Dramaturgy and space in *A streetcar named Desire*[1]

Dramaturgia e espaço em *Um bonde chamado Desejo*

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Abstract
This paper results from an analysis of the representation of space and its possible relationships with dramaturgy. In this regard, this paper aims to analyze the play *A streetcar named Desire* (Tennessee Williams, 1947), considering the relation between space and dramaturgy, just as the discursive matrices present in the space narrative of the theatrical play. The study has a qualitative approach, constituted as a case study based on a bibliographical review. The study concluded that the stage directions reveal meanings and discourses in the space and the action of the characters in the play in the same way they contribute to the poetic composition of space in the narrative.
Keywords: Tennessee Williams; Stage directions; New Orleans.

Resumo
Este artigo é resultado de uma análise sobre a representação do espaço e suas possíveis relações com a dramaturgia. Nesse sentido, o artigo tem como objetivo analisar a peça *Um bonde chamado Desejo* (Tennessee Williams, 1947), considerando a relação entre espaço e texto dramático, assim como as matrizes discursivas presentes na narrativa espacial da obra. O trabalho possui abordagem qualitativa, constituindo-se como um estudo de caso baseado em revisão bibliográfica. Ao final, o estudo concluiu que as didascálias revelam significados e discursos no espaço e na ação das personagens da peça, ao mesmo tempo que contribuem para a composição poética do espaço na narrativa.
Palavras-chave: Tennessee Williams; Didascálias; Nova Orleans.

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Our proposal for reflection is directed toward the modes of representation of space in the theatrical text of *A streetcar named Desire* (Tennessee Williams, 1947), taking into consideration the interdiscursive developments between space and dramaturgy. The analysis takes as its central axis the textual and discursive components in the dramaturgic space, aiming as well toward a historical contextualization of the entirety of the work. Thus, we will consider, as for analysis, a version of the work published in 1980 by New Directions (179 p.).

As regards the plot of the play, two characters in particular generate the main conflict: Blanche DuBois and Stanley Kowalski. The story depicts Blanche's stay in her sister's, Stella, house in New Orleans (Louisiana). Presented as a sensitive and vulnerable character in the face of past trauma, Blanche will enter into direct conflict with the rude brother-in-law, Stanley Kowalski, since he is constantly suspicious of her past.

In order to understand the tensions established in this conflict, other questions arouse our attention throughout the narrative, whose aspects can be related to the paradoxical ideas connected to sensitivity and brutality, refinement and deprivation, libido and chastity, fantasy and reality, femininity and masculinity in the middle of the 20th century, beside the dynamics that involve marginalized individuals in the suburbs of the multicultural New Orleans. It bears mentioning that among the places that marked the artistic and professional trajectory of the playwright Tennessee Williams was the city of New Orleans, whose cultural and social influence imprinted a singular tone on *A streetcar named Desire* (Borges, 2017).

The research is based on an investigation of qualitative character with a focus on case study, concentrating on the exercise of critical and analytical reading of the bibliographical material (Gerhardt; Silveira, 2009). Upon proposing the categories of analysis, we consider, first of all, the stage directions as indicators that go beyond their conventional condition as scene descriptions, now being understood as valuable resources for the poetical dimension of the dramatic text (Ramos, 1999). Besides, in order to contribute to this approach, we make use of some concepts concerning theatrical space based on the conceptions of *scenic*, *dramatic* and *textual* space (Pavis, 2008).

Therefore, the main idea of this study resides on the representation of space as an agent that produces meanings, senses and discourse, recognizing in the stage directions a component that articulates experiences, affects and perceptions between character and

place. The analysis encompasses the period of Blanche DuBois's stay at his sister's, Stella Kowalski, residence, taking into view some of the narrative elements that mobilized her downfall in the frenetic periphery of New Orleans.

