

## EXPERIENCE AND NARRATIVE: BENJAMIN'S INSPIRATION FOR A CLINIC OF WORK<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT.** This article deals with inflections operated by clinical approaches to work that take it as an activity, notably the Ergology (whose main author is the Frenchman Yves Schwartz) and the Clinic of Activity (whose main author is the Frenchman Yves Clot), and the formulations of the German philosopher Walter Benjamin regarding experience and narrative. Firstly, the way in which the concept of experience is presented in the mentioned clinical approaches to work is studied. Then, we investigate Walter Benjamin's formulation of the concept of experience and its intimate relationship with narrative. The aim of this dialogue is to establish a path pointing to the production of a clinic of the experience of work, which, at the threshold of activity, uses narrative as a clinical apparatus. The narrative production in the field of work thus presents itself as a powerful way to face many challenges posed in the field of contemporary work.

**Keywords:** Work; experience; narrative.

## EXPERIÊNCIA E NARRATIVA: INSPIRAÇÃO BENJAMINIANA PARA UMA CLÍNICA DO TRABALHO

**RESUMO.** Este artigo trata de inflexões operadas por entre abordagens clínicas do trabalho que o tomam enquanto atividade, notadamente a ergologia (que tem como principal autor o francês Yves Schwartz) e a clínica da atividade (que tem como principal autor o francês Yves Clot), e o pensamento do filósofo alemão Walter Benjamin a respeito de experiência e narrativa. Primeiramente, estuda-se a maneira como o conceito de experiência apresenta-se nas abordagens clínicas do trabalho mencionadas. Voltamos-nos, então, à apreciação das formulações de Walter Benjamin a respeito do conceito de experiência e sua íntima relação com a narrativa. Busca-se, com este diálogo, estabelecer um caminho apontando para a produção de uma clínica da experiência do trabalho, que, no limiar com a atividade, se valha da narrativa enquanto dispositivo clínico. A produção narrativa no campo do trabalho, assim, apresenta-se como uma potente via para fazer frente a muitos desafios colocados no campo do trabalho contemporâneo.

**Palavras-chave:** Trabalho; experiência; narrativa.

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## EXPERIENCIA Y NARRATIVA: INSPIRACIÓN BENJAMINIANA PARA UNA CLÍNICA DEL TRABAJO

**RESUMEN.** Este artículo trata de inflexiones operadas entre enfoques clínicos del trabajo que lo toman como actividad, especialmente la Ergología (que tiene como principal autor el francés Yves Schwartz) y la Clínica de la Actividad (que tiene como principal autor el francés Yves Clot), y el pensamiento del filósofo alemán Walter Benjamín acerca de la experiencia y la narrativa. Primero, se estudia la manera como el concepto de experiencia se presenta en los abordajes clínicos del trabajo mencionados. Volvemos entonces a la apreciación de las formulaciones de Walter Benjamín acerca del concepto de experiencia y su íntima relación con la narrativa. Se busca, con este diálogo, establecer un camino apuntando hacia la producción de una clínica de la experiencia del trabajo, que, en el umbral con la actividad, se valga de la narrativa como dispositivo clínico. La producción narrativa en el campo del trabajo, así, se presenta como una potente vía para hacer frente a muchos desafíos planteados en el campo del trabajo contemporáneo.

**Palabras clave:** Trabajo; experiencia; narrativa.

### Introduction

This article is part of one of our aspects of research interest<sup>4</sup>, namely: the production of conceptual and methodological modulations in the field of Clinic of Work that deals with the connections between work, subjectivity and health, especially with regard to the way of placing the clinical problem and its strategies. We are interested in Clinic of Work that affirms the creation of ways of existing and of working as resistance, as an act of creation that is done as a possibility to expand the power to act in the face of the constraints present in work situations.

In this direction, we operate through clinical approaches that take the work as an activity, notably the Ergology and the Clinic of Activity<sup>5</sup>, with the objective of producing a clinic of work inspired by formulations of Walter Benjamin regarding experience and narrative.

The formulations of the German author inspire us to draw dialogues that seem potent, but still little explored, with the proposals of the clinics that take the work as an activity. His contributions also make us recognize the production of narratives as a privileged way for the production and transmission of work experience, an aspect that is present in the discussions of Ergology and the Clinic of Activity, especially with regard to considerations related to the history of the work and its place in the dynamics of the development of the activity (Clot, 2010), as well as the renormative process that characterizes work as an activity, according to Schwartz and Durrive (2007).

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<sup>5</sup> We classify both the Ergology and the Clinic of Activity in the scope of Clinic of Work. However, we recognize that Ergology does not pretend to constitute itself as a "clinic", nor does Yves Schwartz, the reference name in Ergology, operate with the concept of subjectivity, preferring to this the concept of the 'body-self', as we shall see along this text. Its concerns are focused on the dimension of training through work as an activity.

