

CHEAP EMOTIONS — ANTONIO CARLOS BRUNET

PLACEBO: n. a harmless substance with no direct therapeutical value, but which is given to sick people for its suggested beneficial effect. It can work, because if the patient believes in it, it reduces his anxiety. (Aurelio's dictionary)

The performance presented by Wagner Schwartz this weekend, on November 22nd and 23rd, at the "Escola Livre do Grupontapé de Teatro" is not in search of novelty: it is just a contemporary presentation of the highest quality. Need I say more?

On stage there's a desk with a computer on it, plus some electronic stuff, with a big screen in the backdrop on to which images are projected from this computer, everything set up on the left side of the stage. On the other side there's a piece of green cloth on the floor, simulating a pool table, with the respective balls in position to start a game.

And the game begins.

The actor/dancer/performer/stage-manager/mentor and executor of the happening" comes on stage, simply wearing a t-shirt, shorts and tennis shoes. He sits at the desk and starts playing an aria from Gabriel Faure's requiem. From a piece of paper in his hands, he starts reading something that sounds like the script of a movie, while he makes the movements requested by same. What he reads is practically imperceptible, and during the music you are only able to catch the occasional disconnected phrase. And this isn't a technical failing: it's intentional. He drops the piece of paper, goes back to the computer, where he simulates an MSN chat with an unknown interlocutor on the previously played requiem and, suddenly starts projecting the beginning of "Saint Jerome", a 1999 film directed by Julio Bressane. The film starts with the scene of Saint Jerome's dream, in which, in a universal court, there is a violent discussion about his needing to choose between converting to Christianity or remaining a follower of Cicero, who transmitted the tradition of Greek thought. St. Jerome exiles himself in the desert, where he writes the Latin Bible, the vulgate, which becomes the basis for innumerable sacred scriptures, which, in turn, are translated for the entire western world. During this initial projection, Wagner repeats the rehearsed movements read in the script of the previous scene, and ends up lying on the floor, as though to sleep and dream, in a clear reference to the St. Jerome of Bressane's film. From then on we set sail on a lysergic trip, loaded with references to Brazilian and international contemporary pop cultures. There is no concrete thread of linearity. We have to deliver ourselves to our imaginarieness, to be led to — and on the way we perceive one of the relations to contemporary dance — the individual sensations provoked by the facts that are being unveiled before us. It is an open work, in the best tradition that gives us total liberty to draw our own conclusions. Wagner reserves the role of inductor/conductor to the labyrinths he has created for himself to show us — as I infer — his view of the world as a man and an artist, and his particular and original way (which makes him unique and irreplaceable) of missing Brazil.

Without eulogizing or longing for the past, a glauberian/tropicalist atmosphere permeates the whole performance. The ghosts are all there: Glauber Rocha, Torquato Neto, Rogério Duprat, the New Cinema, the Nouvelle Vague, the 60s, the 70s, the 80s, the 3000s. Effervescent, this dream\delirium\trance brought Gal Costa to sing "Presente Cotidiano", by Luiz Melodia, recorded in the "Índia" album of 1973, whose cover showed a close-up of her private parts covered only by the skimpiest of transparent bikinis which, in turn, caused the censors to condition the sale of the album to its being sealed with a blue plastic cover.

Sensations came to me, in waves of memory. There's a sequence in the tape showing Wagner walking around Uberlândia (as a stranger, I could recognize some of the places, such as the Tubal Vilella square, the Av. Afonso Pena, the Clarimundo Carneiro square), like a human sandwich, wandering around like the character of "Alegria, Alegria" (a song by Caetano Veloso), with "nothing in his pockets or his hands", with two empty sign-boards hanging from his shoulders, one in front of him, and one behind, as though the object for sale or being advertised was himself. Love for sale.

Many times during the projection of the scenes and the progress of the show, Schwartz stares at the audience, underlining a particular scene with a mute comment or, sometimes, with the inquiring look

of someone searching for complicity. However, for better or worse, this complicity has already been established. Most important is that just like Jardes Macalé of the “Hotel das Estrelas” (Hotel of the Stars), 1971, (one more ghost), he “has the calm eyes of someone who knows his own worth”. And in this particular case, more than simply knowing his worth, he knows what he is doing.

There is a fine sense of subtle and at the same time corrosive humor that shows in his look and permeates the whole show, especially the characteristic nonsense in the scene of the filter, which paves the way for the two subsequent scenes — the one of Carmen Miranda and the “bi-polar” interview. Surprisingly he dances in the scene of Carmen Miranda: sitting down. His soul vibrates. The malice and teasing of the legendary ghost are incorporated in the blink of an eye. It is here that talent takes over. For whoever has it, a simple t-shirt is enough to re-create a world. It is moving to watch his artistic generosity pour out in instants of time. And being intelligent and wise, he takes advantage of this moment to move into the sequence of the young man who dances and is interviewed, giving an apparently senseless/disconnected interview on his relationship with his father. Cheap emotions! Orson Welles hovers in the air like a voluminous cloud of doubts. Is everything the interviewee says true or a lie? Enigmas...

Everything is part of an enormous jigsaw puzzle, a patchwork panel, vestiges of a lifetime, all sewn together in such a way that he, with his talent and maturity, manages to prove to us that it is possible to achieve emotion through cold and rational technological means. You just need to know how to use them.

In the epilogue there is a link between all of the above and a billiard table. New references: Caetano Veloso nude on the cover of “Joa”, in 1975; John Lennon and Yoko Ono’s bed-in as a protest against being denied entry into the USA for having campaigned against the Vietnam war and other such little matters. Wagner takes off his clothes and, in the nude, throws the billiard balls around the stage and then lies down on the green cloth as though he were back in the splendid innocence of his cradle. More images. More enigmas. And as though the super-fetus that watches and circles earth at the end of “2001 — A Space Odyssey” (Stanley Kubrick, 1968), had grown and become a young adult who, divested of all artifice and finally free, having exorcized himself of his ghosts, had come to destabilize the existing order/disorder and, calmly take over the inherited desert, just as St. Jerome had done. The spectacle seemed to me to be a placebo for this young man, to help him bear the time lag while he planned the building of a new world.

However the one sure thing is that we are in the presence of an artist in capital letters. An artist, who dominates his language, knows what and how to do what he set out to do and, most enchantingly, remains faithful and coherent to his proposal, without leaving any spaces open for any type of concession. Is he an actor? A dancer? It doesn’t matter. Is he strange? Unusual? Surprising? Certainly. But above all, he’s true to himself.