

Special Issue Multi-locality studies:
Recent insights and future pathways

FUORI LUOGO

Journal of Sociology of Territory,
Tourism, Technology

Guest editors

Marco Alberio
Simone Caiello
Tino Schlinzig



Editor in chief: Fabio Corbisiero
Editorial manager: Carmine Urciuoli

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The Flâneur-as-Researcher. An Autoethnography²

Introduction

The *flâneur* is a french expression specifically outlined by the poet Charles Baudelaire (1857) and later codified by Walter Benjamin (1982), representing the character capable of getting lost in the city in order to grasp its *genius loci*. Since its inception in the Nineteenth century, Benjamin has never clearly defined the figure of the flâneur, limiting himself to associating it with a series of situations and behaviors. In particular, Baudelaire referred to flâneurs such as “those independent, intense and impartial spirits, who elude easy linguistic definitions”. Nowadays trying to define the flâneur precisely is challenging, and in some cases, it can even contradict the very concept of the flâneur itself. In fact, the flâneur is a “very obscure thing” that cannot be defined exhaustively, except as a kind of “tautology”: the flâneur is the individual who dedicates itself to flânerie, and flânerie is the activity of the flâneur (Tester, 1994, p. 7). For this reason, the flâneur is a character with deep historical roots that has piqued the interest of numerous academics through the centuries, especially impressionist sociologists. The flâneur thus assumes the position of a privileged connoisseur not easily classifiable, who can be identified in different figures who share some similarities with its profile. Although the idea of the flâneur is mainly associated with poets, artists and intellectuals who wander around the city with the intention of interpreting it, the practice of flânerie actually involves a wide variety of individuals who inhabit the urban environment, including social researchers as ethnographers (Nuvolati, 2013).

1. The flâneur from the object to the subject of sociological analysis

Sociological literature has found bold connections between the flâneur and other categories, albeit debatable and partial. As the protagonist of wandering, the flâneur finds itself, according to Nuvolati's grouping (2013, p. 43), in hippies, the homeless, out-of-town students, waiting prostitutes, dog owners walking around, and other categories of people, divided respectively into three sections: marginality, elites, originality and provocation. The resemblance to the figure of the flâneur can therefore be traced in the evolution of the different life stories, influenced by personal choices or predefined in part by social class, family or other vectors of inequality. It is therefore necessary to identify how people try to lead personalized lives, maintaining a resistance against the homogenization and monotony of routine that characterize today's daily life. The flâneur is therefore a subject of great interest to sociological scholars, as it offers the opportunity to explore themes such as alienation, loneliness, urban perception, and cultural resistance through the lens of a literary figure who continues to stimulate our imagination and critical thinking. In addition, the evolution of the concept of flâneur in the contemporary context, with the advent of technology and social media, raises new challenges and relevant questions for social research, highlighting how the flâneur can still be a relevant figure in the analysis of social and cultural dynamics in modern cities. The flâneur “has walked into the pages of the commonplace” (Tester, 1994, p. 1), as the modern city described by Baudelaire has been transformed into a “heterogeneous, mobile, aleatory, kinetic and cinematic” megalopolis, making the figure of the flâneur stereotyped, and therefore outdated and obsolete (Cocco, 2017, p. 64). The figure and the activity attached to it appear again in the attempts of social and cultural commentators to control the nature and implications of the conditions of modernity and postmodernity. The flâneur, in fact, is found in the “frequent singular” (Turnaturi, 2003, p. 31): a character who

