

## IF I DIDN'T CARE, ONE MORE KISS [FEAT\_ 2019'S "SHE (AND THE SPACE OF PAINTING)"]

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*The 2019 text entitled "She (and the space of painting)", produced in a parallel creative process for a painting exhibition, focuses on contemporary art theory, film, female characters, literature, poetry, music and, especially, on pictorial space from the feminine perspective.*

*Now, it is reissued here, choosing one of the paintings made, already exposed, and a song underlying it as symptomatic of the perspective of confinement by the pandemic crisis.*

**Keywords:** *Pictorial space; feminine; film; poetry.*



If I didn't care more than words can say  
 If I didn't care would I feel this way?  
 If this isn't love then why do I thrill?

The Inkspots, 1939

One more kiss, dear, one more sigh  
 Only this dear, is goodbye  
 For our love is such pain and such pleasure  
 That I'll treasure till I die

Vangelis / Peter Skellern 1982

In 2019 she listens to these two songs when she thinks of Rachael.

In 2020 the songs still sound and make sense again. Another sense, indeed.

Although neither is Rachael's song in the film, both echoes strongly as a sign of it.

Now, if Ridley Scott's creative process of filming and editing his 1982 film *Blade Runner* had been more linear and fast, there might have been no Vangelis song *One more kiss, dear*, played by Don Percival to replace the first choice Demis Roussos. Instead, we might even hear to-day, as one of the key moments of the film's soundtrack, the Ink Spots '39 song, *If I didn't care*, which appears in the 1982 movie trailer and is part of some of its soundtrack compilations during the nineties.

Touchingly melancholic and expressing the

Figure 1. Isabel Sabino. 2019. Rachael: If I didn't care. Acrylics on canvas, 196x302cm

appropriate mood to a sort of sound of old radio, both songs help in 2019 to build the voice of the last female character she paints for the series entitled “Ela” (She), exposed in April in SNBA (National Society of Fine Arts, Lisbon).

But, in the end, differently from the director and musician’s decision in favor of *One more kiss*, the concrete painting about Rachael chooses the oldest song, *If I didn’t care*, as able to identify the main idea sought (through the film as a pretext).

The film says, not Philip K. Dick’s but Scott’s Rachael, a female android that feels emotions and cries, and seems to say: “one more kiss”.

But now on this side of the screens we are not androids, at least not yet, so my Rachael prefers to say, “if I didn’t care”, because she does “care”. And that can be our song now, if you agree.

All the paintings, all the female names through the characters of films in the “Ela/she” series, are also about care or feeling, freedom and humanity.

Thus, the following words are written during the realization of the aforementioned painting project, while thinking and painting, between canvas, paper, easel and life in general.

In the end, after the series of *Ela’s* new works ended in 2019 (four large screens and seven drawings, all weaving and creating pictorial images from films and reality), these words are a kind of inner discourse among voices still echoing, often captured in the titles of the works.

However, all of this happens because she is a woman in a confined space.

Such a space can be a living room, a home or a house, a studio or even a sewing room. Although confined as many women have been in history, and although under surveillance (of her own and not only), she remains there by choice and free will, because that is her life and her alternative

life. An uneasy case, one can rightly consider.

When in that place, she forgets that she is a woman, because the deep concentration required by her search implies a very loose state of mind, a fluid drift in which the borders or limits disappear.

There, her heart beats differently, and the world, colors or words simply work together and, sometimes, meaning glows through them.

Here follows some of her thoughts while she paints, under an alphabet of keywords. Anyway, she does it, and every place she is, her question of matter is keeping the invisible line in order to unveil a hidden glitter that leads to salvation.

Then, there are no closed spaces.

## Now featuring\_ She (and the space of painting)

### a) Paint

When in the shower, she always hears the phone. For some time now, she no longer rushes to dry herself and check if it indeed rang because she has learned to doubt, and she knows that what is and what may be shall sound again later. So, when ready and free of echoes, she chooses to play pop music or opera on the sunny side of the house and the garden below, inhabited by birds. Then, in the sewing room, other echoes await her.

