

# Comment on the text *Pragmatism in the last Foucault* by Rossella Fabbrichesi

*Comentário sobre o texto Pragmatismo no Foucault tardio por Rossella Fabbrichesi*

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**Abstract:** This comment was presented at the 16<sup>th</sup> International Meeting on Pragmatism at the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo (PUC-SP) and points out the provocative form in which Professor Rossella Fabbrichesi from the University of Milan analyses the theme of the true life, in the late Foucault. In emphasizing the critical attitude with reference to the present broached by Foucault in his course of 1982-1983, this small text aims at understanding the reason why Foucault, in an article *Qu'est-ce que Les Lumières?*, 1984, relegates Kant to a subordinate position in relation to Baudelaire.

**Keywords:** Critical attitude. Ontology of the present. Foucault. Baudelaire.

**Resumo:** *Este comentário foi apresentado no 16º Encontro Internacional sobre Pragmatismo na Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo (PUCSP) e assinala a forma provocativa com que a Profa. Rossella Fabbrichesi, da Universidade de Milão, analisa o tema da verdadeira vida no Foucault tardio. Ao enfatizar a atitude crítica em relação ao presente, abordada por Foucault em seu curso de 1982-1983, este pequeno texto objetiva entender o motivo pelo qual Foucault, em seu artigo Qu'est-ce que Les Lumières?, 1984, põe Kant em um plano secundário em relação a Baudelaire.*

**Palavras-chave:** *Atitude crítica. Ontologia do presente. Foucault. Baudelaire.*

## Introduction

In a provocative way, to characterize the last Foucault as a radical pragmatist, Rossella Fabbrichesi's text<sup>1</sup> addresses in a clear and attractive form the subject of real life as an existential praxis of the *bios philosophikos* that expresses through his actions what, to him, is taken as truth. As she says in the introductory paragraph, the word truth runs through the writings and sayings of Foucault from his first analysis of the microphysics of power to the modalities of subjectivation in the Greek world.

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1 From University of Milan.

Little by little, Rossella's text gives light to the path traced by Foucault dealing with the problem of truth, not so much from the subject of knowledge, but of the one who takes care of himself. It is a thought that increases especially in the first lectures of the course *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, taught by Foucault at the *Collège de France* from January to March 1982, and extending throughout the two later courses, up to the eve of his death. More than the *logos*, Foucault's attention turns to the *askēsis*, to the pragmata as an expression of something taken as true by the subject of knowledge. Through the relationship established between Foucault and Nietzsche, from a passage in paragraph 110 of *The Gaia Science*, Rossella points to a growing trend of the French philosopher to give relevance to different modes of subjectivation in which thoughts (*logoi*), once tested and validated, are expressed through actions (*erga*). Rossella retakes Plato's thought, expressed in *Letter VII* and analyzed by Foucault in the first hour of the February 16, 1983 class, that the task of philosophy consists in not being simply *logos*, but *ergon*, and that it is a philosopher's obligation to announce truth not only in words, but above all by works. In this sense, the spirit of Nietzsche is even more present along the course designed by Foucault when attention turns no longer to the logical and performative articulation of speech, but to the *alethurgia* of truths expressed by a practice of life constituted as architectonic work. Rossella points over the first pages of her article possible approaches of pragmatist principles, if not similar thoughts to those of different pragmatists. This leads her to defend the thesis that, in his later writings, Foucault proposes a form of pragmatism, although he is careful to say that he "does not know the themes and problems of this doctrine" (p. 2).

Retaking fundamental elements of Foucaultian studies on *parresía*, particularly in the Course *Government of self and Others I* (1982-1983), Rossella focuses on the stylistics of existence preached by cynics. In these, the *logos* and *ergon* relationship reaches an unheard of way of being. Thought is expressed by act, in its nudity and crudity, through which the word usually used to express a truth is silenced and reaches what she calls a "spirituality of the body", to play with the stoic notion of "incorporeal materialism" taken up by Foucault and Deleuze. Remembering the musicality of Socrates, considered a *Mousikos aner*, musical man, for making his beliefs sound on the strings of his own existence, Rossella tells us about the cacophonous musicality of skeptics, who had no home and had a single tunic to wear and cover themselves, expressing their conviction that real life is given through an absolute visibility, without concealment (FOUCAULT, 2009, p. 234), in which the act of eating and sexual intercourse, since natural, do not need to hide in the private space of the *oikos*. That is why they have not, in principle, any personal property let alone a fixed location over their heads. A wine barrel is enough for them as a shelter from the rain and protection from the cold. Through their *biopoiética* almost mute, but real, they acidly criticized the hypocrisy of their contemporaries, whose mouth full of words (*logoi*) was contradicted by the exposed truth of their gestures (*erga*).

Rossella's reflection hints at the direction of the January 5, 1983 class, which deals with the famous text by Kant *Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?* In a small footnote, he suggests, but does not develop, the necessary philosophical choice of a critical way of thinking that "takes the form of an ontology of us-them, a present-day ontology" (FOUCAULT, 2008, p. 22). The next topic will elucidate the reason for this relationship.