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emerged from literature, as a single case who, however, was never singular, because it instructed us on a single member already typed, on a single member that we have frequently already seen or already intuited, even without having conceptualized it. The famous writer George Perec (1989), an “involuntary sociologist” following Turnaturi’s thought, suggests to find our own anthropology, which will speak of us, as it seeks the stranger, that is, everything that we have long plundered from others: no longer the exotic, but the “endotic” (Perec, 1989, p. 10). In this regard, anthropology can be described as a “science of remnants”, and “ethnography is therefore characterized by its attention to detail”, i.e. the ability to identify in the microcosm what can escape in the macrocosm (Capello, 2020, p. 126). The sociologist is therefore the one who deciphers this “concrete grammar” (Tacussel, 1995; quoted in Shin, 2014), whose behaviors provide the syntax and affirm the style. Creating a sociological approach based on the aesthetic aspect of social life makes it possible to overcome the limits of positivism and to examine social reality in a more sensitive way, using literature as an indicator of the sensitivity of an era. This approach requires a dionysian form of knowledge, according to Maffesoli (1996; cited in Shin, 2014), which is able to map the complexity of uncertainty, chance, disorder, effervescence, the tragic and the non-rational. All of these elements are an integral part of the human experience, although they are uncontrollable and unpredictable and difficult to understand with traditional research approaches. To talk about us, about that “endotic” dimension, therefore narratives are necessary. “Literature and sociology share the same object of study: to make sense of reality” [...] “As social scientists, we need someone to tell us a story. The data we collect must presuppose, at least implicitly, a *homo loquens*, a subject who speaks to us about themselves and the world” (Longo, 2017, p. 76). It is therefore possible to deduce that the social role of the flâneur is contradictory, just like its practice itself, and its resistance to modernity is equally ambivalent. Consequently, the flâneur “cannot have a social role, in the sense attributed to this term by functionalist sociology. It cannot have a role - if not anomalous, atypical, unusual - because it is by definition a nonconformist individual. The social role is based on expectations, while the flâneur makes about unpredictability its *raison d’être*” (Campa, 2015, p. 170). Following the analysis of Leeuwen (2019), the first obstacle that emerges in this scenario is that the flâneur, considered as an allegorical figure, tends to be defined according to its gender, social class and race. As a matter of fact, the flâneur is consistently represented as an aristocratic white man. The methodological question that raises is whether it is possible to interpret the flâneur as a “position” or “role” that in principle can be occupied by anyone, regardless of sex or gender, skin color, whether residing in the countryside or living abroad. This is a general challenge in the allegorical approach, but it becomes particularly complex when one tries to interpret the flâneur as a symbol of moral cosmopolitanism based on values of universal respect and equality. The flâneur, as a human figure, has never existed as a separate entity: the flâneur is no longer, or perhaps never has been, just a man. In fact, it has been found in women, who renounced the purely domestic role attributed by nineteenth-century society, thus leading to the birth of the term “flâneuse” (Carrera, 2022). This evolution even leads to the term “choraster”, in which “chora” represents a space situated between being and becoming, which refers to Plato’s philosophy. This figure questions herself even more deeply and constitutes a feminine alternative to more traditional tourism practices (Nuvolati, 2013, p. 40). In post-modern society, it is possible to conceive individuals living in “liquid” modernity (Bauman, 1991) in a fluid identity that, unlike in the modern era, in which the main issue was to construct an identity and stabilize it, “it is now necessary to avoid any kind of fixation” (Shin, 2014, p. 70). It is no longer just about the possibility of choosing a gender identity (in terms of sexual orientation), nor about the simple pluralism of identities. We go further, embracing the indeterminism of identity, in a continuous metamorphosis that sees the constant passage from one figure to another. This concept implies a kind of “permanent revolution” à la Trotsky (1930), not so much in the social structure, but rather in the individual self. Every idea of stability of being is abolished, and all existential certainty vanishes. In this context, “the flâneur is transformed into a living representation of a society in which traditional conventions lose meaning, finding

themselves immersed in a continuous change, in a flow of events, life and intensity" (Shin, 2014, p. 70). Such a rebellious figure, in constant opposition to mass consumerist practices; and in particular to the homologation, to the uniformity of the norm imposed by society, facilitates the construction of new discursive and identity spaces beyond the single dichotomous (Mieli, 1977). In an attempt to find out who the flâneur actually is, Nuvolati (2013, p.) states that the figure of the flâneur is only an archetype, as he argues that there are different intensities of predispositions to flânerie in each individual. A latent dimension, which, based on my subjectivity, I define as queer. In fact, queerness is "performative because it is not simply a being but a doing for and toward the future. Queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world" (Muñoz, 2009, p. 1), just like the practice of flânerie itself. Indeed, it is a "choice to live on the margins, to want to become a stranger", through the questioning of a critical reflection on oneself and the experience of duality between an individual self and a collective self, "between the one who pulls the strings and the puppet who dances on the stage of life" (Shin, 2014, p. 134), conforming to the heterosexual norm. Flânerie is thus "a form of silent resistance to the norm, to evidence, to the submission of thought" (*ibidem*). For this particular reason, I propose a third term, in addition to the "flâneur" referring usually to the male and "flâneuse" to the female individual, i.e. the term "flânqueer", to include all the potential flâneurs with no explicit difference in term of in sex, gender and/or orientation.³

