

MATHIAS GRÜNEWALD AND ANTONIN ARTAUD THE THEATRE AS VISUAL DESIGN

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ABSTRACT: The Mathias Grünewald painting (c.1455-1528) as well as the work of Hieronymus Bosch (c.1450-1516) permeated with deep grooves the scene envisioned by Antonin Artaud (1896-1948) who sought to ensure the forcefulness of visuality in his theater. In the understanding of Artaud the atmosphere as we see in the works of Grünewald and Bosch, despite the huge differences between them, should be reflected in the totality of the scene that, in turn, would attempt to provoke the totality of the spectator, igniting mind and body. In a different time Tennessee Williams (1911-1983) trod similar path making his drama a locus for the transit of images. This article seeks to sketch an unusual network that includes Artaud, Williams, Grünewald, Bosch, and El Greco (Doménikos Theotokópoulos, 1541-1614). The term visuality refers here to propositions of Visual Studies, linked to Visual Culture, research field widespread in Anglo-Saxon environment, already arousing the interest of voices of the francophone culture.

KEYWORDS: Theatre, image, visualities

RESUMO: A pintura de Mathias Grünewald (c.1455–1528), assim como a obra de Hieronimus Bosch (c.1450-1516), impregnou de profundos sulcos a cena vislumbrada por Antonin Artaud (1896-1948) que buscava assegurar a contundência da visualidade no seu teatro. Na compreensão de Artaud, a atmosfera presente nas obras de Grünewald e Bosch, apesar das enormes diferenças entre eles, deveria repercutir na totalidade cênica que, por sua vez, intentaria provocar a totalidade do espectador, inflamando mente e corpo. Em um momento distinto o autor norte-americano Tennessee Williams (1911-1983) trilhou caminho semelhante ao fazer do seu teatro um locus para o trânsito de imagens. Este artigo busca esboçar uma inusitada rede que inclui Artaud, Williams, Grünewald, Bosch e El Greco (Doménikos Theotokópoulos, 1541-1614). O termo visualidade refere-se aqui a proposições dos Estudos Visuais, ligados à Cultura Visual, campo de pesquisa difundido no ambiente anglo-saxão, já despertando o interesse de vozes da cultura francófona.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Teatro, imagem, visualidades

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INTRODUCTION

This paper looks at the impact provoked by the work of Mathias Grünewald (c.1455-1528) as well as of Hieronimus Bosch (c.1450-1516), in the theory of Antonin Artaud (1896-1948), author, actor with great expressive force, and theater director born in France. Whereas that the art of painting also echoed in the work of the American playwright Tennessee Williams (1911-1983) opens up the possibility of connection between these artists. Linking Artaud and Williams in the same position may seem extraneous, but reinforces this paper's strategy, that is: considering the study of the theatrical scene in its visual aspects, outlining the need for approaches that seek to investigate the roles of the **image** in the theater and ruling out interests of overmastering the image inside theoretical frames. The image here is seen as a movement of the theatrical praxis, incorporating thought, concept, texture, shape and color. Such considerations find support in the observation of the **theater** as a locus of images. Mental and visual, physicalized in the scene.

Moving away from intending to exhaust theoretically the topics proposed, the goal is to point the discussion toward the spectacular praxis realizing that the concept of praxis should incorporate the evaluation of an art form taking into account ability and competence issues combined with aesthetic and poetic principles related to the production of images.

The idea of praxis (πραξις), can be related to *prattein*, in Greek - literally - doing. In its Greek origin the term refers to an activity in which participated freemen. In this text the term is approached in the scope of a process, of actions which incorporate knowledge and problematizations presented by the culture. The noun theater [following the trail left by the Greek term theatron, already widely commented on its relationship with the vision, with the verb to see as well as certain derivations] is applied here in view of the statement of the authors mentioned that assume membership in the theatrical western tradition. The expression **visual design** pursues to qualify the relationship between theater and the public, including contributions of the mental images, as well as of the visual images physicalized

in the theatrical scene. The verb to **physicalize** refers to an interpretation of Stanislavski's physical actions and to repercussions of this concept in theatrical research made by authors such as Viola Spolin (1906-1994), when she defines the ability of the artist to assimilate and communicate physically (Spolin, 1963, p. 16). In addition, a definition of Francis Hodge should be listed when he deals with the work of the theater director and qualifies this artist as a designer, asserting: "Design is the physicalization of the poetic idea" (HODGE, 1971, p 191).

