

**BE VIOLENT AGAIN: VIOLENCE, REALISM AND CONSUMERISM
IN ARTHUR MILLER'S *DEATH OF A SALESMAN*
AND MARK RAVENHILL'S *SHOPPING AND FUCKING***

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Abstract: In this paper I will consider the 1950s as a seminal period for the configuration of violence in modern drama and as a crucial moment for the fusion between violence and realism. In post-war drama, we will not see violence portrayed as an extreme action or as unbelievable acts. Violence becomes the natural way to express social and individual tensions, through class conflicts, strong language and war motives. Themes such as the display of physical violence, the failure of the human body, exposing dysfunctional families and war effects, becomes more and more common and attached to everyday life. This was fertile ground for John Osborne, Edward Bond or Arthur Miller, or for the British dramaturgy of the nineties, especially with the so-called in-yer-face theatre.

Thus, I will focus on the effects this discussion had on Portuguese culture and

theatre. I will discuss two performances that are both representative of the Portuguese alternative culture of the time and that stage texts that deal with realistic violence: Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* by Experimental Theatre of Oporto (TEP), in 1954; and Mark Ravenhill's *Shopping and Fucking*, directed by Gonçalo Amorim, in 2007. Both performances represent straightforward approaches to the texts and raise several interesting aspects: how is violence portrayed in Portugal, in 1954, when a fascist dictatorship imposed a severe censorship on performances? And how is Ravenhill's violence replaced by irony in the performance by Gonçalo Amorim?

Keywords: Portrayal of Violence, Realism, Consumerism, Political Theatre, Portuguese Contemporary Theatre.



Resumen: En este artículo voy a considerar la década de 1950 como un período fundamental para la configuración de la violencia en el teatro moderno y como un momento crucial para la fusión entre la violencia y el realismo. En el drama de la posguerra, la violencia no se presenta como acciones extremas o actos increíbles. La violencia se convierte en la forma natural de expresar las tensiones sociales e individuales, a través de los conflictos de clase, el uso del lenguaje y las alusiones a la guerra. Elementos tales como la visualización de la violencia física, el fracaso del cuerpo humano, la familia disfuncional y los efectos de guerra, se vuelven cada vez más comunes en la ficción como reflejo de la vida cotidiana. Estas referencias se vuelven recurrentes entre dramaturgos como John Osborne, Edward Bond o Arthur Miller, así como para la corriente del teatro in-yer-face en los años noventa en Gran Bretaña.

Este artículo centra su interés en el diálogo que se establece entre la cultura portuguesa y el teatro de estas características. Para ello, se describen dos puestas en escena representativas de la unión de este teatro y su representación en Portugal: *Death of a Salesman*, by the Teatro Experimental del Oporto (TEP), en 1954, de Arthur Miller; y de Mark Ravenhill, *Shopping and Fucking*, dirigido por Gonçalo Amorim, en 2007. Ambas representaciones siguen el texto fielmente y plantean varias preguntas interesantes: ¿cómo es violencia que se presenta en Portugal, en 1954, cuando una dictadura fascista impuso una censura severa en las actuaciones? ¿Y cómo está la violencia de Ravenhill sustituido por ironía en la actuación de Amorim?

Palabras Clave: Representación de la Violencia, realismo, consumismo, Teatro político, Teatro Portugués contemporáneo

1. VIOLENCE AND THE DRAMATIC TEXT

Violence in society and its artistic representation has always been a subject for broad debates. Aware of the dimension of this phenomenon and inscribing the “violent material” in the theatrical tradition, the influential critic Eric Bentley, in *The Life of the Drama* (1964), finds the portrayal of violence essential to the dramatic experience: “Why does even a bad description of violent actions please us? How could it fail to? We tend to feel our lives are missing in violence, and we like to see what are missing” (p. 8); he further alleges: “violence interests us because we are violent” (p. 8); and, in a rather ironic way, he also suggests: “If you wish to attract the audience’s attention, be violent, if you wish to hold it, be violent again” (p. 8). Summing up: “Without violence, there would be nothing in the world but goodness, and literature is not mainly about goodness: it is mainly about madness” (p. 221).

