And here the two bridges get linked, the two temporal and spatial borders of writing are divided, writing which is produced from the streets and goes back to it. If, in a first moment, this article examined the enchantment, which the urban types who started to document the streets had (the physiologue, the *flâneur* and the chronicler), it would be convenient now to investigate its agonistic facet. Trying to understand the story of this enchantment/disenchantment, from the old and modern journalists' perspective, we seek to understand a form of human fantasy which is common to whom writes and also to whom reads.

The *journalist-flâneur* catalogued the spaces and the times of the divided city and delivered them in the divided text of the chronicle on the also divided pages of the newspaper, whereas the *multifunction-journalist* (who does everything: films, directs, illuminates, writes, edits, blogs, etc.), who is living in a time of the probable information the power centres send to the editorial staffs, more and more leaves the city, retreats and revisits it from time to time.

And so, unfortunately, the affection the *flâneur* nourished for the street of the beginning of the 20th century gives way to fear in the 21st century. The modern city, with its excesses of people, traffic jams, urban violence and the most varied pollutions converts itself again into the image which threatens, afflicts and causes uncertainties.

Hence this article proposes to look at the late-modern journalism beyond its possible role of means of information and of the formation of an enlightened public opinion. We intended to seek it in its initial glance on the metropolis, on the social shared space in the big city and the emotions and experiences which derive from it. To approach the mass communications media is to carry out an analysis of the journalist (formerly the

flâneur, today the reporter) and of his texts (formerly the chronicle, today, news per second) as cultural products which unveil a time and a space that transcend the journalist himself and reveal much about all of us.

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