ON VISUALITIES

The understanding of visuality applied in these considerations is related to studies of Visual Culture, line of thought that has gained a space since the 1980s in the Anglo-Saxon academic environment and includes the appearing of courses identified as Visual Studies. In this sense, it is worth mentioning the work of Norman Bryson, Michael A. Holly and Kieth Moxe, teachers at the University of Rochester, besides Hal Foster's work (1988), highlighting his introduction to the collection of articles written by experts as Rosalind Krauss, Martin Jay, Jacqueline Rose and Jonathan Crary.

It is relevant to notice Nicholas Mirzoeff's point of view (2006) where he underlines an omission committed by Foster in the aforementioned introduction when the last fails to remark the Scottish historian Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) especially his set of lectures published under the title *On heroes* (1841). To Mirzoeff this is an important work for the field because of the application of the term visuality. This term appears at the conference III, *The Hero as Poet*, in which the author refers to Dante Alighieri (1265-1321). Carlyle's interest in the subject, however, was already shown in the first conference, *The hero as divinity*, in which he says: "Whatsoever a man feels intensely, he struggles to talk about, to see represented before him in visual mode" (CARLYLE, 1906, p. 5). Mentioning more than once the visual quality of the perception he applies the term visuality while commenting the *Divine Comedy*:



But, as I say, no work known to me is so elaborated as this of Dante's. It has all been as if molten, in the hottest furnace of his soul. [...] Not the general whole only; every compartment of it is worked-out, with intense earnestness, into truth, into clear visuality. Each answers to the other; each fits in its place, like a marble stone accurately hewn and polished. It is the soul of Dante, and in this the soul of the middle ages, rendered forever rhythmically visible there. (CARLYLE, 1906, p. 89)

Among the comments that can be done about Carlyle's work could be included a kind of idolatry to the hero, as well as the criticism of his male stress in the human context and the repercussions of his discourse in modern imperialist ideology that gained force in the twentieth century. On the other hand, it is worth observing his pioneer attitude in applying the concept of visuality that, contrary to what one can superficially infer, it is not just a generalized approach derived from the Renaissance understanding of the world as a whole to be dominated and represented, but also refers to the attention in detail and in precision.

Nicholas Mirzoeff, in turn, pointed to the possibility of different approaches to the concept of visuality:

In many instances, the claim to visual subjectivity was part of a general claim to majoritarian status within Western nations for those like women, the enslaved and their free descendants, and people of alternative sexuality. The centrality of Carlyle's discourse of visualized heroism to Anglophone imperial culture was such that any claim to such subjectivity had to pass by visuality. Here lies the contradictory source of the resonance of 'visuality' as a keyword for visual culture as both a mode of representing imperial culture and a means of resisting it by means of reverse appropriation. (MIRZOEFF, 2006, p. 54)

Recognizing in Dante's poetry the capacity of accessing what he calls the **clear visuality** of a context, transcending the observation and the intents of historical recording Carlyle points to an idea of visuality disengaged from technologies operating on the production of material/virtual images. That's this visuality that triggers the

interest of study in this article, namely: reflections and visual actions of an artist who can even include the recording or the playback of an image.

The Mirzoeff's interpretation also indicates two modes of operation of the visuality: one that is linked to modernity and other that exceeds and precedes the commercialization of vision or the exploitation of the image by the market. Both, therefore, recognize the role of visuality in the construction of knowledge.

On the other hand, even though Hal Foster appears to have disregarded some of these issues, he introduces a path of great interest for the approach of visuality underlined here:

Why vision and visuality, why these terms? Although vision suggests sight as a physical operation, and visuality sight as a social fact, [...]: vision is social and historical too, and visuality involves the body and the psyche. Yet neither are they identical: here, the difference between the terms signals a difference within the visual - between the mechanism of sight and its historical techniques, between the datum of vision and its discursive determinations - a difference, many differences, among how we see, how we are able, allowed, or made to see, and how we see this seeing or the unseen therein. (FOSTER, 1988, IX)

Considering such thoughts it would be advisable to remember that the visuality is already characterized as an object of study in Visual Culture and in Visual Studies programs and that Carlyle used the concept in the second half of the nineteenth century. Questioning the *uno* hero which appears in Carlyle with the current character of fragmentation of the human being as an indicator of political approaches that incorporate transnational and transcultural issues the discussion here searches the current comprehension of the term in a close relationship between the human being - as agent of vision - and the discourses of the visuality.