Eloquently, the playwright Edward Bond declares: “Violence shapes and obsesses our society, and if we do not stop being violent we have no future. People who do not want writers to write about violence want to stop them writing about

us and our time. It would be immoral not to write about violence” (Bond, 2000, p. 34). Furthermore, as the scholar Tom Sellar suggests: “Theatre is uniquely positioned to say something on the subject. No other art form can suggest connections between small, everyday behaviour and larger forces as palpably” (2005, p. 8).

The controversial French philosopher Gilles Lipovetsky in his 1983 widely read essay *L'Ère du vide* claims that violence has not been yet under the scope of historical investigation and that it deserves to be better understood since it has been a constant presence in human life and it doesn't seem to be disappearing. While the author distinguishes “savage violence” from “modern violence”, he states that the first was linked to the notions of honor and vengeance and expressed clearly the preponderance of the collective over the individual. If savage violence was inseparable from systems based on cruelty, modern violence is ineludibly attached to the establishment of the vigilant modern states, individualism and consumerism. Violence, Lipovetsky claims, in modern societies became private and individual, subjugated to the urban notions of comfort and individual boundaries. The manifestation of violent behaviors becomes interdicted in human relationships and the development of consumerism, affluence, well-fare, entertainment, travels, the sacralization of the body and health, the destruction of the notion of hero and guilt, all this led to the retraction of public life and to the absence of interest towards the other. Individuals show more interest in sports, music, travels or entertainment than in actual physical confrontation. Not surprisingly, it was, as Lipovetsky argues, “modern state and its complement, the market, which in a convergent and indissociable way contributed to the emergence of a new social order” (2007, p. 178). One may agree or not with the disenchanting propositions of this philosopher, but it is important to notice the link between violence and consumerist society.

Once again, we could refer to Lipovetsky's description of the stages of consumption (*Le Bonheur Paradoxal*, 2007a). According to this author, the first stage of this phenomenon began on the last decades of the nineteenth century and it ended with the Second World War. This first stage was characterized by the constitution of major national markets, made possible by the development in transportation (rail roads), communication (telephone and telegraph) and production (factories that lead to mass production and mass marketing). After the Second World War, a second stage began, mainly characterized by the acquisition of products (automobile, television, domestic devices). The post-war affluent society is also based on the widespread of consumerism to all social classes, homogeneity and standardization. At this stage, consumption is based on the acquisition of commodities, leading to individual hedonism. According to Lipovetsky, there is a subsequent third stage: the hyper-consumption. These hyper-modern times are characterized by a life model that encourages individual and hedonistic consumption, rather than increasing their social status. Consumption is here determined by the experience rather than possession. Although not freeing the individual from the dictatorship of commodities, the hyper-consumption creates a paradoxical happiness: a world stripped from tradition and security, as well as facing an uncertain future creates

considerable anxiety, fear and anguish. All these stages had their preferential spaces. The nineteenth-century had arcades and the early department stores, current shopping centers and malls, and more recently, on-line shopping: they all promote different relations and different types of consumers.

Since consumerism and mass consumption as we know it is shaped under the lights of the Affluent Society of the 1950s (J. K. Galbraith's *The Affluent Society*, 1958), I will consider this decade as a seminal point of departure. Furthermore, the 1950s also appear as a crucial moment for the fusion between violence and realism expressing social and individual tensions, through class conflicts, strong language and war motives. Themes such as the display of physical violence, the failure of the human body, exposing dysfunctional families and war effects, becomes more and more common and relate fiction to everyday reality. This was fertile ground for John Osborne, John Arden and Edward Bond as well as Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams. The early nineties were also a landmark on the aesthetical treatment of violence, especially with British In-Yer-Face Theatre, with authors such as Mark Ravenhill or Sarah Kane, for whom obscenity, sex and blood are precisely the instruments to shock audiences and irritate the establishment.

