



Práxis Educativa

ISSN: 1809-4309

Universidade Estadual de Ponta Grossa

Santana Ferreira, Marcelo
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e Walter Benjamin: contribuições éticas e metodológicas
Práxis Educativa, vol. 13, núm. 3, 2018, Setembro-Dezembro, pp. 966-981
Universidade Estadual de Ponta Grossa

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5212/PraxEduc.v.13i3.0019>

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Passages between the writing and the biography in Michel Foucault and Walter Benjamin: ethical and methodological contributions

Passagens entre a escrita e a biografia em Michel Foucault e Walter Benjamin: contribuições éticas e metodológicas

Pasajes entre la escritura y la biografía en Michel Foucault y Walter Benjamin: contribuciones éticas y metodológicas

Marcelo Santana Ferreira*

Abstract: This paper deals with the relationship between writing and biography, based on the importance of the methodological problematization of first person and autobiographical writings. It starts with Michel Foucault's interview given in 1968 to Claude Bonnefoy, on the definition of writing in the itinerary of the thinker and texts of Walter Benjamin that thematize the relation between the 'I', the memory and the past. With the interpretation of the legacy of the thinkers, it is sought to defend that the relationship between writing and biography is transversal, which guarantees the definition of research methodologies based on first person as laboratories that dialogue with theoretical procedures, language practices and enunciation policies. This paper is structured as a defense of the circumstantial and fictional character of the 'I' that is assumed in academic writings, which also encounter literary experiments around the place of 'I' in textuality.

Keywords: Writing. Michel Foucault. Walter Benjamin.

Resumo: O presente artigo aborda a relação entre escrita e biografia, partindo da importância da problematização metodológica de escritas em primeira pessoa e autobiográficas. Parte-se de entrevista de Michel Foucault, dada, em 1968, a Claude Bonnefoy sobre a definição da escrita no itinerário do pensador e de textos de Walter Benjamin que tematizam a relação entre o "eu", a memória e o passado. Com a interpretação do legado dos pensadores, busca-se defender que a relação entre escrita e biografia é transversal, o que garante a definição de metodologias de pesquisa assentadas em primeira pessoa como laboratórios que dialogam com procedimentos teóricos, práticas de linguagem e políticas de enunciação. O artigo estrutura-se como a defesa do caráter circunstancial e ficcional do "eu" que se assume em escritas acadêmicas, que também se deparam com experimentações literárias em torno do lugar do "eu" em uma textualidade.

Palavras-chave: Escrita. Michel Foucault. Walter Benjamin.

* Professor at the Institute of Psychology at the *Universidade Federal Fluminense*. E-mail: <mars.ferreira@yahoo.com.br>.

Resumen: El presente artículo aborda la relación entre escritura y biografía, partiendo de la importancia de la problematización metodológica de escrituras en primera persona y autobiográficas. Se parte de una entrevista de Michel Foucault dada, en 1968, a Claude Bonnefoy sobre la definición de la escritura en el itinerario del pensador y de textos de Walter Benjamin que tematizan la relación entre el “yo”, la memoria y el pasado. Con la interpretación del legado de los pensadores, se busca defender que la relación entre escritura y biografía es transversal, lo que garantiza la definición de metodologías de investigación asentadas en primera persona como laboratorios que dialogan con procedimientos teóricos, prácticas de lenguaje y políticas de enunciación. El artículo se estructura como la defensa del carácter circunstancial y ficcional del “yo” que se asume en escrituras académicas, que también se deparan con experimentos literarios en torno al lugar del “yo” en una textualidad.

Palabras clave: Escritura. Michel Foucault. Walter Benjamin.

Introduction

The enunciative place of texts in research in the human sciences, fundamentally in the educational field, is not immune to the aesthetic and theoretical experiments underway in contemporary societies. It is possible to find important references of theoretical and methodological exercises - for example, in the perspective adopted by Cornejo (2011), regarding its subjectivation process in relation to pedagogical practices aimed at boys considered effeminate inside and outside of schools in Peru. In this process, the pronoun ‘I’ assumes great argumentative value, as if there had been, in the twentieth and early twenty-first century, an inescapable ethical passage from neutral texts to heterogeneous textualities, in which the question about the status of the enunciative place forged in the investigations takes the lead, even if it has not been made explicit as a question. Writing is not defined, in this problematic field, only as that which communicates the paths traveled and processes lived elsewhere, but also as materiality that has density. The purpose of this paper is to defend, drawing from moments of Michel Foucault and Walter Benjamin’s work, in the transversal relation between writing and biography, the importance of the procedures used in the texts for the affirmation of intonation modalities. ‘I will consider’ writing as a technology that dialogues with political and historical vectors, revealing institutional and theoretical processes that are very important for us to continue to defend the specificity of research in the human sciences. The importance of the argumentation is nourished by methodological reflection on first-person and autobiographical writings, mainly based on the concerns of studies on gender and sexuality regulations.

Michel Foucault’s interview on writing

In 1968, Michel Foucault gave Claude Bonnefoy an interview with fragments of what would lie on the back of tapestry articulated as the work of the thinker, up to that historical moment. The year 1968 was an important marker around the use of the word of collective movements in different parts of the world, between summer and fall of that year, the thinker is questioned about his relationship with writing, moving towards the recognition of the ‘beautiful danger’ that writing presents to those who dedicate themselves to its demands. By the time of the interview, Foucault had already published important books, such as *History of Madness* and *The Order of Things*. How is the activity of writing configured for the thinker? Initially, he resumes the importance of Mallarmé in the definition of writing as a kind of monument of language, which is simply there, in a non-transitive ontology, self-referral. However, this was not the perspective adopted by the thinker himself in relation to writing, when he devoted himself to the studies and reflections that led to the cited books.