This is because she is always listening and she ends up feeling animated by voices, especially feminine, that say things that amplify worlds or loose rhythms and cadences that make her *danse*. She needs that *danse* (with an “s”, as the poet wrote<sup>1</sup>) before she thinks of drawing or painting, as if she were helping the body adapt to a dress in the making. With writing this does not happen, because for her the body is, so to speak, dismissed at work (although Clarice<sup>2</sup> says she writes with the body).

*Aht uh ma hed*, she hears in a song. As if the head would be enough. Miss anything looser and fuller. Therefore, she sews and weaves, with threads of invisible silk, shades that sometimes, between the oscillating dry and wet of **paint**, bind together things and pieces of herself.

### b) Reality and nature

Among so much echoing and reflection, the line separating what is real and unreal, what is natural and what is not, sometimes disappears. And, if both **reality** and **nature** situate her, she breathes in the absence of breezes, instead with the green of chlorophyll and algae, between consecutive appearances and among them, in a game of illusions and truths.

She listens to Rachael who, for example, believes that a certain past is her own and then suddenly realises that it is not: that the family photos she treasures are, after all, an invention.

She, herself, is also made up more and more from reflections, voices, times and spaces beyond her own, in a world that thus expands, becoming strange and seductively multiple, denaturalised, often other. Fragile wires connect her to this open and sinking stage. Precious, she has to care for the possible salvation therein, make them into a raft, like land before the ever-invading sea and shells that, Nora<sup>3</sup> says, are for sale. For some time now she has also known, thanks to Lucia, the melancholy figure on the threshold of her painted apocalyptic landscape, about the possible metamorphosis of fear through the arrest of eyes, windows to the soul, upon skin which, after all, is not only the surface of things but will also never be a conventional academic thesis.

### c) Light

She copied into a notebook: *“Ce n’est pas une fiction, bien qu’il ne soit pas capable de prononcer à propos de tout cela le mot de vérité. Quelque chose*

*lui est arrivé, et il ne peut dire que ce soit vrai, ni le contraire. Plus tard, il pensa que l’événement consistait dans cette manière de n’être ni vrai ni faux.”*<sup>4</sup>.

Perhaps that is why some artists operate multiples of themselves, unfolding in others, who are their reflections. She, like a kaleidoscope’s box, summons the **light** from conversant presences, not caring if they are real or otherwise. But names interest her: Nora, Giuliana, Fiona, Sophia, Germaine, Clarice, Lúcia, Adília, Maria<sup>5</sup>. To each their own, or in this case, her own.

### d) They

So, when she goes into the sewing room, she always listens very carefully. **They** almost always talk while they work. One of them cuts a piece of cloth on the table and remarks on the previous day’s soap opera; another cobbles two patterns together and replies that the character is really mean, while the one standing, gluing interlace with the iron, threatens what she would do to him if it were her - a policy of Throwing Domestic Objects for the Trump era; then they laugh at the one who is always distracted by the window and never hears a word they say. This one is now finishing up a buttonhole and doesn’t feel like laughing because her belly hurts when her period is about to come.

Further back, another sows the hem of rigid fabric with a thread that hurts her fingers. She does not wear a thimble. She does not like it because the coldness of the metal makes her body lie.

### e) Painting

She recalls one day when (the earth and science already taken for granted) a specialist stated: bidimensionality (or flatness) was the only thing **painting** did not have in common with other arts, therefore modernist painting should turn to the affirmation of surface in order to assert its essence. He so denied pictorial illusionism

and, thus, all painting which (even excluding representation or literature, both condemned as extrinsic) could suggest a space in depth – one that would fit in Maria Helena<sup>6</sup>'s abstraction for instance, she asks?

#### f) Essentiality

She considers, for herself, that today the **essentiality** of painting does not lie in any need for distinctive affirmation as a means. The essentiality lies not in what it is different and what distinguishes it, but in what makes it necessary, before other means that are also available. So, the succession of funeral edicts and other many reactions to the resistance and triumph of painting weary her like punchlines in a stand-up comedy. She stopped worrying about the legitimacy or the need for a definition of painting based on the justification that it does what nothing else can. She is signed sealed and delivered that before, and in black and white no less. Now it is simpler: when it's not there one misses it, that's it.