This article explores the relationship between consumption and the representation of violence in realist theatre, which emerged in the post-war context of consumerism. Therefore, I am analyzing two plays: Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and Mark Ravenhill's *Shopping and Fucking*, considering them as a "post-mortem elegy" for the model of consumerism they depict and signaling the ways violence is portrayed differently in each text. I will also focus on the effects this discussion had on Portuguese theatre, discussing two performances that are both representative of the Portuguese alternative culture of their time and that deal with realistic violence: *Death of a Salesman* staged by Experimental Theatre of Oporto (TEP), in 1954; and *Shopping and Fucking*, by Primeiros Sintomas, in 2007. Both performances represent faithful approaches to the texts and raise several interesting aspects: how is violence portrayed in Portugal, in 1954, when a fascist dictatorship imposed a severe censorship on performances? And how is Ravenhill's provocation replaced by cinematic stylization in the performance by Primeiros Sintomas?

Both Miller's and Ravenhill's pieces deal with consumerism – and we find that reference immediately on the title: *Death of a Salesman* / *Shopping and Fucking*. They both depict subjects that pursuit materialist accomplishment: Willy Loman, the tragic common man on Miller's text, is an old salesman who aspires to have the same kind of noble death as Dave Singleman, who could sell even without leaving his hotel bedroom in cities across the States and that, after his death at eighty four, was mourned by thousands of colleagues and customers. This epic funeral made young Willy think that "selling was the greatest career a man could want" (Miller, 2000, p. 63) and put him off from going to Alaska with his brother where new fortune opportunities were flourishing. This dislocated dream about the nobility of having a death of a salesman and the imaginative reveries about his ad-

venturous brother prevent him from realizing the shifts in his profession, in the world, in his family and, ultimately, in himself.

In Ravenhill's *Shopping and Fucking*, the characters Robbie, Mark, Gary, Brian and Lulu live their lives as if they were lost in a huge supermarket, negotiating affections, love and sex as if they were commodities, living futile and materialist lives. When Mark leaves home in order to have a detox rehabilitation, his roommates (Lulu and Mark, both dependent on Mark's income), are forced to sell drugs to survive. This will place the perverse Brian, a producer and drug dealer, on their path. Meanwhile, Mark gets involved with Gary, a male prostitute from whom he demands impersonal sex: "The important thing for me right now" – Marks says – "for my needs, is that this doesn't actually mean anything, you know? Which is why I wanted something that was a transaction. Because I thought if I pay then it won't mean anything. Do you think that's right – in your experience?" (Ravenhill, 2001, p. 294). Those are the ingredients to a narrative which involves prostitution, supermarkets, buying clothes, selling drugs, anal sex, phone sex, fast food, discotheques, forks, Chekhov and the Lion King. In one sentence: a terrifying parable of contemporary consumption.

As an old man, Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman* laments the loss of nobility, personality and friendship in the business: "Today it's all cut and dried, and there's no chance for bringing friendship to bear – or personality" (Miller, 2000, p. 63-64). Indeed, the fifties witnessed the decadence of the itinerant salesman business and local traditional trade. Even if supermarkets began in the 1930s, it was in the fifties that they had a significant boom. Frequently located in the outskirts of the cities, their low prices, vast parking lots and tremendous variety of merchandises attracted many different consumers. Furthermore, as buyers picked out the products they wanted from shelves, there was less need for selling staff. "Shopping then becomes about, firstly, looking rather than speaking; secondly, entertainment and leisure; thirdly, desire rather than need", as Mark Paterson affirms in *Consumption and Everyday Life* (177). Or, as Kowinsky dystopically suggests:

Someday it may be possible to be born, go to preschool through college, get a job, date, marry, have children... get a divorce, advance through a career or two, receive your medical care, even get arrested, tried and jailed; live a relatively full life of culture and entertainment, and eventually die and be given funeral rites without ever leaving a particular mall complex –because every one of those possibilities now exists in some shopping centre somewhere. (Kowinski apud Paterson, 2006, p. 169).