I have always tried, when speaking of an author, not to take into account his biographical factors, nor the social and cultural context, nor the field of knowledge in which he could be born and educated. I have always tried to abstract what would normally be called his psychology to make it function as a pure talking subject (Foucault, 2016a, p. 36-37).

The very understanding about language and the possibilities opened by the discursive regulations led to the production of an argument that questioned the psychological or moral precedence of an author. However, it will be under the sign of retraction that the thinker will forge a renewed look on fragments of his biography, starting to consider aspects of his childhood in a family of doctors of the early twentieth century, still marked by the medical and scientific rationalities of the nineteenth century. Writing well was to write legibly (Foucault, 2016a, p. 37). At the age of only 30, the thinker begins to feel like writing and retakes the validity of the trip and the condition of a foreigner to consider the language as an address evoked when he was in Sweden and faced the difficulty of using English and Swedish, and concluded that, since it was impossible to use the language itself, he perceived it to have density and consistency (Foucault, 2016a, p. 38). At the time of the interview, the thinker presents two images that can take on a great importance in the argument that we are trying to produce: “In the end, the only real homeland, the only ground on which to walk, the only house where we can stop and get shelter is the language, the language we have learned since childhood” (Foucault, 2016a, p. 39).

Childhood will still appear in the interview in many ways, in a kind of fictional retroversion, which does not fit in the recovery of a moment of life as it actually did, but as an image that concerns the exercise that is established in the present during the interview, since what one studies is not explained by means of the defense of a causality of the past, but one recognizes the origin of pleasure and an attitude around the activity of writing. Talking about oneself in the first person does not end in the search for a psychological referential. In the same interview, the thinker will still persist in the defense that one writes so as not to have a face. Gradually, we approach that which, in writing, establishes a relation to the possibility of speaking, according to the understanding of the thinker: “Between pleasure of writing and the possibility of speaking, there is a certain relation of incompatibility. Where it is no longer possible to speak, one discovers the secret, difficult, somewhat dangerous charm of writing” (Foucault, 2016a, p. 39).

The way of writing, later considered as soft and velvety, is related to the confrontation between the pleasure of writing and the possibility of speaking. In the encounter between the two men, the activity of writing leads to the realization that one does not know where one will get when one begins to write and one does not start from an idea that is already stabilized and comforting, waiting for a blank sheet. Writing has a fictional status, giving the interview and answering Bonnefoy’s questions are fictionalizations, or, moreover, possibilities to establish relationships, through the discourse, between the speaker and what he speaks about, as Castro (2009) points out when dedicating himself to the scrutiny of the sense of fiction in Foucault’s production.

Days, weeks, months, years may pass between life and text, the investigations of the thinker did not obey a chronology imposed outside the very activity of writing and speaking in public, to publicly exercise taking the floor to speak. In the interview under analysis, for example, the thinker ends his contributions recalling the passage of time between a trip to Madrid in which he saw *Las meninas* by Velázquez and the articulation of his thesis in *The order of things*. There is a requirement of writing establishing a distance between things seen and lived, making possible that there is a restlessness about what seemed, until then, to be invisible. Thus the consideration itself occurs over fragments of childhood, the atmosphere of the house in which adults also set out to

define the activity of the physician as the one sent to listen, beyond the patient himself and his body. He does not find himself in writing. Relationships are established with what happens.

Foucault (2016a) suggests that he had learned a mode of relationship articulated by medicine with body and disease long ago, in addition to the mistrust in relation to the definition of the statute of madness, a disease not to be taken too seriously. He presents important images of what he understands as the relation between medicine and truth, instituting, by a counter-memory, what marks the distance between himself and his father. The father was a physician who brought the references of nineteenth-century medicine, a field on which the thinker articulated an interpretation in *The Birth of the Clinic*. The doctor's relation to the sick body is an absolute reduction of speech, indicating its rarity. The word was fuel for the thinker, until 12 years before granting the interview. Gradually, the thinker approaches the articulation of a conception of writing and discourse that differs fundamentally from the previous conception. About what he wrote and produced in the 1960s, Foucault (2016a) states:

Nowadays, the problem that worries me, which in fact has not stopped worrying me for 10 years, is this: in a culture like ours, in a society, what is the existence of speech, writing and discourse? It seemed to me that importance had never been enough attributed to the fact that, in the end, discourses exist. Speeches are not just a sort of transparent film through which things are seen, they are not simply the mirror of what is and what is thought. Discourse has its own consistency density, functioning. (Foucault, 2016a, p. 42).

There is a total conversion in relation to what was the absolute devaluation of the word. Once again, the thinker approaches very briefly his childhood and explains the sense of discourse with which he handles his investigations: "I wonder (...) about the way the real discourse appears and works, about the things that were actually said. It is an analysis of things said to the extent that they are things" (Foucault, 2016a, p. 43).

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I suppose there is in my pen an old inheritance of the scalpel. Perhaps, after all, will I not trace in the whiteness of the paper the same aggressive signs that my father traced in the bodies of others when he operated? I turned the scalpel into a pen. I went from the efficacy of healing to the ineffectiveness of free speech; I replaced the scar on the body with the graphite on the paper; I replaced the indelible scar with the perfectly erasable and scratchy sign of writing. Perhaps I should go even further: the sheet of paper may be for me the body of others. (Foucault, 2016a, p. 44).