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, therefore, there is a completion of a cycle: after trying in vain to place this elusive figure in the social system, the sociologists realize that they are talking about themselves, their role, or at least their possible role, thus concluding that "*le flâneur, c'est moi*" (Campa, 2015, p. 170). The focus is therefore no longer on the flâneur's distant and objective gaze on the city, but on its emergence as an artificer: by coming out into the open, the flâneur manifest and express its own subjectivity, becoming the "other" individual, indulging its stimuli and reworking them, to enrich itself and its audience. The flâneur can therefore be "a writer, a poet, an artist, a journalist but also the sociologists themselves who, in their exploration, indulge in personal considerations with respect to what they see" (Nuvolati, 2013, p. 146). Nuvolati thus describes the transition from the flâneur as a mere observer of urban reality; thanks to its supreme art of knowing how to look without being seen and, at the same time, without being caught looking, to the flâneur as the author of the same scene which is observing. This last condition is therefore indispensable for the flâneur to constitute itself as an integral part of the lived experience, by making use of the "virtue of the chameleon" (Shin, 2014), being capable to observe reality not only from the outside, but also from inside it. With regard to this reflection, the new "flâneur-as-researcher" (Stehle, 2008; quoted in Rizk & Birioukov, 2017) is both an "insider" member of the urban space, located in a familiar context and aware of the meaning of the path crossed, and an "outsider" subject, able to interpret the stranger, through a privileged lens, namely that of the researcher. The position of the researcher is therefore in relation to the scope and objects/subjects of the research, that is never completely placed inside or outside, neither as an outsider nor as an insider member. We, as social researchers, find ourselves in the "space of betweenness" [...] since "we are always, at some level, somewhere, negotiating various degrees and kinds of difference- be they based on gender, age, class, ethnicity, "race", sexuality, and so on. Betweenness thus implies that we are never "outsiders" or "insiders" in any absolute sense" (Natz, 1994, p. 57). It is important to highlight the fact that we can never help but interact with "others" who are distinct and different from us; the difference is an essential aspect of all social interactions, implying that we are constantly in an intermediate position or negotiating between the worlds of 'me' and 'not-me'. Not just a space but a condition for the researcher, who adapts to it and to the situations that take place in the space itself, being in a position of dialogue between context and social actors.

3 I intend to emphasize that, for ease of reference, I primarily utilize the term "flâneur" referring to it as an archetype, never as an individual regarding gender, sex or race.

Emphasizing the subjectivity present in the flâneur and the relative impartiality of its interpretations, Nuvolati (2006, p. 130) proceeds to state that “this critical function can be entrusted to the wide range of qualitative scientific methods that can be used in sociological research, [...] but also to the flâneur’s inspiration, intuitions, and sensitivity”. Thus, art, literature, flânerie and all other elements contribute to the function of research and criticism together with the social sciences, without hierarchies, representing different fields that at the moment have limited interactions with each other. Sociology is “also a form of art, and if we forget this, we run the risk of losing the science, finding ourselves with a sandheap empiricism or methodological narcissism, each as far from science as art is from billboard advertisements” (Nisbet, 1962, p. 67). No longer the sociology of flânerie but the sociology with flânerie, in which the latter can be added to the toolbox of innovative methods available to those engaged in research. Although Nuvolati proposed the contradiction on the flâneur as the object and subject of sociological analysis, he then expresses the limits of his own reflection, by presenting it more as a trajectory in development than just a simple observation.