In the midst of the research on the concept of experience in the clinical approaches to work mentioned above, we focused on the appreciation of Walter Benjamin's formulations, seeking to establish in this dialogue a path that points to the production of a clinic of work experience, at the threshold of activity, uses narrative as a clinical apparatus.

### **Clinic of Activity: regarding activity and experience**

Linked to the work of Yves Clot (2010) and other researchers in the field, the Clinic of Activity has as its motto the approach of work as an activity. This concept is part of the distinction between Prescribed Work and Real Work proposed by ergonomists, since the work performed never corresponds exactly to what is predicted. In this way, Prescribed Work refers to the predetermined work, to the predetermined form with which the work is to be performed, including all prescriptions, norms and expected results. The Real Work refers to the work that is, in fact, concretized: the way in which, in practice, the work is done.

Yves Clot (2006) also refers to a third dimension called the 'real of work' or, more precisely, 'real of activity', a dimension that refers to something that goes well beyond the processing and execution of tasks, "[...] considering that the real activity is always greater than that achieved" (Silva, Barros & Louzada, 2011).

This dimension refers to a plan of prior indetermination, a singular response that workers create in an act so as to account for the infinite variabilities of the environment, which is always unfaithful to variability, an insurmountable principle of life, as warns Canguilhem (2002): Says Clot (2006, p. 116, our translation)<sup>6</sup> :

[...] the real of the activity is also everything that is not done, what cannot be done, what is sought to do without achieving - failures - what one would have wanted or could have done, what one thinks or what one dreams to be able to do elsewhere. It is necessary to add to this - which is a frequent paradox - what is done to not do what one has to do or what one does without wanting to do. Not to mention what has to be redone.

Taking work as an activity places the clinical question of work as an operation by a dimension of transformation of the worker and its environment, a transformation that is analyzed from the perspective of daily calls to manage the distance between Prescribed Work and Real Work, therefore by action. Thus, we identify an operation of the experience whose specificity refers to the arrangements that involve adherence to normative spheres to work, as well as creation in relation to them.

From the point of view of the presence of the concept of experience in the Clinic of Activity, it should be noted that Vygotsky's readings were of great inspiration for the development of Yves Clot's approach, which, in a text called 'Clínica do trabalho e clínica da atividade', proposes to present a summary of the main formulations that serve as reference. In this paper, the author argues that the same characteristics regarding 'artistic experience', as formulated by Vigotski (1999), can be found in work, from the point of view of activity.

For Clot (2011), work, like art, carries the power of being a source of otherness, a center of initiative and creativity for the subjects. In experiencing both - art and work - in

<sup>6</sup> "[...] o real da atividade é também tudo o que não se faz, aquilo que não se pode fazer, aquilo que se busca fazer sem conseguir – os fracassos –, aquilo que se teria querido ou podido fazer, aquilo que se pensa ou que se sonha poder fazer alhures. É preciso acrescentar a isso – o que é um paradoxo frequente – aquilo que se faz para não fazer aquilo que se tem que fazer ou ainda aquilo que se faz sem querer fazer. Sem contar aquilo que se tem de refazer”.

Clot's understanding we have the possibility of accessing planes of circulating forces, which the author refers to what Vygotsky refers to as "[...] the social being in us" (Clot, 2011, p. 77). Such forces are considered a source of vital energy, since it is understood that this social being in us is, above all, a conflict. In this sense, what is produced in this type of experience concerns the conflicts of forces of a social, which is accessed in the experience. The author further explains that it is in this encounter of becomings that the creation of the new in us can occur, escaping from the repetitions of an unconscious anchored in the past. It is important to note here that in the text to which we are referring, Clot (2011) makes a point of differentiating the type of psychic production that is given through work as an activity - as creation of new possibilities, therefore - a unconscious different from that of the productions of an unconscious as conceived by psychoanalysis, which would be based on the reproduction of infantile conflicts. This aspect seems crucial to us to understand the notion of experience taken in the Clinic of Activity, from the conceptions of Vygotsky. It is a possibility of 'transforming' production of oneself from the encounter with a social one that crosses us.