A new kind of consumer appears: an individual that cherishes domestic commodities (often superfluous) and that finds in the possession of particular brands or objects a way to overlap class distinctions, in a process of cultural standardization. This will inevitably lead to the loss of class identity; and this is precisely the particular tragedy of Willy Loman: a man deprived of his professional tradition and class consciousness. This detachment is the most violent feature in Miller's

depiction of consumerism. For that reason, *Death of a Salesman* makes an elegy to a type of consumerism that was vanishing, along with local groceries, salesman and face-to-face relations between consumer and seller. But more important, Miller's text mourns the loss a social class identity.

The violence here is not spectacular or extreme. This is signaled through the conspicuous proximity between the market, individual and violence, as Lipovetsky argues and both texts demonstrate. The shifting social order modules the portrayal of violence. In post-war drama the traditional categories of violence in tragedy are replaced by the overwhelming presence of everyday violence and by the multiplication of minor violent acts, such as insults or provocations. This is what seems to inspire Miller's words:

I had not understood that these matters are measured by Greco-Elizabethan paragraphs which hold no mention of insurance payments, front porches, refrigerator fan belts, steering knuckles, Chevrolets, and visions seen not through the portals of Delphi but in the blue flame of the hot-water heater. How could "Tragedy" make people weep, of all things? I set out not to write a tragedy in this play, but to show the truth as I saw it. (Miller, 1996, p. 144)

The language in the play is thus extracted from everyday speeches, full of hesitations and interruptions, in a stuttering and inarticulate diction. It adopts the informal language of modern America, "Gee, I'd love to go with you sometime, dad" (Miller, 2000, p. 23). The aim though, was not to imitate reality but to elevate the situations to an upper level, or, as Miller claims "to lift the experience into emergency speech of an unabashedly open kind rather than to proceed by the crabbed dramatic hints and pretexts of the 'natural'" (Miller, 1995, p. 182).

Where some critics found banality, the lack of emotional power or the absence of tragic dimension, it is more accurate to find the depiction of a violent pressure over the individual and his class expectations. In Willy Loman's case, it is the violence provoked by finding the flaw on the American Dream: he is now old, sick, poor, deprived from the affection of his children, jobless and far from expecting a worthy and noble "death of a salesman".

On post-war drama, "language is no longer depicted as absurd or isolated; rather it is shown to be actively domineering and dangerous, a force which controls and manipulates man, becoming the essence of his being and the limit of his world" (Malkin, 1992, p. 5). This is also what happens in Miller's text. In his autobiography *Timebends*, Miller refers to this subject:

Willy Loman, a salesman always full of words, and better yet, a man who could never cease trying, like Adam, to name himself and the world's wonders. I had known all along that this play could not be encompassed by conventional realism, and for one integral reason: in Willy the past was as alive as what was happening at the moment, sometimes even crashing in to completely overwhelm his mind. I

wanted precisely the same fluidity in the form, and now it was clear to me that this must be primarily verbal (Miller, 1995, p. 182).

So, through everyday language and business jargon we witness the limits of the world this language is capable to create. And, tragically, that world is not sufficient. This is not, arguably, “violent” in itself, but if we consider as the philosopher Slavoj Žižek does (2008), that violence is better defined by its spectators than by the victims or perpetrators, we can have a glimpse of the brutal depiction that Miller makes of the American way of life of the affluent fifties. The common man could not remain indifferent to this gloomy view of America, when a new American Empire was being outlined; as Žižek states: “reality in itself, in its stupid existence, is never intolerable: it is language, its symbolization which makes it such” (2008, p. 57).

The violence imposed on the characters of Miller’s play was also expressed by the progressive erosion of class distinctions. Mass production leads to a common aspiration for identical commodities, from upper to lower classes. Willy “Low-Man” aspired to the same richness and well fare as an upper class individual. Even if this notion of social ascension is at the heart of the American Dream, the affluence of the fifties promoted the pursuit of false needs, all social classes mimicking each other’s desires. And this was expressed mainly through consumption habits. On his autobiography, Miller recalls:

On the play’s opening night a woman who shall not be named was outraged, calling it “a time bomb under American capitalism”; I hoped it was, or at least under the bullshit of capitalism, this pseudo life that thought to touch the clouds by standing on top of a refrigerator, waving a paid-up mortgage at the moon, victorious at last.” (Miller, 1995, p. 184)