2. The autoethnography as a method to investigate on being flâneur and its doing.

By tracing the multiple oxymorons that characterize the profile of the contemporary flâneur, it is possible to find the placing itself both as an object and as a subject of sociological analysis (Nuvolati, 2013), just as it is typical of autoethnography. Autoethnography is a particular type of qualitative research approach, defined as a “research approach and writing style that aims to systematically examine and describe (graphy) personal experiences (auto) in order to understand the cultural experiences (ethno) in which they are inserted” (Ellis, Carolyn, Tony E. Adams, Arthur P. Bochner, 2011; see also Gariglio and Ellis 2018, Gariglio 2018). This is how Ellis (1999, p. 671) herself expresses the autoethnographic approach: “I begin with my personal life [...] By exploring a specific life, I hope to understand a way of life”. A person who practices autoethnography thus interviews cultural members, participates in and observes cultural events and rituals, examines members’ ways of speaking and relating, analyzes cultural artifacts, and places significant value on the use of personal experience. However, the use of personal experience does not imply that the autoethnographers can only tell their own story. Rather, the autoethnographers must be able to distance themselves from their own personal experiences in order to reflect on them. This approach has taken shape within the field of ethnographic research since at least the 1970s, when it began to progressively merge with other disciplines, in particular with autobiography, literature and aesthetic philosophy (Gariglio, 2018, p. 2).

I’m one of those people who perceive themselves as being flâneur, while reading Nuvolati’s works. For this reason, in my master sociology thesis, once I conceived flânerie as a way to implement research practice, I decided to talk about myself and my experience, seeking to investigate how the flâneur emerges and its related distinctive features. In particular, in addition to expressing how the practice of flânerie is discussed and lived, and therefore what flânerie means, I intended to focus on who exactly is the person practicing it, i.e. the flâneur itself. To achieve this goal, I reflected on my own experience, particularly focusing on my period of time in Paris as Erasmus+ student, through the elaboration of autoethnography in an attempt to identify the flâneur’s identity, a facet inherent within my own personality. By taking up Campa’s already mentioned expression, *le flâneur, c’est moi*, seeking to “explain” a phenomenon already previously “described” (Martinotti, 1993, p. 141; quoted in Turnati, 2003), I decided to incorporate the concept of flânerie into an empirical investigation. In particular, I initially asked myself: when and how does a flâneur manifest itself? How does a flâneur or the flânerie practice affect not only oneself but also others? Also, what added value can I provide myself to make my experience as a flâneur more accessible?

As articulated by Allen-Collinson, "at the heart of autoethnography, for me, is that ever shifting focus between levels: from the macro, wide sociological angle on socio-cultural framework, to the micro, zoom focus on the embedded self" (Adams, 2013, p. 579). From this point of view, I therefore intend to highlight the passage of the *flânerie* from a macroscopic phenomenon, as a mere practice, to a microscopic phenomenon: a territorial exploration that also refers to the very existence of those who practice it. This is in an attempt to make this suspension, this waiting a productive moment, in order to be able to justify in the eyes of the community, but also to myself, my strolling, in order to represent new forms of learning, starting from my own experience. My thesis research allowed me to conceive myself as a "being" *flâneur* and, at the same time, to conceive "its doing", identifying a methodological metaphor of the social researcher: a reading that is not radically different, but deeper than doing ethnography. This reflection extends in particular to the practices of "measuring" the different methods used to make ethnography. In fact, the *flâneur's* approach distinguishes the more radical and analytical positivist ethnographies of the nineteenth-century period, compared to the less rigid evocative (auto)ethnography. The characteristic isotopic function of the *flâneur*, a being "other" than the environment in which one relates, like the figure of the foreigner identified by Alfred Schütz, reveals itself as central to ethnographic practice. An attitude of strong identity claim in the conformist society which, however, is going to be lost, due to time constraints attributable to the hegemonic neoliberal model. The temporal dimension, in relation to the physical and spatial dimension of "being in places", clearly modifies the approach and the vision of the lived experience. It is now widely recognized today that the field of study of ethnography is often not simply a representation of reality, but rather a construction of the ethnologists themselves. In the process of creating their own field of research, ethnologists contribute to the development of their theories (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1988; Köstlin 1996; quoted in Meloni, 2015). Acknowledging this potential in contemporary research means taking a reflective approach and carefully considering the relationship between the observer and what is observed. This principle of reflective autoethnography identifies narration as a privileged means of understanding oneself and others (Chang, 2008, p. 33; quoted in Meloni, 2015). In ethnographic research "the observer is intrinsically involved in the very act of observing. [...] It's what I've elsewhere called "living-with," a "technique" that discouraged me from even taking notes on the spot, let alone abandoning the use of the tape recorder. Life as a method. It is its application that makes it possible to draw up the retrospective ethnographic accounts we have been talking about" (Piasere, 2002, p. 142; quoted in Meloni, 2015). The autoethnographic approach therefore represents a balance between investigation and narration, between the ethnographic method and the biographical narration. In this context, the *flâneur* becomes a "storyteller", who seeks to translate their own experience and perspective into a narrative that goes even further, expanding narrative possibilities to create a narrative that provides elements of analysis and cultural products. By recounting one's study in an autobiographical way, it reinserts itself within the field of study as an essential component of research: the knowledge that emerges is closely linked to one's personal experience (Gaias, 2020). The *flâneur* thus presents itself as a living metaphor, a "metaphor of the postmodern strategy generated by the horror of being tied and fixed" (Bauman, 1996, p. 24), particularly suitable for describing and making autoethnography understood by analogy and difference. In this case, autoethnography is a compelling method to methodologically validate *flânerie* practices, i.e. exploring the lived experiences of the city, deepening its complexities together with the interweaving of personal and collective narratives.