It is in Vygotsky's (1999) work that Clot finds subsidies to point out the conditions under which this new can be produced in work. First, it is necessary to situate the term used by the Russian in referring to the experience that interests us. *Pereživânie* is a word commonly used in Russian, but without exact translation into the Portuguese language. Thus, one can find it translated as 'experience', 'practice', 'emotion' and 'feeling' (Prestes, 2010). Current Brazilian scholars of the author's work point out, however, the translation 'experience' as the term that would maintain greater fidelity to the idea intended by Vigotski (Prestes, 2010; Toassa, 2009). As presented by Toassa (2009), the use of the term by the author is related to the meaning indicated by the Russian dictionary: *Pereživânie*- noun of neutral gender. State of mind (soul), expression of the existence of a strong (powerful) feeling (impression); experienced impression (Toassa, 2009).

Such a term would serve to express the idea that an objective situation can be interpreted, perceived, experienced or lived differently by several subjects. *Pereživânie*, as used by the Russian author, refers to a type of event that has a characteristic of transformation, to mark a difference in the subjects in which it occurs. The translation that has been made for the term experience is pointed out as the most accurate, including, by association with the idea of life, of vivacity, of transforming vital movement.

Considering that, according to Yves Clot (2006), the work done (real work) and the activity that was developed to reach it (real of activity) are not corresponding, the Clinic of Activity's approach seeks, therefore, instruments to understand the real work situation, using, for this, to think the articulation between activity and subjectivity. This seems to be a point where Vygotsky's contributions, once again, make a special case, because, as we shall see, the very notion of *pereživânie* points to a connection between human development and subjectivity. Moreover, it is based on the Russian author that Clot (2006) affirms to be the real of the activity, always, greater than the achieved activity. The articulation between the real of the activity, experience and creation of the new is referred directly by the author when recognizing that it is in the possibility of opening to live new experiences that the work allows the discovery of new possibilities that are affirmed as creative acts in the work.

Still referring to the unfinished nature of *pereživânie*, Toassa (2009) refers to a peculiar characteristic recognized in the experience as conceived by Vygotsky: it concerns a dimension that can extend to the past and the future of human existence, showing important elements in the orientation of human actions. It is an experience that does not end in space, but in time, in which past, present and future meet to continue producing each other. In this

sense, Clot's (2001) consideration of the power of a work experience that serves as an opening for new experiences is supported by the concept described by the Russian author. The experience of which Vygotsky speaks to us is something that does not end in itself, being potent to the achievement of spatial and temporal connections, making use of the past constructions to, from the present, construct a future (Vygotsky, 1999).

Clot (2011) recognizes, in this process, something that approaches the operation of the unconscious as thought by Deleuze, an unconscious that is a place of production rather than just reproduction of ancient marks (Clot, 2011). When referring to Vygotsky's (1999) conception, he affirms that artistic experience, by producing the conflict of feelings - making the present for the subject the plane of collective forces in contact with its uniqueness - allows imagining new destinies for our affections and passions. Art would then be a means by which affections can be transformed, a "[...] way to live new affections and give shape to the unfinished" (Clot, 2011, p. 78), just as Clot's work is. According to the Russian (Vygotsky, 1999), works of art would have a power to operate procedures of the unconscious, but of a social nature, being able to arouse conflicts that exceed the personal history of each one. Art is thus taken as a social becoming of the unconscious, not deriving from an unconscious already produced, but recreating the unconscious itself in new productions, in the encounter of the collective with the singular. And it is precisely in this respect that Clot (2011) claims to have the same power in the work. To paraphrase Deleuze, Clot claims that work, like art, is a privileged means of "[...] making a difference" (Clot, 2011, p. 79) in subjective history. Through it - being seen from the same perspective of the artistic experience of Vygotsky -, the production of an "[...] unfinished transpersonal object [...]" is possible, being to that object a Clinic of Activity is linked to (Clot, 2011, p. 80). This aspect of work as a creative transpersonal experience, as a process that deals with the production of common problems from which subjects and the world change, is highly valued by us to think about a clinic of work composed of the concepts of activity and experience.

From such conceptions, we can see how the idea of experience is intimately linked to the collective dimension, both in Vygotsky and in Clot, as a non-personalized zone of forces through which the worker and his work gain passage. In dealing with this dimension, Vygotski (1999) speaks of something that is not characteristic of one actor to be then passed on to another. The transmission concerning the artistic experience concerns something that is only transmissible because it already inhabits some kind of common plan. In this sense, in the sensitization through art, the subject is open to the possibility of accessing contents that no longer refer to the isolated individual (in the sense of being characteristic of an individuality), but which are arranged with the singularities, effecting new collective compositions.

