

Flâneur from South Moravia

An Appendix to ESPES 10(2)

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The following text is inspired by a special issue of the journal ESPES vol. 10, no. 2 (2021) entitled *Everyday Aesthetics: European Perspectives* and returns to the theme of *flânerie*. It focuses on the Czech environment and, after a brief outline of the artistic *flâneurism* associated mainly with Prague, it moves on to the specific phenomenon of the Brno *štatl* and *štatlaři*, which are to some extent related to *flâneurism*. The *štatl* community followed the tradition of the *plotna*, a more closed group of socially weaker inhabitants of the city in the first half of the twentieth century, whose features included a special dialect – *hantec*. *Štatlaři* recruited more from the milieu of the educated people, bohemians, and artists, adopted, and transformed. The aim of the study is to show which characteristics *flâneurism* and “*štatlař-ism*” have in common and in what ways they differ. Furthermore, we will address the question of how knowledge of the phenomenon of *štatlaři* can influence the perception of flâneurs when they are walking around the city of Brno. | *Keywords: Flâneur, Flânerie, Brno, Štatlař, Everyday Life, Mindfulness*

1. Introduction

In the cubicle of the ladies' toilets in the Brno House of Art, one can find the inscription “The future will never come, there is only the present moment.”

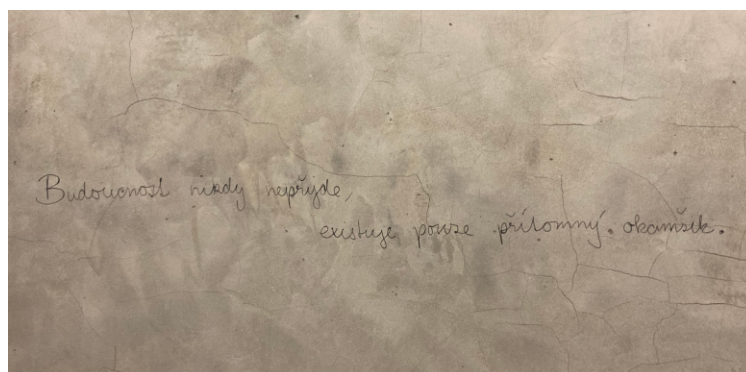


Figure 1. *The future will never come, there is only the present moment.*
Photo by the author.

This message resonated with me much more than the current exhibition, which is conceived as a tribute to the artist and director Ester Krumbachová, who was one of the representatives of the so-called Czech film new wave in the 1960s. Ester was a bohemian, her lifelong artistic and personal theme was the relationship between a man and a woman, but her constant partner was her numerous pack of cats, who remained faithful to her until her relatively early death, which was probably influenced by her favourite cure for depression – alcohol. Krumbachová was born in Brno, and it now pays homage to her – institutionally, ordinarily, provincially and boringly. That is, in exactly the way that Krumbachová opposed. One could say: “It’s a good thing she didn’t live to see the exhibition.” It is therefore astonishing that there has, in this very city that is “always the second one”, existed since the post-war years a specific group of people who had many common features with Baudelaire’s *flâneurs*.

The following text aims to demonstrate the transformation of the *flânerie* in the period from the beginning of the 20th century to the present with example of a specific place – the city of Brno, which is characterised by certain specifics given by its historical, social, and cultural tradition. In mapping the Brno terrain, I drew on Jana Nosková’s study *Brněnský štatl. Mezi mýtem, subkulturou, zdrojem identity a „obchodní značkou“?* (2009),¹ which served as a signpost and source of further literature. Several examples from the work of Brno poets serve as evidence of the artistic treatment of *flâneurism*, but it should be noted that this study is not primarily concerned with literary works, but with aesthetic phenomena.

The transformation of *flâneurism*, the view of it and the possibility/necessity of its redefinition are highlighted by several texts recently published in a special issue of *ESPES* vol. 10, no. 2 (2021) entitled *Everyday Aesthetics: European Perspectives*. In his study *The Dialectic of Presence and Interpretation in Everyday Aesthetics: Applying Heidegger and Gumbrecht to a Walk in One’s Neighborhood* (2021), Thomas Leddy takes Heidegger’s notion of being and Gumbrecht’s adoration of athletic performance and redefines the contemporary *flâneur*, who may no longer be Poe’s man of the crowd or Benjamin’s visitor to lighted passages. Leddy’s contribution to the investigation of the culture of presence and the culture of meaning, as will be shown later, became the starting point for comparing and rethinking the phenomena of the *flâneur*, and the *štatlař*.