It is also relevant the work of William John Thomas Mitchel (1942), responsible for research and teaching in this field. He has published several books and articles and investigates the image in an approach he calls iconology, in the trail left by Erwin



Panofsky (1892-1968). Interviewed by Daniel Portugal and Rose de Melo Rocha, Mitchel asserts:

Since Plato's attempt to ban images [through the critic of a zoomed image, in the allegory of the cave], there was a clash between logos (reason) and imaginary. The values pervading this struggle were decisively reversed by Nietzsche in *The Twilight of the Idols*, where the sensual, fantastic character, of the imagination is reaffirmed, and the only "destruction of images" is the boards of the law, while the idols are merely touched with a hammer or tuning fork (pitch). (PORTUGAL; ROCHA, 2009)

The destruction of the law boards set up a context of visibility that problematize the acceptance, the denial and the questioning of what is allowed to see in every organization of the thought, in each culture o environment. Mitchell comments his approach to relations between image and knowledge:

This is the method I adopt, a non-iconoclastic "reverberation of idols" with the image. The famous remark of Gilles Deleuze - that philosophy is always a form of iconology - or Wittgenstein's claim - that "a picture has imprisoned us" [that is, to us, philosophers] - are symptoms of this long struggle between theory and image. And, whenever the technical basis of production and circulation of images is transformed (i.e., the invention of photography, film, television, digital imaging, mechanical press), a new crisis of the image is declared, and with it, a new crisis theory. To this I call perennial or recurrent version of "imagery turn" [pictorial turn]. (PORTUGAL; ROCHA, 2009)²

This angle provides elements that are tangent to the theme of this text when Mitchel criticizes attempts to subdue and/or belittle the image. Disqualify the image can be a questionable

decision suggesting misunderstanding of a friction that resonates in the relationship between the image and the human being, recipient and place where the images actually occur, space in which the images are processed, the medium where they take effect and from where they can be also thrown. Humanity was not, suddenly, physically blind.

The routing of Visual Culture studies such as those presented by Tom Mitchell in various publications since the late 1980s, found echoes in the research of other scholars, reflecting on works such as the studies of Hans Belting³ (1835). Belting's anthropological approach for the study of human production of images, his connections with several authors, including Jean-Pierre Vernant (1914-2007), notably the book *Figures, idoles, masques* (1990) show an important line of thought for this paper.

Without addressing in particular to the theater Hans Belting traced relevant tangencies:

The roles that have been assigned to image, medium, and body constantly varied, but their tight interaction continues up to the present day. The *medium*, despite its polysemantic character and polyvalent use, offers the easiest identification and is for this reason favored by contemporary theories. The body comes next, but it is all too often and all too neatly played out against current technologies and considered as their obverse. It therefore needs a new emphasis on bodies as living media, able to perceive, to remember, and to project images. The body, as owner and addressee of images, administered media as extensions of its own visual capacities. Bodies receive images by perceiving them, while media transmit them to bodies. With the help of masks, tattooing, clothing, and performance, bodies also produce images of themselves or, in the case of actors, images representing others – in which case they act as media in the fullest and most original sense. Their initial monopoly on **mediating** images allows us to speak of bodies as the archetype of all visual media. (BELTING, 2005, p. 315)

² Mitchell refers to approaches from philosophy written by Richard Rorty and. g.: *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979; *The Linguistic Turn, Essays in Philosophical Method*, (1967), ed. by Richard M. Rorty, University of Chicago press, 1992.

³ PhD in Art History at Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz, Belting served as professor at several universities and is a laureate member of several scientific communities.



It is worth underlining this **mediation** in its dynamic nature, excluding the understanding of an entity/occurrence that is among or **between** two events or things. Mediating, here, refers to something that is happening transversely, in a very particular sense: in the case of the actor, in the spectacular event the image or the body does not arise between, in a static sense. The image does not accept something already finished, it subverts asserting itself as an action of the present. Even though the notion of present – under the idea of visual image – must be observed with flexibility when is taken in account the speed of light or the time it employs to touch an object/body and to be able of sensitizing the human eye, the vision in a certain sense, refers to a relative past. Questioning this perceptual event while confronting it with reflections about its sensorial nature, its symbolic implications it is possible to identify the nature of the spectacular image. Mediation, in that case, is the action of the body that acts as a *medium* elaborating and throwing images.

Volunteering as a *medium* - mediating - refers to dynamic elaborations applied in the embodiment of the spectacular image that can only occur in a close relationship between what is elaborated on the scene and the public. After all, the spectacular image only occurs in the presence of the other, the body-mind of the viewer. Therefore, it is not the case of a superposition of information sent by the scene and secured by the [passive] viewer, but a dynamic interaction which can be qualified as transversal ou trans-linear, involving all visual aspects including mental images.