Stage direction in the theatrical text

The function of stage directions in the dramatic text acquired new conditions in the course of history. Since the turn of the 19th to the 20th century, a period intensified by normative tensions between text (word) and scene (action), the appearance of theatre directors in view of the aesthetic conception of spectacle established a new perspective over theatrical productions. The necessity of the full realization of a staging produced new attributions for the dramaturgical text, so that stage direction acquired structuring functions that went through details as, for example, actors' actions, gestures, speech intensity, characters' feelings and expressions, extrascenic descriptions, among others (Ramos, 1999).

However, despite these transformations, we could affirm that the representation of spaces in dramaturgical works is often neglected in the textual structure of the plays, given that its function is generally restricted to the indicative functionalities of the scenes (Ubersfeld, 2005). Going against this perspective, and trying to signal some aspects that can indicate also other possibilities of analysis, we asses in this study the symbolic value that stage directions can provide for the space in the theatrical text. In view of this, it is worth drawing on the reflections regarding the poetic functionality of stage directions present in texts of dramatic literature, as professor Luiz Fernando Ramos (1999, p. 32-33) points out:

> More and more the author now develops an auxiliary text, or parallel to the dialogues, as an attribution that, previously, when the plays were only watched, was exclusive for actors and other agents responsible for the spectacle. Initially, this text indicating the reading appears in the form of preface, as is the case of Racine, or of Corneille, but soon advances to the space between the dialogues and starts to be used as a habitual resource for actors, be it to move the plot, or to establish commentaries about the mode of the actions.

Given these considerations, it can be said that stage directions present themselves as a resource that transcends the auxiliary role in the dramatic structure of the work. In this

perspective, its place was reconfigured as a new mechanism for the movement of the plot, and, in a way, its presence was materialized as a fundamental element in the execution, interpretation and experimentation of actions described in the dramatic text. Among the playwrights that dared explore them with more vigor, it is possible to cite the Irish Samuel Beckett as one of the greatest exponents that consistently explored them in the makeup of his plots.

> The remarkable in Becket is that in his plays the stage directions have the same status as the characters' speech, which makes inadequate to think of them as secondary or less important in the dramatic development. And, if in the strict plan of his dramatic literature the stage direction is uncontestably indispensable in the articulation of the fiction, it will also be crucial in the scenic formalization and concretization (Ramos, 1999, p. 53).

Hence the importance of considering, in our view, the analysis of stage directions as nooks for the poetic understanding of space in the dramatic text, since, as Ramos highlights on Beckett's scenic writing, the presence of stage directions in the theatre of the Irish author provides, to a significant extent, the actions for the movement of the plots: "Even with an infinite variety of modes of executing it, failing to fulfil it not only betrays the author as well as completely alters the course of dramatic action. '**Estragon** – Let's go (*They do not move*)'" (Ramos, 1999, p. 54).

The idea of "Beckettian stage direction" has become one of the most prominent approaches in the studies about stage directions, given that the configurations in the scenic-textual plane appear, according to Ramos (1999, p. 78), "[…] as legitimate literary expression of its poetics of the scene". Therefore, the presence of the stage directions of the theatrical text can contribute, for example, with the subjective description of the characters, delineate the texture of scene objects, ambiances, temporalities, depths, surfaces, distances, planes, etc.

In the description of the stage directions in theatrical works, whether of a realistic or semi-realistic character, in a greater or lesser degree, the scenic place presents itself as imitation of a material space, that is, an autonomous fragmentation of the real world, and its *mimesis* condenses the representation of a reality in itself.

Scenic, dramatic and textual space

In order to approach some of the categories of scenic space in dramaturgy, we intend here to verify some fundamental contributions in order to investigate modes of reading, perceiving, analyzing and interpreting the theatrical space itself. For this purpose, it is fit to linger on the conceptions of theatrical space according to the French theoretician Patrice Pavis, more specifically on his work *Dicionário de teatro* (2008), whose idea of spatiality in the theatre is divided into three principles.