2. *Flâneur* arrives on the scene

Let us briefly recall the basic characteristics of the *flâneur*. In short, he is a stroller, somebody who is walking. Somebody who wanders aimlessly through the city. And observes. And talks with people. He can be an artist gathering an inspiration. Or he may not. The *flâneur* is the connoisseur of the street. He first began as a literary figure in the 1840s and since then has been theorized on by a number of thinkers across economic, philosophical, cultural and historical fields who each had their own unique view on the concept. It’s been used as a tool over the years to help better understand urban life, modernity, individuality, and capitalism.

¹ In English: The “štatl” of Brno. Between the myth, subculture, identity source and ‘trademark’? (Nosková, 2009, p. 359).

In 1840, Edgar Allen Poe published a short story called *The Man of the Crowd* (1966). It's a tale told by a narrator who sits in a café perceptively people-watching, almost as if reading the soul of each person that passes by. A strange older man walks by that immediately grabs the attention of the narrator, who follows him through the city. The man leads the narrator through the streets of London, aimlessly strolling all night through bazaars and shops, buying nothing and merely observing. The next morning, exhausted and confused by the old man's behaviours, the narrator stands directly in the path of the old man in an attempt to capture his attention. But the old man doesn't notice and walks right on past as if the narrator weren't even there.

In this story, the term *flâneur* is never mentioned by Poe, but it did inspire Charles Baudelaire, his translator, to discuss the concept in his text called *The Painter of Modern Life* (1845). For Baudelaire the *flâneur* is not a mere idler (like for many others), he is a gentleman stroller of city streets. Baudelaire held the *flâneur* in high esteem (see Baudelaire, 2010, pp. 15–26).

And the third important name in the field of the history of the *flânerie* is Walter Benjamin, a philosopher and author of the unfinished *Arcades Project* (1929) who adopted the concept of the *flâneur* spectator from Baudelaire. He saw the *flâneur* as an amateur detective/journalist that worked to investigate the city with his highly astute observations. The street signs were his living room paintings and the newsstands were his library. Benjamin developed the concept of *flânerie* as this unique form of urban investigation. The concept of an arcade is important to *flânerie* because the covered shopping street allows for wandering and window browsing in all weathers and illuminates the night, thus extending the day.

3. *Flânerie* in Czech literature

Although two of the three main authors associated with *flâneurism* were not from France, the phenomenon is generally associated with Paris and the 19th century. As we shall see below, this geographical and temporal limitation is highly misleading. Indeed, the characterization of *flâneur* in the strictest sense does not impose such limits. As the German bohemian Nora Schmidt shows in her extensive monograph *Flanerie in der tschechischen Literatur: Flaneure, Prager Spaziergänger und flanierende Schreibweisen von Jan Neruda bis Michal Ajvaz* (2017), *flâneurism* appears in Czech literature as early as the beginning of the second half of the 19th century. Schmidt's thesis focuses on the time span between the mid-19th century and the present day and devotes itself to literary reflection primarily on literary reflection on the phenomenon that is being studied. Not only literature, but also Czech visual art associated with *flâneurism* is examined by the American scholar Karla Huebner in her study *Prague Flânerie from Neruda to Nezval* (2014), which is part of the collective monograph *The Flâneur Abroad: Historical and International Perspectives*. This publication contains chapters that deal with *flânerie* outside Paris, including London, Madrid, Ireland, and St Petersburg in addition to Prague. Huebner, while discussing the shorter time period of Czech *flâneurism* than Schmidt (Nezval died 1958), does not forget to mention that the first literary

flâneur was Comenius (1592-1670) and his allegory *The Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart* (1623).