Writing is linked to death. In the continuity of the interview, the thinker explains more closely the affirmation: from the relation between medical practices and their related discursive fields it is found what characterized lives that, in their vestiges, wave to the present from the light thrown on them. The thinker deals with others as they are already dead. Paradoxically, from death the others give signs that may indicate the 'survival' of their gestures and the encounter with what emerges after their dissolution. The dead can still indicate to us the importance of systematizing the discourses that have operated on their existences. The relation between writing and death allows Foucault (2016a) to define himself as a diagnostician, which, in a correct way, supports the possibility of defining a work about truth, which can be expressed temporarily, in

the exercise of criticism, in the work that does not aim at the recognition of the origin as a recessed moment, but as a contingent irruption of what still concerns the present. Writing does not reach the source of life, but it is a postmortem work, according to the thinker.

Postmortem work is an exercise in diagnosis, consisting of “bringing to light through the incision of writing itself something that is the truth of what is dead” (Foucault, 2016b, p. 48). The diagnostician approaches lives already ended, bodies already decomposed by time, counter words addressed to discourses that sought to correct and silence. There is a “meticulous unfolding of the truth” (Foucault, 2016b, p. 49) that concerns a kind of activity that does not find the silence of the bodies submitted, but it is surprised by the possibility that such bodies still have to shout before the incision. When narrating fragments of his biography, the thinker retakes the sense of the contemporary activity of a type of intellectual who does not seek an immovable identity, but to be able to say things. To say, to stand in the opposite direction in relation to the silence of the doctors in his family seem to be the subsidies for what the thinker defines as the field for the philosopher, the sociologist, or even someone connected to singular political experiences.

Michel Foucault’s interview still goes on, and an important criticism is articulated to the eventual desire to formulate a work. In defense of the materiality of discourse and the recognition that truth is opposed to death, Foucault makes a strong contribution to the understanding that the density of writing does not rest on the psychology of the writer, and he questions any primary convergence between discourse and the privilege of use of the personal pronoun ‘I’. Between life and discourse, there is a distinction of temporality, although it is on the lives that discourses operate. In the case of writing, the perspective of the thinker is directed to the recognition of a theoretical and political task in relation to what is familiar or close to us: to recognize the thickness of what appears to be transparent. About writing, the thinker will end up defending a kind of obligation that relates to the transfiguration of the reality of things that are not present in the writing itself. Finally, for the purposes of the present argument, it becomes important to recover Foucault’s (2016a) definition from his ‘discourse project’:

I would like to make appear what is too close to our gaze so that we can see, what is there very close to us, but that our gaze crosses to see something else. To give density back to this atmosphere which everywhere around us guarantees that we see things far away from us, to return its density and its thickness to what we usually experience as transparency, there is one of the projects, the themes that are absolutely constant to me. In the same way, come and circumscribe, draw, designate this kind of blind spot from which we speak and see, recognize what allows us to have a distanced look, define the closeness that, around us, everywhere, guides the general field of our gaze and our knowledge. (Foucault, 2016a, p. 69-70).

An interview characterized by the mention of the fictional exercise as a political and temporal trait in relation to what is established as a set of principles that organize language practices. The biographical elements are not undisputed sources of self-explanation of first-person discourses nor of the possibility of authors’ understanding and fields of knowledge. Around written material, life with its specificities and urgencies still unfolds. From now on, it is about understanding that it is the text itself that constitutes a field of political-epistemological disputes that configure the possibilities of investigation in the human sciences, specifically in studies on gender and sexualities. Taking advantage of part of what was presented and defended by Foucault in the cited interview, we can define that in the field of Human Sciences - with regard to the subjects under analysis - it is a matter of addressing ourselves to what our gaze and our knowledge guide, without losing sight of the fact that the too visible is based on an invisibility that we need to mention, so that the enunciative place itself becomes part of the

material on which we exercise an activity, and not simply something we take on without the need to think.

Writing to be extinguished: don't we outlive the texts we write?

Based on the assumption that experience is a set of relations between institutions, discursive practices and processes of subjectivation, studies on gender and sexualities in the field of Human Sciences are also based on language practices that can critically resume ongoing elements in the elaboration of modes of existence. In the perspective discussed in the previous item, it is possible to consider that the *becoming* of the material written as a book or publicized as transcription of interviews and lessons of the French thinker does not crystallize as a recovery of an individuality prior to the battle of rhetorical procedures and of the formulation of ethical and theoretical arguments on different themes, such as sexuality. It does not fall into the condition of the production of truth that is extorted by means of confession, since it is considered that writing is a technology of itself, a movement that is interposed in the relationship between life and written material. When studying the culture of self in Western societies, lingering in the consideration of the first centuries of our Age, Foucault (2010) updates the sense of experience in the investigations on sexuality that took him to Greco-Latin antiquity. When indicating the supposed familiarity of the term 'sexuality', the thinker focuses on the field of research that helped to reconfigure, directing the defense of sexuality as an experience: "history of sexuality as experience, if we mean by experience the correlation, in a culture, between fields of knowledge, types of normativity and forms of subjectivity" (Foucault, 2010, p. 10). The study of experience allows us to define, methodologically, the procedure as a genealogy, which indicates distinct correlations of force for the establishment of the category of subject of desire. The perspective is structured as a critique of the continuist and teleological model of the interpretation of sexuality. The very notion of subject is referred to historical practices in which modalities of self-relation are forged, in which heterogeneous materialities are part of the process of problematization of self, in the critical sense of a historical ontology of ourselves. Written texts play a central role in the interpretation of self-culture in Michel Foucault's thinking, who turns to Greco-Roman antiquity and the early centuries of the Christian era to defend a density in what seems to us to be uncomfortably familiar, as it is about sexuality and its demands for transparency and coherence, when referenced to the interpretation mechanisms of the formulated subjects. Proceeding as quoted, the very definition of life undergoes an inflection. This will broaden the meaning of the relationship between writing and life, as proposed in the previous item.

