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LAMPPPOST WITH BLACK FISH

ABSTRACT: This article is about lampposts, eyes and belonging. In this work, I have thought of lampposts as human eyes since they are part our body. According to Hans Belting (2007), we transform things into images with our body. How is it possible to bring to Brazil a black fish engraved on a lamppost seen by the River Thames? It is unthinkable. It could only survive as an image. Images – or lampposts – have the power of fixing people and places that, otherwise, would vanish in time. However, lampposts are not extraordinary. Moreover, in our current society and in our travels in the world, our eyes need to consume unusual things and images. Consuming as belonging – as superficially as it can be. This paper is a way of expressing a personal image about the complexity of images that constitutes culture. It represents both a struggle and a painful attempt to reconcile my own view about moving and the reality of the globalized world.

KEY WORDS: culture, image, rapture, myth, consume.

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The first meeting: the wind and the statue

The meeting triggers images. The ethologist Boris Cyrulnik (1995) that studies the links of human and animals communication also studies the ritual language of the meetings. Through reports of etiology we learn that a meeting is a disturbing way of seeing oneself and seeing the other in images. Curiously it was the wind that gave this dimension back to me. Because the wind – not any kind of wind – is almost always an involvement. The wind raps, soothes, moves life and, consequently, mixes the visions. When I came face to face with it, I wrote this about myself: *Time is cruel. Sometimes, I think that Zeus was right in killing him. I sometimes have the feeling that I am a small statue almost made of stone. What*

kind of music do I listen to? What kind of objects do I know? What kinds of books am I able to read? The statue is in a large box of thin glass. And it dreams. Will it be able to break it? This is an important question. But you are not a statue. You are the live wind that blows on the sea, on the leaves, in the places. The wind dances around the world and has already danced around the small statue. It left the promise of transfiguration. The wind is an acrobat.

It was like this, me in front of the Other. The contact with the foreign boy brought out feelings, sensations, paradox thoughts, incomprehension. The statue looked at itself. Could the wind know what images it constructed inside the glass? Eyes, things, glass, world. The glass separates the things from the world. Nowadays, when the connectivity seems to be the demand of the behaviors and to express oneself a promise of communication, what happened there? "Observe, it is the impression!" – said the wind holding the mirror and pointing to its feet.

Without knowing, he had made in it one of the happiest human creations: the existence of a myth. But it could not be any one. It would have to be the one that would tell again about the meaning of rapture in man's life and of the images. Culture is, indeed, memory and rite.

The myth and the rapture in culture

The Greek mythology has some stories about abduction. Rape of Persephone (Woolger: 1989, p.181), for instance, is very valuable for me. First, because the myths do not live outside us. Any myth lives inside us. And, second, because in 2001 I travelled by subway for the first time in my life. From this event, I wrote a text about how an image had rapted me. The subway symbolized the god Hades and the tunnels his dwelling place. He appeared as a great metallic serpent that captured and conducted me through inner routes difficult to live. Both the god and the serpent shared the notion of movement and transformation. So, the experience of abduction is almost always the experience of the verticality of our personality. A verticality that – without being ascendant - is descendent, since the experience of descending into the low-world was an experience of the

confrontation with my fears, my frailty and my mask. I called this story *The story of Hades, Persephone and the subway*. It portrayed the story of my first descent to the bottom of the world. On the basis of the production of this inner myth was the need to adjust myself to the new fast environment of the capital of São Paulo, whose cultural organization was quite different from the one I knew until then. The invisible god became visible. If the wind is mobility so is the image, because an image that was inside of me emerged: it could be seen. According to Nise da Silveira's work (1992), the archaic symbols remain alive and acting in the human psyche. How much risk do we take when they are reactivated! We experience in the body the transfer of the images. It is certainly not by chance that the fish, in several cultures, symbolizes what emerges from the depth. The black fish in the lamppost of the Thames River made me pay attention to this observation.