As the visibility incorporates social aspects suggesting the investigation of cultural relations – historical and political – that are inseparable from vision and visibility, it can be found clues to the critical analysis of the complex that has been understood as a scopic⁴ regime directly connected to ways of thinking, to the philosophical orientation that qualifies the visibility of cultures – societies – which promotes relevant content in

the construction of knowledge. There may include the theater, as well as diverse scenic-spectacular manifestations.

Such observations allow an understanding of the actor, of the performer in his condition of a body educated and offered as a *medium* in order to build visual images designed for the encounter-confrontation with the one identified as a spectator and latter as enjoyer (?), here recognized as **co-builder** of the **spectacular image**. After all, besides the reception, besides the function of a locus of recording the enjoyment – sociological, political, philosophical or artistic –, the other, the viewer or the one with whom the actor shares the event runs decisively in the co-building of the spectacular image. After all, the artist introduces images having in mind the co-builder whose powerful presence is incorporated into the spectacular nature of the event.

These trails may suggest the bias of visibility for investigation the theater, as well as of present events that derive from, comment, react and/or deny the idea of theater characterized here as **spectacular events**⁵. It is important to take in account that such events operate as locus for the image, allowing views not studied yet in a systematic and/or consistently way. This is an understandable hiatus once the ephemeral quality of the image in transit through such events is different from that effectively recorded and reproduced by the so-called media, in the sense of plural of medium, incorporating the technological complexes of registration and communication. The ephemeral nature of spectacular image can be one of the main reasons for its disregard in many discussions about the artistic image and in the environment of theatrical, scenic or spectacular research.

In any case, the image physicalized in the show is only superficially touched by some studies due to

⁴ Do latin scopium, derived from the Greek terms skopion and skopein [looking at]. Cf. Martin Jay, in FOSTER, 1988, p. 3-23].

⁵ The term event here applied searches relations with the theatrical event discussed the philosophical approach of Jorge Dubatti: “[...] un ser del estar-acontecer en el mundo. De manera simultánea, una Filosofía del Teatro incluye - y amplía- el campo de la estética teatral”. [one being of the be-happening in the world. Simultaneously, a Philosophy of Theater includes - and extend - the field of theatrical aesthetic.] (2001).



lack of familiarity with the subject by the authors of theoretical approaches on the spectacular nature. Any scholar, as a human being thinks visually; however, to aesthetically evaluate the image physicalized in the scene would be necessary certain familiarity with the fundamentals of image production, its elements and principles. Unfortunately the formal education does not include the experimentation of these fundamentals. This may occasionally result in observations of the image based on intuition or attack of genius, which does not differ from the mere strategy of the common sense.

Moreover, once the spectacular image is not part of the canon of the artistic image, status reserved in critical inventory promoted by official history of art for painting, sculpture, architecture, engraving, among others, and more recently photography, cinema, including digital formats. Thereby, the spectacular image lacks specific studies that emphasize the research and experimentation of its praxis seeking the skills and competencies essential to its tract transcending, however, the technical instruction to expand the studies and delineating points of tangency with theoretical research environments such as the anthropology and the philosophy of image, suggesting transdisciplinary approaches.

It is possible, therefore, to consider the research of the spectacular image in order to problematize the adjective **canned** that appears in the evaluation of Gilbert Durand (1921-2012) while questioning the *media* [advertising] (Cf. DURAND, 1998). The iconic nature of the spectacular image can also provoke the eye, getting away from the **deadlock** underscored by Durand in the **cow eye** applied by the viewer enclosed in the capitalist image imposed by the *media*. The concept of violence presented in the Durand's approach is important index for the critique of spectacular image. Certain degree of violence can be effective on the goal of this image when it provokes the co-builder attacking the alleged passive gaze. Featuring the generation of thoughts and feelings, it proposes debates that can operate rupture of limits, of frames and of borders, assuming an act of violence.

On the interest of the spectacular image begin to emerge studies of Performance Art that includes the visuality as an academic interest in

this field, as one can read in the text by Shannon Jackson (2005), joining a few studies of the theater which investigate the imaged quality in the performing arts [for those environments which still use that expression], with approaches still without the necessary deepening. Jean-Jacques Roubine outlined an attempt to consider the scene as **moving images** (1980/1998) and has also used the concept of **body-image** (1982), dealing with what he understands as the physically **absent** body in the movies.

