



Discarded excerpts from *The glass menagerie* for traces of a Plastic Theatre¹

Trechos descartados de *The glass menagerie* para rastros de um Teatro Plástico

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Abstract

Seeking traces of Tennessee Williams' concept of Plastic Theater, the article will shed light on discarded excerpts from the writing process of the play *The glass menagerie* (1944), in which the author was radical in his reflective practice and formal experimentation. Assuming the perspective that process materials reveal incomplete gestures, the article will discuss a collection of manuscripts found in Williams' personal archives at the Harry Ransom Center (Austin, TX), considering their epic, lyrical, and metatheatrical marks to contemplate the incipient and incomplete idea of plastic theater in the works of Tennessee Williams.

Keywords: Tennessee Williams; U.S. playwriting; Manuscripts; Writing process.

Resumo

Em busca de rastros da ideia do Teatro Plástico de Tennessee Williams, o artigo lançará luz sobre trechos descartados do processo de escrita da peça *The glass menagerie* (1944) nos quais o autor foi radical em sua prática reflexiva e experimentação formal. Assumindo a perspectiva de que materiais de processo revelam gestos incompletos, o artigo traduzirá e debaterá um apanhado de trechos manuscritos encontrados nos arquivos pessoais de Williams no Harry Ransom Center (Austin/TX), tomando suas marcas épicas, líricas e metateatrais, para pensar a incipiente e incompleta ideia de teatro plástico na obra de Tennessee Williams.

Palavras-chave: Tennessee Williams; Dramaturgia estadunidense; Manuscritos; Processo de escrita.

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Introduction

In search of traces of the idea of Tennessee Williams' Plastic Theater, this article will shed light on discarded excerpts from the writing process of the play *The glass menagerie* (1944), in which the author was radical in his reflective practice and formal experimentation. Assuming the perspective that process materials reveal incomplete gestures, the article will translate and discuss a selection of handwritten excerpts found in Williams' personal archives at the Harry Ransom Center (Austin, TX), considering their epic, metalinguistic, and metatheatrical marks to think about the incipient and incomplete idea of plastic theater in Tennessee Williams' work. Through the appreciation of excerpts from the writing process of *The glass menagerie* (1944), the aim is to address an incomplete scenic ideal that emerges preliminarily during the writing of the play - a type of experimental theater named by Williams as Plastic Theater. Thus, the object of this work is not the analysis of *The glass menagerie* itself but rather a glimpse of some of its manuscripts and a questioning of what they can tell us about Williams' theatrical ideas at that moment.

To accomplish this task, I appropriate the notions of "trace" and "gesture" as effective categories for working with archival materials. Originating from genetic criticism - especially in its Brazilian systematization by researcher Cecília Almeida Salles - these notions help legitimize the incomplete as a valid object of analysis. In her work *Gesto inacabado: processo de criação artística* (2004), Salles tells us that while analyzing the making of an artistic object, it is possible to find traces left by the artist in their journey toward the work presented to the public. For the author, this type of "archaeology" of creation takes materials out of drawers and archives and puts them into motion, reactivating the life stored in them (Salles, 2004, p. 13). The tradition of genetic criticism considers the manuscript as an object, and this is what interests us in this work. In this perspective of research, the manuscript does not only pertain to what was handwritten but defines any written document - whether typewritten or handwritten - found in archives. The drafts investigated are all typewritten, with recurrent handwritten corrections by the author himself. It is not easy for Brazilian researchers to access this material, as it is only available in person at archives in the United States. Thus, the importance of this work also lies in providing a preliminary translation of unpublished excerpts from Williams' writing

process for Brazilian research.³ In Williams' extensive archives, there is an "unfinished" playwright whose creative gestures can show us traces both of his writing path and the development of his broader ideas, paving the way for new theories about his theater, his thinking, and his artistic practice, since "gestures repeat and bring forth theories about creation" (Salles, 2004, p. 19).⁴