### **Ergology: about activity and experience**

Ergology has its origins in France in the late 1970s, in the debate between different scholars and protagonists of work activities, under the name of 'multidisciplinary analysis of work situations' (APST). It was in the early 1990s that this current began to present itself, effectively, as Ergology, from the studies of Yves Schwartz (Athayde & Brito, 2011). This approach is presented as a "[...] project to better know and, above all, to better intervene in the work situations to transform them" (Schwartz & Durrive, 2007, p. 37), having as a key operator the concept of activity, that is, as the matrix of human history, as an incessant

movement of renormatization<sup>7</sup> of the means of life at work, since between the Prescribed Work and Real Work, as the Ergonomists have advocated, there is always a distance to be managed by the workers when in a work situation. From this point of view, working is to manage considering that management consists of a human problem that comes from everywhere where there is variability and history, and in which “[...] it is necessary to deal with something without being able to resort to stereotyped procedures [...]”, says Schwartz (2004, p. 23). It should be noted that Schwartz’s concerns relate, in particular, to the themes of work and training.

In a first moment of his studies, when he produced his doctoral thesis, completed in 1986, Schwartz (2011) started from the concept of experience to develop a conception of work positioned in the sphere of human activity of partial renormatization of the means of life, thus following the thought of Canguilhem (2001). Such renormatization generates a permanent movement within the scope of the knowledge produced in work, producing antecedent norms that are always renormalized in the indefinite resumption of activities (Schwartz & Durrive, 2007) and in the ballast of a debate of values.

The author dedicates himself to thinking about characteristics of the experience, taking up the theme explicitly in a writing of 2010 entitled *Quel sujet pour quelle expérience?*, which came to be published in Portuguese in 2011, under the name *Qual sujeito para qual experiência?* (Which subject for which experience?) - Schwartz (2011). Going through the literature of Yves Schwartz, we noticed that an important influence, which eventually converged in Ergology, was the work of the Italian physician Ivar Oddone, who is pointed out as responsible for bringing to light the rediscovery of the role of experience in investigations of psychology of work (Vasconcelos & Lacomblez, 2005).

Through the reading of such texts, it is possible to verify that the theme of experience in Ergology has appeared commonly related to the discussion of how to learn in a work situation, how to train workers, how to acquire knowledge about the work taken in the perspective of the activity. Thus, the questioning regarding the statute of experience in the ergological scope is made by the discussion about the relationship between formal knowledge and knowledge that would come from this experience.

For Schwartz (2010), any views of experience that do not consider the unique aspect of experience for each subject are inadmissible. And this singular aspect of experience is not only concerned with the here and now of how one experiences an event, but implies the way in which one experiences the experience of the moment crossed by the singular history of all experiences already lived.

The second ‘ergological view’ of experience concerns the existence of a dimension of this experience that is somehow ‘hidden in the body’ (Schwartz, 2010). This means that experience is not limited to what would be proper to the soul (feelings, thoughts, subjective sensations), nor to the strict intellect, in terms of concepts formulated consciously and expressible in words, and neither, to competencies that are expressed only in a productive materiality. All this seems to compose the experience of the way Schwartz (2010) interrogates it, however, as emphasized by the author, it also integrates - in the competences that are its own - always something that is more or less unconscious and not directly verbalizable. In this particular respect, the concept of the ‘body-self’ becomes fundamental, as we shall have the opportunity to develop in greater detail later on.

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<sup>7</sup> In his texts, Schwartz uses the term renormalization to refer to the incessant process of re-creation of norms by workers when managing the distance between Prescribed Work and Real Work. We chose to use the term renormatization to distinguish it from the normalization process related to social regulations. This is a tenuous border between what would be the vital norms for Canguilhem (2001) and social norms for Foucault (2002), which are embedded in complex processes.

A 'third view' of the concept of experience is that it can only make its history unique for the subject to become effective, or, in Schwartz's (2010, p. 41) words, "[...] to be capitalized on original elements of knowledge [...]", if it is 'processed' in a debate of values of this subject. With this statement, the intimate relationship between activity and experience is demonstrated, since it is through the activity of the subject, which has as a characteristic the debate of norms and values, that experience can be 'achieved' in a singular, historical way and 'embodied'.

Thus, we may think that for Ergology there is no experience without activity. On the other hand, experience returns to activity to the extent that it becomes a part, in some way, of the antecedent norms of work. What 'remains' for the subject as his/her unique experience will compose the set of heterogeneities that will combine in the encounter that the activity calls: the so-called meeting of meetings (Schwartz, 2010). This dimension of meeting of meetings in any work situation is identified as the experiential part of the activity (Schwartz, 2010). Working-experiencing implies a transformation of the self.

We come to the concept of body-self, a concept of capital importance to think about experience, activity and work. Schwartz (2010), when referring to the characteristic of experience as something of the order of indefiniteness, on which it is not possible to know its limits, states that the entity that makes or experiences experience is also difficult to define. According to the author, it is not possible to specify in whom the experience is given. For him, the subject of experience is an enigmatic being whose limits are tenuous. This subject of experience uses his/her historical patrimony to make this experience a particular event. For this, one uses knowledge that is not totally clear, nor verbalizable for oneself, a kind of memory of experience. Schwartz (2010, p. 43) points out that such a subject refers to an "[...] enigma of the body".