She also shows that Prague in the *fin de siècle* period represented for German writers (Meyrink, Kafka, Kisch) a kind of personified femme fatale associated with magic, mysticism, and mystery. Especially alluring were the corners of the Jewish town in the period before the large-scale redevelopment, which is, for example, the subject of the novel *Lord Mord* by Miloš Urban (2008). It was here that the mysterious golem, a character in Meyrink's most famous novel, walked, personifying the portents of misfortune and tragic events. Czech writers, on the other hand, did not share this image of Prague because it was not patriotic enough. However, they knew Paris (some of them from their own experience), they had read Baudelaire and Guillaume Apollinaire dedicated his novel *Le passant de Prague* (*The Prague Pedestrian*, in English translated as *The Wandering Jew*, see Apollinaire, 1991) to the Czech capital, where a French narrator describes his chance encounter with a mythical wandering Jew Isaac Laquedem (an old mediaeval legend based on a biblical story, see Matthew 16:28) during a visit to Prague. In the poem *Zone*, Apollinaire describes Prague where (in contrast to fast-moving Paris):

“Les aiguilles de l’horloge du quartier juif vont à rebours
Et tu recules aussi dans ta vie lentement.”
 (“The hands on the clock in the Jewish Quarter run backwards /
And you too go backwards in your life slowly.”)
(Apollinaire, 2001, p. 42, English transl. see Huebner, 2014, p. 288)

As Huebner says: “Prague, like Paris, had plenty of modern office workers, but Apollinaire’s romanticising vision would ensorcel both the Czech avant-gardists and the French Surrealists. Czech writers embraced *Zone*, which in Karel Čapek’s brilliant translation had an enormous impact on both their style and content” (2014, p. 288). And Alfred Thomas posits:

But it is impossible to underestimate the importance of Apollinaire’s story in re-inventing Prague as a space of pleasure and hedonism rather than of ghosts and golems. It would be no exaggeration to claim that Apollinaire “rewrote” Prague for the Czech avant-garde. The artistic movement known as Poetism heralded a completely new and hedonistic response to everyday life, and this sense of *joie de vivre* transformed Prague from the gloomy, introspective habitat of the traditional artist into the playground of the avant-garde. (Thomas, 2010, p. 115)

As a true manifesto of Czech *flânerie*, however, can be regarded Vítězslav Nezval’s prosaic poem *Pražský chodec* (1938, trans. as *Prague Walker* or *Prague Flâneur*), a poem openly claiming the legacy of Apollinaire and Breton. Nezval describes a city in which he is new and which he is getting to know through numerous walks, a *flâneur* as curious as a small child discovering unknown places. Let us recall that Baudelaire considers curiosity as the starting point of the genius of Constantine Guy, who for him is the ideal representative of the *flâneur-artist* (see Baudelaire, 2010, p. 19).

Right in the introduction Nezval explains what being a pedestrian means to him:

One realizes what is to be a *flâneur* as soon as fate pins one to a chair. A chair is the opposite of a throne. It is a workbench. And life flies by. [...] It is because life flies by that the role of the *flâneur* seems so ideal. When we walk, and mainly when we walk aimlessly about the town, the subtle images of our desires, which impose themselves on our footsteps, cause us to cease seeing the end of the walk, the other side. (Všetečka and Nezval, 2011)²

The 1981 edition is accompanied by photographs by Josef Sudek. Sudek, together with painters Toyen and Jindřich Štýrský are among the *flâneurs* who express themselves in ways other than literature. Both Schmidt and Huebner devote themselves almost exclusively to authors associated with Prague. Huebner only mentions, without further information, the Brno poet Ivan Blatný (2014, p. 291), but it is he, whose work which will be discussed below, who would stand up boldly in comparison with the far better known and more respected Vítězslav Nezval (who was Blatný's close friend). Unfortunately, due to the political developments in post-war Czechoslovakia and the author's mental illness, Blatný's work did not receive greater recognition until after his death in England in 1990, where he went into exile in 1948 and spent more than forty years in a psychiatric hospital. The rediscovery of Blatný was made possible by the Brno writer, publisher and cultural organiser Martin Reiner, who published a biography of Blatný under the title *Básník. Román o Ivanu Blatném* (*The Poet. A Novel about Ivan Blatný*, 2014).

Blatný's poem *Melancholické procházky* (*Melancholy Walks*, 1941) is a meditative pilgrimage through a semi-empty city, across the city districts and along the rivers Svatka and Svitava. In one passage, he invites his friend to visit and plans where they will go together:

Or you can see my Brno on a sunny day,
that slowly fades and grows silent. Let's go
to the alder coves beneath castles and forests,
till the whole country is like a bowl of light.
(Blatný, 1990 p. 23, English translation by Lenka Lee)³

This passage was not chosen at random, for the poet invites a companion (a friend) to follow him on his wanderings.⁴ Nezval worked in the same way, speaking directly to the readers in *Pražský chodec* (1981, p. 17); the *flânerie* here 'takes place' in the presence of two people. For Baudelaire, *flânerie* is a solitary activity, the *flâneur's* calling is to blend in with the crowd, to remain hidden, to let oneself drift, to become an incognito observer: "The crowd is his