The first note that the author highlights regarding theatrical spatiality concerns (1) *scenic space*: this category calls attention to the real and concrete presence of space, where the action of actors in the scene can extend, also, to the space of the audience. The second conception that the author takes into consideration is (2) *dramatic space*: this, in turn, constituted by the symbolic negotiation between actors and spectators as a place of staging, fiction, imagination, illusion and playfulness. And, in the end, we encounter, in the last category, the idea of (3) *textual space*, whose structure is located in the enunciative dimension of discourses, textualities, sentences, rhetorics, descriptions, indications, etc. According to the author himself, this last concept "Is space considered from the point of view of its graphic, phonic or rhetorical materiality, the space of the 'score', containing the actors' speeches and the stage directions" (Pavis, 2008, p. 133).

Concluding this discussion, it becomes fundamental to establish a relation between the aspects and the dynamics of the textual space – rhetorics, replies and stage directions – in the work *A streetcar named Desire*, so that it is possible to scrutinize the environments described in the dramaturgical text. It is pertinent to detect the layers of meaning interwoven not only in the public spaces of the plot, such as the street, the Kowalskis' quarter, but also to explore other signs contained in the "intimate space" of the characters. In this way, it is necessary here to propose a transversalization of these perspectives.

The representation of space in *A streetcar named Desire*

Like Amanda Wingfield in *The glass menagerie* (Williams, 2014a), the enigmatic Blanche DuBois in *A streetcar named Desire* underscores nostalgically the remembrances of her refined and prosperous past at the same time that she infers a future adrift, carried by

the circumstances. In sum, the story revolves around Blanche DuBois's stay at her sister's, Stella, house in New Orleans. Averse to the new environment, Blanche seeks a new perspective on life after a series of traumas. However, her presence will occasion a direct conflict with her brother-in-law, Stanley Kowalski, since he is suspicious of Blanche's past.

The arrival of the refined lady amidst the busy periphery of New Orleans appears, initially, as the first paradox of the plot, given that the non-identification of the character will collide with the turbulent environment of the city. This contrast with the rural appearance of Blanche is personified in the figure of the *Southerne Belle*,[5] that is, the noble and chaste lady that, in the middle of the 19th century, belonged to the agrarian elite in the Southern region of the United States. Daughters of great farmers and heiresses to vast stretches of land, the *Southern Belle* had a separate role in the old southern society, since her upbringing was modelled toward moral and domestic education, essential elements for the future role of wife, mother, etc. (Silva, 2005).

In the work of the American playwright, one can see the scene of a busy neighborhood in New Orleans, whose vibrancy in the streets confer, in the city's periphery, a distinct appeal. The buildings, minutely described in the stage directions, reflect the rhythm that the tenants impress daily on the environment, so that "The houses are mostly white frame, weathered gray, with rickety outside stairs…" (Williams, 1980, p. 3). The reading of the suburb in the play fosters other forms of perception in the receptor, since the textual-dramatic construction of the space dwell on other elements of a sensorial order, such as smell, hearing and vision, translated in turn by the symbolic potency of the stage direction highlighted by the author.

> [The sky that shows around the dim white building is a peculiarly tender blue, almost a turquoise, which invests the scene with a kind of lyricism and gracefully attenuates the atmosphere of decay. You can almost feel the warm breath of the brown river beyond the river warehouses with their faint redolences of bananas and coffee. A corresponding air is evoked by the music of Negro entertainers at a barroom around the corner. In this part of New Orleans you are practically always just around the corner…] (Williams, 1980, p. 3).

If the place evokes all of its qualities in this piece of the city's suburb, the "atmosphere of decadence" will echo next a fresh air in the slums of the world capital of

[5] **The history of the Southern Belle**. Available on: http://projects.leadr.msu.edu/uniontodisunion/exhibits/show/the-history-of-the-southern-be. Accessed on: 24 Jul. 2022.

jazz after the arrival of the new visitor. This dimension becomes clearer in the appearance of Blanche on the lively Elysian Fields[6] street, where the Kowalski couple's residence is located, that is, her sister Stella with the respective husband Stanley. The origin of the term that names the street of the Kowalskis' is related to paradise in Greek mythology, given that the place represents the destiny of the blessed souls.