SPECTACULAR EVENT AND PICTORIAL IMAGE

This paper deals with echoes of these contexts in the relationship between the theater and the mental/verbal/visual image, outlined here. In the first instance it will be observed the affinity of Antonin Artaud's works with the painting, which strongly characterizes the visual accent of the theater he envisioned and that permeates his theory. It will be sketched then an unusual connection between Artaud and Williams. It is Artaud who causes this approach when he asserts in his essay *Le théâtre et la cruauté* [*The theater of cruelty*]:

[...] to speak clearly, images of certain paintings of Grünewald or Hieronimus Bosch say well what could be a show where, as in the brain of any saint, things outside of nature will appear as if they were temptations. (ARTAUD, 1938, p. 135/136)⁶

Impressed by the dense atmosphere of Mathias Grünewald's work, invoking also Hieronymus Bosch, Artaud felt links that had repercussions in his theoretical writings. One can question the association of these artists considering the differences between their works. After all, Grunewald accentuates the ecstasy in

⁶ From the French original: [...] pour parler clair, les images de certaines peintures de Grunewald ou de Hieronymus Bosch, disent assez ce que peut être un spectacle ou, comme dans le cerveau d'un saint quelconque, les choses de la nature extérieure apparaîtront comme des tentations.



an aesthetic styling that can be understood as a form of mannerism, while Bosch celebrated in ghostly images of overly fantastic character, recording with a meticulous realism the horrors of war, approaching with a clinical look dreams [or nightmares] of his time. Perhaps Artaud may have been impressed by the emotional stress of Grünewald paintings and by that treatment of the dream [or nightmare] we find in the works of Bosch. If Grünewald is recognized by the critics as a forerunner of Expressionism, Bosch has been appointed as big influence on the surrealists. This leads to the observation of his interest in the work of Pieter Brueghel the Elder (c.1525 / 30-1569) in which certain engravings bring atmospheres that seem to strongly echo in the work of Bosch.

This aesthetic and poetic connection is magnified when one observes the Paul Hindemith's⁷ opera (1895-1963) *Mathis der Maler* [*Mathis (Grünewald) the painter*], included in the list of the *Entartete Kunst* [Degenerate Art] by the Nazi part. The *Mathis der Maler* opening took place in 1938 in Vienna, five years after Artaud's *Le théâtre et son double* [*The theatre and its double*] in which he relates his theatre to Grünewald images. It should be said that the interest by the atmosphere of the German painter's work sparked a series of echoes in the works of numerous artists. When Artaud described the friction between the soreness afflicting a saint and the temptation he indicated clues to articulations with the Grünewald's painting *Saint Anthony being tempted by demons* (1515/1516), which originally was part of the altarpiece St. Anthony Monastery in Isenheim, Alsace. In this tableau pulsates the emotion of Grünewald while he addresses the theme, revealing in slashing saturation, twisted bodies, mutilation the physicalization of entities that inhabit the imagination of the artist as he plays the fantastic event of temptation, inscribing in the scene astonishing aspects.

⁷ Naturalized American he has taught at Yale and, returning to Europe in 1953 died in Frankfurt. Composer, scholar, violinist, teacher and researcher he wrote the opera under the tradition of the historical plays. Also librettist he was inspired by the life of Grünewald.

This work is the result of instigations coming from the life of Antonio, born in Egypt (251- 356), stubborn man who puts aside the material property and heads for the desert living in complete solitude, resisting the devil's temptation, performing miracles and bringing numerous followers, which earned him the *status* of a Catholic saint. His life instigated others artists and promoted deep echoes, pervading several works. Grünewald painted also *Antonio and Paul the Hermit*, the meeting between the two saints.⁸ It should also be mentioned the novel *The Temptation of St. Anthony* considered a masterpiece of Gustave Flaubert (1821-1880) and published in 1874. The American translation of 2001 published by Modern Library Classics of New York, with Michel Foucault's preface, brings on the cover a remark of Sigmund Freud:

[*The Temptation of St. Antonio*] is not only about the great problems of knowledge, but also deals with real questions of life [...] and confirms our conscience of the perplexity before the mysteries that reign everywhere.

Even if inconsistencies are identified in Artaud's speech his elaboration of theater as a mysterious art recognize in the scene a striking visuality.

IMAGES: TEMPTATION OR CHALLENGE?

The researchers who analyze the work of Antonin Artaud have the right to ignore the network outlined above and can disregard the path raised here, defining their own approach. But that does not deny the fact: Artaud proposed a partnership with pictorial art, between his theatrical theory and the painting of Bosch and Grünewald despite the differences already commented.

Besides, Artaud proposed a double in the theater and of the theater offering pathways to criticism for his work. Unlike Plato (428aC-347aC), in Artaud the double is not represented outside

⁸ St. Paul and St. Anthony in the desert is the subject of Grünewald paint, to the left of the Temptation of St. Anthony, the third view of the altarpiece Isenheim in Alsace.

the body as something that was alienated from it, a shadow thrown into the distance as a negative result of a body that stands between the light and a canvas or a body reduced to an obstacle thrown in deformation, to the distance.