Therefore, it is no wonder that the consumerist American Dream in *Death of a Salesman* is pictured in such a gloomy and skewed manner, and it is substituted by a much more simple, pure and original form: nineteenth century pioneer mentality, seen in Biff’s desire to work in the country side. This desire for the open air opposes to the claustrophobic urban space: “The way they boxed us in here. Bricks and windows, windows and bricks” (Miller, 2000, p. 12). This opposition is also perceivable on the frontier mythology echoed in Uncle Ben’s exotic adventures in the African Jungle and in distant Alaska. They both represent Willy’s failure but they also signal the need not to lose sight of the human scale in commercial relationships. Paradoxically and tragically, Willy Loman could perhaps have been more successful by pursuing the original American Dream than trying to succeed in its consumerist version: clearly, Linda and Biff, his wife and son, say in the “Requiem”: “He was so wonderful with his hands/ He had the wrong dreams. All, all, wrong” (2000, p. 110).

About forty years later, British In-Yer-face theatre blatantly resumed the vigorous treatment of reality and the discontent view on modern consumerist society. Ravenhill's *Shopping and Fucking* depicts characters that "are just trying to make sense of a world without religion or ideology" (Sierz, 2001, p. 130). Deprived of his traditional values, they are forced to search in commodities the ideal substitution. The playwright David Edgar calls the play "an elegy for lost political certainties" (Edgar, 2009, p. 96). In effect, the characters of Ravenhill's play denounce the fragility and futility of modern life: post-political, post-modern, post-human. The "nasty nineties" depict a world where nothing is certain and everything is relative. They express the failure of social bonding and are a clear example for Lipovetsky's gloomy view of contemporary hedonism and individualism. But we should bear in mind that if Mark Ravenhill "writes about a generation which can't see beyond next Tuesday or back last weekend, it doesn't mean he likes it" (2009, p. 96), as David Edgar acutely remembers.

Ravenhill's starting point was "imagining 'characters whose whole vocabulary had been defined by the market, who had been brought up in a decade when all that mattered was buying and selling'" (Sierz, 2001, p.123). According to Aleks Sierz: "The play's theme was simple: "these were extreme characters pushed to extreme situations. The market had filtered into every aspect of their lives. Sex, which should have been private, had become a public transaction'. At first, its title was *Fucking Diana*." (Sierz, 2001, p. 123).

The commodification of modern days is thoroughly drawn in this play. In an article titled "Postmodern Violence and Human Solidarity: Sex and Forks in Shopping and Fucking," Leslie A. Wade claims:

Ravenhill's play is quite compelling in its portrayal of the many breakdowns of contemporary capitalist culture, and the work's sensibility (...). Media images and technologies are pervasive. Brian, the ruthless drug boss, is enamored of Disney's *The Lion King*. Videotapes are used in numerous instances. Robbie and Lulu operate a phone-sex line to pay off their drug debt. The virtual realities of the play are highlighted by Gary's apartment, located on the second floor above a video arcade. (...) Gary performs oral sex on Mark before the gaze of the store's surveillance camera. (2006, p. 110)

But there are almost countless references to consumerist society: the title parodies some "shopping and fucking novels" from authors such as Jackie Collins, with her romanticized urban light fairytales; moreover, the play begins with three characters eating a fast-food meal (which Lulu will refuse to share); Gary is sacked from a Mcjob; Brian gets his sense of moral from Disney's *The Lion King*; their names are all from popular "boysbands": Robbie [Williams], Mark [Owen] and Gary [Barlow], from Take That; Lulu refers to Lulu Kennedy-Cairns, a singer and celebrity who worked with this band in 1994; Brian refers to Brian Harvey from the rival band East 17. Aleks Sierz, in *In-Yer-face Theatre*, wrote: "The choice of names meant that young people not only fell about laughing when they read the play, but

also felt an ownership of it, felt it was written for them and was about them” (2001, p. 130-131).