It must be remembered that the description of the character Blanche reveals a meaningful dimension that the stage directions undertake in Williams's dramatic text. In this perspective, it is possible to comprehend the conception of space and place in this theatrical work, and how much of its scenic-textual function contribute to the analysis of character in the play.

> [Her expression is one of shocked disbelief. Her appearance is incongruous to this setting. She is daintily dressed in a white suit with a fluffy bodice, necklace and earrings of pearl, white gloves and hat, looking as if she were arriving at a summer tea or cocktail party in the garden district.] (Williams, 1980, p. 5).

It is in this aspect that the stage directions become a descriptive intervention of the narrative agents, given that their application will expand our reading of, among other things, the individual characteristics of the characters, the description of the rooms in the residence of the Kowalskis, as well as the sounds present in the Elysian Fields street, as we will see further on. Still considering this context, if, on the one hand, Blanche is shown as a symbolic figure of her extinct aristocratic universe, icon of a refined and prosperous past, on the other, her supposed aura of cordiality will be undermined before the antagonism of a character that, according to Blanche DuBois herself: "[…] He acts like an animal, has an animal's habits! Eats like one, moves like one, talks like one!" (Williams, 1980, p. 83).

Descendant of Polish immigrants, the ex-member of the American Army Artillery, Stanley Kowaslki integrates now the urban working class of New Orleans, acting as an employee in a spare parts plant. In its more general aspect, the text associates Stanley and his co-workers to animalistic figures, impulsive, hostile and vulgar. In parallel to this first observation, it is also noticed that their energy is conditioned to an idea of excessive virility in that environment. In this way, Williams's text suggests a nonchalant appearance of the character, connected to physical vigor and robust behavior, which, in this case, seem to point to a masculine posture associated with the idea of seduction, control or vitality:

[6] Cf. **Campos Elíseos**. Available on: https://brasilescola.uol.com.br/mitologia/campos-eliseos.htm. Accessed on: 24 Jul. 2022.

> [Animal joy in his being is implicit in all his movements and attitudes. Since earliest manhood the center of his life has been pleasure with women, the giving and taking of it, not with weak indulgence, dependency, but with the power and pride of a richly feathered male bird among hens.] (Williams, 1980, p. 24-25).

The meeting between Blanche and Stanley does not represent simply the conflict between two distinct personalities, since their social contexts, worldviews and sociocultural identities will be highlighted during the clashes that will succeed (Félix, 2010). Here, Blanche will be the one most harmed due to the brutality of the brother-in-law. In order to link these two characters in the narrative, the presence of Stella Kowalski, Blanche's sister, is taken as an element of mediation between the two protagonists of the story. A former heiress of the lost plantation of Belle Reve, an old property of the DuBois family, Stella underscores the context of transition from the agrarian world to the urban environment. Contrary to Blanche, Stella broke abruptly with her old rural past:

> **BLANCHE** - Well, Stella--you're going to reproach me, I know that you're bound to reproach me--but before you do--take into consideration--you left! I stayed and struggled! You came to New Orleans and looked out for yourself. I stayed at Belle Reve and tried to hold it together! I'm not meaning this in any reproachful way, but all the burden descended on my shoulders.
> **STELLA** - The best I could do was make my own living, Blanche. [*Blanche begins to shake again with intensity.*]
> **BLANCHE** - I know, I know. But you are the one that abandoned Belle Reve, not I! I stayed and fought for it, bled for it, almost died for it! (Williams, 1980, p. 20).

Lost by virtue of a series of debts left by the deceased relatives, the Belle Reve plantation formed the valuable remnant of symbolic and material power of Blanche and her family. Besides, the loss of the estate certainly proves some of the downfalls of the protagonist, which we will describe later on.