When Michel Foucault (2010, 2016b) suggests that categories such as subject and desire will be the object of his investigations, without meaning a 'return' to a spontaneity of the subject, he tries to interpret continuities and discontinuities in historical periods that do not maintain relations of causality, such as the experience of paganism and the elaboration of the subject at the heart of Christianity and the experience of the flesh. What we stand out for the present discussion is precisely the effort to consider that life was defined - in the context of Greco-Roman Antiquity - in a way that does not coincide with what is expressed in Christianity and in the formulation of our own modes of appropriation and the conduct of individual and collective existence, even though some historical traces are recognizable in the very procedure that the thinker forges to deal with the problem he is investigating. Foucault (2016a) studies techniques of himself in Greco-Roman antiquity and in the early centuries of our Age, recognizing that they are not merely prescriptive, but can be reduced to the condition of code, and turn to the arts of existence, qualifying living in a different way:

(...) for the Greeks, there are two verbs which we translate by one and the same word: *vivre*, live. You have the word *zēn*, which means: to have the property [propriété] of living, the quality of being a living being. Animals certainly live, in this sense of *zēn*. Then you have the word *bioūn* which means lead a life, which is in relation to the manner of living this life, the manner of leading, conducting it, the way [*façon*] which allows it to be qualified as happy or unhappy. *Bios* is something which can be good or bad, while a life which one leads because one is a living being is simply given by nature. (...). *Bios* is what happens to us, of course, but from the angle of what we do with what happens to us. (Foucault, 2016a, p. 33).

At another point in the study from which the preceding excerpt was taken, Foucault (2016a) will still consider that the Greek *bios* is not defined by the possibility or injunction of a conversion, as in Christianity, but by the “continuous work of oneself on oneself” (Foucault, 2016a, p. 227). More than 10 years have elapsed between Foucault’s interview, cited at the beginning of the paper, and the investigations resumed in the previous paragraph, but we can argue that the definition of life itself becomes denser in the relation defended between it and the technology of writing. Historically, the opportunities for a continuous exercise of oneself about oneself become rare or unnecessary in the establishment of the relationship with truth, as evidenced by the disconnection between knowledge and transformation of the self in modern Western thought. For the present argument, to take ownership of the political sense of technology of the self in the historical *becoming* allows us to argue that the investigation is subsidized in the transformation of the very status of those who interrogate historically established regimes of sexuality and gender, since such regimes lose their transparency. So it seems to have occurred to the French thinker, who constitutes a critique of the moral of the field of knowledge that seeks to refer to the author as a full category, auto-justifiable.

With the appropriation of the contingent definition of the art of existence in the ancient Greek context, we can insist on the reflection on the life at play in the biographies as assuming a position in relation to what concerns us, surpassing the condition of primary or individual element. Foucault investigates the past to contest the evident condition of the very present. The questions of the thinker about the conditions to see and think about the historical and political context, in which he exercised assuming the discourse in public, reach the very heart of the relationship between writing and life: the text allows the visualization of administrative procedures, ethical exercises and truth requests that are part of the elements we use to write the pronoun ‘I’ in a text. The transcribed class, the interview granted and the material forged as writing suggest the political density of life and the ethical importance of enunciations in which subjectivation processes can be considered in the simultaneous criticism of the metaphysics of a subjective substance. We know that, contemporaneously, the reduction of significant strata of humanity to mere living beings introduces the task to the thinking of the political technology problematization for the conduction of social life and definition of human life.

Important contemporary struggles claim the fullness of the possible by referring to the themes of sexuality and gender, usually evoked in the attempt to exhaustively regulate existence. Efforts undertaken in contemporary studies on sexuality and gender are also directed at the composition of enunciative places, since they are not subjects that may be separated from the way in which policies of existence are articulated. Precisely in this way, there are methodological perspectives that claim the centrality of experience and the place from which the themes are glimpsed, as political and institutional markers that should not be circumvented and denied. Such themes are not only used as examples in which the problems raised in the present text can be applied, since they enabled biography, autobiography and first-person writing to cross in the production of the present argumentation.

In our methodological investigations, we understand that gender markers and dissident sexual experiences claim a new kind of argumentative production, which is directed, first of all, to the assumption of a place from which a certain type of knowing and knowledge, indissociable from the processes that subsidize, for example, that someone can be named as gay or heterosexual. Our argumentative effort is directed to the understanding of the contingent character of the regimes that produced the need to know the conditions for the enunciability of certain speeches, as if it were necessary for us to know, first and foremost, who says, who writes and, not simply to address what is said and written in certain contexts and in relation to certain conditions.