When Aby Warburg (2004), the great Arts scholar, went to New Mexico in 1895 he made the black fish movement. He walked through the villages to understand the conflict lived by the inhabitants of Pueblos and to understand the conflict that he himself had in relation to the history of the images in Art. The trip was an excellent exercise of attitude. It is necessary to learn the value of fall, states the Psychology. What was the ground on which Warburg stepped on? What was the ground on which the Indigenous people walked? Without the fall, there is no change. It is not possible to be a fish again. There is no way to dive into the ground of culture. Is it to perform movements to be in contact with the other? Is it to feel that a little part of oneself and of the ground is lost? Is it also to feel fear? José Angelo Gaiarsa (1994) has already written that the fear is a valid and protective emotion. Fear is our guardian Angel – reinforced the psychoanalyst. Yet, it is necessary sometimes to experiment some disorganization. Warburg's trip was a trip to get out from the Center. The serpent's ritual performed by the indigenous people is a dance to get out from the center. The Serpent is the Earth; the ladder is the sky – showed the ritual. Two continuities, two different ways of being in time. In culture, everything is a risk, everything is a fall, everything is a getting up. Life is attitude – teaches José Gaiarsa. Life is an attempt to balance certain forces and forms. Let us remember the wind's feet. It dances over invisible lines. Also Aby Warburg's trip was a

dance: to ask about the time of the images is the same as asking about the rhythm of the images.

Although it is a vague idea, I think about this hypothesis: for me, Warburg was taken by the internal and the external images. The rapture is a significant symbolic gesture in culture and in life. On page 260 of the dictionary of roots and cognates of the Portuguese Language¹ we have this register: *rap*₁ from the Latin *rap-io*. The word may mean *rap-az*, *rap-ina*, *rap-ido*, *roubo de uma mulher*, *arreatado de si mesmo*, *êxtase*, *arroubo*. From this search, a set of images was formed: the first: The god Hades with immortal horses. The dreadful one leading a golden carriage: of light. Fast as a bird? Or could it be said fast as the wind? The horses are the god's wings. *Horses*, *cavall*, *cav*. *Cav* is hollow, is *cavern*, *cav-e-ola*. Does the wind live on the bottom, in the hollow? How? Second image: From *rap* the variant *rept*₁ is born that gives origin to *sub-rept-icio*. *Rept*₁ in *rept-ar* is crawling, is *répt-il*. So, the metallic serpent is in the hollow. A *Quetzacoalt*? In the rapture who is taken? Persephone or Hades as well, because he saw her and desired to snatch her away? The rapture opens and closes the known world. For this reason it is the founding gesture. Third image: broken worlds. Glass is a broken *video*. In the dictionary I look up *Rump* that means exactly to break, to shatter. And after that I look up *rupt*: *rupt-ura*. The statue saw through the glass. It suffered the disadvantage of not having contact with the things, with the processes. So the glass that allowed the vision blocked the contact. Is this to see? Is this life? This is *video*. Fourth image: When Aby Warburg used an Indigenous people's mask on the face he also experienced a rapture. He put on another clothing, another *image*. *Roup-a* in Portuguese was a development of the Latin root *roub*, *roubar*.

In a way, wouldn't this be an experience of the appropriation of the other? We will say - again - to feel yourself being abducted is to be filled with great enthusiasm. It is to lose the fear of being dissolved in the world of the other. There is no wall, no ground and the frontier that divides the observer and the

¹ The motivation to consult the dictionary of roots and cognates of the Portuguese Language by Carlos Góes came from the indication of José Angelo Gaiarsa, in his wonderful book *Breath, anguish and rebirth*.

observed is diluted. The air expands, the environment is transformed. A new atmosphere is designed in the horizon of life. A new system of codes is incorporated. Isn't it surprising? The spirit of rapture has love in its root. Consequently, I find myself. Through the perception of the other, I identify myself. That is why this happening becomes sacred.