Following the interest in the movement of processes, we approach a selection of Tennessee Williams' manuscripts for the play *The glass menagerie* without intending to reconstruct its creation stages, but rather to elaborate on Williams' initial ideas about his own theatrical aesthetic that will prove to be highly reflective. Many documents found in the archives show a radicality in the experimental processes of *The glass menagerie*. I use the term "experimental" to denote everything that deviates from the "ideal drama" – a round, self-contained, realistic form – and that "modernizes" the theatrical spectacle. Given the inexhaustible richness of Williams' manuscripts, we explore some examples of these discarded moments in *Menagerie* that will help elucidate Williams' publicly underdeveloped idea of a plastic theater. The analysis of the selected manuscripts will take place in two stages. First, we will read versions of excerpts named "Recess" in which the protagonist narrator interrupts the drama to ask the audience's opinion about what is happening on stage. Second, we will consider attempts to approach scene lighting from either a lyrical or epic perspective. Using the idea of distancing effect, we will see how Williams intensifies choices that were toned down in the final published play.

Tennessee Williams' Plastic Theater

Since his earliest writings for the theater, Williams has utilized formal and stylistic experimentation. *The glass menagerie*, his inaugural theatrical box office success, is replete with marks of critical and reflective effect. Characterized by the protagonist himself – Tom Wingfield – as a "memory play," the scene incorporates critical reflections after the dramatic action of the present by the narrator, who is in the future examining his family's movements before his departure for the merchant marine. Tom is fully aware of his narrative aspect and says he can make "time turn back" (Williams, 2014, p. 31). The

³ The original version of the article provides translations into Portuguese of the excerpts that will be transcribed in their original form in this English version.

⁴ In the original: "gestos se repetem e deixam aflorar teorias sobre o fazer".

protagonist also demonstrates an awareness and control over the technical elements of theater, as when he says that the violins are backstage due to the sentimental nature of the play (Williams, 2014, p. 32). There is also a thematic and formal relationship with cinematic apparatus, as well as writing marks that link the dramaturgy to a film script (Santos, 2020).

The first production directed by Margo Jones and Eddie Dowling (1944) removed an important suggestion of a screen with stage projections but maintained Tom's self-awareness, which was already a bold move for a play that would debut on Broadway in the 1940s. In 1945, Williams released the dramaturgy of the play with the experimental marks that had been removed by the direction during the staging. In this publication, we can have access to essential production notes for understanding not only this play but also Tennessee Williams' theater in a broader aspect. These notes are concise and directed toward the staging of *The glass menagerie*, but they present the idea of a theater focused on the relevance of visual and sound elements removed from the prevailing naturalism. In the archives of the play at the Harry Ransom Center (Austin, TX), there are more extensive notes on the idea of what Williams named as Plastic Theater, as well as a robust material of discarded attempts at this dramaturgy, in which it is possible to find gestures of what this idea of theater would be.

The idea of Plastic Theater in Tennessee Williams publicly emerges in these production notes published alongside the play in 1945, which serve as a preliminary guide to the style of the production but can be read as a brief anti-naturalist treatise. Advocating for "unconventional techniques," Williams rejects the theater of realistic conventions with its exhausted "photographic aspect" (Williams, 2014, p. 25). For the author, this theater, in which the represented world is meticulously similar to the everyday world, cannot reach the core of the real. Thus, it is necessary to seek "a more penetrating and vivid expression of things" (Williams, 2014, p. 25). The playwright then briefly discusses the use of the cinematic screen, music, and lighting, always emphasizing the plastic and aesthetic nature of these choices. However, these notes do not delve into a more elaborate idea of this concept.

Richard E. Kramer (2002) seeks active influences in the playwright's work and life to trace the genesis of the term Plastic Theater in Tennessee Williams. Kramer states that this nomenclature, in Williams' work, is linked to the notion of spatial plasticity employed

by the visual artist Hans Hofmann, whom Williams openly admired. The author also highlights Williams' youthful fascination with the use of specific techniques in the theater of Eugene O'Neill, as well as his close relationship with Edward Piscator. For this author, the triad of Hofmann, Piscator, and O'Neill is fundamental to the emergence of the term in Williams' notes. Kramer focuses on the genesis of the nomenclature and identifies the difficulty in finding analyses that delve into the conceptualization or application of Williams' Plastic Theater, given the scarcity of material on the subject: after *Menagerie*, Williams did not further develop this concept. Nevertheless, in many of his plays, it is possible to identify elements that revisit the premises of the "production notes", as if the practice of this theater were active in his work.

