

# Performative Mimesis – immediacy in action or the action of mediation?

**Mimesis Performativa – imediatez em ação ou a ação da mediação?**

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## Abstract

This article discusses the notion of a performative *mimesis*, taking as its starting point considerations by Michael Fried and Luiz Fernando Ramos who coined the term for the Brazilian context. It develops a reflection on the semantic and performative dimensions in contemporary theatrical performances and disallows conceptions that propose a non-referential performativity, but also criticizes Fried's anti-theatrical position. Finally, it argues that performative *mimesis* constitutes an action of mediation between artistic singularity and social context, within the structure of the theatrical phenomenon.

**Keywords:** Mediation – Performativity – Autonomy of Art

## Resumo

*O presente artigo discute o conceito de mimesis performativa, sobretudo a partir de uma leitura crítica das reflexões de Michael Fried e de Luiz Fernando Ramos quem cunhou o termo para o contexto brasileiro. Tece considerações sobre a configuração das dimensões semânticas e performativas do fenômeno teatral contemporâneo e refuta a concepção de performatividade não-referencial, mas também critica a posição antiteatral de Fried. Por fim, argumenta que a mimesis performativa constitui uma ação de mediação entre singularidade artística e contexto social no interior do fenômeno cênico.*

**Palavras chave:** mediação – performatividade – autonomia da arte

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While Latin America laments its general misery, the foreign observer cultivates a taste for that misery, not as a tragic symptom, but merely as a formal element within his field of interest.  
(Glauber Rocha, *The Aesthetics of Hunger*)

## Introduction

In this essay, I want to discuss the notion of antitheatricity on the contemporary (Brazilian) stage, its advantages and disadvantages for the constitution of a contemporary stage in an emphatic and (self-)critical sense of the word, taking a dialogue with the book *Mimesis Performativa – a margem da invenção possível*, by Luiz Fernando Ramos as my starting point. In my opinion, Ramos's book is central to this discussion, because, despite presenting itself as a modest gesture, it reveals a conceptual audacity in its objective. Apparently humble when recognizing that the discussion about mimesis that it presents can be hardly more than "a modest contribution" (p. 11) to a very old and almost incommensurable idea: the idea of mimesis. And bold, when stating that regarding the concept of "performative mimesis", proposed by the author, we would encounter an idea that is "better equipped to deal with a spectacular production of invention that temporarily supports the perspective of an expanded scene, bringing together visual, plastic and performing arts" (p. 13). So much better equipped that it is "proposing an alternative model to think of issues regarding the theater and performing arts today" (p.15) complementing and possibly even replacing the so-called *postdramatic theater*, *performative theater*, or even *post-modern theater* models. That is, Ramos's book intends to conceptualize what can be understood as the shaping forces of the contemporary scene around the world and in Brazil.

Giving this unapologetically contemporary horizon, intertwined with the didactic context of the author – who is a full professor at the University of São Paulo - USP –,

which still stands in for the hegemonic context that shaped the relevant discourses about the performing arts; a context that nevertheless is inserted in a complex reality whose contemporaneity necessarily oscillates between apparently mutually exclusive neighborhoods – dialectically interdependent regarding their social composition – like *Brasilândia* and *Higienópolis*. Considering this situation, it seems to me that this book allows a reflection about the current state of the “Sciences of Performing Arts” in Brazil, furthering and diversifying a reflection among peers (and I insist that this community is established by a gesture captured by German poet Ingeborg Bachmann, when she said that nowadays honors are extended not due to courage shown when facing an enemy, but due to “boldness in the face of friends”).

This reflection seems to be even more important, if it can show how its formal issues are best seen as being social allegories or devices. I hope to be able to demonstrate how discussing the notions of antitheatricality, the anti-dramatic, expanded theater and performative mimesis – all central when thinking through this book – can bring into play something vital about the future of our field. Thus, I propose, as a final analysis to carry out this discussion, to think of these notions as allegoric formations of subjectivities and sociabilities. What is at stake is not only a decision regarding formal questions of the stage, but concerning a kind of social imagination. It is with this intention that I present my reflections about the nature of the theoretical project called “performative mimesis”.

*Contemporaneity from a theatrical (formal)  
and social (thematic) point of view*

I believe an allegorical and also contextual approach is necessary, given the book’s goal of configuring a contemporary art. Indeed, the most important implicit gesture in Ramos’s

book seems to be this insistence on bringing to the Brazilian academia a reflection about contemporaneity, provoking national scholars to think about what it means (and implies) to be a contemporary performing artist in economically hegemonic countries and in an economically dependent country such as Brazil. Certainly, the task is too demanding to be fulfilled by only one publication, but, given the political situation of the country, and considering a theater that intends to be artistically relevant in this national context, this is a virulent and urgent reflection.

The book was published in 2015, and since then we have gone through a parliamentary coup whose effect on the arts has been devastating, since it drained – in many regions, almost completely – the financial resources allocated for productions in the field of performing arts. What is left of this production in many Brazilian cities in many cases can hardly be considered, from the formal approach adopted by the book, as being a *contemporary* production<sup>2</sup>.

But this hiatus also threatens the contemporaneity of the book and of the artistic production that it considers to be the foundation of its aesthetic view and which is the object of its critical study, - i.e. mostly European and North American productions – when related to the Brazilian context. And this relation is vital if the book wishes to be relevant, to have a productive impact on the theatrical and academic productions in Brazil.

The situation becomes even more complicated if we accept that the historical reality of Brazil is marked by a juxtaposition of coexisting historical times whose outline is more similar to a pyramid whose peak corresponds (in terms of technological development, of necessary economic investment and also of the hegemonic social position of its agents) to a minority in socioeconomical and geographical terms. Or, putting it simply, only the small economic elite can live (blindly or knowingly) according to the forces of contemporary capitalism, even though it affects the whole population in different, specific ways. Thus, the contem-

2. I believe that this is not necessarily a disadvantage for the performing arts, since most of the Brazilian population participates in (and thus constitutes) Brazilian contemporary society exactly as excluded and marginalized people. That is, traditional performing forms, when problematized regarding their relationship to the contemporary perceptual and social logic, can play an important part in provoking and engaging artists and spectators to take a stance.

poraneity of this foreign production – which is the result of advanced forces that encompass the whole globe, and thus in one way or another evidences the dynamics of these forces – can be adequately analyzed and assessed only in relation to the status of the local production that exists at its margins. This adaptation of the analysis needs to go beyond the critical description of the form and ask what is the social imaginary presupposed and proposed by this form. How does this form as a social imaginary relate to the imaginary of most of the Brazilian population who does not live organically in the context of globalization and who does not enjoy the neighborhood of Higienópolis, but suffers the economic policies of social hygienization exerted by those who live there. If not, this would be only an abstractly universal contemporaneity, valid (as an idealistic promise) only for the few whose living practices align with this technological and socioeconomical peak. For them, there is no hiatus between their social practice and the social perspective and form inscribed in the performative mimesis as presented in the book. Thus, maybe inadvertently and reading its production against the grain, the book offers critical study material to think of the historical configurations of this current moment in the field of performing arts.

