

## At the turn of the century: the phantom walks around Rio de Janeiro City<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT:** The nineteenth century was marked as an important time in the development of the city of Rio de Janeiro, since the relevant historical events for the establishment of the idea of modernity, characterized by the *Belle époque*. Within this whirlwind of novelties, the growth of journals followed the city progress. In this work, we seek to make some considerations about the representations of the city in literary chronicles, with emphasis on the representation of social life in the *Belle époque* period, focusing on the chronicles of the newspaper named – The phantom (1902). We evidenced, in the periodical, how much it brought to its pages, the repertoire of modernity, with the rise of the city from different aspects, such as: daily life, leisure, the advent of modern equipment and how these changes were captured in the literature, considering that the chronicle, according to Cândido (1992), is a genre related to everyday life, constituting a kind of urban everyday writing. It is a documentary research combined with the contribution of a theoretical bibliography, in which we carried out either a survey and a study of the chronicles of the newspaper – *The Phantom*, from the year 1902, first edition, as this is the only one available in the newspaper library of the National Library Foundation. Our theoretical contribution was based on Berman (1986), Sennet (1988), Foucault (1987), Anderson (2008), among other critical texts on journalism in *Belle époque* Brazil. This work is part of the project “Urban Cartographies: centers and margins”, financed by a Research Productivity Scholarship from CNPq – National Council for Scientific and Technological Development.

**KEYWORDS:** The Phantom; city; modernity; chronic.

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### I. INTRODUCTION

The 20th century dawn was marked by the sign of modernity<sup>6</sup> that it had already been forged in previous centuries, being well represented by the image of the whirlwind, strength and emergence of novelty, as it infiltrated the social imagination as attested by Marshall Berman:

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<sup>6</sup> From the origin of the word “modern”, it is possible to understand the meaning that was incorporated to it in the 19th and 20th centuries. The term *Modernus* is derived from the Latin term “modus” (recently, nowadays) and “hodiernus” or “hodie” (today), meaning “what is on the order of the day, at the present time”. (NASCIMENTO, 2011, p. 29).

Modern life turmoil has been fueled by many sources: major discoveries in the physical sciences, with our changing image of the universe and our place in it; the industrialization of production, which transforms scientific knowledge into technology, creates new human environments and destroys old ones, speeds up the pace of life itself, generates new forms of corporate power and class struggle; huge population explosion. (BERMAN, 1986, p. 25).

The 19th century was called by François Dosse (2003) as the "the history century", having been an important milestone in the knowledge field, thus inaugurating a period centered on knowledge production, in which it was taken under a temporal perspective. It was in the midst of this modernity that the industrial landscape, trams, railways, the city and the press developed themselves.

In the wake of nineteenth-century capitalism, distinctions were drawn between the public and private areas, with bourgeois society having established itself as a public sphere and the flourishing of the most varied periodicals, with the circulation of information and ideas that brought a discursive representation of a civilizing project at their core (SENNETT, 1999) for the formation of a modern nation. It is noteworthy that the periodical press has a relevant role in the formation of modern society, helping, greatly in the construction of the nation as an 'imagined community', as postulated by Benedict Anderson, as it constitutes "one of the first forms of capitalist enterprise, the publishing sector had to pursue the relentless search for the market, as befits capitalism." (ANDERSON, 2008, p. 72).

In Rio de Janeiro, several periodicals for the most different audiences proliferated, including the newspaper – The phantom (1902). The current study comprises the time frame of only one issue, since the collection of the National Library's Hemeroteca contains only one copy, namely: issue number one. However, we find the newspaper referenced by Estephanie Regina O. da Silva, in her text - Forever Club of the Democraticos. The author states that The Phantom newspaper was the official organ of the Club. (SILVA, 2017, p. 283). In light of this statement, we raised the possibility that the periodical studied is homonymous with this one in analysis, since the Club of the Democraticos was also a carnival club and we did not find any reference to this club in the analyzed issue. In addition, we find other newspapers with the same name Phantom in Ceará state and in Portugal, in Ponte do Lima<sup>7</sup>.

Therefore, we emphasize that it is not known, exactly, if other issues of the newspaper The Phantom circulated, but, dialoguing with Bloch, we understand that "where calculating is impossible, it is necessary to suggest" (BLOCH, 2001, p. 55), and, based on this postulate, our work was centered on the only issue that is available in the newspaper of the National Library Foundation.