In the private sphere, in letters and diary entries, there are a few traces of this idea. Robert Bray finds a gesture towards the development of Plastic Theater in a diary entry where Williams comments on what would be a "Sculptural Drama" (Bray, 2014, p. 13). Devlin and Tischler recall that in a letter to director Margo Jones, on the occasion of the production of *Summer and smoke* (1948), Tennessee Williams summarized the essence of his poetics by emphasizing that the play deals with intangible elements that need a much more plastic than verbal expression (Devlin; Tischler, 2000, p. 180). Beyond private considerations, there are almost no traces of the conceptualization of this innovative theater sought by Tennessee Williams.

When we think of a theater that detaches itself from realistic or naturalistic traditions, we can recall various traditions whose important legacies eventually manifest in contemporary theatrical practices. Symbolist, expressionist, epic, so-called "absurd," performative theater, among many others – with authors and directors as diverse as Chekhov, Lorca, Maeterlinck, and Beckett – contain elements that may remind us of Williams' considerations about his plastic theater.

Richard E. Kramer will say that this theater can be found in directors ranging from Meyerhold to Brecht, Robert Wilson, Peter Brook, Yuri Lyubimov, and groups like Théâtre du Soleil, Théâtre de Complicité, and Ex Machina, among others (Kramer, 2002, p. 6). Although we can agree that many of the elements proposed by Williams appear in the work of these mostly European directors and groups, there are specificities in this U.S. playwright that can only be imagined from handling his archival material. Williams was seeking a new type of staging, in a movement – perhaps naive, given that we are talking

about the beginning of his career and a theorization that was not fully realized – of inaugurating an authentic, unique aesthetic specifically detached from the commercial theater of his country. In his notes, the author will mention the influence of expressionism and pre-war poetic theater, while in his dramaturgical writing he will also reveal an adherence to epic practices that particularly recall the experiments of Edward Piscator.

Distancing Effect in Scene

In 1941, Tennessee Williams was in New York studying playwriting at the Dramatic Workshop of the New School for Social Research, which was coordinated by Erwin Piscator, one of the founders of the idea of epic theater and a frequent collaborator of Bertolt Brecht. During the following years, Piscator and Williams collaborated constantly, with the still-student playwright even serving as the director's assistant. Thus, the young playwright, in his intense association with Piscator, received a "private course in epic theater techniques" (Kramer, 2002, p. 5). The influence of Piscator's distancing effect techniques – which, among other things, explored the use of projections on stage – was crucial for the writing of *The glass menagerie*. In several of his early career plays, Williams applied distancing (or alienation) devices typical of Piscator, such as narration, projected captions, and simultaneously staged scenes.

The concept of distancing effect refers to the term that became popular in the theory and practice of Brechtian theater, which, however, was already present in ancient Chinese theater, Greek tragedy, and even in popular street theater traditions. Distancing, estrangement, or alienation effect – possible translations for *Verfremdungseffekt* – became popular in the early 20th century in Russian and German theater, among directors like Erwin Piscator and Vsevolod Meyerhold, in Soviet agitprop, and, of course, in Bertolt Brecht. Conceptually, this Russo-German tradition advocates for theatrical strategies that combat alienation linked to immersion and empathy with what is happening on stage. In practice, these techniques manifest in various ways, from the actor stepping out of character to reflect on the situation, to the use of music, set design, lighting, and other theatrical elements that denaturalize, politicize, or reflect on the scene. These devices support the anti-naturalism and the notions of plasticity in Williams' attempts at plastic theater, as we will see in the following analyses.

The glass menagerie, the finished play, employs alienation effects strategies, and it is no coincidence that various authors relate it to Brechtian epic theater. In the manuscript excerpts selected for this work, there is a radicalization of the distancing effect process through epic and lyrical breaks. It is worth noting, as Maria Silvia Betti (2013) points out, that lyricism is one of Williams' most striking features, and it is in *Menagerie* that this hallmark becomes explicit. The use of lyrical strategies is also a way of differentiating and distancing from the drama.