#### g) Openness and poetry

She is interested mainly in the spongy, impure qualities, in the **openness** that allows painting to absorb everything outside itself and to integrate all, allowing something to transpire, persisting as a medium of reflection and expression endowed with great plasticity.

Moreover, painting has always worked for her as an open space, both physically and conceptually.

All she has to do is to remember her own path: in the 70's, short texts, para-poetic outbursts and drawings in notebooks, then larger paper formats, in collages and paintings, indistinguishable media; in the 1980s, canvases and papers added laterally to canvases and papers and the discontinuous spaces with overlays of strata and

inserts to continue images, histories and landscapes that could not fit anywhere, but which, by their physical materiality and texture, invited the touch; in the 90s, drawings with sheets of paper added to each other, the objects tendentially three-dimensional along with the mimetic play in painting, the installation projects, the consciousness of a common body with nature that made her say: this is my body; and, from the years 2000 onwards, in line with previous work, a greater focus on the diversity and porosity of the pictorial plane with a personal and crossed narrative approach, letting in literature, the media, the movies, the operas, the history of painting and other women's stories, the world around always on the move, the ever more irrevocable loss of nature.

In her way, there is something like **poetry** in everything.

#### h) Silk

And if there is a guiding thread, it is again like the delicate **silk** that binds an insect to the web and the world.

This tenuous thread is drawn through attention to everything, from an open room where she once heard someone say: "Viens, et rend-nous la convenance de ce qui disparaît, le mouvement d'un coeur."<sup>7</sup>

#### i) Conversation

So, there, the radio plays and they talk while they work. Only sometimes silence settles. Just moments ago one of them helped the older woman undress after pouring coffee down her gown, and from there the **conversation** shifted to various standguards, life between confessions and a lot of laughter. There was an ancient wisdom, superior to what is said, in gestures and looks.

"Ils cherchaient l'un et l'autre la pauvreté dans

le langage. Sur ce point, ils s'accordaient. Toujours, pour elle, il y avait trop de mots et un mot de trop, de plus des mots trop riches et qui parlaient avec excès.”<sup>8</sup>

*If I didn't care*, was nevertheless a fragile voice coming from afar, that should have been Rachael's song. It also came from ink spots. The Ink Spots.

#### **j) Feminine**

She is still trying to understand better - and is therefore writ large with each brushstroke - whether the open space within painting that involves her pertains to a kind of “womanhood”, a term that she is allergic to. She read about attempts to associate pictorial illusionism with a gender ideology in which the **feminine** is debated, but the “thing” slips between contradictions and confusions, plausible areas of Freudian approximations.

While being certain that pictorial illusionism refers to the mimetic desire expressed by *trompe l'oeil*, it also seems settled that it consists of the creation of a common space that includes the piece and its beholder: that is, there is a space that opens into an abyss and that, by virtue of being unreal, for brief moments suspends the real and creates a doubt, even if more or less fleeting, about what is or is not. It is not, however, a naturalistic space, for its perceptual condition and unstable experience bring it into the realm of an artificial event.

#### **k) Illusion**

To what extent does a gender assignment to the illusionist tendency in painting make sense? Barbara Rose - a woman, predictably - seems to approach a hypothesis in 1967<sup>9</sup>, when she tries to solve the paradox between the defence of flatness (according to the the integrity of the pictorial plane recommended from Fry to Greenberg)

and the possibility of a perspectival painting, that is, reopening the surface as one would a window. In her opinion at the time, four artists (Ron Davies, Darby Bannard, Frank Stella and Jules Olitiski) exemplify the conscious reconciliation of abstraction with pictorial **illusion**; they do so because they act on a path that moves away from natural space through the “establishment of the artificiality and hence the abstractness of pictorial space”<sup>10</sup>, this artificiality is built by the attention given to the physical identification of surface and the contradictions of visual information that establish its conventional nature.