It should be pointed out the importance of the cave allegory for the study of Plato and of the context in which it is enters. However, it can be observed in the Artaud's texts strong tendency to a theater in which the shadow is different from the negative, is more than a hole, a black spot, or a threatening darkness. This may indicate critical paths that include the shadow on spectacular event as a living extension of the body and as a presence in the body itself, not including the **shadow theater** that requires specific approaches.

Artaud seemed already to perceive wisely in the actor's body the function of medium for the physicalization of mental images, excluding approaches that impose or register dichotomies over the relationship between mental and visual image. Even more, by investing in the confrontation between the concepts of temptation and repose Artaud insists:

Every true effigy has its shadow that doubles it: and the art is set in when the sculptor that models believes liberating a kind of shadow whose existence will lacerate its repose. (ARTAUD, 1984, p. 20)

The shadow can be observed as a moving subject that inscribe human being in the world. This suggests dynamic propositions for the spectacular image. The space would speak through moving bodies, comprehending the shadow as an agent capable of transforming the environment while defining the actor's body in its condition of image, condition originated in the living relationship between the bodies, the light, the locus and the co-builder. Thus, the spectacular image, proposes discourses that take into consideration the contribution of the shadow.

In Artaud's understanding the space already physicalized at the actor's body would disregard the set design as known before, revealing images over the transversal relationship between the actor and the space, as inseparable concepts. The actor's

body is the *primeva* visual/spatial cell of the scene: "[...] the hieroglyphic characters, ritual clothes, mannequins ten meters high [...]". (ARTAUD, 19, p. 125). Thereby, recognizing the forcefulness of the visual aspects Artaud stressed the importance of the actor:

The actor is, at the same time, an element of primary importance, because the success of the show depends on the effectiveness of its interpretation, and a kind of passive and neutral element, [...] (ARTAUD, 1984, p. 125)

One can grasp that Artaud wanted to share with the reader provocations reverberated in his own imaginary. He believed in the power of the images, not only those developed within the scene, but also the mental images that pulse in the co-builder's imaginary, invoking this relationship as a force capable of igniting, since the image will be effective in the co-builder, deconstructing the position of a gazer, whose vision copies and mentally stores the idol. On the contrary, it is recognized an interaction between the scene and co-builder.

Artaud states: "[...] new images speak, even new images **made with words**. But space **thundering** with images and crammed with sounds **speaks too**, [...]" (ARTAUD, 1999, p. 87, emphasis added). And when an artist believes in the freedom of creating individual images for a show disregarding the images that are said by the words, disregarding the images that are made with words, if he does it as result of the lack of familiarity, this can result in weakness of the visual images proposed on the scene, compromising the thundering capacity of his theatre, by writing the term used by Artaud. He understood the perception as an extended operation in which the human being is integrated, in its entirety:

One does not separate the mind from the body nor the senses from the intelligence, [...]. Thus, on the one hand, the mass and extent of a spectacle addressed to the entire organism; on the other, an intensive mobilization of objects, gestures, and signs, used in a new spirit..8 (ARTAUD, 1999, p. 86-87)

Such considerations may suggest caution,



avoiding to face the relationship between human beings and the visual images as mere contemplation and/or promoting superficial attacks on what is meant by the supremacy of vision in Western thought. It seems incongruous to deny the contribution of visuality - his philosophical interactions - for the construction of knowledge, since ancient times.

Questioning the role of the vision in the construction of Western thought do not take this faculty from the human nature. As the human being did not lose its memory after the advent of writing or recording its reflections and acts. Before labeling in a simplistic way the modernity as a stronghold of oculo-centrism, the researcher analysing the spectacular event can observe that successive revolutions - theatrical, scenic, performative - are deeply immersed in the visual image. Even qualified according to each revolutionary process, the mental image is inscribed as a foundation aspect of these events and defines in each of these manifestations the context of the visual image that, in turn, constitute the spectacular image. Accepting reductionist attitudes that set aside visual perception denying to the human being the right to interact with the multidimensionality of the image physicalized in the shapes, colors, and textures - volumes - may result in a limited understanding of human nature in its condition of a perceptual complex.

Reading Artaud one perceives the forcefulness of the image to the theater he envisioned. His impulse to promote visual disruptions that can shake superficial approaches that prefer transforming the viewer into *voyeur*. He proposes a path: "[...] a serious theater, which, overturning all our preconceptions, inspires us with the fiery magnetism of its images [...]". (ARTAUD, 1958, p. 84) Nevertheless, the scene may not be interested in translating a text; in the theatre the image may not represent or picture, it is not a second in place of the first, the image may not accept to be framed in linguistic limits. The spectacular image is presentified in that absolute place, protruding in time.