The notion of 'body-self' is used to refer then to this entity in which paradoxical dimensions are combined. It represents a living body that is at the same time the body of a psychic and historical being (Schwartz, 2014), a body whose boundaries are difficult to discern.

### **Narrative and Experience in Benjamin: some inflections with clinics of work**

Benjamin, in dealing with the theme of experience and the transmission of experience, does so in the perspective of his intimate relationship with the concept of narrative, which seems to us to be intriguing as far as thinking about the experience of work taken as an activity is concerned. In the text 'O narrador — considerações sobre a obra de Nikolai Leskov', Benjamin begins with the intriguing statement that the figure of the narrator, however familiar it may be, would no longer be present among us in its living actuality (Benjamin 1987). According to the author, it is as if we were deprived of a faculty that seemed to us safe and inalienable: the faculty of exchanging experiences.

The perspective of the experience lowering had already been constructed by the author since his text 'Experiência e pobreza' (Benjamin, 1987), in 1933, which focuses on the analysis of qualitative change in the dimension of experience in modernity. In this writing, the concept of experience is presented as knowledge transmitted between generations (Lima & Baptista, 2013), being linked to the accumulated knowledge that was transmitted through fables, stories, parables or proverbs.

Benjamin argues that the knowledge that was previously transmitted naturally among men of different generations, constituting them as part of their history, has lost its acceptance in modernity. In modernity, man suffers to recognize this knowledge, which has been so

naturally transmitted between the generations, and is no longer able to give continuity to this experience, and can no longer communicate it or recognize the weight of knowledge in tradition (Lima & Baptista, 2013).

The reasons given for this transformation in the relationship with experience would have to do with the enormous advance of technical capacity, in the modification of productive systems, added to the poor capitalist factory reality. The greatest event, however, pointed as a transformative of the quality of experience was World War I: instead of producing stories and knowledge to be passed on by those who passed through it, it produced men muted by the trauma. Thus, the dizzying decline of this type of transmission of experience was observed.

Benjamin in the text on the Russian writer Nikolai Leskov not only explores the concept of experience, but also develops propositions about the narrative and the figure of the narrator. Contrary to what can be imagined with the title of the text, the figure of the storyteller is emphasized not as an identity position regarding a specific task, but as a skill or disposition, a way of being connected to a style of transmission of the experience.

Through the description of characteristics present in narrators throughout the history of humanity, Benjamin deals with a form of narrative construction that has as a kind of transmission vector the figure of the storyteller. The storyteller is often not the one who experienced the tale he/she conveys; nor who created it. Most of the time, the narrator narrates what was previously transmitted to him/her through another narrator, which he/she in turn heard from another narrator, and so on. The best recorded narratives are those that have passed through innumerable anonymous narrators. The narrator, thus, basically counts, and his/her task approaches the existence of the narrative.

The narrator conveys a story without putting himself/herself in the point of view of an authority on the subject, on which everything is natural and explained to him. In the same way, the narrative is constructed by a multiplicity of looks, in which each narrator who transmits it adds to the narrated his/her other look. The narrator relates to the narrative without taking it either as his/her own, or as not telling him/her any respect, for through the movement of the transmission he/she appropriates himself/herself, too, the knowledge that has reached him/her in contact with it.

Benjamin states that the figure of the storyteller becomes clear only when one recognizes the two most common groups of storytellers and their multiple interlacings. The first of them concerns the traveler or stranger, the storyteller who comes from afar and brings stories of distant places. The other group is that of the narratives of the man who has spent his entire life in his land and knows all the traditions and histories of that place: they are the narrators identified by the figure of the sedentary peasant.

However, it emphasizes that the best understanding regarding the narrative tradition can only be obtained in the interpenetration between these two basic types, giving mainly, in function of the system of production of the medieval corporation. In this productive model, knowledge was transmitted from the sedentary teachers to the migrant apprentices, who worked together in the workshops. It is important to emphasize here the fundamental importance that the work of the medieval corporations had in the construction of the narrative tradition, a crucial element for our analysis of work as experience. It was in the relationship of dialogue and transmission of experience that corporate workers – masters and apprentices – established among themselves that narrative art, as characterized by Benjamin, has developed. The shared experience among the workers was the fertile field for the development of this art which, according to Benjamin (1987), is in extinction. From this, we see the approximation between the field of work and the production of narratives as



a fruitful relationship, in which investment could open possibilities to activate the dimension of work as a collective experience.