Yet when she looks at the works of Larry Zox and Miriam Schapiro, she fixes on the latter, who moves away from abstraction to a surrealist touch, as an example of sophistication and illusionistic complexity “in order to establish the purely imaginary and artificial nature of pictorial space”<sup>11</sup>. And she considers this illusionism, which has nothing to do with abstraction's earlier interplay of figure and foreground (for example, in Matisse's paper cutouts), as an exit from the reductionist impasse unleashed by minimalism and monochromatic painting.

However, if Barbara Rose clarifies the possibility of the illusory and imaginary nature of painting in abstraction and thus bestows highlight to Schapiro - an artist whose work suggests a hybridism between expressionist abstraction and surrealism and which asserts itself away from abstraction - it cannot be justified through any gender theory. It does not place the pictorial illusion as necessarily feminine, even though Schapiro consciously assumes a feminist discourse in artistic creation.

## l) Beauty

In the sewing room, she continues to weave fragments of echoes into a theory about everyday life and the condition which defines, perhaps, her continued practice in conversation with reality.

Years ago, Dave Hickey suggested, in defending Mapplethorpe's work, that pictorial illusionism has a feminine sign, not because of abstraction but by creating an opening in the reception space. In *The Invisible Dragon*<sup>12</sup>, Hickey uses the examples of Caravaggio, Mapplethorpe, Raphael, Warhol and writings by Ruskin, Shakespeare, Foucault and Deleuze to rehabilitate the idea of **beauty** versus an institutionalization that denies art's seductive pleasure. The subject of this book deals strongly with the work of Robert Mapplethorpe insofar as it continuously proves to deal with discomfiting subjects (as happened recently in Serralves).

Aside from the central matter of beauty, that "non-thing"<sup>13</sup>, Hickey believes in the power of images to change the world and considers there to be a reactionary, hegemonic, even homophobic, tendency in the anti-illusionist conception of art. And, as another woman<sup>14</sup> later writes, illusionism is an essential part of the founding rhetoric of European painting: the ancestral ability to suggest a presence which does not exist in reality. Illusionism deals in what Hickey calls negative space, metaphorical absence, that is, producing the metaphor of real space and also past time (not only with memory but also the undoing of time categories in the sense of free fluidity through different times).

## m) Subliminal

She notes that, according to this critic, many taboos "related to feminine space" and the "feminine" appeal (his quotes<sup>15</sup>) still persist, taboos derived from **subliminal** ideas about the

genre of the work of art itself, a homophobic tone in the critique of high modernism - one that generally challenges the effeminate character of the illusionist space - laid bare in Michael Fried's texts on Frank Stella's *Working Space* and *Absorption and Theatricality*. And he writes:

Stella addresses the "masterful" Caravaggesque inversion of passive Mannerist recession into aggressive Baroque intrusion; Fried addresses the success of late-eighteenth-century French Painters like Greuze, Vernet, Van Loo, and early David in dropping an invisible "fourth wall" down the picture plane, chastely sealing off the erotic, participatory extravagance of Rococo space from the viewer - while occasionally depositing an artist-created simulacrum of the viewer inside the hermetically sealed pictorial atmosphere, thus imposing what Fried class the "supreme fiction" that the beholder is simply not there. Fried implies, and correctly, I think, that this device is designated to cast the non-participatory observer in the role of objective moral observer. Its less redemptive by-product is that it recasts the viewer in the role of an irresponsible, alienated, elitist voyeur. This is the aspect of the "supreme fiction" that Fragonard exploits so seductively in his *haut* pornography and that Chardin, more ominously, employs to provide us with secret glimpses (through is one-way "sociological lens") of the lower orders in their most private moments.<sup>16</sup>

Indeed, when Fried<sup>17</sup> defends the primacy of absorption with *Père de famille* (...) by Greuze, and despite some ironies, he seems to highlight an obvious moral choice implied in the picture: and after all, doesn't space that absorbs the observer take on a gender perspective?

## n) Ideology

However, she notes meanwhile that Hickey, to better understand the dissensions around

Mapplethorpe, uses the term effeminate rather than feminine to refer the nature of the illusionist space (in the photographic, or more concretely pictorial, representation).