The interest in the *form* of the contemporary spectacle, which marks most analyses in the book, configures the strong gesture of the book. But it also signals its limitations. One can hardly live up to the contemporaneity of a production without situating one's own position in relation to the hegemonic discourse about it, as well as in relation to the concrete context of people, their social practices and the collective imaginary of which such production is a slanted witness and to which it answers formally and thematically. Because, as stated by Agamben (2009), the contemporary thinker know that they cannot escape their time, but choose, in their view and speech, to go against the haughty discourse that this very time weaves about itself. Thus, it is the task of a book

that intends to be contemporary to think of the dissonant relationship between art and its context, between authors and their context; to show how the forms, tools and procedures of this art expose, in their inopportune characteristics, the blind spots of this confident collective discourse, highlighting the pains and fractures that the collective moment imposes on the living experiences of an individual (or the limits that a historical moment of individualistic entrepreneurship establishes for the idea of collective, of a commonality, of a being-together). A reflection that seeks to establish itself as contemporary must make it noticeable how art is a meeting point for these two moments: the blind temporary triumph of hegemonic forces and the famished and demolishing gnawing of marginalized impulses. It is through contemporary art (or the equally contemporary reflection about it), that the spectator and reader can “receive on their face the beacon of darkness that emerges from their very own time” (Agamben, p. 64). And Agamben carries on, saying that the task of the contemporary being is to perceive in this darkness a light that they try to reach, but they cannot because the source escapes faster than the speed of light (p. 65). This does not correspond necessarily to the dimension of the unspeakable present in the performative *mimesis* presented by Ramos, but certainly problematizes the utopic dimension seen in the arts (and many times also in the unspeakable, in the instauration of new non-figurative and non-referential realities of the modernist view). From this perspective, the relative absence of a contemporary Brazilian world in the book is coherent with the research proposal, but this seems to weaken his claim of placing himself in the field of a contemporaneity that also positions his Brazilian readers, even though this field is formally contained within the type of performative production that Luiz Fernando Ramos analyzes.

The task the book considers to be imminent, and which itself it does not claim to answer directly, is a

critical assessment, especially of the implications on a social imaginary, of the characteristics of what Ramos calls “performative mimesis” as “inventing unrecognizable shapes” (p. 49) and configuring a performative expression which cannot be synthesized and, therefore, interpreted in a text (in a narrative or *mythos*) extracted from it, and so “this exposition remains necessarily undefined when read by the receptor” (p. 46).

It is this assessment that must be problematized, not least to evidence the possible power of this indefiniteness, because at the same time as it risks the semantic irrelevance of the performative production, it undermines any narcissistic discourse about it.<sup>3</sup> However, it seems that what is at risk in this situation (both performative and interpretative) is to make the specific position of the spectator or the artist irrelevant as well. The consequences of this perspective on an artform that is represented here as non-representational and relational do not seem to be empowering, because with this stance, all art that is expressed through this performative mimesis becomes irrelevant for empirical life - unless one wants to defend in an utopian gesture (that is perhaps escapist and certainly modernist) the relevance of this indefiniteness for our being in the world through some kind of contemporary *vanitas*. But even as *vanitas*, the eruptive force of expressing the unspeakable depends on presenting a referential empirical context as a hardened and even fossilized territory. By trying to carry out this problematizing assessment of performative mimesis, according to Ramos’s belief a way of accomplishing “unrecognizable shapes” that remain undefined in the act of reception, I seek to find in this production its capacity of presenting us with the “beacon of darkness” of our time.

So, I want to discuss performative mimesis and its ‘antitheatricality,’ first in the structure conceived by Ramos, and secondly from a more historical approach following readings of Michael Fried’s work, to propose, at last, a

3- When Ramos states that the performative scene “becomes a narrative awaiting narrators that can, each time, and from an individual perspective, tell it to themselves” (p. 94), he directly confirms the narcissistic offer, but goes back a few steps behind the line he had traced previously in his book, by perceiving that performative dramaturgy is permeated by a type of negative semiotic theology that thwarts any construction of meaning with incongruence or incompleteness, and consequently with a semantic blank. And is not so that there lies a possible critical project, maybe even with political dimensions, in creating this hiatus between an affirmative narcissistic look and a deconstructive and emptying look within a work of art? Ramos does not explore this dimension, but we will get back to it at the end of our essay.

reading of this performative mimesis that is different than Ramos's, but supported by his structural analyses.

*Performative mimesis – the production of non-referential spectacles*

The book discusses examples from both the performing arts and the visual arts to lay out the amplitude of the concept that gives the book its title. That is, the concept is created also to be able to think the relations between the performing arts and the visual arts today. It is about

a theory of the theater and performing arts, that is turned especially and vertically to the phenomenon of the spectacle in an expanded aesthetic field [...] and that this new scope, that of a performative mimesis, reaches other types of artistic presentation, now only associated to the visual and plastic arts (p. 16).

In this expanded and hybrid field, the dominance of the fictional narrative in the creative process is obviously abandoned. But it is rejected not only as a plot that precedes the presentation. Neither can it survive, according to Ramos, as its conceptual score or as the logos of the scenic production, deduced later as its expressive and communicational intention, concrete stimulus of a dialogue whose ultimate referent is inevitably our being in the world. The antitheatricality claimed by Ramos as a characteristics of performative mimesis is at first antidramatic, but soon expands and becomes anti-mimetic. This refusal rejects not only the figurative representation, but any representational claim. That is to say, any referential intention inscribed in the artistic phenomenon is abandoned, however slanted it may be.<sup>4</sup> An issue that could be raised here concerns the hybridity of this supposedly non-referential scene, since hybridity also relates to the intersection of figurative and abstract languages, or representational and performative languages. And one of the purposes of the hybridization

4. See, among many, p. 31, p. 60, p. 61, p. 64, p. 91, p. 107, p. 139.



of artistic languages seems to me its ability to expose and strain the limits of each language. From the moment when performativity emerges as the undoubtedly dominant force, this self-critical and self-reflective project of the arts in expanded fields is lost. A risk that Ramos's approach may not even notice, but certainly ignores, when he thinks that the most advanced ways of producing for the stage are those where mimesis as representation and referentiality is completely overcome.

It seems that this referential absence is seen by the author as a liberating stimulus, and thus necessary, so that the spectator and/or the artist can imagine other ways of making art and living in this world, outside the horizons of established expectations. Ramos says:

The hypothesis here is that contemporary currents associated with the idea of a possible margin of invention in the field of mimetic or spectacular representation, having in common, also, the refusal to drama and mimesis and the performative vocation, increasingly use pure *opsis* as the central element of their poetics. Even if a residual *mythos* always remains operative, inexorably (the one the spectator formulates in the absence of references), this preponderance of *opsis*, or of living and opaque matter, is an inescapable evidence, at least in those spectacular phenomena in which one no longer works in the dramatic paradigm and in which the performative element is the primordial source of information. (p. 31-32)

Throughout the book, Ramos emphasizes this non-semantic and non-referential dimension as a key to understanding contemporary 21st century theater production and situates the concept of performative mimesis as an operational concept for this theater, whose modernist origin is clear in the centrality of the discussion of Mallarmé's theatrical utopia. From it, Ramos concludes that

[the] idea of a meaningless presence, of a matter irreducible to semantic resolution, fully foreshadows the utopia of a non-dramatic theater, still a spectacle in its visibility, but no longer mimetic, or bearing only a negative mimesis, that projects future riddles rather than corresponding to previous references. Of course, the realization of a scene with this power

and emancipated of the *mythos* only occurred during the 20th century, becoming more effective the more it manifested as pure *opsis*. (p. 60)

Or, in other words, this *opsis* as a “friction of gross visual matter that presents itself against the reality that welcomes it”, free from a mimesis understood as “a beacon that repeats senses and meanings” (p. 64), constitutes the “performative mimesis” and substitutes the “fictional illusion” or the “dramatic play” (p. 35) as a central element of theatrical practice.