Aware of this information concerning the main characters, there is further still in the plot an ethnic variety of characters as narrative composition of the place. In this sense, the cultural heterogeneity of New Orleans should be highlighted. Now, even though the characters are described with generalized impressions through accent, skin color, or birthplace, we can consider the relevance of some of them, such as: the "Negro Woman" (tenant of the tenement); the "Mexican" (flower seller) and Stanley's Friend, Pablo Gonzalez, whose ascendency (very likely Latin American, given his name) is not described. It is worth remembering still that Stanley himself, in some moments

pejoratively named "Polack", is a descendent of Polish immigrants, while the sisters Stella and Blanche are of French origin.[7]

In another aspect, it is worth highlighting one of the characters that calls Blanche's attention during her stay at her sister's residence. Mitch (Harold Mitchell), contrary to the manners with which Stanley and his companions are portrayed, displays himself in the story as a peaceful person, having as his only company his own mother, who is ill. Blanche describes him as a man that expresses "[…] a sort of sensitive look" (Williams, 1980, p. 52). For her, his image personifies maybe a "gentlemanly" posture if compared with the other colleagues of Stanley, considering him as a possible suitor. Here, the expectation of Blanche in part resides in the hope of seeing him as a light that comforts (emotionally and financially) her present, if not a vector of resilience in the face of pains reaped in the past.

Many of these narrative elements, moreover, were preserved, for example, in its two main adaptations for the cinema.[8] It is worth remembering that the play was presented for the first time on Broadway in 1947, directed by the film and theater director Elia Kazan (1909-2003). The first release as a film, also with the direction of Elia Kazan, happened in 1951, however, under the watch of the Hays Code,[9] a decree that officialized censorship guidelines for the Hollywood studios at the time.

Figure 1 – On screen, Vivien Leigh and Marlon Brando interpreting Blanche and Stanley

Source: *A streetcar named Desire* (Elia Kazan, 1951).

[7] Blanche DuBois means "White of the Wood" in English. Besides, the old Belle Reve plantation means "Beautiful Dream".

[8] Apart from the film by Elia Kazan, another famous adaptation refers to the 1995 film directed by Glenn Jordan, with the same title as the play.

[9] Intending to avoid polemics (or financial loss) with the general public in relation to their content, the Hollywood studios signed, with the support of the lawyer Will H. Hays, an agreement of self-censorship called Motion Picture Production Code, which lasted from 1930 to 1968. Cf. **Código Hays: a censura de Hollywood**. Available on: https://cinemaemcadernos.wordpress.com/2015/01/21/codigo-hays/. Accessed on: 25 Jul. 2022.

The movie was produced in the context of the Cold War, marked by the political, economic and ideological polarization between the USA and the USSR after the Second World War. In this sense, it is in this period, also, that the political repression against possible adepts of communism was intensified in many spheres of American society, including Hollywood. The campaign of persecution was promoted by the Republican senator Joseph McCarthy (1908-1957), and came to be known as McCarthyism, so that the accusation practices – sometimes unjustified – implicated the names of artists, scientists, politicians, and other citizens with supposed affiliation to the communist movement. Highlight is given to the fact that some accusations became famous, such as those of Elia Kazan himself against former colleagues of the Communist Party USA, of which he was a member between the years of 1934 to 1936, and that such denunciations would inevitably mark his career for the next decades.[10]

Without intending to linger on this theme, and still on the subject of the movie directed by Kazan, some crucial dialogues and scenes of the original play were suppressed in his film, as the text provided details about motivations that led the protagonist to insanity, such as the suicide of her former husband, Allan, after Blanche had found about his homosexuality. Such reference is not even mentioned in the film adaptation.

The censorship of the movie in Brazil was also not different, exemplified by the unfortunate choice for the title in Portuguese: *Uma rua chamada Pecado* (A street called Sin). Here, the moralizing option in the change of the word "desire" for "sin" seems clear. In this translation operation, the layers of meaning can be displaced to other levels of interpretation not intended by the original aim of the author, which would compromise, thus, the strength in the reference to the symbol of the electric vehicle. Returning to the theatrical work itself, the term "Desire", name given to the streetcar line that takes Blanche to the Elysian Fields, implies notions that are not restricted only to urban mobility, once they contemplate also ideas connected to libido, frenzy, and the discomfort or repulse toward the environment.