He justifies this by saying that while the artist's connection to the work allows one to associate ideas of "strength", euphemism of the old "virtue" that refers "to men to power and women to chastity," he states that, "by analogy, 'weakness' implies effeminacy in men and promiscuity in women."<sup>18</sup>

In this controversial **ideology**, Hickey also invokes a succession of gender shifts in the last 400 years of art history and especially in painting, using Vasari's take on the feminine by way of example - beauty, harmony, generosity and, on the other hand, the so-called masculine characteristics of "strength, singularity, autonomy" in the language with which modern criticism validates works. And he explains that even though subliminal ideas are often not verbalized, there are still innumerable immediate, often evaluative and pejorative adjectives which lie atop the unsaid. Fair or not, there arise dichotomies and oppositions as "traditional gender fictions," and are at the origin of traditional behaviour, although they have seen their beginnings in judgements of real and symbolic power rather than in biological facts.

#### **o) Space of the observer**

It is with this kind of data that Hickey interprets the change that takes place in pictorial **space** from the sixteenth to the seventeenth centuries as a rotation of the plane of painting: The window, when opened inwards, turns outwards.

Recession is replaced by foreshortening, "feminine" space by "masculine" intrusion. The Renaissance's invitations to step out of the real, through the picture plane into the possibility

of the ideal mercy, is replaced by the Baroque intrusion of secular power – by whose imagery naturalism demands to be perceived as more real, more authoritative, than the reality in which you stand.<sup>19</sup>

The illusion mediated within the observer, a relation between pictorial representation and reality, seems to lose, in this excessive regime, its qualities of openness, permissiveness and dialogue with the observer, surpassing the play of seduction and becoming, instead, an imposition. Thus, the **condition of the observer** also changes: from his active freedom to enter into the picture, to the subjugation of the observed, his own exclusion from the space of painting under the dependence of another authoritarian illusion which painting also entails.

#### **p) Shift**

In fact, the *trompe l'oeil* of narratives associated with names like Zeuxis and Parrasius return in force within the Baroque, exalting the supreme illusion: the fusion of real and imaginary spaces and, by means of the deceit of the eye, creating a false possibility in the viewer's gaze. Ribera, El Greco, Velazquez, Caravaggio, La Tour, Murillo, imply this kind of submissive-ness of the spectator that, for Hickey, plays out in painting as a perceptual gender **shift** from the feminine to the masculine. He links his own ideas to those of feminist psychologist and writer Carol Gilligan, for whom male judgments have a moralistic tendency, insisting on abstract criteria of justice and value hierarchies, while feminine judgments insist on a morality of "care", drawing concerns with interdependence and human needs, common values, communication (and, of course, in the backstage, the question of feeding, going back to breastfeeding).



Such antinomies underscore the art and critique of modernity, the very debates on the crisis of painting since the 1960s.

#### q) Aesthetics

She finds, however, that none of this is certain, for often the brilliance of the debates verbally expressed in criticism and theory exacerbate arguments and belie intermediate tonalities, which, at the heart of creative processes, are equally expressive. Although the idea of open or welcoming space versus a more imposing type may certainly refer to ancestral maternal categories, she still resists oedipal or phallogocentric interpretations.

Then, she pays special attention to another woman, Mira, a painter and teacher of other women painters. She thinks deeply of an **aesthetics** of the feminine, and of her messed up bookcase, book covers with feminine names that lie on the living room sofa and on the bedside table, a landscape that oscillates between the defense of equality, radicalism and the rejection of dichotomy: Nochlin, Woolf, Beauvoir, Lippard, Parker, Pollock, Butler, Irigaray, Courtivron, Gallop, Clément, etc.

And she states that, like paint in painting, this ideology resists fixed form, does not dry.

#### r) Language

In one of these readings, she still recalls that French feminism centers the phallogocentric question of **language** itself, inscribed within culture, following a Lacanian logic.