## 1 Baudelaire: critical attitude as ontology of the present

In the eponymous text by Kant, as he reworks the content of the January 5, 1983 class, Foucault, in 1984, introduces the stylistics of Baudelaire's existence as an example of someone who becomes modern at the time he establishes not only a critical relationship with the present, but also a critical way of relationship with himself. According to Foucault, in Baudelaire we can contemplate the voluntary attitude of modernity that is tied to an indispensable asceticism. "To be modern is not to accept oneself as one is in the flow of time passing; it is to take oneself as the object of a complex and hard preparation" (FOUCAULT, 2008, p. 1,384).

Sartre, at the beginning of his book on Baudelaire, turns to the poet's letters to his mother and to another verse pinched back at the whim of a careful reading. Foucault deflects from this analysis, since he does not even mention his writings. When he speaks of Baudelaire, he just mentions his attitude towards life. Pages 80 to 129 of Sartre's book, however, can help us to see why Foucault has added Baudelaire to the text primarily dedicated to Kant that defines *the Enlightenment* as an exit (*Ausgang*) from minority. Perhaps through Sartre's text we can understand better this *détour* operated by Foucault, putting Baudelaire in the foreground in relation to Kant, valuing the Baudelairean reaction against the natural moral and the way of thinking and acting of the nineteenth century bourgeois themselves.

Extolling cosmopolitanism and civilization, Baudelaire opposes natural law—which Kant strengthens through the categorical imperative—with conduct laws based on the construction of universal and necessary moral judgments. For Baudelaire, the natural is the gregarious, common to all, which prevents the construction of a unique way of life, and dandyism, as well as being a criticism of *Lights* and its natural rationalism, is the expression of a culture of oneself, an aesthetic of oneself bordering on "the artificial": a singularity built to artifact templates. For him, "water in the bottle is more important than water running rampant in nature", says Sartre (SARTRE, 2000, p. 98). In fact, what is dearest to him is the bottle containing water more than properly the crystalline liquid inside it. The bottle, this translucent material prepared by man himself, is an artifact that opens a huge field for one to think about the power of creation that presents itself to the human condition. This is the reason for his sympathy for Satan (Lucifer), who rebels against the natural law enacted in the creation and "imposed" by God. Baudelaire's rebellion to what, universally and necessarily is imposed by the metaphysical construction, reaches the very image of God, the guarantor of the necessity and universality of the moral law. To rebel against the slavery of free will seems to him the only way to rescue what is more suitable to the human condition: the freedom to create.

As an artist, he understands this, deeply within himself when he creates verses, but above all when he creates himself, giving himself a finish. What matters to him now is to build himself as a way to contain all the forces of nature, making his life a work of art (even if in the eyes of others he is no more than a "*gacheur*" a failure! Here's the reason, for Baudelaire, for the need to express, by an attentive and passionate rereading of each verse, the iron materiality that emanates from his inner voice and to thoroughly search the best word to best represent what is meant. In nothing like the natural impulse immediately transformed into writing, the art of writing what one thinks is expressed by the arduous task of carving words on a blank

page or even to brush those that were taken from other sayings and other writings, as later the Mato Grosso do Sul poet Manoel de Barros (2007) will say. The art of writing what one thinks requires the writing to be carved in one's flesh, not just as young people do by offering their bodies to the stylus/needle of the tattoo masters, but by the thought articulation of each gesture, the slow and diligent work to achieve a more appropriate tone of voice; such accuracies reveal a movement from oneself upon oneself in order to forge a style, to fill space and time not by an infinite series of the same, but by a way of being that wants to be unique, because unique is the spirit of the one that engenders oneself and does not want to be merely created.

I think that this is the reason that drives Foucault to deal with the *diagnosis of the present* in the 1984 text, *Qu'est-ce que Les Lumières?*, unlike the 1983 text—in which he mentions Kant's modern attitude, as he elaborates a critical analysis of modernity without quoting Baudelaire. In the 1984 text, Foucault introduces a few paragraphs about the French poet to refer to a truly modern attitude (contemporary to his time). I believe that, for Foucault, Baudelaire is modern, or rather contemporary, due to his task of making visible the futility of bourgeois morality and their taste for fashion and the arts as objects of consumption, given the subtle criticism that the poet makes to narrate the scene he himself witnessed: two soldiers, visitors to a museum, who—without realizing that the catalog offered by the show contained a coding error, with a mismatched number that did not correspond to a famous battle—sought to interpret the reason for Napoleon not being found in the painting that had him as a major figure. The motive depicted the inside of a kitchen. Then both seriously discussed where Napoleon was. Baudelaire's sears trembled when he heard one of them shouting to the other: “Buster, don't you see that they are preparing the soup for his return?” And they went away happy about the painter and pleased with themselves” (*apud* CALASSO, 2012, p. 14)<sup>2</sup>.

## Conclusion

Besides this view, which gives rise through his verses to the lack of culture of those who promote and consume art, Baudelaire's criticism of bourgeois fashion is shown by the affectation of his gestures and the extreme care with the “*frous-frous*” of his trousers and shirts, in most times frayed because unable to be changed, due to the subsidiary allowance given to him by M. Ancelle, guardian of his estate at the request of his mother, sending him only what they thought was necessary in order to put a brake on Baudelaire's profligate character. His detailedly arranged gestures and clothes, as arranged as his hair also was, made an “all very delicate” set, but it worked like a “broken mirror” through which his contemporaries and his time found themselves heavily criticized, a radical critique enacted by a simple attitude and which affected even those who had not read a single line of the damned poet.

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2 Cf. BAUDELAIRE, 1975, p. 124.

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