² Czech original: "Co je to býti chodcem, uvědomuje si člověk, jakmile je osudně připoután k židli. Tato židle je opakem trůnu, je to pracovní verpánek – a život prchá. Úloha chodce se zdá býti snad proto tak ideální, poněvadž život prchá. Když jdeme – a hlavně když jdeme po cestě bez cíle –, nepatrné obrazy naší touhy, jež se nám vtírají do kroku, působí, že přestáváme vidět její konec – její opak." (Nezval, 1981, pp. 12, 56)

³ Czech original:
Anebo uvidíš mé Brno v slunný den,
jenž zvolna zhasíná a tichne. Zajdeme si
k olšovým zátokám pod hrady a lesy,
až bude celý kraj jak místa ozářen.
(Blatný, 1990 p. 23,)

⁴ Blatný was not the only *flâneur-poet* describing walks in Brno. We can mention also Jan Skácel, Jaroslav Seifert, Oldřich Mikulášek and Leoš Janáček's poems.

domain, just as the air is the birds, and water that of the fish. His passion and his profession is to merge with the crowd” (Baudelaire, 2010, p. 22).

In contrast, Czech authors admit the presence of a companion. This is noted both by Nora Smidt and Karla Huebner, who says:

[...] *flânerie* is usually considered a solitary practice, but the Prague writers provide evidence that to some extent it could be practiced with a friend or lover. While it may be that Kafka’s walks with friends, or the companionate walks described by Karásek or Steiner-Prag, were more other-focused than strictly *flâneurial* – presumably the walkers’ attention was often on each other rather than on their surroundings – Leppin’s description of Severin⁵ teaching Zdenka multi-sensory *flâneurial* techniques is quite striking – especially given that Leppin’s portrayal of women typically focuses on their sexuality. The possibility of *flânerie à deux* should not be dismissed, especially when we consider the fact that both French and Czech Surrealists often wandered in pairs. (Huebner, 2014, p. 292)

In this context, let us recall again E. A. Poe’s *The Man of the Crowd* (1966 pp. 705–710), in which one *flâneur* – narrator – stalks another one – a man with a distinctive devilish expression on his face – chasing him incognito the whole night and next day in the city centre of London. We mentioned that Nezval addresses the reader in *Prague Walker*, he even confides in him about his problems (financial insecurity). Georges Perec in his synthetic novel *La Vie, Mode D’emploi: Romans* (Perec, 1987) draws the reader into his demonic play and leads him obediently like a puppet up and down all the floors of an apartment house in the 11 Rue Simon-Crubellier. Perec’s reader is turned into a *flâneur* of the text. His tediously detailed descriptions of the furnishings of every room in the house and the fates of its inhabitants invite us to skip and skip long passages, only, as Tester summarises:

A fleeting satisfaction is quickly overwhelmed by dissatisfaction caused by the possibility that perhaps something clearer or even better can be found with the next tenant, in the next apartment. And so, the reader as *flâneur* has to get up onto weary legs and start going up and down the stairs once again. (Tester, 1994, p. 19)

4. *Flâneur* from South Moravia

The basic points of the phenomenon of Prague’s *flâneurism* are therefore comparable to these of other European cities. In this chapter, I would like to present its local version, with specific cultural and social features, some of which it shares with *flâneurism*. Let’s start with the etymology of the terms *štatl* and *štatlař*.⁶ The word *štatl* comes from the German die Stadt and *štatlař*

⁵ Paul Leppin’s novel *Severin’s Gang in die Finsternis. Ein Prager Gespensterroman* (München 1914) describes the ravages of a neo-romantic dreamer who wanders through the darkness of the night city and the darkness of his own soul. Severin meets many women, mostly courtesans, the exception being Zdenka, who becomes his companion on his feverish wanderings.