But whoever in a London museum comes near the sculpture of Proserpina's rape sees that the gesture is violent. It is the imagined scream that comes out of the maiden's mouth that shows this terrible moment. When I looked at the black fish on the lamppost, what did I see? Eyes, a voracious and open mouth – of air? Or of new images? Images that asked for a new place in my body, a new status in my memory and in my life. And I looked around: London and the images of consumption, arts, entertainment, of many languages and lights, images of people's daily lives which were for me live maps and that – many times – only appeared dotted. All the images were there. The world was there. The visions were there: in the Center of (my) western world. Which images put us in the center? And the light that came down from the fish's mouth lit my life for an instant: and I felt myself so small before the excess in that civilized island. I was afraid of being dissolved in the river that was by my side, that did not stop running. It was not dissolution for love. I did not vibrate. It was not a meeting. Did I have to empty myself? Of the lamppost that shines on my house in Brazil? It is abduction in reverse. This is how one can occupy *another* place, the place of the other. And I, that had never read anything about the history of the city of London, *suffered the place*. I struggled. And to convince the soul of the lamppost, I repeated: "it is the progress. Understand!" But it was too much. And I decided, because I remembered the wind and Warburg's dance that I needed to dance around the black fish. Only some movements: magic and technique. Imaginative procedure. Saving artifice. And with a step, I don't know to which side, I got out from under my artificial sun. In the poorly lit zone I could see better: it was emptier there. Relief. I had seen the cores of the rapture on the outside.

The receptors: the eyes and the lampposts

Two ways of inventing and receiving images: the eyes of the body and the eyes of the lampposts. Two ways of seeing the world. Two ways of being blind in the world. From what I described above, what did I know about England? Stereotypes, pictures, framings. Things listened from the news, seen places mediated by the internet? Filtered vision of reality? An attempt to *pasteurize* a possible cultural shock using images? When I saw the black fish engraved on the lamppost, I could understand: ah! The presence. So, here is the New World. And in a second the vision of the ancient History books which I had read and of the current information sites was inverted. Electronic eyes and the eyes of Other's experiences. But what about mine? *Other* is a word whose meaning I know very well: what is out of me. The lamppost of the Thames River showed that there are images that run fast and in abundance outside. Images which shape us. I did not want more glass, more light from the outside. I wanted life made of another matter: that one from which the lamppost is made of. To see the other through glass is a kind of existence. It is the predominant way that is used by the communication system on line to operate. But what I wanted most was to have my eyes back. To live Job's philosophy. Better: to live *Job's dermatology* – Just like Vilém Flusser (1998) brilliantly had described in his book *Philosophical Fictions*. What did I care if I was talking to a lamppost? Can anybody honestly affirm that a lamppost with a black fish is only a lamppost, when it deeply strikes our eyes? That was me, I was that: a statue that I was writhing like a serpent-fish engraved in a metal column. Everything has eyes. But only that one looked at me. Only that one was able to put me in movement – made life wave once more: in leaps, in falls, in combats, sometimes shining, other times in a very dark way. There, on the ground: I – standing, alone – assuming a new attitude. There up high: looking at me a black fish which swam in the air. I had to put things in order – in a chart, maybe. Certainly, the eyes can help. But everything was just a miscellaneous. Simply indetermination. Flusser wrote: *How can one that dilutes himself in the environment continue to be "complete"? Job, on the heap of broken tile, scraping the skin with the broken tiles, wouldn't he be an integrating part of the heap? Job, on*

the heap of broken tiles, wouldn't he be the images of unio mystica, although a negative image? What is left to be complete, when subject and object mix together? When there is no skin? (1998:169)