The use of autoethnography to narrate the experience as a *flâneur* is a unique approach to study and to understand one's own experiences within the context of urban life or any other lived environment. In fact, the autoethnographic method lends itself "as a template for studying controversial and not easily accessed phenomena" (Adams, 2011, p. 178), such as the *flânerie*, with regard to the contradictions mentioned above. My autoethnography has therefore intended to illustrate, show, suggest, give an account to readers of the conditions and vicissitudes that

a subject who self-identifies as the flâneur - or rather, flâneur like myself - faces, referring to my experience in Paris. This shows how the "sense of a place" and the "sense of belonging" are crucial in reference both to problems of a literary and sociological nature, and to questions concerning the nature of identity and the place occupied in society. Moreover, since autoethnography as a qualitative research method allows us to identify a series of nuances of a given topic, such as flânerie, which could not be grasped otherwise, this approach was essential to give an account above all of my experiential and subjective dimension to enrich the aspects previously observed. By telling my story, I decided to focus in particular on what my experience really was, what it still was to the day I was writing, although the Erasmus program was over and I was still in Paris. Reflecting on what I imagined at first, resorting to memory, questioning myself about the reason for my choices and the ways - "why do I do this?", "how do I do it?" - in addition to my past experiences that I have passed, by giving space also to the similar experiences of other people and/or characters, in which I have seen myself, through literature and related art forms, such as song lyrics. It was therefore essential to consider the inclusion of my own spatiality within my research that goes beyond the concept of proxemics: the experience of being in places without any apparent purpose, or the activity of flânerie itself, is central to ethnographic practice as an instinct. In particular, I let myself be guided by the questions about "who am I and what am I like?", also thinking about what I have chosen to do, to see, and what I have chosen not to do, not to see. Once I had established my own position in the physical and discursive space of research, it was also necessary to question myself about the method, the "how" of research, and therefore about the "whys of research", in relation to my own presence in the field, which in this case coincided with my daily life. In particular, the empirical question of my thesis focused on a more reflective approach, based on the schützian common sense, on the "world of everyday life" that constitutes the condition of "the foreigner". A radical otherness that is becoming less and less radical, in order to be able to interact with other methods, such as the similar approach of Natali's itinerant soliloquy (2016). In a continuous repositioning in front of others and in front of myself, what I did as a storyteller was to mix the experience of the field with that of the autobiographical and narrative writing of the research itself. An experience that becomes the writing of the experience: a sort of meta-writing that reveals itself in the course of life and reflection on its flow. An activity of flânerie that at first is denied in the act of also becoming research, therefore not just a mere account of what I have done and observed, but an articulated and reflective reflection partly confused and without a common thread, as life itself. For this reason, in my case autoethnography presents itself as an adequate approach, perhaps even ideal, because it allows me to combine scientific reflection with my subjective experience of personal reorganization of the relationship with the space I have crossed. The attempt to position oneself in front of the self and the space in which one moves leads back to analytical tools, such as autoethnography, which are now also widely used in contemporary social geography (Gaias, 2020).