Recess and Invocation: Epic and Lyrical Breaks

Fascinating things have been discovered in the folders and boxes of what has come to be known as Williams' "Texas archives". Regarding the genesis of *The glass menagerie*, for example, Gilbert Debusscher (1998) highlights versions in which a Black nurse begins the play by singing a song, reminiscing about a past when she was a singer. In this version, there is an attempt to establish racial tensions – which leads us to think: what would *Menagerie* have been like with a central Black character? Another striking aspect when analyzing the "Menagerie folders" is the evident intent for a political and didactic play. One example is a prologue in which a drawing of a topographic map of the United States is projected onto the curtains. Then, the narrator enters the scene and points out on the map the territorial conquests made by the Wingfield family's ancestors on the continent. His speech is structured in verse, with a lyricism that gradually highlights a decaying heroism from a bygone era, in a typically American imaginary of "lost honor".

In another attempted beginning, Tom dressed as a "tramp," finds typewritten pages in a typewriter and reads them. Often with an ironic tone about what he is reading, it is as if he were finding traces of his own past. From there, he faces the document, the manuscript, as we face these abandoned pages: taking them as an unfinished process of memory. This version does not extend far and remains only a small, abandoned fragment. The number of different beginnings sketched for what would become *The glass menagerie* is remarkable, all of them highlighting some form of departure from the dramatic form, often aiming for the broad, general, U.S. heroic and decadent imaginary, wars, or strategies to emphasize that all this is a record of a past, a memory. Analyzing the manuscript trajectory of *Menagerie*, Debusscher indicates a movement that starts from a

broad and general idea, emblematic, political, and extensive, and arrives at the most intimate, smaller, and less pretentious (Debusscher, 1998, p. 56). Much remains to be said about the genesis process of this play and its materials in Texas, with researchers like Parker (1992) and Debusscher (1998) following this trail. However, as previously mentioned, we will use the creative gestures of *Menagerie's* dramaturgy to glimpse not the play itself, but the conception of the idea of a plastic theater, a specific aesthetic and concept in Williams.

In *The glass menagerie* manuscripts, we find a collection of scene sketches titled "Recess". These are six typewritten pages, some with many erasures. There is no page numbering. "Recess" is a proposal – divided into two scenes – of interruptions in the performance. In them, Tom Wingfield directly questions the audience. In the arrangement placed within the folder, the first page in this sequence begins with the header: "RECESS: SCENE ONE" and then the scene goes straight to Tom:

Tom: [...] Maybe while we're waiting somebody in the audience would like to ask a question or make some criticism.

Man: (Angrily) This is not the kind of a play that I like.

Tom: Thank you. How many in the audience feel the same way? Don't be polite. If you don't like it, say so! Raise your hands, yell, whistle, but please don't damage the theater as it is not the fault of inanimate objects. Thank you. Now, Mister, would you like to tell us what kind of plays you prefer? (Williams, 1943, n.p.).

In the drafts of this scene, the dialogue occurs between Tom and people in the audience, who alternate between "man," "fat man," "thin woman," and "Tiny Little Frightened Wisp of a Woman". The feedback is generally negative. Notably, Tom questions if anyone else feels like the man who complains, which opens the space for spontaneous responses from the audience. Continuing the dialogue with the male figure, who always stands up to speak, there is a discussion about naturalism and verisimilitude. This discussion begins with a question about the artistic or modernistic aspect of the play:

Fat Man: All I've got to say is this sounds like the beginning of an awfully silly play. I suppose you think it is modern or arty or something but all I've got to say is the behavior of these characters and the way they talk just sounds crazy to me and my patience is already exhausted with you (Williams, 1943, n.p.).

Subsequently, the fat man will question the representation of Tom's sister, Laura: "You say that girl is crippled. Everybody can see there is nothing wrong with that girl's

legs!” (Williams, 1943, n.p), he points out that it is very hard to believe that Laura is not popular, given that she is portrayed by a very beautiful actress. To all this, Tom responds with the idea that will be the central speech of the play: that everything is seen through memory – and memory is not realistic. In response, the young Wingfield explains to the man in the audience that in his memory, his sister is beautiful, even though, in the real world, she was not.