In order to describe and criticize the effects of globalized production and everyday consumption of commodities and experiences – such as the ones experienced by Ravenhill’s characters – Mark Paterson coins the term McDisneyfication, conflating two notions, the McDonaldization and Disneyization into one term. McDonaldization (Ritzer, 2004) refers to the rationalization of service industries through efficiency, predictability, calculability and control; Disneyization (Ritzer and Liska, Bryman, 1997) refers to global tourism under the features of theming, dedifferentiation, merchandising and emotional labor. Thus, McDonald restaurants and Disney theme parks are considered hyper-modern examples of globalized and placeless experiences. McDisneyfication refers to a global, placeless, rational, simplified and impersonal world. And it is precisely this world that is under Ravenhill’s scope. While serving a ready-made food Lulu cheerfully states: “Come on, you’ve got the world here. You’ve got all the tastes in the world. You’ve got a fucking empire under cellophane. Look, China, India, Indonesia. In the past you’d have to invade, you’d have to occupy just to get one of these things” (2001, p. 330).

But the most commoditized value in this play is sexuality, persistently trivialized. Furthermore, sex appears as a “commercial transaction and consumption sexually arousing” (Sierz, 2001, p. 128). The libidinal dimension of shopping is always present and the metaphors for consumption and sexuality seem to overlap. An impressive example is Mark’s “shopping story” – a delicate reverie in which he buys Lulu and Robbie from a ‘fat man’ in the supermarket.

Notwithstanding, the constant use of strong language, explicit homo-sex, a gang-rape scene, the menace of torture or its moral shock, all these elements gained an entertaining and playful gaiety. Yet, the strongest violence in Ravenhill’s text is not visible. It lies beneath the extravagant fantasies of the characters. It is the violence promoted by a conspicuous system where “all that mattered was buying and selling”.

According to Leslie A. Wade, Ravenhill’s play “locates the source of violence. Violent issues in one form from the status quo hierarchy of capitalism and its supportive moral/ aesthetic value system. This is a violence born of greed and coercion.” (2006, p. 114) Both Miller and Ravenhill’s plays depict characters trapped in the dominant consumerist society where traditional human values and traits are vanishing, those which have been for centuries essential to the human experience.

2. DEATH OF A SALESMAN AND SHOPPING AND FUCKING IN PERFORMANCE

Death of a Salesman premiered in Portugal in 1954. In the immediate post-war period, Portuguese Dictatorship softened its politics due to the victory of the

democratic forces, and the need to show (or pretend) a clear alignment with their politics. As a consequence, theatre practitioners seized the opportunity to explore more experimental paths, trying out new texts and new staging options. This experimental movement was led by amateur groups formed by intellectuals, students, artists and young actors. The fifties witnessed a hardening of censorship and political vigilance that led to the disappearance of the majority of these experimental amateur groups. Throughout the fifties the TEP was the only significant group that outlived the experimental boom of the late forties. The liberties permitted to this group can be in part explained by their location in Oporto and not in the capital, Lisbon.

Their staging of *Death of a Salesman* by the highly reputed director António Pedro was a landmark of the theatre in this decade. It was received with hyperbolic enthusiasm, motivating endless applause. The critics, almost consensually, described this three hours amateur performance as an “outstanding success” (Luís Osório Guimarães, 1954)¹, “an amazing accomplishment!” (Goulart Nogueira, 1955), “the greatest artistic achievement of the year” (Jorge de Faria, 1954), “a breath of fresh air” (Anon., 1954), or they simply exclaimed “Theatre: at last!” (Armando Bacelar, 1955).

This was a legitimate response to decades of commercial theatre. Armando Martins brutally described Portuguese public as: “a poor ignorant animal that, depending on what it had eaten for supper, wants to be moved and shed a tear or to have a good belly laugh” (Martins, 1951, p. 20, m.t.). In effect, the audiences’ resistance to new aesthetic ventures leads to financial disasters; financial disasters lead to cautious repertoires, and so forth.

The acting, the direction, the set, everything was highly praised, especially because it was made by an amateur group. But some critics, alert and struggling for an urgent theatre renewal, preferred to ignore the personal artistic achievements to underline the importance of having this play staged in Portugal – especially after some professional groups refused to stage it claiming technical difficulties.