Language is the law of the father, and the “search for a definition and representation of a female sexuality implies crossing a field mined and snared by phallogocentric logic”<sup>20</sup>, in which one cannot clarify the other without operating in the dichotomy established by language. So, any debate is a failure in those terms.

And in this context, although the mother-daughter relationship is a very strong axis in our culture, the mother’s name remains unwritten, according to Irigaray.

*The women are losers*, Janis sings. Another time?

#### s) Condition

Is it because of this **“loser” condition** that the universes of feminine creation are filled with radical strategies of struggle, or subtle compensations, dissimulated answers or perverse negotiations, or even, in the debate for power as war, filled with dismissed territorial boundaries, opening land up to one another, instead of imposing space or conquering it, bringing the “war” to its own land?

The disguised, the perverse, the seemingly invisible, are detours from real power that acquire symbolic strands as strategies understood in the field of the feminine.

But the opening of space is something else: it erases the war front, in a tactic that, if also assuming a fragile status or potential loss according to established values, gets to operate a change of field, a denial of the conditions of the struggle which, by the invitation to “cohabitation”, becomes unsustainable except as a tolerant assumption of permanent tension between each other. In this perspective, the opening of space has, therefore, something feminine and maternal.

However, she is not certain with whom she speaks in this no man’s land. Maybe she talks to his daughters and granddaughters, with her mother or her father transformed into son. Without Oedipus, Jocasta is just another female figure.

#### t) Fortune telling

And it is also known that she is a mother,

daughter, wife, friend, princess or queen, muse, priestess, fairy or sorceress, bunny and kitten, but also pig, cow or goat, bitch, witch or whore. She revisits herself in marked mirrors (as Berger knew) as the sweet hues of Aznavour or Sinatra, also attentive to his fear: *She may be the song that Salome sings*. In the eminence of severed heads that nobody wants, she negotiates even in intimacy, using the words or the subtle art of **fortune telling**, also collecting the other signs of the body, sometimes more authentic than what one can say.

And the art of guessing is mixed with the strange relationship opened by time, the past that erupts permanently, the instant now passing and barely lived, and a future about which she always knows something, like Jennie.

Again: the opening of space, now also through the relationship with time in permanent passage and fluidity.

Perhaps that is why paint helps her, in its liquid movement, refusing to dry definitively.

#### u) Organic body

On the other hand, the openness of pictorial space may also lie on its physical and tactile side, on the reality of the plane that denies surface, not only because it suggests another penetrable space, but mainly also because of its reality as an **organic body** that invites a viewer who maybe shares with her a certain animal condition.

But still at the window, she clearly recognizes that, in a different line to Hickey's, there is also Thierry, who is more interested in the idea of art than that of beauty, and who defends something else: for him, the operation of including the viewer in the frame is achieved with Manet<sup>21</sup>. There he is, as a representation, reflected in the mirror of the bar of the *Folies-Bergère*. In this case, the window opens again. This way, a gap is

installed in the hypothesis of the pictorial space that keeps the painting's observer in limbo, or even abroad, either through authoritarian (more real than real) illusionism, or through the artificiality and conventionalism of modernist flatness.

At a reasonable distance from the modernist debates and the search for a formal autonomy of painting, Thierry is interested in a post-Duchampian view, especially humanist. It is not a simple matter of form, but of representation of the world as centrally inhabited by humans, with all the complex circus of interpretative possibilities involved therein.

However, long before Manet, Clara Peeters already reveals in her painting an identical or even more daring proposal, when her self-representation, almost imperceptible, appears as if reflected in a metallic object of her still life. Only decades later would Velázquez propose a similar enigma, in *Las meninas*.

#### v) Pronouns

Impatiently, she shakes the dust that surrounds the altars of the *Vierge* and the *Mariée*, displeased with the echoes of old words. With so many letters in the alphabet, there may well be new anchors for ideas.

Or perhaps a theory about the space of painting under gender interpretations is too demanding (or excused?), when the categories of "autonomy" and "care" become ever more and less epitomized by ideas of the masculine or the feminine, when gender is now either affirmed or questioned, when, to top it off, new realities and categories of people question the gender of names, our adjectives and pronouns.