But is this friction, in order to be relevant and perceptible, not a hermeneutic phenomenon as well? A phenomenon that demands from the spectator a reading that recognizes its shifting power of making its own gaze oscillate between its empirical reality and the presented artistic reality? That is, the perception of friction, as a qualitative friction and not mere quantitative variation, depends on a significant context. How could friction gain its relevance without being inscribed in this field of meanings, intervening in it through sensations that are transformed by the viewer into deviant meanings, imagining subjectivities and sociabilities, into metaphors of social and economic structures? What kind of spectator would be interested or indeed able to look at this *opsis* without a perception concomitantly affected by their being in the world? That is, how could this *opsis* gain relevance as “pure” *opsis*?<sup>5</sup> Doesn’t it remain “pure” only in the naive eyes of the spectator who forgets or does not want to know about the cultural construction of *opsis* as well as of his or her “eyes”?

Behind this conception of the aesthetic dimension of the work and the aesthetic experience on the part of the spectator we find, apparently, its ‘neo-Kantian’ construction under postmodern and ‘post-mimetic’ conditions. However, a more careful analysis than the one carried out by the book requires one to ask whether it is possible to exclude the presence of a hermeneutical aspect in the construction

5. The answer I suggested in the first part of the essay is that this materiality that is opaque before the world functions as a kind of contemporary *vanitas*, of a radical emptying of the world and of its processes of signification. But who would be interested in this negative theology and what would be the consequences of communing with this god of absence?

and enjoyment of the work without thereby dissipating any relevance and specificity of the phenomenon called 'art' for the life and individual and social reflections of viewers.

Ramos concedes that remnants of mimesis continue to exist as an operation that still "acts in more open forms, without origin or destiny of arrival, only as negative signs and hollow senses" (p. 64). It can be seen that this mimesis continues to represent almost exclusively a semiotic negativity, and is at the same time self-referentially closed in itself and materially directed to the sensorial perceptions of this spectator who is averse to hermeneutics.

As valid and pertinent as many of Ramos's formal observations on the way in which many of the spectacular contemporary, visual, or scenic phenomena operate – such as the dominance of syntactic performativity over semantic representation, the displacement of the work from its autonomous objectivity to the reception by spectators, a tendency towards disfiguration and depersonalization of the human body and voice on the scene, and even the insistence of the works on being works without semantic closure<sup>6</sup> – his decision to privilege the anti-referential mermaid songs of contemporary times weakens both his theoretical and his analytical and critical view on the spectacular production chosen as material from his book.

He characterizes this anti-referential gesture as "modernist violence against the referent" (p. 61), and recognizes from this insight that, for example, the actor's body on stage is treated by this performative production as a "scapegoat" (p. 61) that needs to be sacrificed, transformed "into an indecipherable object, with its functional use prevented by the theater" so that performative mimesis can install itself in this new paradigm. Still, there is no critical evaluation of this project by historicizing it within the context of a serious crisis of values not only in the culture that this practice intends to overcome – the culture of drama as a deeply bourgeois culture –, but also in the culture to which this practice belongs – postmodern or post-dramatic culture

6. Although this insistence is something that applies to many works of realism that invest in semantic instability, without thereby completely deconstructing the intersubjective reality of the world shared with its readers. For it is one thing to provoke and at the same time suspend the construction of one meaning for the work, and another to declare any meaning as something obsolete, unnecessary and even impeding to affirm any artistic relevance in contemporaneity.

as an expression of a post-bourgeois world that emerges in and with contemporary capitalism. It seems that in this fascination with the post-dramatic, some element rejects thinking through the relation of this formal structure to the rational imagination (antisocial in its pure formalist materiality) of the promoters of the global capitalist world, and consequently reflecting on the modalities and demands of a possible relevance of this form for the life and social imagination of those who suffer this process in positions of vulnerability and poverty.

For it is precisely the construction of the expulsion of hermeneutical elements, as the equivalent of sacrificing a scapegoat, which reveals to us in Ramos's discourse how many impulses of (self-) sacralization exist in this anti-hermeneutic project. Impulses that obviously preclude the historization of the project itself, either as production or as aesthetic reception. This is all the more problematic since the priests of this sacrifice in the empirical field are the agents who wish to make shine, as the light of contemporaneity, the efficient destabilizing performance of technological and economic innovation, in order to be able to affirm, as a result of this performativity, a "new enchantment with the world"<sup>7</sup> that relegates the social interpretation of these actions to modern darkness. A relevant and potent contemporary art, in the sense of producing an awareness of its own historical position and of its transgressive gesture, must, in my view, carry out in its poetic, allegorical and referential language the desecration of this cult without, however, denying the symptomatic value of performative poetics. A critique that does not want to run into the danger of stripping the performative reality of its ethical meanings needs to reflect the symptomatic dimension of this form.<sup>8</sup>

Does the work of expanding artistic languages beyond traditional mimetic boundaries necessarily intent to construct – as its most fruitful goal – the artistic phenomenon as a manifestation of the unspeakable, and

7. That is the term that Erika Fischer-Lichte uses in her "The Transformative Power of Aesthetics" to theorize the effects that this poetics intends to have on the social perception of its spectatores.

8. In the last section of this article I discuss how this performativity can be put at the service of a historically and self-reflexive project, both in aesthetic production and reception.

therefore as something indecipherable in contemporary performing practices?<sup>9</sup> Or perhaps the expanded theatrical performance aims at a better exposition of the artistic creation and reception of its formal principles and pragmatic contexts, whether social (site specific) or subjective (of reception), through the intersection of mimesis and performativity, but not by replacing the former with the second? Does an immediate and non-hermeneutical reception of these performances,<sup>10</sup> in the form of “pure” sensations and affections, that is, in the form of readings that are more like constant projections of what the spectator feels than the interpretations of structures that are inscribed in the work, really allow for an experience of the “possibilities of invention”? Does this opposition between the aesthetic object and the receiving subject really outweigh the logic of traditional aesthetics, or does it simply alter the domination of one over the other, without intervening in the conception of its supposed opposition?

Moreover, is it not the case that this conception of spectacle and *opsis* stimulates, first of all, a double misunderstanding: first that a satisfactory human existence in this world is possible outside of a hermeneutical texture and given over to the immediate action of the materiality and the physicality of the aesthetic object; and second, that for the construction of a remnant of logos or an enriching *mythos*, there may suffice the projection of the singular sensation itself – transformed into provisional and supplementary meaning – on the dessemantized materiality of the performance, implicitly stating that the sensory metaphor of the spectator corresponds in adequate terms to this materiality, thus “inventing” new meanings for the materiality of this object?