> **STELLA** - But there are things that happen between a man and a woman in the dark--that sort of make everything else seem—unimportant. [*Pause*]
> **BLANCHE** - What you are talking about is brutal desire--just--Desire!--the name of that rattle-trap streetcar that bangs through the Quarter, up one

[10] Cf. **A delação que atormentou Elia Kazan por toda a vida**. Available on: https://jornaldaparaiba.com.br/cultura/silvio-osias/2017/05/15/delacao-que-atormentou-elia-kazanpor-toda-vida. Accessed on: 09 Oct. 2022.

> old narrow street and down another....
> **STELLA** - Haven't you ever ridden on that streetcar?
> **BLANCHE** - It brought me here.--Where I'm not wanted and where I'm ashamed to be (Williams, 1980, p. 81).

Blanche's inadaptability justifies her discomfort, and the tensions between her and Stanley are reinforced as the mood in the Kowalkis' apartment is heightened, such as in the poker night meeting. We can see in this scene Stanley's friends gathered at his house for a card game, "they are men at the peak of their physical manhood, as coarse and direct and powerful as the primary colors" (Williams, 1980, p. 46). At the same time, after returning from a walk with Stella, it is curious to notice Blanche's concern in changing her makeup and gently asking the men sitting at the table to not get up, which request is, next, answered by Stanley: "**STANLEY** - Nobody's going to get up, so don't be worried" (Williams, 1980, p. 50).

It is possible to perceive that all of Blanche's behavior, throughout the narrative, reverberates symbolically in two components of the play, that is: the *lights* and the *sounds* of the space. In a first analysis, we perceive that Blanche avoids the clarity of light with the intention of hiding as much as possible her appearance, trying to conceal, especially from Mitch, her true age. "**BLANCHE** - Daylight never exposed so total a ruin!" (Williams, 1980, p. 14). To better specify this detail, it is worth noticing the ways in which the character avoids or adapts the luminosity of space according to her necessity, like, for example; (1) constantly turning off the lights in the rooms of the residence; (2) reducing the luminosity of a lamp by covering it with a "Chinese paper lantern"; and, at last, (3) avoiding exposition to natural daylight.

In a second analysis, we can point out the sound interferences that the environment produce, revealing clearly the emotional and mental states of Blanche. One of the most present sound elements in the space of the narrative are the noises from the railway in the quarter, generally condensed by dialogues that provoke discomfort in Blanche, such as the remembrance of the young dead husband, Allan Grey:

> **BLANCHE** - Then I found out. In the worst of all possible ways. By coming suddenly into a room that I thought was empty--which wasn't empty, but had two people in it... the boy I had married and an older man who had been his friend for years.... [*A locomotive is heard approaching outside. She claps her hands to her ears and crouches over. The headlight of the locomotive glares into the room as it thunders past. As the noise recedes she straightens slowly and continues speaking.*] (Williams, 1980, p. 114).

We notice here how incisively the sound sources of the space intersperse with the moments of fragility and imbalance of the characters. The discovery of the husband's homosexuality deepened in Blanche the sensation of guilt after the respective suicide of the young man. Add to this other factors that Stanley, with the clear intent of expelling her from her residence, discovered about the enigmatic past of the sister-in-law, such as the harassment committed against a student in the old school where she taught (Blanche was an English teacher) and the many nights spent in hotels with "strangers", which occasioned her bad reputation and expulsion from the small Laurel, the city where she lived. Due to this information, Mitch, who had been developing a spontaneous relationship with Blanche, refuses to marry her, compromising even more her psychological conditions. Consequently, the character starts to hear inner voices more often, such as waltz melodies, gunshots, and others.