## II. BETWEEN TEXTS AND PHANTASMAGORIAS

The 19th century was marked by the sign of modernity, which had been forged since the previous century. Urban life gained a fast pace and the publishing industry followed the steps of social life. Thus, literature, culture and the press created strong links within the journalistic and urban scenario:

The passage from the 19th to the 20th century can be considered the period par excellence of the great historical and social transformations in which the Enlightenment matrix was reaffirmed and expanded. Such transformations implied changes in all dimensions of human life, from material aspects (food production, consumer goods, cultural goods, growth of cities) to social and subjective aspects, the need for speed and punctuality, the magic of electric light and the emergence of a new class – the working class – with a way of life determined by industry. Despite all these transformations, this period was also punctuated by contradictions: on one hand, the hegemony of bourgeois power, on the other, the exhibition of the spectacle of misery and social scourges. (NASCIMENTO, 2011, p. 30).

From this perspective, journalistic activity as a form of "invention of everyday life" contributed to the creation of an image of society and nation, making it possible to perceive, according to Benedict Anderson, an interaction between a mode of production (capitalism), a technology communication (the press) and human linguistic diversity. (ANDERSON, 2008, p. 78):

If the development of the press as a commodity is the key to creating entirely new ideas about simultaneity, we are simply still at the point where "horizontal-secular-transtemporal" communities become possible for the nation became so popular within this type of community? [...] founded reasons that the main one was capitalism. (ANDERSON, 2008, p. 71)

With the development of capitalism, the press was able to articulate through commercial exchanges that were increasingly present in society, as Anderson postulated (ANDERSON, 2008, p. 72), "being one of the first forms of capitalist enterprise, the publishing sector had to pursue the relentless search for the market, as is proper to capitalism." In the wake of the development of editorial capitalism, many periodicals began to

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<sup>7</sup> The newspaper is available for research at: <https://pesquisa-arquivo.cm-pontedelima.pt/viewer?id=983956&FileID=250825>. Accessed on: June 20, 2021.

circulate and among the many niches in this market and, thus, also the press dedicated to theater and entertainment, as was the case with the newspaper -The Phantom.

The Phantom was published fortnightly, and it was characterized as a critical and satirical periodical, which addresses political issues and the daily life of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in texts and cartoons drawn by director A. Raposo and artist Ricardo Casanova. A notable feature is in addition to the illustrations present in the cartoons, as an illustration of our ghost was added at the bottom of the newspaper. The periodical has a more modern content, using titles with diversified and highlighted fonts, as well as having several advertisements and advertisements between the cartoons and the texts.

In 1892, the first periodical in Ponta Lima was created in Portugal, with the same title as “The Phantom” that we are analyzing. Under Alfredo Mâncio’s authorship, being the owner and illustrator of the periodical, in addition, the newspaper had a humorous content having as main subjects the place, Ponte de Lima and Portugal as well.

The word “Ghost” (*phantom*) is derived from the Greek *Phantafomai*, which is the same as “I imagine”, it is strictly connected with the dream world and the realization of the fantastic. The periodical introduces us to Pierrot's ghost, a specter that through fantasy communicates the soul or, in this case, with the reader, provided with a single objective, that is, to scare people away with criticism and satire.

**Picture 1** – Journal cover and information pages



**Source:** <http://memoria.bn.br/DocReader/DocReader.aspx?bib=738662&pagfis=1>

In its year of release, 1902, important events took place, such as: the 1st Battle of Flowers promoted by Rio de Janeiro and the recording of the first maxixe rhythm songs by Edison House. The Battle of Flowers was a traditional event of Nice in France, since the year 1876 and in Rio de Janeiro, under the influence of the *Belle époque*, Francisco Pereira Passos, in the beginning of 1903 promoted the first Battle of Flowers in the city, having been a success and receiving praise and media attention.

it was a party with an all-personal stamp of refined beauty and above all of great joy, of extraordinary sympathy, in which the good people of Rio de Janeiro, eager for pleasure and parties, cheered at every step, clapped their hands, shouted among the leafless roses and everyone's laughter. (*Gazette News*, 16 Aug. 1903, p. 1).

Another important event was the recording of the first Maxixe by the Edison house and it was, according to José Ramos Tinhorão's statement, a “rogue and exaggerated way of dancing the polka-tango, which would eventually give rise to the maxixe rhythm as an autonomous musical genre”. As much as it was recorded this year, the genre had been developing since 1870, one proof is the citation of the genre in a note in Brazil's Newspaper on February 13, 1899, “To say that Maxixe rhythm did miracles would be too emphatic; man multiplied like a microbe...” (Brazil's Newspaper, 1899, p. 2).

Another important point to emphasize is the value and functionality of advertisements in journals. Newspapers as newborns began to be part of popular daily life. Publicity and advertising gained great prominence in newspapers, being, therefore, abundant and varied in the pages of periodicals and also represented a form of financing for the editions, considering that in Brazil at the time, we did not have a large readership.