And finally, we can ask whether desemantizing, understood not as rupture, but as a gesture of supplementing the empirical *status quo* with an indefinite enigmatic power,<sup>11</sup> does not make this *status quo* the ultimate horizon of this possible invention? For even if the supplement can destabilize images

9. It is worth noting here the use of the adjective “pure” in relation to *opsis*. As a pure *opsis*, it refuses the work of mediation and invests in an immediacy of sensation and reception that conditions both the construction of the scene and the position of the viewer. But does this immediacy really allow us to leap out of the instrumentalizing context of a closed work, or is it just the contemporary version that shifts the instrumentalizing power of the closed work to the closed spectator with the illusion of their “pure” gaze?

10. We cannot forget that there is a long tradition of defending this immediate imbrication of the spectator in the work, within the Brazilian performative trajectory. See for example the following statement by Lygia Clark: “the (art) work must require an immediate participation of the spectator and he, spectator, must be thrown into it” (CLARK apud MILLIET, 1992, p.25). The requirement shares with pure *opsis* a sensory imbrication, a necessary effect to establish the aesthetic experience.

11. This is the proposal of the last chapter VI of the book.

created for this *status quo*, it does not propose to articulate a transformation of it in the sense of overcoming it.

Questions that we can formulate in the context of our initial assertion that any artistic form is a structure that forms social imaginaries: does a dialogue with the work that comes down to a perception of the interplay of forms and materialities as well as any bodily reactions in face of this play live up to the idea of perceiving “something”?<sup>12</sup> Does a reading that resembles the projection of the results of a sensorial experience onto the materiality of the performance do justice to the idea of reading and, consequently, of dialogue?

Does this project of the sacralization of a world without referentiality really offer the spectator an enriching experience of dialogic and non-alienating relations with the work and its world?<sup>13</sup> Or does this structure of scenic performativity isolate the viewer into a sensorial monologue? And does the reception of this pure *opsis*, far from being a shifting and destabilizing reflection, reveal in the conditions put forth by Luiz Fernando Ramos a resistance to think artistically of this human being as a dialogic being in his social and affective concreteness? Is pure *opsis* a productive distancing from the construction of worlds and imaginaries which are not only possible as a radical denial of empiria, but concrete transformations of the *status quo*, and enriching intellectually, affectively and spiritually? How can anyone who lives outside the forcibly “organic” bubble of the beneficiaries of the current techno-economic process imagine a different existence in this antitheatricality “which does not refer to any referent” (p. 139)? To whom can this “radical” non-referentiality promise a liberating effect? Who cares to imagine a freedom without social references?

### *The configuration of antitheatricality in Ramos and Fried*

Looking at fiction or at the stage play as another world is like looking at the Other (with a capital letter, if we look

12. There is, for example, a critical reading of Fried's text by Georges Didi-Huberman in his book *O que vemos que nos olha* (see especially p. 35-38), which insists on the production of meaning in a dialectic of destabilizing and stabilizing impulses that emanate from both the object and the subject.

13. In fact, the search for an experience of constant transformation, an informal space beyond all form and consequently out of time, of detachment from the forms and union simply given with that field outside of the forms and times in which all forms of existence appear, seems to me an intrinsic search for human existence. But reducing art to an expression of this quest (which I believe is the only way to live up to Ramos's project – and Michael Fried's, as well) is, in my view, prejudicial to both the arts and this search which should be better characterized as being of spiritual and theological nature. The seminal texts to reflect on this fusion of art and religion are in my view the writings of Walter Benjamin, especially the distinction between symbol and allegory in the book on the tragic German drama, and his theses on history.

at the non-figurative dynamic structure as a whole) or at a specific other (if we focus on the verisimilitude with our empirical world). And this relation to an external otherness implies in establishing an imagetic relation with the otherness within me. A relation that can be marked by processes of voyeurism, instrumentalization, alienation or dialogue, (self-) reflection and recognition of otherness from the perception of a distance. This distance between the perceived scene and the perceived subject is fundamental to the idea of a theatricality, especially when it installs itself as an oscillation and structural instability within the perceived phenomenon as well as in the self-perception of the spectator. Avoiding or suppressing this oscillation<sup>14</sup> is the goal of any antitheatrical position.

Here there is *only a formal distance* between the antitheatricality expressed by Ramos and Michael Fried's antitheatricality. The book evokes and quotes this author almost as an alter ego, perhaps because it shares with him and his author a strong claim to an almost absolute autonomy of art. Fried condemns theatricality for producing an excess of unstable meanings in an interminable temporal movement, whereas Ramos demands that theatricality be overcome so that there can be a game free of signifiers with no decipherable meanings; a game of materialities with unspeakable impulses. Ramos inscribes a constant temporal movement in his concept of performative mimesis – the emergence and disappearance of unusual materialities without a referential dimension – that Fried rejects completely as a characteristic of good art, precisely because this movement impels the spectator to a constant (and always provisional) construction of meaning by projecting its semantic interest on the materiality of the work. *Good art*, for Fried, strikes the viewer through the flash of a revealing moment in which spectator and work have their happy meeting. For Ramos, the encounter occurs through the endless sequence of sensations that are constantly constructed and destroyed

14.

It can manifest itself in the oppositions between the sign and the material signifier, between the real and the fictional, between the truth and pretending, between the text and the scenic event, or in the processes of reception in the instability between the objective autonomy of the work and the subjective autonomy of an interpretation in the form of projection. What matters is the disconcerting and disturbing experience of a shifting dimension in the performativity and significance of the observed object.

in the variation of materiality. However, both share that the reception should lead to a moment (Fried) or a state (Ramos) of the spectator that escapes hermeneutics, because it is an epiphanic instant (Fried) or infinite sensorial variation (Ramos).

This debate should be thought less of a conceptual *querelle* about how to adequately define the term (anti-theatricality). Rather, it reveals its relevance only when we understand its ethical core. This nucleus is registered in the theater as a social phenomenon, insofar as

for the modern aesthetics from Hegel to Nietzsche, through Diderot and Rousseau, theater is precisely that subject in which aesthetic and ethical aspects are intersecting each other. The theater establishes not only an aesthetic structure, but at the same time a certain form of social interaction, and with it, certain models of subjectivity (Rebentisch, 2003, p. 23, my translation).<sup>15</sup>

What is at stake in the dispute about how best to organize the relationship between spectators and artists and their fictional universe (when there is one) is the metaphorical relationship and the process of mediation between social and aesthetic interaction.

At least in Fried, this relational core is perceptible when he accuses modernist art of establishing a violent relationship with the spectator, since it denies them any stable point of view. Fried calls theater the incessant interplay between the provocation and deference of a meaning within the work. This theatricality positions the viewer in such a way that they find themselves as the sole producer of meanings, which in turn are constantly undermined by the material objectivity of the work. Fried addresses his critique to this notion of theatricality as a shifting production of deferrals and semantic overlaps. In a way, Fried insists on the dialogue between theatrical discourse and perceptual discourse on the part of the viewer, as a moment that allows both to recognize each other. But the ideal moment of double recognition is, for Fried, a moment out of the

15.