As I have personally experienced, writing autoethnography requires a combination of research, storytelling, and self-reflection skills. In this form of writing, there are no hard and fast rules to follow. The crucial element, but also the main challenge that presented itself to me, was to be able to find a balance between the narration of my personal experiences together with a critical analysis of the subject under study. This balance has also involved setting boundaries during my personal "flanering" process, as both object and subject of research. In order to understand the subjective meaning that is attributed to the experience of flânerie, narratives are in fact a way of organizing, interpreting, giving sense and meaning. Storytelling is a social practice that incorporates narrative knowledge derived from experience situated in specific contexts. Narratives are a powerful tool since they help organize the world from the narrator's point of view, offering connections and interpretive patterns. These patterns serve to reaffirm and construct the narrator's identity within a larger narrative that takes context into account. Stories cannot be understood separately, but must be contextualized, as they are part of a narrative landscape constructed by various subjects, objects, and events of the narrator's social world (Clandinin, Connelly, 2000).

Attention is thus placed not only on what is said, but also on how it is said: and it is precisely this “how” - the how it happens, the sense of action - “that makes literature a very rich source. But there will never be an explicit explanation of meaning, nor interpretative categories of meaning. It is the reader, the critic, the scholar who gives meaning to what they read every time they encounter the text. The meaning is born every time from that encounter” (Turnaturi, 2003, p. 77). In particular, I’ve chosen to refer to Adams’ (2011) text, “Narrative the Closet. An Autoethnography of Same-Sex Attraction”, whose main objective of this autoethnography is to provide a thick description of the “closet”, i.e. the metaphorical space that a homosexual person passes through and experiences. I have tried, therefore, to propose the same definition with regard to the flâneur as a metaphor itself, embodied by me in the first person, in relation to the phases and significant moments that I have experienced. In particular, as the author uses autoethnography to develop his experience of coming-out, narrating the closet of a homosexual person and the phases associated with it, I made use of this narrative as an example to make it my own, about my flâneuse life path. Adams (2011) examined the characteristics of three significant moments experienced by people with same-sex attraction in relation to this metaphorical space, namely: “learning the closet”, in which the first familiarity with the concept occurs; “living in the closet”, i.e. the period in which a person privately acknowledges same-sex attraction but publicly denies its existence through words and actions; and “coming out of the closet”, the moment when a person decides to reveal their same-sex attraction to others. I have therefore chosen to structure my autoethnography around two main phases that I have experienced myself, and which involve the figure of the flâneur in the first person. Since the flânerie is “a moment in which one first experiences a rupture with oneself and then an experience of mixing with others” (Shin, 2014, p. 31) the first part therefore describes this moment of “the disruption of the self”, in which I tried to express the factors and implications of how I experienced this phase, which was painful at first and then turned out to be creative. From this first rupture I then come to “blending with others”, the second part of my research application, in which I express my experience in a new social fusion. Moreover, since the profile of the flâneur is trapped in contradictions, these ones are made possible by certain conditions that I have identified in my autoethnography, analogous to what Adams did. This was mainly achieved through the analysis of Shin and Nuvolati’s research, together with the characteristics and premises partly already discussed previously. These conditions have been fulfilled allowing to manifest myself as a flâneur. In addition, Adams’ different narratives are separated by a square dot (□) which, in addition to punctuating his narration, I discovered giving a linearity to the non-linearity typical of flânerie, thus conceiving writing itself as a form of errancy. This is the reason I adopted this same way to represent the narratives to indicate changes between my themes - changes between time and space, experiences and people. As the author then, I compressed a significant amount of time into the text and made decisions about the “emphasis, tone, syntax” and “diction” of my writing (Mandel, 1968, p. 218; quoted in Adams, 2011, p. 167). I, in turn, employed different writing techniques to express the themes I chose. In particular, I chose to use a collage of texts: my own experiences, the experiences of others, media-mediated representations, audiovisual texts, poems, existing research to create a “layered account” (Ronai, 1995, 1996; *ibidem*). By doing so, I implemented the production of those “frequent singulars”, where “each researcher can find, according to their sensitivity, their theoretical approach, their novels that best suit them” (Turnaturi, 2003, p. 12). These elements constitute part of the flânerie itself, which I feel I have experienced, as they have allowed me to give voice to my emotions, which I admit at that moment I didn’t fully know how to express. Writing a diary to keep track of the field notes, helped me in this too, to feel what I felt in relation to what I was experiencing. In particular, I used the first-person voice to tell a story, stories that I personally experienced. I did this to present an intimate, immediate, and engaging account of a situation (Caulley, 2008, p. 442; quoted in Adams, 2011). Sometimes I’ve used the third-person voice to establish the context of an interaction, report my findings, and present what others do, say, or write. This is in an attempt to be able to actively involve readers, together with the author,