The theoretical perspectives highlighted in the present argument help us to turn to the new demands of veridiction of discourses, that is, the demands that we must validate or invalidate certain discourses through the disclosure of those who pronounce them. Such demands make our field denser, although we run some risks and open up new possibilities for investigation. We are interested in understanding how part of the articulation conditions of an enunciative place can be interpreted as fabrication and not revelation. The very outlines of a text for the recognition of its scholarly status reflect our experiences of generalized beings and subjects elaborated through unfinished processes. Gender and sexuality do not pre-exist to the writing policies and circulation of academic texts, since they are also forged and disputed in the practices of writing and interpreting texts. It was precisely from the historical investigation on the emergence of the theme of sexuality as a nominalist deployment that Michel Foucault secured a renewed outline of his questions about the relation between subjectivity and truth. To us, the exercise of writing in the first person results from a fictional positioning - as explained at another time - under regimes established before and during textual production. This also applies to the methodological experiments adopted, for example, in Cornejo's exercise (2011). The autobiography and the biography have emerged in our intellectual exercise from the problems that are placed on the nature of the referentiality of what is meant by life. In this sense, as we understand that problematizing gender and sexuality policies is also carried out through writing practices that evoke gender markings and the sexual deployment, it was initially that we turn to the study of first-person writing exercises, biographical and autobiographical exercises. Turning to gender and sexuality introduced us the theme of biographies and autobiographies, since to diagnose the presence of themes in the processes of subjectivation at play in writing is fundamentally to confront its contingency and its political and institutional character, before they can be defined from a psychological or personal point of view.

Academic disputes around enunciative places in research on gender and sexuality intersect with the political ontology of life, since the subalternization of modes of existence that clash with norms of sexuality and gender is also expressed in the production of new textualities, as an image of historical processes of division and naturalization of personal attributes. New political struggles have emerged, for example, in the last century from the defense of the right to life, as Peter Pelbart (2003, p. 59) points out: "The right to life, to the body, to health, to happiness, to the satisfaction of all needs, is the political reply to the new procedures of power, so different from the traditional right of sovereignty".

In Pelbart's (2003) comment, we recognize Foucault's immediate interpretive grid about the societies in which biopolitics is formulated, conceptualized by contemporary thinkers, such as Giorgio Agamben, an Italian intellectual who proposed the concept of nude life as part of the political paradigm formulated on contemporary societies, settled in the state of exception and in the concentration camps. Contemporaneously speaking, it is about a politicization of the fact that we are living beings, since life, "devoid of any qualification that would protect it (...), has no choice, to resist, but to think beyond the judgment and authority that condemns it, as potency

authorizing itself, refusing all authority” (Pelbart, 2003, p. 67). With the transmutations of what is defined as political experience, we move towards a new placement of the condition of ethnic minorities, political refugees and sexual minorities. Drawing from Foucault, it is possible to consider the transversal relation between life and writing as an opportunity for different unfoldings of what is defined as politics and self-elaboration. We write in order to not have a face. The paradox of writing is with the political sense of ‘bio’ in biography: a life from the encounter with others, with fragments of experiences and with the discontinuous exercise of remembrance. It is no coincidence that in the interview given by Foucault to Bonnefoy, childhood is made present as a precarious citation to what shelters a flash of time: where we hoped to find a singular reference to the trajectory of the thinker, we still find a reference to social and political aspects of medical practice and knowledge in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The importance of the interview of the thinker also refers to the management of the precariousness of what he remembers and to the immediately political status of vectors of subjectivation. A life that concerns an exercise and not simply an individual. They are important elements for the consideration of which enunciative places are not the updating of attributes or personal characteristics, but spaces of fictionalization and examination of historical and political aspects of subjectivation processes when assuming the discourse.

Between writing and life, a political exercise takes place which, in the case of critical studies of gender and sexualities, may indicate the contingency of regimes of regulation of existence. Exactly here, we can start from Foucault’s interview and Walter Benjamin’s methodological elaboration in what concerns the overcoming of the individual experience in search of the political characterization of an era. The erasure of the face, suggested by the French thinker, does not contradict the ethical and theoretical efforts at play in investigations about gender and sexualities, since experimentations in terms of enunciative places form shelters for the vestiges of times, institutions and interpellations. From the erased face, we will pass the physiognomy of an era. For this, we will need Walter Benjamin.

Political experience and overcoming individual experience

Starting from the interview granted in 1968 by Foucault to Claude Bonnefoy, it is already possible, at this stage of the argument, to defend that the biography is not exempt from the specific procedures of the interpellation of an interview and the requirements of writing. Politically, the defense that writing functions as an erasure of authoritative referentiality, in a way conflicts with contemporary disputes over enunciative places in research on gender and sexualities in the humanities. Assuming the discourse of characters forged in practices and institutions that subsidize a sexual and gender policy is accompanied by the defense that individuals who make up sexual minorities and articulate gender identities that escape the gender-sex continuum would be fully capable of establishing written practices in which processes of subjectivation could be glimpsed in their integrity and immediacy, without the need for interpretive efforts or mediations imposed by academic mechanisms. Of course, the emergence of cursed textualities, scripts not encoded by hegemonic interpretive models, and insubordinate academic and political practices, balances the existing structure of establishments and institutions. However, the recurrence of the transparency of an experience supposedly circumscribed by individuals can only guarantee the transition from one hegemony to another: from detached neutrality to self-reported proximity. Hence, the need to position ourselves with regard to the limits and possibilities of the ‘I’ aimed at establishing processes of subjectivation in the relationship between writing and biography.