The German original: "*Für die moderne Ästhetik von Hegel über Nietzsche zu Rousseau und Diderot ist das Theater eben jener Gegenstand, an dem sich ästhetische und ethische Aspekte überkreuzen. Das Theater etabliert nicht nur eine bestimmte ästhetische Struktur, sondern zugleich auch eine bestimmte Form der sozialen Interaktion, mithin bestimmte Modelle von Subjektivität.*"



dialogue, an epiphany moment in which the work in its entirety opens up by understanding an integral part of it. Fried calls the existence of this moment “presentness” and attributes a religious dimension to it: “presentness is grace”. Through a different path than Ramos’, Fried even demands an almost absolute autonomy of the work so that its symbolic effectiveness can be an experience of instant grace.

To the extent that theatricality is feared as the dynamic play between semantic reference and the exposition of the spectator’s productive gaze, both Fried and Ramos participate, each in their own way, in a version of antitheatricality. Ramos rightly points out that with this moment of grace

Fried is aiming at the relation between work and observer [...] the erasure of the performative aspects intrinsic to the canvas, both as traces of its production and in distancing the one who observes beyond the thematic and dramatic contents that they could entertain. (p. 80)

He is also correct when he points out that Fried “is not free from falling into an inexorable intentionality” (p. 81) and warns that he favors a dramatic, absorptive, scenic device marked by the clear separation between the fictional space of the scene and the empirical space of the viewers. Fried wants – through his compositional logic – an enigmatic force of the work (at the same time endowed with an absolute naturalness and authenticity) to hold our contemplative gaze, instead of offering himself to an incessant reading of its signs and semiotic strategies. Ramos considers inappropriate Fried’s qualification of this ideal device as non- or antitheatrical (p. 85). For this device cannot do without artificiality, pretense/appearances and a constant performativity to keep going. Therefore, the antitheatricality of the object is nothing more than a “phantasmagoria that no longer holds in reality” (p. 87). However, the same could be said of Luiz Fernando Ramos’s idea of pure *opsis* and of purely performative mimesis, based on the

supposed possibility of a spectacle and materiality devoid of significant layers which would allow a fusion of aesthetic space with empirical space in the act the sensory reception of this pure *opsis*.

Criticizing Fried for neglecting that the dramatic device is also theatrical, artificial, and based on the pretense of a center, is formally a correct objection, but escapes the ethical dimension of Fried's concern: to prevent that the pictorial, sculptural, or by extension, abstract work capture the spectator in a promise of freedom or a sense of false infinity, to which the spectator can react with an infinite series of narcissistic readings that, in their interpretive omnipotence, install an instrumentalizing look for which the work is only material for its interpretative will, without an intersubjective world corresponding to this interpretation.<sup>16</sup> This interpretation, however, never finds somewhere to rest.<sup>17</sup>

It is an effect radicalized by the idea of a pure *opsis* and completely de-semantizing, without this conception overcoming the problem of instrumentalization. In fact, Ramos embraces the dynamic dimension of theatricality that Fried condemns in minimal art, but subtracts any semantic intention from it, stating that the performativity of the work consists in calling attention to "what is being done immediately, here and now before the public. [...] [A] drive which, like a surplus gravity, draws all the senses from a spectacle to the actual situation, opposing, rivaling or even completely eliminating any shadow of dramatic narrative" (p. 101). The antitheatricality in Ramos's book resides in this last point, of

thinking of the spectacular performance of a certain spectacle or performance, not [as] the efficacy of its semantic system, as if we were recomposing the confirming powers of the realist mimesis, but simply, attentive to its syntactic [...] performative [...] aspects, whether they occur, or how they repeat the form. [...] like that phenomenon which, independently of recognition and fitting into a referential scheme of the observer, robs it of its performance and obliges it to operate it as an open game, or as a record that orbits tirelessly without fixing itself in a stable final destination. (p. 102)

16.

Fried says that "[the] object, not the spectator, must be maintained as the center or focus of the situation; but the situation belongs to the spectator – it is his situation." (p. 6) However, he believes the focus should come from the work whose structural stability would promise the validity of this intersubjectivity.

17.

See, for example, Tony Smith's oniric promenade in this essay (p. 8).

It is curious that there is an apparent approval of this effect of the spectacle to dominate the spectator's affective system and force him to operate the spectacle in a certain way. For differently from spectacles that consciously offer themselves to a hermeneutic or deconstructed reading, where the opening of the phenomenon is something to be discovered in part against, but especially with, the work, this version of performative effectiveness transforms the spectator into the object of its visceral force.

In this way, it becomes clear that Fried defends antitheatricity for a specific renewal of the dramatic referential mimesis, and Ramos defends it for a complete overcoming of the idea of mimesis as a referential structure inscribed in the work. Consequently, the meaning of the concept of theatricality oscillates between a dangerous destruction of any referential stability (Fried) and unjustified fidelity to a fixed meaning inscribed in the work that inhibits its free spin in an orbit without a final destination (Ramos).

Curiously, however, if we are willing to read these two versions of an antitheatrical stance as metaphors of social relations, or as ways of being together, both critics seem to reject (or consider irrelevant) the politically positioned viewer and the critical and analytic role of art in the concrete empirical world. Or rather, they choose to seek a proposal to radically overcome the dangers arising from the fact that the work of art also exists in the world. Both believe that good art must get rid of these mundane vestiges.<sup>18</sup>

Fried believes that the solution comes from a spectacular detachment from the work and its content that allows the recognition of the specific totality in which the utopia of a full existence articulates outside the social and existential dilemmas of the world: the absorption of the spectator in a presentness of the work which is recognized as grace (corresponding in some way to the meeting of the beautiful soul with the instant beauty of the work). This encounter can only take place in a space

18.

I would just like to note here that thinkers like Jaques Rancière or Ileana Dieguez Caballero, to name only two who are recognized here in Brazil, have elaborated a reflection on the aesthetic phenomena in general (Rancière) or specifically in theater (Caballero) that stipulates a relative autonomy of scenes without accepting that they can be reduced to a pure *opsis*, or to a puzzling symbolic fullness, without historical references.

marked by the autonomy of the object before the viewer (and the social conditioning inscribed in their perception). Its critical gain is the refusal to see a sign of the spectator's freedom in the spectacle of ceaseless theatricality.<sup>19</sup> Rather, it is a condemnation to a false infinity effected by the fact that the contemporary spectator, deluded by the desire for a quantitative infinity of sensorial modulations, deliberately seeks.<sup>20</sup> Fried's warning seems relevant to me, but his proposal – focusing on symbolic depth in the totalizing moment of the autonomous work – does not allow us to understand the potential of the work of art as a gesture of intervention in its social context whose relevance is given not lastly in the presence of the spectator's gaze. The work idealized by Fried exists only as an abstract slit in this context, whose concrete contours necessarily escape the view of Fried's spectator.