Another interesting feature of the narrators is the practical sense that the author claims to find in many of them. This is the advice within the narrative that refers us to an important dimension to be thought of in clinics of work, referring to the transmission of knowledge derived from experience. In this direction, we highlight, above all, the questions of Yves Schwartz regarding the knowledge of experience (Schwartz, 2010), which leads us to think that what is transmitted through experience relates to the production of common problems (in the sense of referring to the collective). This would be one of the characteristics of the narrative and the dimension of the experience valued by Benjamin: to have a shared utilitarian dimension. The storyteller, therefore, is appointed as one who knows how to give advice, be they moral or practical.

Benjamin understands that in the period in which he wrote about this subject (year 1936), the act of giving and receiving advice is no longer well-regarded, even considered old-fashioned, a consideration that we can identify as something that follows relevant when we call contemporary work into question. For the author, the reason for this devaluation of the advice is linked to the increasing impossibility of the communication of experience.

Counseling is less answering a question than making a suggestion about the continuation of a story being narrated. In order to obtain this suggestion, it is necessary first to narrate the story since one is only receptive to an advice insofar as one speaks of its situation. The advice woven into the living substance of existence has a name: wisdom. The art of narration is languishing because wisdom - the epic side of truth - is in extinction (Benjamin, 1987).

The first clue of the process that will culminate in the death of the narrative is the emergence of the novel at the beginning of the modern period. What separates the novel from the epic narrative in the strict sense is that it is essentially bound to the book. The diffusion of the novel is only possible with the invention of the press. The oral tradition, patrimony of the epic poetry, has a fundamentally different nature from the one that characterizes the novel. What distinguishes the novel from all other forms of prose - fairy tales, legends and even novels - is that it neither comes from the oral tradition nor feeds it. It distinguishes itself especially from the narrative. The storyteller removes from experience what he tells: his own experience or that reported by others. And incorporate the things narrated to the experience of his listeners. The novelist is segregated (Benjamin, 1987).

Differing from the novelist, who is a segregated subject, who has only his/her individualistic experiences as source of what counts, the narrator has as a source of what narrates the experience, making no difference whether it is his/her own lived experience or of the experience that reached him/her being reported by others, being in its production always on the plane of collective experience. In the field of work, by sharing among colleagues - in the effective formation of the collective of work -, the worker has the possibility of experiencing the experiences not only as being his/her. The experiences through which their colleagues pass, when shared, become 'repertoire' for the whole collective, incorporating the larger narrative about that work, and providing the possibility of being transmitted, even by those who did not live directly specific situation.

Drawing a dialogue with Benjamin, the narrative of workers, as described by the German author, works as if the narrators continued to be produced by the very existence of the narratives that followed them. The experiences narrated by someone were incorporated by their listeners, who would then become narrators as well. In this way, the narrative

followed its interminable and continually collective course, always being retold, adding the inexhaustible increment of each of its multiple narrators.

We insist here on presenting considerations about the differences between narrative and novel, because from this argument of Benjamin, reinforced, as we shall see, by Blanchot (2010), we understand the individualization of narrative production as a mark of the transformation of experience. The passage from the predominance of the production of novels to narratives in human history corresponds to the emergence of the production of individuals, thus modifying the quality of the experience that is produced - from a collective experience to an individualized experience.

In order to help us understand the importance of differentiating between narrative and novel, in order to affirm a clinic of work interested in the collective dimension of work experience, we used the contribution of Maurice Blanchot (2010), who also addressed the issue of narrative. In his writing 'A voz narrativa', the author draws considerations about the place of the voice that narrates, being this identified as 'neutral'. At first, this identification may seem rather strange and even contrary to Benjamin's constructions of the narrator's figure. Blanchot, however, thinks the narrator not as an identity position, or a personality with special characteristics 'owner' of the narrative, but as a multiple vector of narrative construction, as Benjamin thought, helps us to reinforce this perspective. Like Benjamin, Blanchot points out that the epic narrator reproduces deeds in his narratives even though he has not directly witnessed them. This position is identified as always external to the narrative, exteriority that does not mean, to the reverse of what may seem, lack of implication with what is narrated. On the contrary, the implication is intense, but not given in the order of objective consciousness. It is as if the narration itself uses the narrator as a means. Nevertheless, this relationship is not passive, as the use of the term 'neutral' may suggest. When this 'passage' of the narrative occurs by the narrator, something *happens* to him as well. The specificity of this event becomes clearer by the surprisingly simple and clear synthesis of the concept of experience in the light of Benjamin's conceptions by Jorge Larrosa Bondía (2002):