The newspaper became a tool for the expansion of commerce, as there was a deep relationship between newspapers and houses of commerce, uniting both interests, namely: newspapers received more readers and sponsorship, while houses of commerce expanded their business. An example to be mentioned is the advertisement for Paris House, published in the newspaper *The Phantom*, as it draws attention due to its rhymed aesthetics, very characteristic at that time. In addition to this advertisement, on the penultimate page of the periodical you can find several advertisements from other businesses such as: weapons workshop, house painter, typographic services, among other advertisements that can be seen on the pages of the newspaper.

It is noteworthy that advertising in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was already being considered the biggest reservoir of resources for the press, giving recognition to successful periodicals, accompanied by the extinction of others, because the more famous the periodical was, the more advertisements it would have. According to Nunes (2012, p. 309), "The existence period of the periodical depended, in part, on the number of advertisers it had and their loyalty to the vehicle in which its establishment was known", it is also important to remember that the periodical would have to use a language and characteristics that would attract readers, such characteristics were considered essential by the press.

Furthermore, Olavo Bilac, in a chronicle written about the model of journalism in Brazil, exposes that the press cannot avoid becoming an industrial product in a century of great impetus to industrialization, which will shape the face of periodicals as vehicles of mass information. It should be noted that at that time the most varied types of advertising were no longer refused, not even those of healers, mystics and wizards. Within the arrival of the advertisements, it could be seen that Brazil was undergoing a transformation, as well as the press, and these changes were being evident in the advertisements used by the media industry.

Focusing on another important reference in the studied periodical – the origin of the newspaper's narrator-character, the ghost of Pierrot. Pierrot is one of the characters in the *Commedia dell'Arte*, a popular theater that emerged in the 15th century in Italy and was characterized by being an arena that always had the same characters, but the actors (always wearing masks) acted improvised performances. Pierrot was a sad clown and usually on his mask there was a drop, representing the crying and his unhappiness. In the periodical – The Phantom, Pierrot still maintains his dislike for life and the sentimental gloomy side.

*Commedia dell'Arte* had a great contribution to European culture, as this popular theater, in addition to enabling the recognition of actors as professionals, ensuring an occupation within the theater and a livelihood option, was also a legacy for other arts that made use of its famous images and symbols, such as the theater, the circus and even the carnival, which was celebrated at a specific time in the year, for being considered profane to religion and capable of tarnishing the seriousness of society. In addition, the existence of *Commedia dell'Arte* gave freedom to Carnival by extending its commemorative date to the entire year.

And then the *Commedia dell'Arte* figures circulate in the form of puppets, theatrical, in the circus (clowns forming pairs who resemble the performance of the smart – Brighella and the fool – Harlequin becoming a "fun clown" – Harlequin and the "sad clown" – Pierrot. However, the space in which such masks were most distinguished was in the carnival, that, despite the total irruption of the moorings, became, in the beginning of the 20th century, domesticated [...] (POSTAL, 2011, p. 107).

Picture 2 – The Phantom Newspaper, n. 1, p. 4, 1902.



Source: <http://memoria.bn.br/DocReader/DocReader.aspx?bib=738662&pagfis=4>

Entering the newspaper's writing structure, among advertisements and claims, there are texts that can be classified as chronicles, because, as Antônio Candido points out, the chronicle is a text with popular language, perfect for a newspaper with a satirical and humorous nature, characterized by being an “ephemeral publication which is bought one day and the next day is used to wrap a pair of shoes...” (CANDIDO, 1992, p. 17).

On page 6 of the periodical, there is a chronicle entitled “Good deal”, it is initially a clipping of an article from Brazil’s Newspaper that presents the lack of women in South Africa, based on this information the author creates a small poem with a humorous nature, in which he plays with the idea that lovers and women who do wrong should get in touch with Transvaal (a region located in the North East of South Africa).

Regarding the Journal’s humorous trait, first, the French influence (airs of the *Belle époque*) on the Rio (carioca) vocabulary is remarkable, as pointed out by Elias Thomé Saliba, in his book *Raízes do Riso* (Roots of laughing). Such influence can be found in – *The Phantom*, in addition to the word *pierrot*, the very idea of clown, reveler, are words and concepts from a French vein.

Camilo Castelo Branco made an effort to find Portuguese peculiarities in the humorous field. His attempt was, of course, frustrated, but he continued trying to identify in the language that he only knew words equivalent to the “spirit” or the “spirited vein” of the French. And he managed to list eighteen surprising words: *brooding, grimacing, harlequin, clown, jackhammer, effeminate, pimp, fool, juggler, goliard, buffoon, farsist, reveler, vegete, jester, pierrot, mono and joker* (SALIBA, 2002, p. 37. (Author's Highlights).