In a later version of “Recess”, Williams replaces the terms “modern” and “artistic” with “naturalistic” in the man’s lines: “This sounds like the beginning of a long, dull play. I suppose you think it is naturalistic but the behavior of these people just seems crazy to me” (Williams, 1943, n.p.). The gesture of changing the word “modern” to “naturalistic” in this dialogue indicates a subtle shift that may reflect Williams’ intention to mark his departure from prevailing naturalism within the scene. Instead of emphasizing the supposed modernity of the play through the character’s speech, Williams chooses to highlight its disconnect from naturalism. In this version, the man also says that everyone in the play seems like “damned fools” and asks for his money back. There are two women that speak up. The first one joins the discontented voices: “I have never heard such terribly, unnatural dialogue in the theater in my life. I am getting out of here and going to the movies” (Williams, 1943, n.p.). The second woman, on the other hand, identifies with what she sees on stage: “Tiny Little Frightened Wisp of a Woman: (Faintly) I Think that scene was – lo-vely” (Williams, 1943, n.p.).

There is an attempt at a scene for a second recess, where questions about naturalism resurface, but this time the issue raised is whether what is being presented is actually a theatrical play:

Recess Two: Tom: Questions? Comments? Good? Bad? Terrible? Come on, folks, don’t wait for the morning papers!

Fat man: (Rises)

Tom: An old friend! Yes?

Fat Man: What is the plot of this thing – I won’t call it’s play [...]

Tom: [...] this is a play!

Fat man: Because it is on stage? Does that make it a play? What is it about, for instance?

Tom: It is about people living!

Thin Woman: (Hopping up) Anybody who presents this sort of thing as entertainment is perpetrating a fraud and ought to be prosecuted. [...]

Wisp of Woman: I like this play because I feel that the people in it are people like me with problems like mine and I am becoming more and more interested in how it all works out (Williams, 1943, n.p.).

Beyond questioning the style and whether the play is a play, the man in the audience will question why Tom is doing theater instead of being in the army. Tom turns the question back on the fat man, to which the man replies: a weak heart. Tom says his heart is also fragile. The questioning about the army has a homophobic undertone, as the man says he “wouldn’t say in front of those people” what he really thinks about Tom (remembering that until 1993, gays were banned from the U.S. armed forces, and the play is set before the start of World War II).

In the versions of the two “Recess” scenes, Williams gives body and voice to the spectator, places the scene within the audience, and launches a game that, at the risk of approaching a performative experience, could prompt spectators to reveal their opinions and viewpoints. Considering the ultra-controlled standard of Broadway theater at the time, this type of staging is quite unconventional. Not that Williams was aiming for Broadway at that moment, but the fact is that his play would become a fundamental work for that type of theater. The reflection and questioning with the audience, once explicit, gradually fade from the scene, leaving traces in a much more subtle staging proposal.

In a set of manuscripts titled “Invocation”, Tom develops a relationship with the stage lighting in two aspects: one lyrical and the other technical. There are at least nine drafts, totaling fourteen pages. In the lyrical attempts, poetic prose and verse structures are utilized. In these drafts, Tom explores a relationship between the morning light, the blood of the Wingfield family, the “myth of America,” and the city’s fluorescent tubes:

TOM: (Wryly addressing the audience)
Something bad has certainly happened this morning.
Morning has had some kind of weird misfortune...
Our blood remembers how it used to be,
[...]
Western Electric says, It hasn’t changed.
Public Utilities say, It’s just the same.
However our blood remembers something else. Our blood says no to the
metropolitan day,
the down-town bus caught on the drug-store corner,
to Celotex interior lit by fluorescent tubes! (Williams, 1943, n.p.).