If Fried wants to restore the dignity of the symbolic work, against the force of its literality (and that is to say its materiality), Ramos wants to attribute supreme artistic value to this materiality, which is accomplished as “a stroke of language” (p. 109) that “intends to abolish all representation” in the performativity of presenting itself as “pure” materiality or *opsis*. This non-semantic process is the grace that the work of art, conceived according to the principles of performative mimesis, can offer the contemporary spectator. In this conception one gains an awareness of the performativity of materiality, but one loses the chance to install the construction of meanings and representations of the world as a self-reflective process in the interaction between material performativity and activation of semantic contexts. That is, one throws away the possibly illuminating experience that interpretation is partly a projection. But this projection that never finds enough support (or finds too much unstable support) potentially constitutes an aesthetic experience provoked to also carry out a constant self-search of the motives and precepts of this stabilizing ‘projection’.

19.

Perhaps it is better to call this phenomenon ‘spectacularity’, to live up to the danger of alienation detected by Fried in this structure.

20.

Fried says that “the experience of both [materiality of the work and reception] is of infinity, of inexhaustibility, of the ability to continue indefinitely” (p.14).

Even if neither sets out to think about the problem and its solution in explicitly ethical terms, we can see that the refusal of theatricality is marked by ethical questions. In Fried, it occurs because of an instrumental relationship that theatricality would establish between work and spectator, and vice versa. An instrumentality that is based on an alienation between work and spectator. At least it seems to me that Fried interprets the distancing described and effected by minimalist artists in this way. The minimalist work absolutely isolates each spectator before the work and his or her companion of reception and delivers them, as Fried sees it, this experience. The isolation can be overcome only by the work that allows, in its distance, an experience of presence that is equal for all, since it is anchored in the epiphanic instant whose lighting depends on the specificity of the work. That is to say, the being-together that Fried craves is organized according to the principles of a religious community (with all the political dangers that this entails when politics is aestheticized in this way, as we can see in the various pseudo-religious and totalitarian ideologies of the 20th century, Nazism, Stalinism, etc. although this is definitely not Fried's intention).

In Ramos, we find as the receiver of pure *opsis* necessarily a subjectivity deprived of any historicity or intersubjectivity. There is no common world to be shared, only physical sensations that change and modify constantly. It is the ardor of this moment that attracts, arrests and releases the reception in a sensorial play of materiality and shapeless surfaces<sup>21</sup>. As a metaphor for sociability, this game obviously does not correspond to a totalitarian community, organized religiously around an enigmatic sacred center. Rather, it refers to a set of floating particles, structurally coexisting and attracted to one another by bodily desires. Thus, they form a spatial structure characterized by an interaction, but not by an idea of a common, nor by a mutual intentional interest.

21.

Ramos finishes his book with a quotation from Mallarmé, with an allusion to the instant of reception, almost as eschatological as Fried's evocation of the presentness. But it is not the symbolic fullness in a total moment, but the pure burning of a creative flame. Metaphorically speaking, it is not the "enigmatically full personality" of the work that matters, but the appearance - at every moment - of its inexhaustible erotic embodiment.

In another essay, I have already stated that this characterization of performativity as hostile to hermeneutics and other interpretive impulses – including the awareness of such performativity as a positioning in an instrumental political context – presents us with

a cybernetic thinking that does not know the acting subject, since it describes processes that are both systemic and casual. It allows us to verbalize formally perceptive analyses (the exchange of positions between active artists and passive spectators; the construction and problematization of distance and close relations; the assumption that this reconfigures community settings), but ultimately abstract, since they make it impossible to discuss and problematize the postulated unity between performative action and political action, between physical co-presence and social event. For it is not the physical co-presence itself, or the circle of feedback itself, which allows one to understand and problematize the social, but the critical use of the discursive dimensions inscribed in human bodies and in the encounters between them (BAUMGÄRTEL, 2018, p. 138)

It is an immediate cybernetics that does not allow us to think how its structure presents a mediation between its individual elements and the whole of the systemic functioning; a systemic performance that is blind to the social costs and the analytical and intellectual limitations that it endorses in its abstract performativity. In short, it is unable to perceive and analyze the social and ideological pact to which it is subjected.

This inability affects both antitheatrical positions. Mainly due to the fact that none of them knows how to value the distance between materiality (transgressive and excessive, but not completely volatile) and meaning (necessarily fixed, even if precariously and for a limited time) as intrinsic to the theatrical phenomenon; a productive link in the construction of both the autonomy of the work and its aesthetic power of performing an analysis of its context and intervening in it. In order to work with an idea of performative mimesis that is productive in this sense, but not marked by what I judge as “antitheatrical error”, it will be necessary to show how the theatricality present in it, seen as the perception of the presence of materiality and meaning in inter-

action, allows us to think of the aesthetic experience in its singular specificity and to create a process of interpretive mediation that restores the social and ethical force of both mimesis and performativity. It will be necessary to show that performative mimesis is more potent, especially in the works chosen by Luiz Fernando Ramos, when the phenomenon is understood not as immediacy (materialistic or symbolic) in action, but as an action of mediation.

### *Performative mimesis – an aesthetic action of mediation*

In the previous section, I suggested a relation between mimesis and performativity in which each dimension enhances the presence of the other, constructing a kind of oscillating figure. It is an oscillation that meets both the requirement that an artistic work be a relatively autonomous phenomenon as well as a phenomenon that references our empirical life (and therefore has possibilities of construction of meaning inscribed in the work and not only in the viewer's perspective). That is, the work is both action and text. This double anchoring meets the philosophical demands of the defenders of artistic autonomy as well as the demands of an interventionist position and force for art by the defenders of socially engaged art.

We have seen that the two authors represent divergent aesthetic positions in their antitheatricality, which share, however, the view that it is possible to separate the material layer (literalist) from the semantic (referential) dimension, the force of action from the referential-textual force. This separation ensures the possibility of repressing the oscillation between materiality and signification, inscribed for Fried in literalist works and for Ramos in dramatic theatrical works, with their remnants of mimesis.

It is of no interest here to establish a problematic notion of mediation as the construction of a middle ground

between mimesis and performativity. This middle ground would clearly point to a kind of realist art in which both mimesis and performativity may go unnoticed by being naturalized. In the enjoyment of this work there will be no emphatically aesthetic experience. Fried and Ramos's insistence on an extra-ordinary dimension as inherent to the aesthetic experience seems fundamental to me to be able to understand and to value how the action of mediation builds, besides a possible hermeneutic understanding, an immediacy in action that our field usually calls "effectiveness of performativity" of the work. Or as Juliana Rebentisch says:

The event that makes the work a work of art is an event that happens between the aesthetic object and the receiving subject, and in such a way that it cannot be completely controlled by the subject beforehand [...] For aesthetic experience begins [with] a strangeness of the aesthetic object in relation to our usual mode of understanding; with a fundamental destabilization of our comprehensive access to the aesthetic object; with a peculiar distance from the aesthetic object that activates the aesthetic reflection and thus the work itself. [...] Only in the reflexive confrontation of the recipient subject with the forces that he – in a way not fully controlled by him – develops in relation to the aesthetic object, can this object mobilize its expressive potential in such a way that its material can express itself repeatedly, but unexpectedly as what, for structural reasons, does not fit into the comprehensive procedures (2003, p. 249).<sup>22</sup>

Here we find a notion of work as the concretization of a performative mimesis that does not need the phantasmagoria of pure *opsis* or of the fully eschatological *stasis*.