⁶ Although the following part of the paper is devoted to the etymology of dialectal terms, I also present the translation given by the dictionary of the Brno dialect called *Velký slovník hantecu* (*Great Dictionary of Hantec*, 2013) by Dvorník and Kopriva: *štatl* – město (“town”, p. 113) / *štatlař* – městský flákač (“city bum” p. 113) / *plotna* – skupina, parta, společnost brněnských individuí (“group, mob, society of Brno individuals”, p. 87) / *hancec* – brněnská hantýrka, řeč, mluva (“Brno slang, speech, language”, p. 38). Here follows the appropriate pronunciation: *štatl* [shtah-tl]; *štatlař* [shtah-tlahrzh]; *plotna* [plot-nah]; *hantec* [han-tets].

is an inhabitant of *štatl*. Jana Nosková (2009, p. 359) explains: “The term *štatl* can signify the city of Brno itself, or the city centre, but also a certain type of subculture and, in connection with the term *štatlaři*, the specific group of the inhabitants of Brno.” This specific group of people was active in the city of Brno from the 1950s to the 1970s, and its legacy was later taken up by artists (mainly theatre artists) who rediscovered it and breathed a second life into it, which, however, was not spared substantial changes in the name of artistic licence.

Historically, the phenomenon of *štatl* evolved from another specific social group that was active in Brno in the first half of the 20th century, called *plotna* after the German or Viennese *die Platte* (see below *Plattenbrüder*). *Plotna* was a group of people living on the fringes of society, both in the social and local sense – the best known and most dangerous *plotna* groups came from the peripheral Brno districts of Husovice and Židenice. The members of the *plotna* were mostly recruited from the ranks of workers, often working only as seasonal employees, or not working at all. Other typical occupations included taxi drivers, waiters, many of them had problems with the law, and thefts, fights, domestic violence, and rioting were common criminal acts. Their community can be compared to the Parisian Les Apaches (sometimes also called Mohicans – see Dumas’ novel *Les Mohicans de Paris*), the Viennese Plattenbrüder and Wiener Strizzi or the Prague Pepíci (Pepík is a diminutive of the Czech name Josef). *Plotna*, as a particular subculture was characterised by dress (eccentric), behaviour (sovereign, eccentric, sometimes violent, loud), and a specific language called *hantec* (Germ. *hantieren* means *to negotiate*). That specific language was a kind of argot, a secret language of the insiders, which mixed Czech, Viennese German (Brno was until the end of the Second World War a city with a large German-speaking population), local slang of Brno, Moravian dialects, and some words newly created. Just to give some examples: *augle* – the eyes (from Germ. *Augen*), *fořt* – nice young man (from Germ. *Förster* – a hunter), *pingvín* – the waiter (from French *pingouin* – a penguin, allusion to the traditional black and white clothing of waiters), and the emblematic noun *šalina* – tram, probably derived from the German *elektrische Linie*, and still in use today, is specific only to Brno and is, of course, the butt of jokes by non-Brno residents (especially Prague residents).

Plotna disappeared after the Second World War, or was replaced by another group, namely the *štatlaři*. Their social structure was somewhat different – in addition to people of dubious characters, who were a minority here, it included high school and university students, representatives of the bohemian community and artists. The member of *plotna* can be characterised as a *badaud* (French word meaning *gawker, a strolling person, bystander*), *štatlař* has more in common with a *flâneur*. Why? *Štatlař*, like *flâneur*, is defined by numerous dialectical opposites – inertia vs. curiosity and fascination with the unknown, laziness vs. detective work, rush vs. meditation, modernity, and movement vs. the eternal and unchanging. As M. Featherstone summarises:

On the one hand, the *flâneur* is the idler or waster; on the other hand, he is the observer or detective, the suspicious person who is always

looking, noting and classifying: the person who as Benjamin put it “goes botanising on the asphalt”. The *flâneur* seeks an immersion in the sensations of the city, he seeks to “bathe in the crowd”, to become lost in feelings, to succumb to the pull of random desires and the pleasures of scopophilia. (Featherstone, 1998, p. 913)

And an anonymous witness of the golden era of the *štatl* describes it laconically as follows:

That was the *štatl*. From Liberty Square to the station. Several times a day. Meeting people you know, or not meeting anyone at all. But you had to walk it, almost like you had to. Then people would ask you why you had to. There was no answer. You just had to go through it several times a day, find out this or that. Or going back and forth just like that. (Nosková, 2009, pp. 359–360)⁷