Despite these factors, it will be Stanley who will execute the biggest gestures of violence (physical and symbolic) against the already debilitated Blanche DuBois. During the celebration of the sister-in-law's birthday, Stanley gives her a bus ticket back to Laurel as a gift and, as if it were not enough, while the wife is in the hospital pregnant, the Stanley's doses of aggression culminate in the act of rape against the sister-in-law, situation which seals once and for all the tragic destiny of Blanche.

Keeping due proportions, we see, in the final scene of the play, the establishment of a new atmosphere in the dramaturgical space. We will see an apparently anxious Blanche while Stella and the neighbor Eunice help her dress herself. The peaks of delirium increase, so that the character waits, according to her, the arrival of the Texan oil millionaire Shep Huntleigh, an old boyfriend that invited her for a cruise in the Caribbean. According to what happened on the poker night, the Stanley's colleagues are playing cards, including Mitch, however, everyone now is aware of the conditions and the destiny of the character.

> **BLANCHE** [*tensely*] - I wonder if it's for me.
> [*A whispered colloquy takes place at the door.*]
> **EUNICE** [*returning, brightly*] - Someone is calling for Blanche.
> **BLANCHE** - It is for me, then! [*She looks fearfully from one to the other and then to the portieres. The 'Varsouviana' faintly plays*] Is it the gentleman I was expecting from Dallas?
> **EUNICE** - I think it is, Blanche.
> **BLANCHE** - I'm not quite ready (Williams, 1980, p. 171-172).

The expectation for the waited suitor becomes for Blanche her hope for comfort and stability. After the doorbell rings, the whispers between the men in the game are hushed. Blanche, accompanied by Stella and her neighbor Eunice, walks to the door, convinced that Shep Huntleigh is waiting for her, however, without dismantling her posture previously personified in the figure of the Southern Belle: "**BLANCHE** [*To the men*] – Please don't get up. I'm only passing through" (Williams, 1980, p. 173). Upon answering the door, Blanche is received by a doctor and a nurse, while she is surprised by the respective visits. The break in expectation leaves her dumbfound, and the bewildered return inside the apartment will be the last. She enters the room. Leans on a chair. Her despair increases while Stanley and the nurse try to intercept her: "**MATRON -** Hello, Blanche. [The greeting is echoed and re-echoed by other mysterious voices behind the walls, as if reverberated through a canyon of rock.]" (Williams, 1980, p. 175).

Blanche's sensation toward the space becomes more topophobic[11] as the stage directions reveal more minutely her torments, providing the reader a place of witness for the total destabilization of the character. The reader follows Blanche's turmoil, knowing that he/she will be the only one to visualize, or hear, each mental manifestation of the character before the actions imposed by the other actants. Stanley's last blow against Blanche happens in a gesture of profound symbolic violence: "[He crosses to dressing table and seizes the paper lantern, tearing it off the light bulb, and extends it toward her. She cries out as if the lantern was herself.]" (Williams, 1980, p. 176).

Acquired at a Chinese store in the French Quarter, the paper lantern was used by Blanche to reduce the lamps' clarity in the room, minimizing thus the exposure of her appearance to light, as mentioned before. The object carries out in space a function beyond its ornamental attribution, given that its presence manifests a clear extension of the character's subjectivity in that environment. Thus, the paper lantern constituted in Blanche an extension of her body, a transfiguration of her own fragility.

Seeing the paper lantern destroyed, Blanche reveal her complete vulnerability amidst that situation of oppression: "*The heavy woman* […] *pinions her arms. Blanche cries out hoarsely and slips to her knees.*]" (Williams, 1980, p. 177). The moments of tension are relieved after the arrival of the doctor, before whom Blanche, upon hearing him, calms down: "**DOCTOR** - Miss DuBois. [*She turns her face to him and stares at him with desperate*

[11] According to Marandola Jr. *et al.* (2012), the term *topophobia* can refer to feelings of repulse, dread, fear, or trauma experienced in a determined place.

pleading. He smiles…]" (Williams, 1980, p. 177-178). Perceiving Blanche's tranquility after his approach, the doctor takes off his hat and gently offers his arm (a chivalrous gesture of gentleness, common at the time of the play), so that Blanche's look of dismay gives place to a sensation of reassurance.