Experience is what passes us, what happens to us, what touches us. Not what happens, or what it touches. Many things happen every day, but at the same time, almost nothing happens to us. It could be said that everything that happens is organized so that nothing happens to us. [...]. Never has so many things gone, but experience is increasingly rare. (Bondía, 2002, p. 21, our translation)<sup>8</sup>

Blanchot, like Benjamin, deal with a need for distraction in the encounter with narrative. This distraction would allow an apprehension of what does not refer to the same identity, on the contrary, being without the focus concentrated on the search for the same aspects already given beforehand, it is possible to transmit what is not particularized, the collectivizing dimension that makes the narratives continue to betold in their creative power. Here again, we refer this differentiation to the type of production of experience that can be given through work: this being as much an openness to the potency of habitation and creation of collective senses as an experience of individualization; this second, as we have already discussed, so present in the context of contemporary work.

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<sup>8</sup> "Experiência é o que nos passa, o que nos acontece, o que nos toca. Não o que se passa, não o que acontece, ou o que toca. A cada dia se passam muitas coisas, porém, ao mesmo tempo, quase nada nos acontece. Dir-se-ia que tudo o que se passa está organizado para que nada nos aconteça [...]. Nunca se passaram tantas coisas, mas a experiência é cada vez mais rara".

Returning to the conception of neutral of Blanchot (2010), its power would be exactly in recognition of this narration that starts from a non-particular place, but which encompasses a common place. This narrative voice also has the characteristic of being always different from the one who speaks it, and it is not possible to place it anywhere in the narrative. In this perspective of obligatory narrative distance, it still operates in a way never to be placed as the center of such narrative. Nor does it allow the narrative to exist as a finished whole, finalized once and for all, always leaving openings to the creation of meanings.

Another aspect still allowed by the perspective of the narrative neutral space is that the speakers themselves (who in other formats would be recognized as characters) are also in a position of not identifying with themselves. In the same way as with the narrator, the narrative occurs to them without passing through an identity consciousness. This perspective of history construction in which the narrative producers themselves are not in strict identity positions makes us think of a production of work as an experience in which workers position themselves as vectors of collective productions, from which even prior identity positions can be questioned, indicating a direction toward a critical experience in and by work.

As we see, the ideas of Blanchot and Benjamin converge in the sense of differentiating the characteristics of the type of experience implied in the production of the narrative and of the novel. The perspectives of the authors, however, differ in the moment in which Blanchot envisions the possibility of still experiencing the type of narrative voice that describes, leaving us a call to this exercise. Benjamin, on the other hand, prioritizes to draw analyses on the reasons that have led the art of narration to extinction. According to the author, the crisis that the information provokes about the narrative is even more terrifying than the novel provoked, considering that even this narrative genre was also affected by the advent of information (Benjamin, 1987). For Benjamin, information, with its super objective, verifiable, and immediate character, destroyed the narrator's authority, which was considered valid even if not controllable by experience.

One of the main characteristics of information is the imperative of being understandable in itself, and the obligation to be plausible. In a completely different way from the narrative, the way the information is offered leaves no room for anything beyond what is already explicit, delivering the narrative in a finished form, without any possibility of construction from it. Every morning we receive news from all sides of the world, but we are poor in surprising stories. The reason is that the facts come to us with explanations. Almost nothing that happens is at the service of the narrative, but at the service of information. Half the art of narrative lies in avoiding explanations. The extraordinary and the miraculous are narrated with the greatest accuracy, but the psychological context of action is not imposed on the reader. He/she is free to interpret history as he/she pleases, and with it, the narrated episode reaches a breadth that does not exist in information (Benjamin, 1987).

Information, in the manner of contemporary living (Bondía, 2002), has value only as it is entirely new; its life is limited to this restricted moment. It is demanded of it that it gives itself totally to this little moment, without loss of time, and that it is totally justified in it. To the extent that all its explanations are exhausted (without which it is not granted the status of valid information), its end is decreed. Very different is the narrative. It does not surrender. It retains its strength and after a long time is still able to develop (Benjamin, 1987). This is only possible because of its characteristic of preserving, always, the opening to the production of new senses. The mystery to which Blanchot refers (2010), is not an enigma to be unveiled,

a truth hidden in the narrative. The mystery is the very opening to the new, the curiosity that makes the narrative continue being told and conserving its charm by countless generations.

This understanding of narrative as fruitful to incessant creations leads us to affirm the power of thinking the specificity of experience that occurs in work, understanding that, just as Benjamin tells us of different possible experiences related to different ways of constructing the saying, it is possible to understand that work can have different qualities of experience.