Creating a bridge between Newspaper and humor, the weekly magazines provided the opportunity for the creation of a generous humor production, for at the end of the 19th century, there had been a considerable increase in the number of periodicals circulating in the city. Since *The Phantom* dates back to 1902, it takes part in this era of creation and animation with content conveyed through cartoons and caricatures.

Just as they are in *The Phantom*, cartoons became quite present from the second half of the 19th century onwards, expressing the opinions of cartoonists and periodicals on matters of public knowledge or related to politics, in a satirical and humorous way. However, the cartoon from that time differs from the one we know today: “a unique product, the result of a progressive maturation of form and content, whose trait is critically linked to the problems of the society in which it operates” (TEIXEIRA, 2001, p. 1).

In order to understand the first steps of cartoons in the 19th century, we must first comprehend that they, during the Monarchy, had characteristics such as: the plurality of paintings and abundant texts. Such features were the same as a comic book presented. Due to this “quadrinization” of the cartoon, according to Teixeira (2001, p. 12), the scarce literate strata of the population started to assimilate the language only expressed in text, which demonstrated a culture little familiarized with discourses articulated by images.

The cartoons in the Monarchy, in addition to having the characteristics of a comic book, developed a critical mood due to opposition to imperial policy. In 1876, Ângelo Agostini launched the *Revista Ilustrada* (Illustrated Magazine), and as a result there was an expansion of the notoriety of graphic humor, “the Magazine was the first publication in South America to have a circulation of more than four thousand copies.” (PARNAIBA; GOBBI, 2014, p. 14-15). Years later, in 1891, *Illustrated Magazine* stopped circulating, but it had a memorable participation in the abolitionist campaign. Ângelo Agostini was a significant representative of the cartoons despite being considered closer to the language of comics because they used subtitles. His cartoons featured strong political intervention and critical observations of everyday events, “his cartoons confirm, like no other in this period, that its function is not primarily to make people laugh, but to produce reflection” (TEIXEIRA, 2001, p. 14), having a great importance in a society that lacked channels of expression and representation.

**Picture 3** – The *Phantom Newspaper*, n. 1, p. 9, 1902.



**Source:** <http://memoria.bn.br/DocReader/DocReader.aspx?bib=738662&pagfis=9>

Paraguayan Andrés Guevara was another cartoonist who had great contribution to the development of the cartoon in Brazil. During the Old Republic there was a lack of political content leading to the loss of aggressiveness in the cartoon, the cartoonist brought with him this lost confrontation and definitively reinforces the cartoon as a form of political intervention. Later in the Estado Novo (New State), Guevara transforms the cartoon into form and content due to its original lines: “It produces a line in tune with modern aesthetic trends such as cubism, creates textures, halftones, volumes, thicknesses, and introduces geometry into central composition of characters.” (TEIXEIRA, 2001, p. 44).

Thus, the cartoonist separated the text as the only source of meaning and the image is no longer the support for the text but it starts to have its own meaning, generating countless forms of expressions that were previously limited, indicating the maturation of the cartoon and making it the most modern, along with the maturing of society.

As the years progressed and cartoons matured, we can understand it as an instrument of political intervention and composed with critical representation of a fact, expressed through images – and possibly

accompanied by text – in a given social context. It is noted, then, that cartoons are powerful vehicles of communication and by studying them we can have more knowledge about societies and important events of a given time.

Amidst the whirlwind of periodicals born at the beginning of the 20th century, the *Phantom* perfectly serves to characterize the newspapers of the time, marked by a satirical humor, chronicle-style language and full of advertisements, in addition, it also shows the reality of having many periodicals circulating in the city, some didn't last on newsstands and that's what happened to the *Phantom*, it started and ended in its first edition, leaving Pierrot's sorrows behind.

### III. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Marked by a whirlwind of newness, the end of the 19th century was an important time for urban, cultural and technological evolution. In this prism, the search and need for information also grew exponentially, thus flourishing several newspapers of all kinds, in order to meet the demand for communication.

Hence, periodicals from the end of the 19th century/beginning of the 20th century can be recognized as the first vehicles of information and nation constitution, as Benedict Anderson (2008) expressed well, and even though the periodical studied used laughter and mask as well, even so, it demonstrated elements of the civilizing process in vogue at the time, when, for example, it dealt with the social route, the theater, as well as the advertisements which revealed the scientific discourse and behavioral models.

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