The "chivalrous" act coming from the doctor triggers one the most potent scenes in world dramaturgy, and the next moment will give the most emblematic sentence in the work: "**BLANCHE** - Whoever you are – I have always depended on the kindness of strangers" (Williams, 1980, p. 178). At the end, she goes out toward the car that waits for her, gently accompanied by the doctor and the nurse. Another aspect that is possible to notice, still in respect to this famous passage, concerns the echo triggered by the sentence of the protagonist, which beatified her as one of the great tragic heroines of modern dramaturgy.

> For Arthur Miller, this sentence was so remarkable that the playwright still remembers the audience's sighs on hearing it, almost 60 years after the first time he watched the play. The identification of the public with the character was so great that 'when she went out in the arms of the doctor, everybody went with her' (Borges, 2017, p. 140).

It is before the emotional/psychological destabilization in that reality that all of Blanche DuBois's fantasies collapse, maybe her greatest armor in that context, in opposition to the ruins of a traumatic past. However, the considerations taken from this debate conceive narrative structures in which the spatial signs are incisively disputed. In this ample stylistic, poetic, symbolic, and discursive constellation, it would be possible to attest that we visualize an emotionally debilitated Blanche due to the tragic experiences of the past, which was covered with auras of purity, cordiality, and nobility, even though they are composed through excessive fallacies and illusions, dreams and expectations.

On the other hand, there is a Stanley that expresses pragmatism, objectivity, at the same time that he manifests impetuous, violent, and aggressive actions when he "lays his cards on the table", emblem of a person whose brutality works with the highest doses of toxicity, and which evidently conditioned Blanche to a state of madness. According to Anne Ubersfeld (2005, p. 106), "[…] the structure of almost all dramatic narratives can be read as a conflict of spaces, or as the conquest or the abandonment of a given space". In this perspective, Blanche faces Stanley in an invisible game of power over the space in which both transit. In their more general aspects, the collapse of the character dialogues

with the narrative space since the moment the same environment starts to compose (or oppose) its appearance. We see that the her sensibility is revealed also in the mode with which it apprehends the space that it occupies, as well as the strategies of trying to adapt it according to her necessities, factors which, until then, walk hand in hand with elements that would indicate her own decadence in that context.

Final considerations

We can notice that the meanings attributed to place transcend the very materiality of space. In this sense, it is possible to say that the indications concerning space in the dramaturgical text are given, in particular, through the descriptions of places, of actions, of desires and motivations that impel the characters in the narrative environment. In this perspective, we considered relevant to ascertain the symbology inserted in the stage directions of Tennessee Williams's drama.

With the intent of guiding the dramaturgical mechanisms with a focus on the representation of narrative space, this paper enabled the inference of an interpretative reading of the text, taking into account the sign elements as vectors fit to be deciphered, concerning the (internal or external) environment described in the work. The analyses acted as keys to a metaphorical interpretation of the fictional universe, highlighting, thus, the different possibilities of meaning underscored in the representation of space in the theatrical text, taking into consideration not only the dialogues of the characters, but also the poetic composition produced by the stage directions.

Accompanying Blanche DuBois's trajectory through the narrative space of *A streetcar named Desire*, under the noise of the transit of trains and streetcars, one presupposes that the poetic potency of the work can reside in the descriptions of space in the dramaturgical text. All of this insofar as the characterization of character and the other environments are properly explained. At last, Blanche DuBois guides use to a multiethnic, suburban, frenetic, and frantic Elysian Fields street through the streetcar *Desire*, the alter ego of a highly captivating and seductive New Orleans, a nook for the blessed souls, as the Elysian Fields themselves suggest in Greek mythology. Here, symbolic values related to the capacity of visualizing a world with more sensibility, alterity, acuity, and empathy are inscribed as elemental virtues to be exercised in various spheres of society, especially

according to the strong tragic juncture expressed in the last years in Brazil and in the world.

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