Many narrators, in academic texts, assume the protagonist role of the arguments, referring to experiences that might become untranslatable if they were not said in the first person. Even considering that there are specificities in Latin America regarding the dispute for enunciative places in academic research on gender and sexualities, what characterizes as historical resonance of the repeated hegemony of European and American references in the characterization of a problematic field persists among us a set of unthinking, when methodological efforts to manufacture new forms of enunciation and textualities are multiplied. The fecundity of experiments in the field of Latin American literature on the undecidability of the status of fragments of personal histories and glimpses of historical events such as civil-military dictatorships (Zambra, 2014) indicates part of the important proximity between the theoretical and aesthetic fields, without withdrawing the transversality of their regions of contact, that is, without imposing on them a single identity.

In the case of exercises such as Zambra's (2014), the use of autofiction introduces in the body of memory work on childhood vestiges of a historical epoch that was unidentifiable to the narrator, assuming an important space in the literary and political understanding of the recent past in Chile, uncomfortably current. Experiments, in enunciative terms, help us to envisage an unfolding of the political sense of biographical writings. Surely, the theoretical perspectives triggered in this paper do not exhaust the problematic field in which we stand.

In Walter Benjamin (2013) we also recognize ethical and theoretical efforts in articulating a critical positioning in relation to the place of the 'I' when producing a narrative about the past. There are important distances between Foucault and Benjamin's theoretical perspectives. However, there are also possibilities for interrelationships that do not detract from the uniqueness and magnitude of the individually considered works. Curiously, the journey and the distance from the homeland also enabled Walter Benjamin to question the status of the subject that was forged in a politics of problematization of the past. Moreover, considering the paradigmatic status of the War and the political persecution of minorities in Benjamin's work, we find the narrative elaboration of first-person and autobiographical texts in which vestiges of the 'I' point continually to political and historical elements that could mobilize the establishment of political actions that collide with the historical norm of evolution and progress.

To the German thinker, as well as to Michel Foucault, the text does not simply communicate something that does not concern its own materiality but it has a political density. Confronting the genre of autobiographical texts, the thinker is invited to write about the nineteenth century in Germany, through fragments of his own childhood. Striving to articulate a 'negative autobiography', the thinker dedicates himself to the unfolding, in *Berlin Childhood around 1900*, of images that dislodge the self from its supposed security or psychic singularity. He tries to cross the images that are recovered from his perception of Berlin of the nineteenth century to reach the political history of the city referred in the memory, through an exercise that interpolates in what it was. To do that, the thinker killed in 1940, persecuted by Nazism, chose the balconies as propitious spatiality for an allegory of undecidability between the exterior and the interior. On this, Sedlmayer (2011, 54) points out: "if it were possible to find an internal architecture capable of staging an image of the form of the writing of the self, in Benjamin, this form would be that of a balcony. Construction that, paradoxically, welcomes, but at the same time only allows short stays".

The paradox of first-person writing in Benjamin (2013) claims a passage, a crossing of a memory that would only interest the one who remembers towards what is configured as historical and social. The thinker himself evokes the context of producing 'anti-biographical' fragments in his intellectual course:

In the year 1932, when I was abroad, it began to be clear to me that I would soon have to bid a long, perhaps lasting farewell to the city of my birth. I had felt, more than once, in my heart, that the vaccination procedure was beneficial to me. I guided myself by this intuition also in this new situation and deliberately appealed to those images which in exile tend to arouse nostalgia more strongly – the childhood. But the feeling of nostalgia could not, in this case, overlap with the spirit, just as the vaccine cannot take care of a healthy body. I tried to restrain this feeling from the point of view that I advised myself to follow the irreversibility of past time, not as anything casual and biographical, but rather necessary and social. (Benjamin, 2013, p. 69).

The biographical features, according to the thinker, retreat to a background in the consideration of images in which fragments of the “experience of the great city of a child of the bourgeois class are evident” (Benjamin, 2013, p. 70). The exercise of the thinker is nourished by distance and exile, devoting himself to the scrutiny of images formulated in the text that are aimed at a kind of sketch of the future, articulating a transmissibility of aspects of an era that would have been buried by time and which at the same time concern future generations, with political value, since they prefigure processes of individualization of the sensibility and bureaucratic management of collectivities, as they are designed in Nazism and even before the consolidation of the totalitarian regime in Germany. There is a duty of memory (Sedlmayer, 2011) in the link between subjectivity and childhood, in this Benjaminian exercise about the past and the tensions between the ‘I’ and the ‘subject’. Such duty relates to the status of *Spuren* (vestige) of self that is unrecoverable, but left a trail. Such an operation indicates the ethical understanding of childhood as an image of what has been lost, but which allows an interpolation, a production of an image about what still concerns the present.

Michel Foucault and Walter Benjamin seem to forge images in which the ‘I’ is not personified, or even in that the enunciation reveals a mechanism of desubjectivation in relation to what is established as norm. And it is exactly the possibility of the desubjectivation that guarantees the tone of criticism to the writing of the thinkers. Judith Butler (2013) had already advocated that in Michel Foucault’s thinking, we can find the definition of criticism as an exercise of epistemological, aesthetic and political overcoming of what is defined as a regime of truth. Overtaking presupposes the establishment of a relation with oneself focused on the recognition of what is a constituent and occlusive element of the field of knowledge in which subject positions are formulated. Desubjectivation can mean denial and scrutiny of what binds us to ourselves, as the theme of sexuality seems to be.