Unlike the information, which is mechanically constructed as a rapid production, in series, without life or differentiating marks, the narrative is compared to the artisanal production, in which the effect of the work of its constructors is present in all its presentation. Benjamin (1987) argues that the narrative, which for so long thrived in an artisan medium, is itself, in a certain sense, an artisanal form of communication, using, once again, a metaphor that refers to the world of work as a privileged plan of narrative production. The narrative, according to him, is not produced in the industrial way, purified of the impurities, trying to transmit pure information on the thing narrated, like a report. On the contrary, its production is immersed in the very life of the narrators, imprinting on the narrative the mark of the narrator, like the hands of the potter in the clay of the vase (Benjamin, 1987).

The narrative, then, is compared to a manual craft, referring once more to the work in the way it was done by men, especially before the advent of capitalism. Narrative-Product of a patient dedication, that takes time, carried out with calm and becoming singular through the particular marks left by its producers. It can be compared to a fabric that is woven manually, a piece of wood that is carved or a stone lapidated gradually. It is also comparable to the productions of the slow processes that depend on natural action to reach their best form, such as aged wines and natural pearls.

Furthermore, the construction of the narrative in the manner described is not only the result of a relationship with time, but mainly of a form of production in which the whole body of the worker/craftsman/narrator is summoned and never seen as exclusively individual. The productive work typical of the craftsman counted on the coordinated involvement between soul, look and hand. In the same way, narration is not an exclusive product of the voice, but it relies on the decisive intervention of the hand, which coordinates the flows of what is said, using the gestures learned in the work experience (Benjamin, 1987). The narrator's task could thus be summarized as artisanal work on the raw material of experience to return it to the world as a product in which the marks of all narrator-craftsmen would have their place.

Our encounter with the thought of Benjamin and Blanchot encourages us to produce inflections with the perspectives of the Clinic of Activity and Ergology towards the production of a clinic of work as an experiment in its thresholds with the concept of activity. We are interested in a specific type of experience, which is produced in the housing of a collective and fertile dimension for the creation of new possibilities of living and working. This creative collective experience is closely related to the production and transmission of narratives, which are produced in the dynamics between the accumulated heritage of a tradition and the unique contributions of each narrator.

## **Final considerations**

A fruitful relation between the transmission of experience through advices, as found in Walter Benjamin's thought, and the experience of work is present, since it is easy to identify a practical sense in who works. The worker so that he/she can do well what is proposed to him/her, well beyond the requirements of the manuals, needs to exercise, at

the very least, advice to himself/herself on the best ways to reach the labor objectives. By experiencing the work activity, he/she faces difficulties and has to develop ways to bypass them, finding better ways to achieve the practical goals that are proposed. In looking at this perspective, the worker, by the characteristic of the purpose of his/her work, can also be considered a subject with a practical sense, from which advice derived from experience is produced, which is linked - as we have seen in Ergology and Clinic of Activity - with the history and patrimony of the craft.

If we think about this practical sense and the necessary sharing connected with the act of advising to which Benjamin refers, the work could thus be considered a plan of experience for the practice of narratives. Finally, the work will be more likely to develop the more fruitful the exchange of experiences among workers. Just as the best narrative is the transmission between a multiplicity of anonymous narrators over time, work is constituted and developed as successive transmissions are effected among the workers. As a narrative that must continue to be told by the successive narrators, the work continues to be done by the exchanges between those who execute it.

The change in the means of production revolutionizes not only the material production resulting from it, but all the way the experience of work has been given. The transformation in the productive forces not only produces new goods but different ways of working, of relating and subjectivizing. One of the main differences built in the modification of the means of production since the beginning of capitalist production concerns the progressive individualization and personal, not collective, responsibility for production.

It is interesting to think, however, that in the prevailing configurations in work in times of cognitive capitalism, there is a call for workers to communicate abundantly and to form teams. In this sense, it would be possible to say that many changes are produced in work. The quality of these exchanges, however, deserves attention from the perspective of the narratives to which Benjamin (1987) refers. The narrative, as we are seeing, concerns the development of a common history, made of singular contributions, of alternatives to questions that do not concern individuals. The dimension of the communication convened in contemporary work, thus, differs from narrative production, in that it is situated in an exchange between individuals who take responsibility for work in a personal way, incited to achieve 'professional success' through strategies that enhance the individuals, in which intense communication between peers can also be included.

We may think that, in the contemporary world, an ever-increasing number of demands are always being placed, and the workers are encouraged to 'experience' as many as possible. This operation reminds us of the incitement of Immaterial Work so that workers are always involved in a greater number of tasks and subjects in order to perform an extremely dynamic performance in their work, and they are given many experiences.

These experiences for more intense they may seem at the time are seldom configured as effective experiences in the sense pointed out by Benjamin. This is a highly relevant dimension within the clinical problems of contemporary work.

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