Establishing itself as a *kosmos* mind-body the human being proves itself to be a locus of amalgam in which varied sensations are processed before a presumed inability to isolate the vision or any other

sense. What he sees, interact, not only with what he would like to see, but also with his ability to see, what he is allowed to see (FOSTER, 1988) and with everything that stimulates the hearing, touch, tasting along with the inner history that pulses in his imaginary.

In Artaud the purpose of working on a spectacular event that circles the one with whom the event is shared in order to break borders between the stage and the audience, proposing movements occurring throughout the space intended for theatrical relations, revolving around the actor and the other, was the attempt of dismantling known hierarchies. Without disqualifying the vision, on the contrary, acknowledging what he called "fiery magnetism of its images," making room for the observation of visuality, i.e., the thought that guides the visual discourse. He sought a theater in which words, images and sounds, new and surprising would rebound in the body-mind of the viewer: "[...] *physical temptation* of the stage." (ARTAUD, 1958, p. 39, author's emphasis). Therefore, there would still be a place to house the action, the theater would still be shared with the public, there would still be an actor, but it would be a game in which the artist would apply vivid forces to provoke the other with whom an encounter-confrontation called spectacular event, is built.

Investing in the spatial quality of the actor's body that would resonate in the physicalization of the show Artaud underlined the strength of a theatre that recognizes in that one considered mere gazer the ability to act.⁹ In the show, gesture, thought, expression in space and precise visual features would tear sensitive frames, accentuating temptations inherent to the images of poetry. Dreams would act as sources, and bodies as media to discuss in the human being what Artaud defined as:

[...] his taste for crime, his erotic obsessions, his savagery, his chimeras, his utopian sense of life and matter, even his cannibalism, pour out, on a level not counterfeit and illusory, but interior. (ARTAUD, 1958, p. 92).

⁹ Cf. ARTAUD, 1958, p. 90.

The Temptation of St Anthony by Grünewald (1510-15), as well as the triptych with the same theme, by Bosh (1505-06) can indicate to the reader of the *Theatre of cruelty* an approach of what Artaud saw in mind when making such proposition. The demons are not necessarily in the sensible world, outside. Neither exclusively within the personalities.

At some point in reading these reflections, one or another reader wondered when it would be included here the Artaud's comment about *Lot and his daughters*, c. 1521, painting by Lucas van Leyden (1494–1533). His approach to this work appears in *Metaphysics and the mise-en-scene* (ARTAUD, 1958, p. 33-47) a very important document for studies of the visuality of the scene, requiring reading for the discussion of the spectacular visuality. On the other hand, it should be considered that such painting may arouse more attention due to the incestuous relationships in Lot's family (*Genesis* 19, 30-38) than with respect to the main point of this text, i.e., the visuality as spectacular identity.

VISUALITIES AND SPETACULAR IDENTITIES

Although Artaud has not carried out consistently his theater, he wanted to impregnate the space by sounds and provocative views, proposing atmospheres of huge temples with verticality and horizontality capable of exposing its public to the difficulty of reaching the limits. Thus, the public would be immersed into something gigantic, experiencing multiple actions and great vigor. Even though Artaud has not presented technical solutions to actualize his ideas he has proposed a crude theater in which everything one sees, everything that surrounds and touches the actor, his movements, the expressions of his face and his body, everything, act as precise gestures of a total action

And Artaud cannot be characterized as an isolated voice in the desert, once other authors did accept, incorporate or accentuate the visual discourse of the scene already in the written play, expanding and provoking the discussion. You can even observe in this recurrence traces of a method of analysis that would unite these authors, playwrights, and even the most revolutionary performers since they deal with the scene as a visual

design, an artistic expression of visuality, although many artists go through the visual approach of the scene in a intuitive mode, exclusively or primarily.

One might say that while writing a play or a guide for a show, developing ideas yet in mental images for spectacular events of any nature the artist is already dealing with notions of space, of body. These mental images represent certain stage once it will have repercussions on the visual images physicalized in the scene. In this context it may be mentioned various artistic initiatives, a variety of events that are constantly emerging. Events designed and developed with a certain degree of spectacularity interacting with possible limits that indicate the decision of, at least, one artist who wants to share aesthetic reflections with, at least, one partner already called public or spectator and here recognized as co-builder, since without its contribution the visual images built in the scene would not be actualized.