Carlos Porto, one the most important and hard-working Portuguese theatre critics (who has recently passed away, in October 2008) wrote: “For us, the generation without theatre, meeting Arthur Miller’s text had a significance that we might call historic. On that stage, we found a theatre for us that dealt with our problems and our anguishes” (Porto, 1973, p. 46). Carlos Porto read Miller’s text as an accusation on the American Dream and pointed out the fragility of this dream, built on money and hypocrisy. Another influential critic of the nineteen fifties agreed with Carlos Porto. Redondo Júnior on the journal *O Século Ilustrado* recalled an anecdote: an American, in order to end up an argument, picked a dollar bill from his pocket and exclaimed: “This is our flag!”. With some humor, this critic underlined the role that dollar has on Miller’s play, being the reason for all actions. And he

¹ All translations from Portuguese are my own.

sadly states: “Dollar is allergic to Poetry, to Dream, to Fantasy – to Truth” (Júnior, 1954).

Those were arguments raised by theatre critics that were struggling for a cultural renovation that would only arrive in 1974, when the fascist regime was overpowered. Some conservative critics, resistant to realism (that was synonym of subversive), such as João Gaspar Simões, dismissed Miller’s text as being dated and found it “not above a neo-realist dramatic leaflet, a genre that will take in the history of dramatic literature of our time the same place that the bloody drama or the moaning melodrama had in romanticism” (Simões).

Portugal in the fifties did not know consumerist society or mass production. It was still an agricultural and domestic country, where Coca-Cola (among many other things) was forbidden. Nevertheless, the violence imposed on Willy Loman and his family by consumerist society was widely perceived. Furthermore, Linda’s final words would have had a tremendous and wide echo: “We’re free and clear. We’re free. We’re free... we’re free.” (2000, p. 112)

The backwardness of Portuguese industries and markets is nowadays, generally, overcome. Being a member of the UE, the features of modern capitalism are present on Portuguese everyday life. In 2007, a group of young actors staged *Shopping and Fucking* in Lisbon. Although Ravenhill’s play dialogues more effectively with the nineties, the Portuguese staging of the text (by Gonçalo Amorim/Primeiros Sintomas) placed the story in present-day reality. Amorim kept the original provocation of the play but adapted it into the noughts, keeping though its universality and timeliness. The themes and the intentions were concomitant with the ones on the text. The acting was realistic and this was the axis of the performance’s strength: its realistic acting guaranteed that the text’s structure was kept intact. Furthermore, it granted that the performance’s rhythm could be fastened or slowed without the loss of its impact. This permitted to add some unspoken scenes that commented on the action and made (rather pessimistic) remarks on the way capitalism is (still) heading. The set was simple and evocative, suggesting normal white card boxes, creating the impression that they all lived in a huge card box. The sound track transported us through time: from the Clash to Radio Head; from The White Stripes to Scissor Sisters. Amorim and his team found a symbolic perspective of the play – realism was substituted by a cinematic experience.

Supermarkets are no longer what they were in the nineties. Nowadays, more and more people (especially upper middle and middle class) buy on-line and the groceries are dropped at our door. The experience of shopping changed in the last decade. As Lipovetsky signals in *La Bonheur Paradoxal*: “If in stage one and two the consumer frees himself from the pressure of the seller, on stage three the cyber-consumer overlaps all spacio-temporal obstacles, no longer being forced to go to a determined location”. (2007a, p. 93-94, m.t.) Furthermore, the itinerant consumer can buy everywhere: on bus stations, airports, everywhere. And these were the spectators of Amorim’s performance. While adopting a realist approach

and crossing it with a more symbolic structure, Ravenhill's terrifying parable of contemporary consumption continued to be effective in Portuguese nougts.

Realism, violence and consumption constitute an intricate triangle. Miller and Ravenhill's plays help us to evaluate the evolution of consumerist society in western countries. But more important than that, help us not to lose sight of the human dimension of it all. Because as they firmly remind us, money cannot buy everything.

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