in the experience, so that there is no distancing from an event. Through the use of conversations, I showed events that seemed emotionally intense. Show “brings readers into the scene” to “have an experience” evocatively (Ellis, 2004: 142; *ibidem*). In contrast, “telling” positions readers at a distance, provides an overview of a situation rather than an evocative experience of it, and uses a description that lacks the immediacy of dialogue and sensory involvement. I recounted events that seemed fragmented and emotionally empty, where intellect took priority over emotion (*ibidem*).

Moreover, I did not intend to focus my study only on myself but especially on me to reflect on social and sociological issues, methods. Although it characterizes the flâneur as such, by doing so this approach allowed me to go beyond a mere self-centered dimension which aims to constitute an anomalous but interesting attempt of social research. I have therefore chosen to collect and include in my narrative some testimonies of other people who identify themselves as flâneurs or similar, as they are the only ones capable of documenting this particular form of relationship and analysis of reality in order to grasp its dimension. A real triumph of the flânerie, “the flâneur spied by the flâneur” (Nuvolati, 2006, p. 107). I then reflected on my experience and documented conversations I had with other people with similar vicissitudes to mine, about the themes that emerged during my reflections, and then also opened up to the issues that emerged from their own. By doing so, I followed what I previously explained, that as social scientists we need someone to tell us a story: stories allow us to give meaning to our data, where the researcher implicitly reflects on which story can offer the best interpretation of their data. This is “a risk that must nevertheless be taken” because “the story has the ability to illuminate aspects of data of which we would otherwise not be aware, in any case, the disjunction produced by imposition generates an internal dialectic in which the story illuminates data and data modify the story, until, at least so it is hoped, in the end, something coherent, something readable and, which is perhaps the most important thing, something interesting is processed” (Davis, 1974; quoted in Longo, 2017, p. 77). Through the use of autoethnographic interviews, I sought to understand the personal experiences and perspectives of the study subjects, gathering additional data on their own experiences, reflections and personal stories through interviews conducted on themselves or collaborating with other researchers to do so. The aim was to gain an intimate understanding of individual perspectives and personal experience within a wider research context. This aspect is part of my first fundamental question that I asked myself, which is who were the people who could be associated with the figure of the flâneur, identifying them among those who show a natural curiosity in exploring the world outside their birth place or geographic origin. In the context of my autoethnographic research, ethics based on relationships with participants has in fact been a fundamental element, leading me to reflect on several issues that have influenced my work. Another question I asked myself was about who has the right to share their story, recognizing the importance of not assuming that my worldview is identical to that of others. Striving to cultivate a deep respect for the perspectives of others, I then focused on broader questions related to the common challenges faced by the participants, such as the moments arising from the “crossing of the border” (Nuvolati, 2013). This aspect also refers to my personal relationships with the participants, recognizing that these dynamics can become an integral part of my research. This raised the question of the performativity of relationships, given that the same interactions with participants can be profoundly influenced by the research itself. This approach made it possible to establish a less asymmetrical interaction with the respondents, as I gave them the freedom to express themselves and share what they intend to, without being tied to fixed or specific questions. This has created a freer climate of exchange, inviting people to tell their personal experiences and stories, as *homo loquens*.