Focusing on the problematization of the autobiographical genre in Walter Benjamin, Jeanne Marie Gagnebin (1994) indicates exercises in the thinker’s writing that may be related to the non-originating status of the subject. Writing did not mean to seek definitive security, but to claim a reading made possible by the dissociation of the present from its presumed truism. When characterizing the specificity of writing policy in Benjamin’s autobiographical texts, Gagnebin (1994, p. 84) suggests that “the ‘I’ and the subject are neither identical nor interchangeable; it would not be correct to confuse the subject with this pronoun that only represents him before the instances of interpersonal dialogue, in the opposition (...) between the first and second person”. Moreover, the ‘subject’ in Benjamin’s autobiographical practices is not restricted to the affirmation of an awareness of self, but opens him/herself to the involuntary and unconscious dimensions of psychic life (Gagnebin, 1994).

With the importance assumed by traveling and wandering, the autobiographical fragments reveal the perspective of a political understanding of life. The paradox of writing in Michel Foucault can be found with the defense of the political sense of an image of the past remembered by an ‘I’ that is forged in Benjamin’s writing. To Gagnebin (1994), the reflection on

the unconscious and involuntary aspects of psychic life in Benjamin's work is also related to the "expansion of the social dimension of the subject who, renouncing the tranquillizing closure, but also the suffocation of individual particularity, is crossed by the waves of desires, revolts, collective despair" (Gagnebin, 1994, p. 85). Turning to childhood, Benjamin (2013) draws on the importance of spatial displacement for the defense of a production of images over the passage of time. We find ourselves with a political and philosophical-psychological extension of the notion of subject, still according to Gagnebin (1994). The extension recognized by Gagnebin (1994) is a reflection on our own historical practice, or how we tell what defines our history and how we can act in it.

Narrating and acting, transmitting, and positioning oneself politically are not split attitudes in Benjamin's thinking. His attention to the aesthetic vanguards of the first decades of the twentieth century also allowed the elaboration of a critical exercise around the 'I', which may represent a narrator, but not to sell or fetishize its monotonous continuity. To Gagnebin (1994), autobiography, in Benjamin, no longer refers to the self, but it constitutes as an explosion of life (bios) in the intersection of several other lives and, in terms of writing (spelling), follows the crossing times that do not follow any single linear direction. Considering his movements through life, confronted with the misfortunes of love and writing, Benjamin (2013) characterizes himself and his social class by forging an image that seems to last longer than a piece of journalistic information, transmitting to his eventual readers important historical and political changes for the recognition of the uniqueness of the present. For this, the thinker turns, as already pointed out, to the balconies, to the short stops, as the references to the 'I' can be brief:

The balconies have changed less since my childhood than the other rooms. But that's not why I feel it any closer. It is rather by consolation that their inhabitability brings to those who, so to speak, can no longer live anywhere. In them, the housing of the Berliner finds its border. Berlin - the city's own god - starts there. It is so present there that nothing transient can be affirmed by its side. Under their protection, place and time find themselves, and each other. Both lie down at its feet. But the child who once allied with them settles, confused with his group, on his porch as in a mausoleum that had long been destined for him. (Benjamin, 2013, p. 72).

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In order to characterize so carefully and lucidly the very transience of childhood, of a personal experience - *Erlebnis* -, it seeks to move towards a transindividual political experience - *Erfahrung* - in which time itself and space can meet. The inhabitability of the balcony is an important counterpoint to the spaces where we feel more comfortable or warm, familiarized. Also in the restlessness of the journey - especially when it is forged from the temporality of love and compulsory displacement driven by political persecution - in the brevity of the stops, rest and dream, we confront ourselves with the non-definitive sense of our certainties about ourselves. The text articulated by the thinker in first-person indicates the brevity of the enunciative place itself, finding the opportunity to visualize the convergence between the past and the present. The balcony is not an abode and the experiences of the German bourgeoisie in the early twentieth century will also undergo important metamorphoses. Remembering, writing, and telling a story do not evidence the 'I' that one remembers, that is forged in writing and shares a narrative, but unfolds the revealed images in the maintenance of a reading and interpreting procedure. Perhaps we can say that in Benjamin we write so that we do not get accustomed to the supposed evidence of the 'I', guaranteeing a possibility of referring to the relationship between the 'I' and the processes of subjectivation.

The interview, the fragment and the defense of the enunciation as a process of subjectivation

Drawing from an interview with Michel Foucault and a textual production of Walter Benjamin, in which the authors headed towards an immanent critique of the autobiographical genre, we can consider that the relationship between biography and writing can be understood politically, and the sense of experience can be broadened, as already pointed out by Joan Scott (1998) in a fundamental reflection on the need to historicize the category of experience in disciplined fields focused on the effort of interpretation of what is configured as normative and as difference. Studies of gender and sexualities can contemporaneously also be considered as important laboratories for the experimentation of renewed enunciative places, since, having been textually and politically forged, they broaden and consolidate criticism of stable and supposedly transparent enunciative places.