What is important is rather to show that the enigmatic force (breaking or overlapping) of performativity is within a semantic horizon that has already been framed both by the subject and the form of the work and the view of the spectator. From the point of view of mediation, there is no question of an abstract enigma that shies away from any attempt to make an enunciation, but rather the enigma that displaces the hegemonic utterances that belong to the historical moment of the presentation of the work.

22.

*"Das Ereignis, das aus dem Werk ein Kunstwerk macht, ist ein Ereignis, das sich zwischen ästhetischem Objekt und rezipierendem Subjekte ereignet, und zwar auf ein von letzterem schon zu Beginn nicht vollständig kontrollierte Weise. Denn die ästhetische Erfahrung beginnt [...] mit einer Entfremdung des ästhetischen Objekts aus unserem gewöhnlichen Verstehen, einer grundsätzlichen Verunsicherung unseres verstehenden Zugangs zum ästhetischen Objekt, [...] welche die ästhetische Reflexion und mit ihr das Werk in Gang setzt. [...] Nur in der ästhetischen Konfrontation mit dem Objekt, in der reflexiven Konfrontation des rezipierenden Subjekts mit Kräften, die es – auf nicht vollständig kontrollierbare Weise – in bezug auf den ästhetischen Gegenstand entfaltet, kann dieser in seinem Darstellungspotential so in Bewegung geraten, daß sich sein Material immer wieder auch unerwartet als das zeigen kann, was in den auf es gerichteten Verstehensvollzügen aus strukturellen Gründen nicht aufgeht."*



The efficacy of performativity can only be established by the way in which the established semantic context and the *de-semanticizing* and *re-semanticizing* forces of materiality are mediated in its textual action. Only in the dialectic collaboration between material and semantic performativity, on the one hand, and sensory and interpretive reception, on the other, can the work activate a genuinely aesthetic experience in which it can express its full potential of being action and text; of being readable and disturbing the act of reading; of being itself a creative act that arouses in the spectator the dynamics of its perception. This dialectical collaboration establishes reception as a reflexive dialogue between the spectator and theatrical phenomenon that escapes the phantasmagoria of Fried's theatricality and pure *opsis*, but without succumbing to the double danger of instrumentalization: of the work through the eyes of the spectator or the spectator through the structured content of the work.

I say dialectic collaboration, because this collaboration shows how the specific semantic dimension of material performativity is inscribed in action, and this referential dimension articulates its readability only through this determined performativity. In this sense, performativity is mimetic, that is, the creation of an artistic image of the world. The fact is that this relation exists only as the tension of an opening within the image, which calls for an interpretation that respects this opening. This performative mimesis is formally constitutive of any theater work, but it articulates differently throughout history.

How does performativity articulate a semantic and referential dimension? Rebentisch gives an important clue: by constructing *a significant difference in the repetition* of an established pattern. A shifting referentiality is articulated in the articulation and perception of this significant difference. I understand this effect as the mediating action of the artistic work through its performativity. A kind of unstable intertextuality acts within the performative mimesis that

displaces established readings and evidences that the work cannot be caught within specific readings. It is necessary for the performativity (as an extra-quotidien phenomenon) to be relevant to the viewer.

Taken as mimesis, the work in turn articulates and exposes the material and empirical conditions that allow the existence of these established standards and that guarantee the possibility of their recognition. Mediation perceived from mimesis exposes in the performativity of the work how it articulates materialized social patterns. A kind of precariously stabilized and standardized material performativity acts within mimesis. And it is necessary for mimesis to represent not only the *status quo* but also the critical semantic potentialities (be it in hindsight looking at history or anticipating an unknown future) arising from and within that *status quo*.

The mimesis that exposes its performativity (and thus *causes* and *undermines* the construction of fixed perceptual frameworks) and the performativity that suggests the search for a mimetic referential dimension (and thus *causes* and *undermines* its reception as sensorial and energetic) collaborate dialectically to guarantee the specificity of the aesthetic experience (and, we can also say, the affective fullness in the oscillating present of reception) as well as the relevance of the work and experience in relation to an empirical social context (we can also say its historical readability by a collective that we call spectators).

In this relation there is no state of immediacy, neither of the object in pure *opsis* nor of the subject in a sensory-only perception free of cultural patterns. At the same time – and this is fundamental for neither subject nor object to fall victim to an instrumental relationship – neither does the work exist only as a cultural text for the subject; and the subject can never understand the object in a transparent and complete way through his or her interpretative gaze.<sup>23</sup>

In this way, the concept of performative mimesis presents an analytic and synthetic look at what we call “theatri-

<sup>23</sup>. Of course, for a more activist, more practical interest, this desire for instabilities is not functional.

cality” in our area. Rather than defending it as anti-dramatic, as Ramos does, I believe it is more fruitful to emphasize its critically dramatic dimension. Performativity, necessarily inherent to mimesis, opens a rift within dramatic mimesis and thus becomes a (self-) critical event. And it allows us to understand that there is no significant (i.e., artistically relevant) performativity that does not establish itself as a deviant and shifting gesture in relation to a semantic context stabilized by affirmative statements and repetitive acts.

In fact, in many moments, Luiz Fernando Ramos stresses the tension between “matter and meaning” (p. 246), present in the works analyzed by him. At the end of his book, he curiously retracts emphatically to the subject of mimesis, as if he understood that he needs to recognize that within mimesis itself, a dialectic is articulated between “now [...] the mirror of the world, similarity, then [...] a lend to other worlds, difference” (p. 251). And a little further on, he agrees with Arne Melberg, when he states that “Mimesis is atavistically, and always, already a repetition – meaning that mimesis is the meeting place of two opposing but connected modes of thinking, activity and production; similarity and difference” (p. 258). That is, mimesis, repetition and variation/difference, is the production of a singular referentiality, the exposure of a dynamics inherent in any structured theatrical phenomenon. Thus, it must be seen as a kind of performativity.

What is lacking, in my view, is to think that performativity is also a meeting point – between uniqueness and repetition, between an action of fissure and another of quoting in this action necessarily an intersubjective and (relatively) stable context. In his last chapter, Ramos discusses writings by Derrida and Deleuze on the concepts of mimesis and difference. What is unclear in this discussion is the fact that these authors use their understanding of these two concepts mainly in a tactical way, and not as affirmations of a new hegemony. In fact, the ways Derrida and Deleuze use the concepts of difference, repetition, and

reference are intended to dynamically relate matter and meaning; provoke and at the same time ruin the possibility of attaching meaning to them. But since modernism, the aesthetic experience is situated in this suspension,<sup>24</sup> in which subject and work, mimesis and performativity, are intrinsically and contradictorily related, but at the same time retain a certain autonomy.<sup>25</sup> In this context, it is indicative that the notion of the “possible margin of invention”, which appears in the title and is briefly resumed in the last chapter, is a notion whose deviant efficacy depends on the existence of a stable context and an established meaning on which it acts and in relation to which it expresses this intention to act. This possible margin of invention is at the same time the opening of a rupture in a semantic field and the reorganization of it as changeable.