On the other hand, initiatives designed without interest in the spectacular nature, assuming diversified political attitudes without evidence of aesthetic propositions and giving priority in occupying spaces of other fields of knowledge, e. g., the human sciences, are excluded from this context. Respecting the choice of the makers of such initiatives it should be clarified that the interest here turns to the spectacular event as the only locus or situation in which the human being can discuss its condition by the incorporation of aesthetic traits - artistic procedures - together with poetics - choices, traces (*kbaraktér*) - of one or more artists involved and with the presence of co-builder.

To question this point of view by invoking artistic initiatives, it will be elaborated an attempt of bringing together Antonin Artaud and Tennessee Williams, proposing an unusual connection, even a frightening one for many people. In the last paragraph of his Notes for the production, preface to *The glass menagerie* whose opening night took place in 1944, Tennessee Williams says that the light of the play is not realistic and suggests a treatment that points to the visuality of his theater:

A certain correspondence to light in religious paintings, such as El Grecos's, where the figures are radiant in atmosphere that is relatively dusky,



could be effectively used throughout the play. (WILLIAMS, 1970, p. 55)

Although it is a subtle note, the attentive reader may even notice there the indication of compositions, of pictures to the scene provoked by El Greco's painting. Although some critic could point the lack of technical accuracy in El Greco's work, Williams presents exciting problems, not only for the designer, but also for each artist who consider the show as a visual fact, a locus of visibility. Careful contact with any text, script or suggestion of performativity can promote approaches that mature critical visual attitude in the spectacular event itself. Underlining a link between his *The glass menagerie* and the work of El Greco Tennessee Williams follows the same path trodden by Artaud, indicating outside the text of the play visual images that pulsed in his imaginary.

As it is written above any artist involved in a production of that play is free to ignore such a relationship. On the other hand, in a study process it would be worth visiting El Greco and seeking potential points of friction even to propose a different reading. An artist can, after careful analysis, point technical difficulties when it comes to reproduce in a show the features of the painter's work in question. And who knows, reproducing will not be the most provocative way. A gloomy atmosphere, in turn, may not be the only or main way to propose visibility for a show conceived with *The glass menagerie* in mind.

In any case, how to elaborate on the scene radiant figures from which light emanates, as in Catholic saints, as in the Christ child painted by El Greco?¹⁰ For what reason? Re-establish, reconstruct at the show the universe of El Greco suggests an exciting challenge from which the imagination can be brought about. After all, provoking the imagination might be the desire of the artist who is responsible for the construction of the theatrical space, as it was for Williams, through his text written/literary or pre-spectacular. It is important to stress that Artaud also mentioned El Greco as a theme of

study and provocation, in the letters referring to the theatre of cruelty.

Investigating the spectacular event as visual design immersed in a context that expands and incorporates other strategies beyond the image recorded and reproduced through several available devices can be more than a theoretical approach that plans to dominate the image. There is an image that already pulses in the actor's body that is given as a medium for that purpose and, according to Artaud, the playwright can already incorporate **the fiery of images** as provocation to the scene. It would be up to scholars interested in the visibility observing its spectacular aspects as an assembly of ephemeral images actualized in movement throughout the show.

Observing these assumptions the study on the work of Antonin Artaud or Tennessee Williams, as well as any other playwright or of show projects may give substantial learning for the artist interested in the theater as a discourse of visibilities. This work suggests spaces for discussions in which the spectacular visibility designed by the work of Williams, as well as the poetry of Artaud investigates the physicalization of aesthetic events caused by images that trigger its speeches.

The use of term visibility may suggest some care in order to clarify the approach avoiding to tie the reader to common sense what it would take, at most, the exegesis found in dictionaries, stagnating in precarious levels of understanding of the topic, e. g.: the visible, the quality of what is visual, the vision, and so on. Yet, in specific theatrical discussions one can take the risk of investing in the term visibilities to identify the costumes, the makeup, the set design, the props and even the lighting and, at last, all aspects featuring theater as a composite work. Nevertheless, although all these aspects integrate the visibility of the theater, the present approach avoid the characterization of one of them, singly, as a visibility of the scene. The visibility of the show is constituted by the transversal relationship between these aspects, by the thought that guides that relationship. In conclusion, the imposition of visual formulas to a spectacular event at the expense of aesthetic and poetic evaluation may result in fragile visibility.

After all, considering to underline playwrights,

¹⁰ Cf. El Greco, Adoracion de los pastores (Museo del Prado, Madri)

directors and performers who find the image a relevant teaser for their work, it would be plausible to observe the mental image as a level in the process of building the visual image that physicalizes the spectacular, outlining a method that can be investigated.

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