The critique of hegemonic enunciative places - effects of white and western heterosexual domination - does not come about without the very experimentation of heterogeneous writings, where precisely the notion of experience and the recurrence of the personal pronoun 'I' should not obliterate historical and institutional processes with which we collide and which often subsidize writing and research policies. Investigating gender and sexualities, through a critical perspective, confronts the very context that made it possible and reiterates the production of sexed beings, referring to their own histories and singularities. The enunciative places in these investigations are not the revelation of transhistorical spontaneities, dialoguing with precise institutions and contexts, such as those forged in Latin American countries, in an expression of the aesthetic and academic counterparts around the word expressed by new subjects, such as those designated in Preciado's analyses (2011).

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Considering that corporeality itself and the immediate relationship between bodies and the different technologies forged for the reproduction of life need to be taken into account for a redefinition of the political experience from the queer crowds, Preciado (2011) suggests the deontologization of the subject of the new political organizations that interfere with the functioning of sexual politics (a range of institutions and practices that sexualize and generalize individual existences, using the disqualification of dissenting experiences). The word expressed of the crowds does not obey the primacy of the originality and historicity of the subjects. Preciado's (2011) defense touches on the problematic field in which we seek to situate ourselves, since we identify theoretical and methodological initiatives in relation to the invention of non-subalternized enunciative places, in which the experience would become visible, propitiating deviant textualities, of criticisms of hegemonic models.

Our attempt was to position ourselves in relation to the contribution of two thinkers who tested the relationship between biography and writing, either through the interview, a specific situation of interpellation in which a thinker is invited to look at his or her personal and theoretical course until the moment of the encounter; or through fragmentary writing, which is an intellectual and political effort to interpret the relationship that can be established with the past and with the homeland through the remembrance and the appeals of geographical distance.

Foucault and Benjamin help us to consider the brevity of the function of the 'I' in the political task of indicating the weight of gender and sexuality regulations over our existences, but without losing sight of the political meaning of our experience. The experience is not configured as the essentially personal or subjective background of a possibility of enunciation. Aesthetic procedures, political transversalities and language practices are vectors that interrelate to the

production of enunciative places. Therefore, the personal pronoun 'I' - seldom used in Benjamin's work and precariously situated in the articulation of the word expressed in public by Foucault - does not go back to a source temporarily situated and sheltered in the beginning, but it is subsidized in subjectivation processes that do not end in what is seen in the text itself, which consolidates itself as a gesture that can be recognized in reading practice, since the criticism of the regulations of life is also carried out with a variation of our own ways of designating and understanding ourselves. Judith Butler (2016) was attentive to the intimate relationship between the institution of the 'I' and the pronoun 'we', when she analyzed, in a brief textuality intended for the public exercise of expressing the word by an intellectual, the commitments of theoretical elaboration with the task of making lives more livable, especially through the recognition that the unintelligibility of certain dissenting modes of existence in relation to gender norms must be overcome ethically and politically. In the textuality evoked, Butler (2016) seeks to relate the security that a transgender person feels to cross a busy street or a commercial establishment without needing to be followed up by other people, with their concern and their interest, which need not necessarily be transgender. An exercised and honored right, a connection between the 'I' that walks and the 'we' that ethically is forged. The thinker points out:

Each 'I' brings the 'we' with it, as one enters or leaves through that door, finding oneself in an unprotected enclosure or exposed outside on the street. We can say that there is a group, if not an alliance, also walking there, being or not somewhere visible. It is certainly a unique person who walks there, who risks him/herself walking there, but it is also the social category that goes through this particular way of walking, this singular movement in the world; and if there is an attack, it targets the individual and the social category all at once. (Butler, 2016, p. 37).

The intervention of the thinker brings multiple references, including on the defense of a relationship between life and theory without falling into the articulation of an immediate and perhaps dangerous connection. The hypothetical situation of unprotected wandering and an 'out there' exposure of minority modes of existence is connected to the political commitment to make life more livable. It sounds ironic that the thinker was the target of conservative demonstrations in Brazil in 2017, when she came to participate in a seminar on the end of democracy in São Paulo. The thinker could not walk unprotected by the airport before boarding her flight back to the United States. In images taken by cellphones, we see a lady shouting at the thinker to return home, because she was not welcome in Brazil. The weak voice of the unknown woman makes even more evident the risks we face as we persist in the invention of unsuspected freedoms, fundamentally those which concern the attainment of what we understand by humanity.

The weakness of the unfamiliar voice has no place in texts structured to be read and commented on in consolidated academic institutions. However, the paradox of its weakness reveals an inescapable trait of the present in which we stand. The weak voice of the unknown character calls for new alliances to be tested, helping us to sketch ways around the defense of wandering - and essentially, right of existence - of transgender people at airports and at our country's fast food chains. At the same time, it becomes part of the political and moral dissonance that gives texts a brief, perhaps frightening outline. This paradoxically extrinsic and intrinsic temporality to the texts interrupts the truism of any enunciative place. The intonation assumed in the text is not an effect of the contingency of the tensions lived outside the texts, but it extends or hides in different reception and reading practices. Not everyone can say 'I', those who use the pronoun can only consolidate themselves into temporary spaces of security and viability. However, they can also help us to understand the often desperate political background in which textualities and enunciation policies are forged. These are short, banal scenes, but they weave an unfinished density to what we find in the texts. Inside and outside the text, the 'I' is a

passage, a temporary stop for a resumption of wandering by the city. Outside the text, what has not become a text persists. In the text, the passages of the self evoke vestiges of what we can imagine and what we will have to face in order to continue walking, researching and living.

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Received on 06/02/2018

Corrected version received on 31/05/2018

Accepted on 01/06/2018

Published online on 05/06/2018