In this invocation, which reproduces the attempt to begin the play by projecting a map of the United States while the narrator discusses the myth of the “discovery of America,” there is a recurring nostalgic tone found in Williams’ reminiscent, Southern characters. In this passage, this nostalgic feeling seems to direct itself towards the

“metropolitan day,” this cosmopolitan early morning illuminated by fluorescent lights. The overlap of “night” and “day” and their contradiction, placed in a poetic intonation, provide an opportunity for plastic experimentation with light on stage. This becomes explicit when Tom interrupts his lyrical moment to question the lighting technician. In an early manuscript of this interruption (unnumbered), the lighting technician takes on the role previously held by the fat man in the audience, questioning the senses and meanings of the play using the same words as the former – demonstrating Williams’ gesture of maintaining the questioning dialogue while changing the character who speaks. In subsequent versions, Williams abandons the idea of the lighting technician questioning the reasons for the play and shifts the focus back to the methods of lighting:

I think you missed your light cue.
Gruff Voice: I never missed no cue!
Tom: Where is morning?
Voice: You got morning, Bub.
Tom: Where is it?
Voice: You’re standing on it.
(TOM LOOKS DOWN AT THE FAINT WRAITH OF LIGHT AT HIS FEET.) (Williams, 1943, n.p.).

In the discussion with the lighting technician—represented in this passage by a voice, although there are drafts in which he appears on stage – Tom shows that he does not want lighting associated with verisimilitude. In his clash with the technician, he suggests that the morning be lit with “noon light”. He then concludes that “The main reason my plays are never performed in the American Theatre is you can’t light them, they call for undiscovered kinds of light” (Williams, 1943, n.p.). When questioned about what “morning light” is, Tom asks the lighting technician to “cheat a little” to achieve an anti-naturalistic effect. To do this, the narrator-protagonist indicates precise numbers of spotlights for the technician – always dissatisfied – to operate. Throughout this process, the character does not disconnect from the audience:

(TO AUDIENCE)
I’m sorry but light is important –
when I say silver light they give me tangerine –
and so nobody knows what I’m driving at...
You see my plays are mostly tricks of light! (Williams, 1943, n.p.).

The function of lighting, as we know from reading production notes or paying attention to the stage directions and notes from other Williams productions, plays a

fundamental role in the author's aesthetic conception, reaching in this collection of manuscripts titled "Invocation" a place of reflection or lyricism, always in tension with the ongoing family drama.

Further Notes

While experimenting with these ruptures, Tennessee Williams also wrote notes that became the foundation for his brief and incomplete thoughts on plastic theater. In the published edition of the play, as mentioned earlier, there are considerations regarding certain technical aspects and how they should not be treated naturalistically. In his archives, however, there are more extensive notes that attempt to address the idea of an experimental and innovative theater. These annotations are relevant to Williams' thoughts on plastic theater, and some authors, like Richard E. Kramer, have already delved into this material. It is worthwhile in this work to revisit some aspects of these reflections to elucidate certain notions that interest us, such as plasticity.

Expanding on what will remain in the published notes regarding the role of music, Williams discusses in the manuscripts the use of music in cinema and how it should be appropriated by theater: "if there is a resurgence of the poetic theater after this Second World War, as I hope there will, the uses of music in the sound film should have a very strong and fortunate influence on its development" (Williams, 1943, n.p.). For the playwright, music should give unity and continuity to the play and possess a seductive character. However, he is critical when music follows cliché patterns, insisting that it should create an additional dimension to express the inexpressible verbally.

Williams' profound interest in capturing what cannot be expressed through words is evident – his obsession with the possibilities of stage lighting as well as with the creative role of music underscores this desire for the inexpressible. Following this inclination, Williams writes, in these unpublished notes, about the prevalence of the text in the commercial theater of his time, pointing out that this theater is primarily literary. From this, the author discusses how other elements should be at the center of theatrical realization. Williams mentions Piscator as a contemporary who attempts to work with a different type of scene and adds that he desires a theater where the supremacy of writing is challenged by the centrality of elements such as lights, shapes, sounds, silences,

movements, patterns, bodies, which “will be all not fragmentarily but completely and triumphantly incorporated in a theatre which is a complex of all the arts” (Williams, 1943, n.p.). Additionally, Williams advocates for all breaks in conventions and says that for this type of theater to exist, there must be a chaotic period of experimentation. He concludes by stating that only amateurs can sustain this experimentation, and he, therefore, considers himself an amateur – a rather radical consideration for an author who, in a very short time, would become one of the most popular U.S. playwrights.