I thought that the images – or a row of lampposts – had the power of fixing in the memory people and events which escape in time. They there, and me here. I grabbed this idea. What did I expect before a fish with a serpent tail? Line up: an image here, and then another one there, and (...) keep well your senses. Keep the time that is gone. If the ideas escape and return, and if they invert and wind themselves, if they trick me, what then expect of the image of my black fish? To walk under a lamppost is an eye opening exercise. An opening of the lungs – because the wind is there – remind me of Gaiarsa and my past. I used only one photograph to bring back what I saw. To feel again: eyes, mouth, open breast of the animal. Everything going through there: the negative and the positive, the unexpected and the fear of existing. Everything intensely there. I inhale and there is the black fish back to my present. I inhale and one is living in the *deep*, in the myth of the things. Exhale and there is the fusion of the time. It must be like this: to understand the *other* is born from the desire. It is born from *Eros* and from the death that he carries. The etiology defined *empathy* as the competence that human beings have to put oneself in the place of the other (Cyrulnik: 1994). Warburg (2004) understood it as *incorporation* – because to him the *other* was the survival of the images. This way of understanding things and of communicating was there, very visible to me. The disturbing interlacement: fish that bites lampposts and lampposts that bite black fish. Expressed in images it was the representation of the way we incorporate the inorganicity of the objects and how we scramble our own limits. I have never felt so *inadequate* by experiencing in the eyes the distant as really distant and, because of this, precariously *imagine* another country – despite being in 2010, in the era of the Internet and of the airplane. For not having the language as a faithful sign of guidance. And for thinking the eyes as a globe which cannot be globalized. Regions of nonsense is Man.

Death. It is part of the lamppost and it is necessary to take it into account. Not as Perseus did. In his hand he held a brilliant and protecting helmet that

allowed him to look at the Gorgon – apparently free from the fear that he felt. However, the *mirror-weapon* is clear: it sees under conditions. Under mediations. Such a mirror – today – is revealing to the point in which it reflects how our look has been guided by many communicative situations. I think to myself: why doesn't he face her? This will be the defining meeting of his life as a hero. Look! Do not cut what frightens and fascinates you! We know that his fear was huge. And Perseus did not live the experience of the astonishment. The shield is an interesting semiotic element. There it is hindering the communicative passage. And so the hero does not let anything of himself to pass into this other. To look at the lamppost is to change into stone? Let us consider the interlacement a second time. I can say, according to Naves (2006): in communication nothing is fixed: on earth, or at sea. It is rather a mix of blokage and porosity.

Overall, I also recognize: the meeting with the lamppost is *Praise to astonishment*² – which is praise to things. Things are not instruments. A Stone does not have a heart, does not have eyes. Yet, man as an animal that manipulates the things, projects on them his imagination. The things say, speak - they are projects. Man – stated Vilém Flusser (2007) – is a designer par excellence. To speak about the shape of things is to speak about eyes. It is them that draw the things that draw a man. With them it is possible to escape from the most immediate reality. The eyes have such a power. The outside eyes and the inside eyes. The root of the verb imagine is *im* that in Latin means: from the deepest of the soul. However, the inside look is the one that gives meanings to the images - the things that give them life. It works very hard to integrate them. It belongs to the universe of artifice. Certainly the instruments incorporate little or nothing. Death is the environment where they live. Aby Warburg would understand such a position, since his eyes had not been far from the proximity of things. That's why the *Praise to astonishment* fits well Warburg's experience – that was astonishing.

That's why the instruments are still close to the consumption and far from the unexpected. What are the lampposts for? It is not an object of consumption for the tourist's eyes. I speak about another thing: about the unknown outside and

² Praise to astonishment is the name of a text by Vilém Flusser which is in his book *Of Religiousness: the literature and the sense of reality*.

about the unknown inside of me. Losses. And I lost much. I met death in me. I needed the feet. Of the image that remained from the event. Of the body that changes things into images. The lamppost with the black fish is the transfiguration of the wind and of the statue. It is unthinkable to take a black fish engraved on a lamppost to the place where I live. They survive only as an image. I know that in our present society and in the trips that we take, the eyes need to consume uncommon things and images. Consume to belong superficially - said Norval Baitello (2005) about the problem of proliferation of images in culture. I wrote this text to return to the unknown. Just to see it again. I tried to recollect the struggle and the agony to conciliate my vision about displacement and about the reality of the globalized world. To try to understand a little more the experience of confrontation; the experience of looks and counter-looks.

The lamppost is in the Thames River. The black fish is there around it. The river is there. Nothing has changed in that landscape. However, inside of me, a serpent line which crosses my memory emerges. It is the sign of my rupture with the distant. A sign of the displacement of the look.

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