Rachael, in her own fiction, or robotic Sophia, who threatened to take everyone's jobs, already materialize possible paradigms. In these and other cases lies the reality of the changing human being - between the multiplication of gen-

ders, the biological hybridism and the artificial (or the inhuman that Lyotard referred) - in languages like Portuguese, the personal **pronouns** "he" and "she" will not be enough.

#### w) Other

In her case, by the edge of that room, affirming the feminine nature of pictorial illusion may be fine for a convenient gender theory, *noblesse oblige* though she suspects it may not be so, or there would not be men's illusionistic painting, as shown by history.

Besides that, as Paula once said (when I paint I'm a man - would it be exactly like this?), she also thinks that when she paints she is not aware of whether she is male or female, which is not quite the same thing, even though she's she. "Who-Does-Not-Hate-Men-And-Who-Likes-To-Wear-Lip-Stick-And-High-Heels-For-Herself-And-Not-For-Men", as Chimamanda *dixit*<sup>22</sup>? Of course, consciousness is only a part and parcel. Mid-tones are a hell of a job.

Decidedly, she listens: "Cela s'est donc passé ici et vous étiez avec moi? – "Peut-être avec vous: avec quelqu'un que maintenant je ne puis manquer de reconnaître en vous."<sup>23</sup>

In constant conversation, in real dialogue or in the inner process, the **other** is largely a collective concealed in the form of individual names, with or without gender.

#### x) Memory

Meanwhile, the cut fabric takes shape. Here, there is a neckline, a sleeve appears there. One hole is for the head and neck; another piece will hold one arm. The heart fits somewhere and in an uncertain place lies, absurdly, the fattiest part of the body: the brain.

With them there is rarely silence. One of them sews buttons that glow when light strikes and says they are beautiful. The darker one asks the

skinny girl at the sewing machine 'how's your father' and she responds that he is still in the hospital, weaker and weaker. Her eyes get wet, then jerks the thread with a wide gesture. The brunette caresses her face and says that everything will be fine. Another brunette sighs, as she sews an accidental hole in a hidden area of a silk lining; she suffers because she has discovered that her husband has another woman, and so she strives to sew, thread over thread, in parallel, then in taffeta, as if mending an invisible hole with ultimate perfection would solve everything.

The taller one observes, fed up with it all: so much time spent like this, she says. But she shrugs and goes on, erasing the **memory** of that body worn mark<sup>24</sup>.

#### y) Fiction

Later, she still thinks that if there is something inherently feminine, perhaps it's not exactly pictorial illusionism, but something in which it participates: the opening of space, which, in the paradox between tactile appeal and evanescence, creates a **fiction** which derives from everything and not only from the iconographic play.

Gombrich states that we as beholders project our mental picture onto the pictorial plane, thus carrying out a kind of collaborative work with the painter. That is why the incomplete forms advocated, for instance, in the Cozens' method of drawing or sort of *schematas* are so attractive - they suggest an action in need of completion, which is the observer's charge. Leonardo, on the other hand, writes about this in his Treatise on Painting as a way to "accelerate the spirit of invention," just as Vasari refers to Donatello's work in the cathedral of Florence, where the unfinished is more suitably perceived at a distance, with higher suggestive quality. The *sprezzatura* goes along as another value to consider. And for

such effect, Velázquez would use long brushes to draw away from the picture, less detailed upon close inspection, but with everything there encompassed upon distant viewing. Gainsborough and Reynolds (who also write about this<sup>25</sup>), already exemplify a “psychological theory of painting that takes into account the interaction with the viewer,” according to Gombrich<sup>26</sup>.

Thus, space is opened not only because it is welcoming and therefore penetrable, even if only in a short illusion, but because it abolishes limits and allows a back and forth, a play between the overflowing of gestures (of the body) and the admission of the other, a place of texture and seduction at play: care after care, possible latent union, eroticism, mystery.