In a shorter draft, Tennessee Williams will clarify that his understanding of the term “plastic” has two connotations. The first pertains to the formal, visual, auditory, and sensory elements of the play, beyond the text. Thus, Williams would be proposing that it is the playwright’s task to write by removing the focus from the literary character of the scene. The second connotation pertains to the mutability of the play. For the Tennessee Williams of that time, theater should not be fixed but adaptable – and thus “plastic” or “moldable”: “something not fixed or frozen but in a state of flexibility and change” (Williams, 1943, n.p.). For the author, there was something “tragically frozen” in the commercial theater of his time.

Final Considerations

Analyzing the materials in the folders of *The glass menagerie* at the Harry Ransom Center, it becomes evident that Williams aimed to create a metatheatrical piece in which he sketches experiments reflecting his vision of a future theater and his idealization of an experimental theatrical aesthetic. In the drafts of “Recess”, Tom interrupts the play to ask for opinions, reflect on what naturalism is, justify scenic choices, and, in a kind of reverse criticism, questions the way characters speak. These dialogues with the audience also reveal what seems to be a process where Williams reflects on his own writing, searching for his unique style. Perhaps the critiques voiced by the audience were criticisms he himself had about his play – and it is well-known how he constantly revised his works and rarely reached a point of satisfaction. However, it is also a didactic practice outlining what he envisioned as this new theater. The didacticism and distancing are epic elements significant to this new theater, as demonstrated by these interactions. The epic thus forms part of Williams’ plastic theater.

In the manuscripts of “Invocation” and the notes on plastic theater, Williams sketches a vision of the formal and aesthetic elements of the scene, emphasizing the importance and differentiation of light and music in his theater. Through lyricism, epic breaks, and reflective notes, the notion of plasticity is accentuated in these drafts, leaving traces in the published version of the play. In the examples I presented, we can see attempts to achieve plasticity in both senses proposed by Williams in his handwritten notes: in the sense of mutability when Tom directly questions the audience, and in the sense of plasticity in the dialogue with the lighting technician and in his lyrical incursions.

What I propose is that what appears in the production notes and, subtly, in Tom’s speech in the published play, is embodied in a radical scenic dimension in the manuscripts. This radical gesture transforms into a trace: in the handwritten drafts of *The glass menagerie* we find attempts to theorize a new theater that unfolds within the scene, integrated into the theatrical play. Over the course of various versions, however, this gesture becomes separate notes and softened fragments of scenic experimentation, especially in its first production. The play would be a practical example of his own plastic theater, regardless of what it eventually became (considering that a play is the result of different vectors/forces). The “result of the play,” that is, its first productions and how it entered the collective imagination, deviates from these initially transgressive intentions, having become, in its inaugural production, almost the opposite, at least according to much of the criticism: “what he achieved was a realistic psychological portrait of a dysfunctional family” (Single, 1999, p. 75). Much is remembered about the family drama, the relationship with the author’s family, the private scope of the play, and – outside some academic critical circles – little is said about its connection to a larger public sphere of the pre-World War II U.S. or its formal research.

The development of the play, as seen in the archives, reveals Williams’ early and clear intention to broaden the play’s private scope, align it with the tradition of epic and experimental theater, and establish his concept of plastic theater. Thus, it is valid to contest a commonly disseminated “origin myth” about *The glass menagerie*, which is that of simple and pure autobiographical inspiration; the notion of “staging past traumas”. What the Texas material shows us is an intention to reflect on a specific aesthetic, a reflection that would occur within the scene, on stage, and in dialogue with the audience – there is a distinct research effort in shaping and demonstrating a unique style.

Since Williams' plastic theater is an ideal that, outside the productions of his plays, never structured itself into a longer and more official treatise, it remains an unfinished object. Considering this characteristic of the process of the material, this work aimed to bring to Brazilian research only a part of a much larger path to be traced – Williams' gesture, obsessive and deeply connected with his time, towards experimental radicalization.

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