Conclusion and limitations of research

The unique approach of the *flâneurist* investigation in the contemporary urban context has so far been used only by a few researchers, to the point that, although I found Nuvolati's careful analysis far-sighted and revealing for my research, his studies are focusing more on the identification of methodological problems regarding the activity of flânerie in sociological research, rather than in their resolution. The very limit of the ethnographic approach is found in the objectification of an experience that filters through the relationships between bodies: and this is why it is plausible to define the practice of flânerie as a unique methodological metaphor for qualitative research. This is particularly relevant as it can be compared to a form of ethnography that is, at the same time, reflective and retrospective: it is in fact a matter of conceiving ethnography as an open path, never excessively structured, sometimes characterized by absolute freedom, in the waiting for events to unfold in the interaction between the researchers and their interlocutor. In this regard, it's important to mention the concept of "serendipity", the ability to wait for the unexpected, a predisposition of the ethnographer towards it. Occasional discoveries based on intuitions can prove fundamental for the progress of one's research, as they often derive from fortuitous encounters and situations (Fabietti, 2012; quoted in Meloni, 2015). Soukup (2012) has also pointed out in his research how, in a world that in many ways appears full of illusions and surreal visions, the flânerie represents a valuable tool for ethnographic observation. This methodological approach thus highlights the processes of individual meaning-building in postmodern culture and responds to the need for an "ethnology of solitude" (Augé, 2003; cited in Soukup, 2012).

Talking about "the narrowness of the real Paris in which each individual lives, within a geographical area whose radius is extremely small", I do believe it is important to emphasize that I did not and have not experienced Paris in its totality: mine is therefore an experience that filters to the notion of common sense by saying "I have experienced Paris and therefore I know", without being fully aware of the limitations that this entails. The fact of living in a space, occupying it in a specific position and following certain paths, is not simply an objective matter, but depends on subjective conditions in which intentional representations come into play. Consequently, to live does not mean to be in "the" world in general, but to live in a particular way "a" world, which has specifically appropriated itself at the same time as one's own appropriation of it. I then spoke of this personal world, which I made "my own" in a specific and intentional way. In this case, the spatial field of research turns out to be vague, not precisely defined. It is impossible to completely isolate the vagueness or limitation of a space, considering that the spatial field of research depends primarily on the starting point (Debord, 2006).

The flâneur experience can be fruitful, as in the end the individual "will come out matured, as an adult, will have important elements to elaborate through narrative forms and to leave to those who cannot afford the same test" - such as autoethnography, in my case - "In this perspective, the territory takes on a new guise, shedding its more physical clothes to become the map of our emotions" (Nuvolati, 2013, p. 22). In this sense, flânerie is to be understood as an experience towards adulthood, tracing in particular the oxymoronic characteristic of the flâneur as *puer* and *senex*. The fusion of these two metaphorical figures of psychoanalytic matrix remains a constitutive feature of the flâneur, which is able, from time to time, to summarize the primordial yearning for discovery, in the most instinctive forms in which it manifests itself, with the courage of research and interpretative wisdom (*ibidem*, p. 4). For this reason, autoethnography allowed me to validate my experience as a flâneur, a topic that is not entirely excluded in traditional social scientific investigations since it has been recently redefined, along with other eminently qualitative themes, in favour of the perspectives of administrative sociology. Autoethnography has made it possible to interpret and illustrate traditional concepts of the social sciences, making

4 P. H. Chombart de Lauwe, "Paris et l'agglomération parisienne", 1952; quoted in Debord, Œuvres. Quarto, 2006

them accessible to those who are not familiar with the field, raising questions that otherwise would never have been asked. As a researcher, if I want to avoid projecting my assumptions of the social world into others, through my predefined measurements and investigations, I think it is necessary to learn from the subjects themselves, by listening to them. A well-crafted autoethnography can therefore represent a valuable contribution to the researchers authentically interested in the human condition, as well as to their audience. The result is a text that considers the aesthetic and textual aspect, characterized by a considerable emotional charge. A text that therefore questions the disciplinary "normometer" (Borghi, 2020, p. 18), in an attempt to redefine the dominant binary logic.

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