“Le mystère – quel mot grossier – serait le point où se rencontrent en la simplicité de la présence la chose qui se voit et la chose qui se dit. Mystère qui ne serait saisissable que s’il s’écarte, par une légère oscillation, du point mystérieux.”<sup>27</sup>

This is how, in her more recent works (although this also occurs before), she speaks with the voices and images of other women, in an open dialogue that oscillates between reality and fiction and the search for a necessary relation between the politician and the poetic. Each painting (and each drawing) is like a tangible screen - in which the film becomes a painting as if it could not be something else, thus present in the same space as us. With sounds and speech, even when silence spares spoken words, each painting and drawing also act as pages in a notebook, where writing is implied and the eyes can *danse*, zoom in and out, or simply turn the page.

## **z) Reality**

Meanwhile the one at the sewing machine prays quietly. The eldest makes mental accounts. The button one sings. And another one sighs.

The garden down there is getting dark. In the old days, between the orange tree and the wall, there was a parrot that whistled, meowed, said hello, and imitated the sound of the hanging clothes rope. His owner sold him for unexplained reasons. Today there are birds, cats, mice, and rats that attack blackbirds unignored because **reality** has excesses, otherwise the word ‘reality’ wouldn’t have been given the female pronoun in Portuguese. Therefore, one coexists, in a pact of mutual non-interference, as long as no one crosses the threshold. But one knows that the line has been trampled on and that the opaque waiting announces an earthly terror filmed by the angel of Cendrars.

Later, in the sewing room, it is time to leave. There is a dress in the making on the hanger, and it is still necessary to sweep the cotton and silk lines today, to leave everything tidy for tomorrow.

The last one to leave turns off the light.

## **Notes/References**

- 1 Sophia de Mello Breyner Andresen (1919-2004), Portuguese poet.
- 2 Clarice Lispector (1920-1977), Brazilian writer.
- 3 Female character in the film *Key Largo* (John Huston, 1948) played by Lauren Bacall.
- 4 BLANCHOT, Maurice. **L’Attente, l’oubli**. Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1963, p. 11-12.
- 5 Besides the names already explained, now some of these refer female film characters: Giuliana, played by Monica Vitti in *Il Deserto Rosso* (Antonioni, 1964), Fiona, played by Cyd Charisse in *Brigadoon* (Vincente Minnelli, 1947). Adília Lopes is a Portuguese contemporary poet (1960-), Germaine Dulac (1882-1942) is a French surrealist film director. Maria Keil (1914-2021) a Portuguese artist and Lúcia is a figure in a Sabino’s painting from the 90’s.
- 6 Maria Helena Vieira da Silva (1908-1992), painter born Portuguese, naturalized French.
- 7 Blanchot, Op. Cit, p. 68.
- 8 *Idem*, p. 16.

- 9 ROSE, Barbara. Abstract Illusionism. **Artforum**, October 1967, p. 33-37.
- 10 *Ibidem*.
- 11 *Ibidem*.
- 12 HICKEY, Dave. **The Invisible Dragon**. Revised and expanded. *Essays on Beauty*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009.
- 13 Hickey, *Op. Cit.*, p. 2.
- 14 SABINO, Isabel. Nuvens, de novo: a fluidez do real e a beleza (ou a criação artística, com Retrato de Jennie). Em Cirillo, José; Belo, Marcela; Grando, Angela (Org.). **Nuvens no papel**. Impressões sobre o processo da criação. Vitória (E.S, Br): Editora PROEX-UFES, 2019, p. 23.
- 15 Hickey, *Op. Cit.*, p. 38.
- 16 *Idem*, p. 39.
- 17 FRIED, Michael. **Absortion and theatricality**. *Painting in Beholder in the Age of Diderot*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1980.
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- 19 *Idem*, p. 47.
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- 22 ADICHIE, Chimamanda Ngozi. **We Should all be feminists**. London: Fourth State, 2014, p. 10.
- 23 Blanchot, *Op. Cit.*, p. 18.
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- 26 Gombrich, e. H.. **Arte e Ilusão**. Um estudo da psicologia da representação pictórica. S. Paulo: Martins Fontes, 1986, p. 160 e p. 172.
- 27 *Idem*, p. 108.

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