In this sense, Deleuze and Derrida’s interest in exposing, for example, in repetition as a scenic gesture a “difference without reference” or a “difference without concept”, is due to a tactical interest of undermining an essentialist understanding of textual or scenic writing and to maintain in it an empty gesture of non-referentiality, but inseparable from the referentiality in which it acts as this overlapping force: a force of creative expression in search of a future referential that can be realized only by the spectator. And it gives concreteness to the tension between difference and similarity, provoked by the game of performative mimesis. This realization ensures that this game does not become formalism or an empty retroactive circle. And the tension ensures that the game cannot stop and fix a center. Rather, it constantly shifts this center. But it does not want to establish its own dynamics as a new center.

Thus, only with the spectator’s interpretative contribution will this performative mimesis manifest a transforming force. If the rupture with the semantic *status quo* (or its constant supplementation by overlapping and sliding images) can be seen as a sacred gesture of artistic creation in the model of a performative mimesis, it would be necessary to

24.

In this it differs from theoretical experience (guided by the paradigm of truth) or practical experience (guided by the paradigm of the common good).

25.

About the issue of self-sufficiency, see Juliane Rebentisch’s essay “Autonomia? Autonomia! Experiência estética nos dias de hoje”, published by the journal *Urdimento*, volume 30.

add that this sacred gesture seeks intrinsically to be sacrificed in the mundane, that is, a voluntary profanation to be carried out by the act of interpretation (which in turn must recognize the perpetuity of difference, of the radically singular, of the sacred). This profanation will make the act of interpretation productive. Rather than bemoaning the fact that a remnant of referentiality brought by the spectator survives in the performative mimesis, as does Luiz Fernando Ramos, I believe it is essential to value and potentiate this remainder to put into practice the transformative force of this poetic called performative mimesis.<sup>26</sup>

Perhaps because the book does not share this view of non-referential difference as a concept of tactical interest, it steadily slips from the recognition of the tension between matter and meaning to the assertion that the more advanced works have a non-referential antitheatricity, in the performance of a pure and non-referential *opsis*, materialized by floating signifiers.

### Final considerations

His interest in affirming an antitheatricity that is pure and non-referential *opsis* as a more advanced paradigm of contemporary art causes Ramos to privilege in his readings of the Brazilian theater manifestations a linear narrative that establishes a growing overcoming from the dramatic to the non-dramatic (from Qorpo Santo to Gerald Thomas and Roberto Alvim, passing by “A Morta” by Oswald de Andrade and Luiz Roberto Galizia’s creations, on chap. V). This narrative necessarily underprivileges theater manifestations that work with performative mimesis, but still in a figurative sense,<sup>27</sup> singling out this figuration and making it stand out of the elements referenced through, for example, the grotesque, the circus, the improvisational game, in the here and now, or also carnival performances, musical presentations coming from currently popular forms such as rap and hip

26.

Is it necessary to emphasize that the reigning force and the owners of this force – the capital and the owners of capital – do everything to pretend that they are fulfilling this constant transformation through an ideology of volatility that destroys everything but the domination of that force?

27.

I want to recall the discussion about the conservative force of the actor’s body in the theater, as presented in Ramos’s book. Silvia Fernandes (2011, p. 13) highlights the modernist paradigm that is behind the distrust of the personification of the actor and which she believes relates artists that are so different in other aspects, such as Mallarmé, Craig, Beckett and even Brecht. However, if the first three represent an attempt to overcome the tension between individualization and structuralism in theatrical practices through a growing scenic abstraction, Brecht seeks to maintain a balance within this tension by balancing his structuralism with an always concrete materiality. In other words, Brecht sees as a problem what the other three see as a solution. Contemporary conceptions that look at the proposal of a modern antitheatricity as a problematic point of departure are not included in Ramos’ book, as for example works by Rodrigo Garcia or Angélica Lidell, as well as proposals that work with installation or participatory principles present, such as Roger Bernat, Rimini Protokoll, or here in Brazil plays by Companhia São Jorge, Cia. Teatro Doc, of the Opovoempé group, all from São Paulo, to name only a few.

hop, as well as other proposals that privilege the participation of the spectator or explicitly address their presence as a witness in proposals that modulate the status of their theatrical material as a document.

Valuing and analyzing the possibilities of these performative mimesis practices, with their own zones of semantic instability and juxtaposition of meaning, would not only undermine the production seen here as the most advanced, but also help to see in this other production seeds of concrete destabilizing mediation. This mediation does not take place between repetition and difference as a formal game (although it may work with these features), but as a reference to the cruel war-game between a besieged human life and the dehumanizing forces; among those interested in dissolving the whole materialistic ground in the intellectual wind of floating signifiers and those who insist that the strength of these signifiers must plow this ground more than to clear their horizon of all organic material, since beneath the horizon of that earth lies the remnants of everything and everyone left over from the path called progress (whether social or scenic).

Due to advances in media technologies that capture images and the consequent mistrust of the effectiveness of a relatively stable representation of the world, we cannot deny that artistic performativity is an inescapable theatrical principle. We can also add to this media context a socio-economic context in which constant transformation, the “creative destruction” (Friedrich Hayek) of the social world by capitalist forces has created a system that presents itself as almost without alternative, as “a spectacle that is unified and at the same time diffuse, in such a way that is almost impossible to distinguish the inner from the outer side, the natural from the social, the private from the public” (HARDT e NEGRI, 2000, p. 171).<sup>28</sup> And the performative mode can symbolize this spectacular dynamic better than a hegemonically representational structure.

Because of this social urgency (and not only to avoid

28.

Leia-se no original: “*un espectáculo [que] está unificado y a la vez es difuso, de modo tal que es imposible distinguir lo interior de lo exterior, lo natural de lo social, lo privado de lo público*”

epistemological problems, which I attempted to point out in this essay), performative mimesis can gain in contemporary culture a relevance (without losing in aesthetic power and artistic effectiveness), if it presents a process that consciously exposes this act of plowing, of bringing this disposed material from the depths to the surface. But this act needs to work with a referentiality enunciated by the scenic materiality. Where to find this referentiality of performative overturns?

Since theater practices with more popular origins (grotesque, carnivalesque, mimetic in their various forms of detachment) are themselves part of this material buried beneath the technological progress of the present scene, it seems to me that they could expose the sharp tension between repetition and difference without resorting predominantly to forms linked to the ruling power or to explicit statements about relations with that power. That is, without having to create a layer of false political criticism to a formalist structure too committed to these political forces. In fact, they represent a scenic practice that privileges the performativity of actions without repressing their referential dimension. It is a performativity that actually causes hermeneutical readings. It is possible to find this performativity in countless works that consciously expose in its structure and operation the mark of dominant norms and social realities. Working with and about popular theater practices allows us to establish a performativity that does not distance us from the concreteness of our world, but which in its performativity presents the contradictory dynamics of this world, not through words, but in the enunciation of a referential performative form. Perhaps we should coin the term *parafigurative art* for this performative mimesis: not exactly figurative in the traditional sense of the word, but with objectives similar to those of figurative art, among them to show how this very world can give rise to the possibility of transforming a *status quo* through the dynamics of conflicts and contradictions.

I propose that for a time of necessary social adjustments, one searches these parafigurative practices for the possibility of constituting a performative mimesis that knows how to be not only formally, but tragically performative, to mention Glauber Rocha's astute words, and therefore, be simultaneously untimely and contemporary.



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