We see an urgent need to participate in the everyday bustle and pulsating life of the city centre (Svobody Square is a central square of Brno), but at the same time the way of participation is a completely arbitrary act of each *štatlař* – he chooses, depending on his mood and the situation, whether he wants to just anonymously blend in with the crowd or, on the contrary, meet his fellows. *Štatlaři* took the language of the *plotna* and gradually modified it. The merits for those changes went mainly to the theatre artists and other members of the bohemian community who used it in their performances. Bohuslav Beneš Beneš likens this transformation to the processes in the case of folklore, when it is transformed into so-called folklorism, which occurs when its primary conditions change (2005, p. 131). For example, the awareness of Brno *hantec* shaped by the memories of some theatre actors describing their youth in Brno in the 1970s in TV entertainment programmes on Saturday evenings. This does not mean, however, that *hantec* is now a completely dead or preserved language – on the contrary, many words are used by all social classes, albeit for different reasons. While for socially and economically weaker groups it is a common means of communication, for intellectuals or representatives of the artistic scene this language represents a kind of game, a pose, perhaps to distinguish oneself, to spice up one’s speech and to captivate the audience.

There is one more point to remember – the political dimension of *štatl*. Some artists and intellectuals, in their memoirs, interpret now the *štatl* in the 1970s as a kind of “island of freedom” (Nosková, 2009, p. 368). The illusion of independence from the socialist state system was supported not only by a specific language – *hantec* – but also by certain eccentric, conspicuous clothes, or appearance (long hair for men). Even the writer Jiří Kratochvíl (2001, p. 66) reminds us that “*štatl* is in its heyday when political misery is approaching its climax and declines when the first signs of relaxation appear”. In any case, this does not mean that the *štatlaři* openly revolted against the state; larger expressions of resistance took place in private, only in a small circle of like-minded people. Although the *štatlaři* were (like most of

⁷ Czech version: “To byl *štatl*. Od náměstí Svobody k nádrži. Několikrát za den. Potkávat se se známými, nebo se vůbec s nikým nepotkat. Ale muselo se to projít, skoro jak kdyby se to muselo. Potom se tě lidi ptali, proč se to muselo. Na to nebyla odpověď. Prostě se to muselo absolvovat několikrát za den, zjistit to a nebo tamto. A nebo mňozovat jen tak.” (Nosková, 2009, pp. 359–360)

the inhabitants of the then Czechoslovakia) not satisfied with the political situation of their time, they never turned nostalgically to the past, they lived in the present and tried to overcome the ubiquitous communistic greyness staying on top of things and with humour.

The common features of *flâneur* and *štatlař*, then, are a penchant for aimless wandering, observation of their surroundings, and the freedom to decide whether to remain unseen in the crowd or to step out of it and involve their friends in their actions. An important aspect is a certain unity of opposites, the most important of which is the pair of activity vs. laziness, as both groups teetered on their borderline. Both groups are also characterised by a concern for their own appearance. The fundamental difference between them is related to the historical development: while *flâneur* was associated with the advent of modernity and the paradigm shift of big cities, *štatlař*, on the contrary, represented a way of life in an unfree society ruled by a totalitarian regime.

5. *Štatlař* revisited

Bart van Leeuwen claims, that Baudelaire and Benjamin:

[...] took an eccentric lifestyle of mid-19th century Paris, the typical strolling and observing of individual men on the streets of the city, as a heuristic device to write about a change in the modern way of life. Their notion of the *flâneur* basically refers to (or is the personification of) a broad cultural change from the patient engagement with some object or structure of meaning to a restless wandering, a distracted perceptive style and way of life. Characteristic for *flânerie* is a certain fleetingness and dispersed attention. (Leeuwen, 2012, pp. 301–302)

But as we have mentioned before, fleetingness and dispersed attention are just one side of the coin, on the other side you find eternity, immutability, and stability engraved. In this context, Thomas Leddy mentions mindfulness (see Leddy, 2021, p. 65), which is one of the meditation and therapeutic techniques. Because what is the *flânerie* at its core? It's to walk and observe quietly. Not just seeing, because mindfulness is an act of free will, we focus our attention where we want (An example is when we witness a car accident on the highway. The reactions of the passers-by are threefold: rational assessment of the situation, fascinated staring and tightly closed eyes covered with palms). In his article (2021), Leddy, quoting Gumbrecht, points out that our current culture is a culture of interpretation, whereas Ancient Greek and the Middle Ages was a culture of presence. Our world today tends to over-interpret, the rational, analytical and memory component of our minds overrides our ability to experience the present moment. Leddy says, that:

We cannot go back to living in a presence society (at least not normally). But we can learn from such societies, and this is perhaps what atheists whose minds are closed to varieties of religious experience and other enlightenment thinkers fail to see. (Leddy, 2021, p. 65)

And he also defends the role of culturally specific meaning:

Does this mean that meaning, which is culturally specific, does not play a role? Not at all. How we see and what we focus on is culturally determined. Art, too, is culturally specific. Studying art, viewing many artworks, and learning how to paint are all activities that train the eye. The mind is stocked by these cultural practices unconsciously in such a way as to animate vision even, and especially when, the vision is not encumbered by language. Moreover, speaking, writing, painting, photographing, and other cultural practices happen after and before the moment of presencing, are comments on, and can extend and enrich that experience. There is a loop that goes from presencing to the cultural, then presence, then the cultural, and on and on. (*Ibid.*)

How can we specifically apply Leddy's useful manual/instruction/philosophy to the phenomenon of Brno *flâneur* and *štatlař* today? Our knowledge of their culture can enrich and extend our reality and experience of the present. This is not to say that we are following in the footsteps of the past (as members of historical societies do), but rather that we are adding another layer to the palimpsest of the cultural history of a particular place.⁸ The classic route of *štatlař* can be walked in 10 minutes – from the street Česká to the Liberty Square (náměstí Svobody) and from there along Masaryk Street to the main railway station (in *hantec* called *rola*). On the way we can stop at the biggest market in Brno, the Zelný trh (Vegetable Market) which was a frequent object of *flâneurs-poets*.

Jan Skácel (1922–1989), a poet who drew on Moravian folklore and after 1969 was not allowed to publish publicly, so he was forced to publish in samizdat, thanks to which he was more appreciated abroad than at home, dedicated the market in his poem *Město, které musím* (*The city that I like*) these three verses:

And up the hill the Vegetable Market sleeps
And above it like tangerine
(The unavailable one) the moon shines.
(Skácel, 1984, p. 51, English translation by Lenka Lee)⁹

While comparing the moon to the tangerine is a common poetic metaphor, “the unavailable one” already presupposes a certain historical and political pre-understanding – in the time of communism, tangerines and bananas were among the scarce commodities that (if you were lucky or familiar with a grocery stores shop assistants) could only be bought at Christmas time. Contemporary *flâneur*, as characterized by Leddy, combines aimless walking, mindfulness and noticing the present moment. This perception of the present can be expanded through previously acquired cultural knowledge, creating an enriching interplay between the culture of presence, and meaning. Thus, a *flâneur* with awareness of the subculture of the *štatlaři* can enjoy the present moment more deeply than an ‘uninformed *flâneur*’ due to his or her knowledge.

⁸ For more about the cultural palimpsest see Thomas, A. (2010).

⁹ Czech version:
A do kopci spí Zelný rynek
a nad ním jako mandarinek
(ten k nedostání) luna svítí.
(Skácel, 1984, p. 5)

6. Conclusion

The phenomenon of the *flâneur* has changed during its one hundred and eighty years of existence, but the essentials remain. The contemporary *flâneur* may wander aimlessly and mindlessly through the city, may recall favourite verses or narratives, may expand reality through technology and media,¹⁰ may or may not create. Unlike the dandy, the *flâneur* is not heartless and care about their surrounding urban space in some way. He doesn't have to articulate or publicly proclaim his opinions; he just needs to focus on the small events of everyday life and perhaps share them with people close to him. With his experience and his ability to focus his attention, *flâneur* should be able to keep his distance from all the external pressure, to stay on top of things. He should be tolerant because the environment in which he moves like a fish in water, is cosmopolitan and full of the unknown and the unusual and he should care about the sustainability of the urban space that is his home.

By applying the local phenomenon of Brno *štatlaři* and recalling specific *flâneurs-poets* and their works, we tried to show how we can practically connect the stock of knowledge provided by our culture of interpretation to immerse ourselves more easily and effectively in the (culture of) present. We have also shown what common features can be shared by two subcultures that emerged in a completely different place and time and in a completely different socio-cultural-political paradigm, and how they may influence today's *flâneur*.

It is the balance of the local and the cosmopolitan, mindfulness and engagement, presence and interpretation, solitude and sharing, the joy of walking and the willingness to see the everyday world through the eyes of a 'child' that I consider the main ingredients of 21st-century *flânerie*.

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¹⁰ About the influence of listening to iPod music in perceiving the surrounding urban space see Bull, M. (2013).

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