

**A Dialogic Pathway for the Reading of the Works of Rubens  
Gerchman / *Um percurso dialógico para a leitura da obra de Rubens  
Gerchman***

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**ABSTRACT**

Based on the concepts of dialogism and polyphony postulated by Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975), this article investigates some of artist Rubens Gerchman's works that integrate the Exhibition *Estética do futebol e outras imagens* [Aesthetics of Soccer and Other Images]. It aims to build a pathway that relates such works to other artistic and literary productions, both those of Gerchman and those of other artists. It uses dialogic discourse analysis as its methodological approach, which proposes a dialogue between different concrete utterances and the production of meanings generated by the interaction between socially and historically situated subjects.

**KEYWORDS:** Art; Image Reading; Aesthetics; Dialogism

**RESUMO**

*Este artigo investiga algumas obras do artista plástico Rubens Gerchman, integrantes da exposição “Estética do futebol e outras imagens”, a partir dos conceitos de dialogismo e polifonia postulados pelo filósofo russo Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975). Tem como objetivo construir um percurso que relacione tais obras com outras produções artísticas e literárias, tanto de Gerchman quanto de outros artistas. Como abordagem metodológica, utiliza a análise dialógica do discurso, que propõe o diálogo entre diferentes enunciados concretos e a produção de sentidos gerada pela interação entre sujeitos situados social e historicamente.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Arte; Leitura de Imagem; Estética; Dialogismo

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## Introduction

Addressed to those who are interested in discourses related to image reading, this article aims to analyze works of artist Rubens Gerchman so as to create a dialogic pathway for reading. To achieve this, we investigate the artist's works that integrated the Exhibition *Estética do futebol e outras imagens* [Aesthetics of Soccer and Other Images], promoted by the *Serviço Social do Comércio* (Sesc) [Social Service of Commerce]. In 2013 this show of prints toured different Brazilian cities, presenting viewers with a part of Gerchman's diverse artistic output. The exhibition focused on recurrent themes in the artist's work: soccer, kisses, cars, bicycles, beaches and crowds. We know that Gerchman used different languages in his artistic journey, dialoguing with painting, printing, sculpture, and conceptual art. However, the images analyzed here are, for the most part, silkscreens. Based on Gerchman's theme, we deal with two main axes in the development of the dialogic pathway: the artist's admiration for soccer and his *voyeur's* eye for the urban space.

*Dialogic Discourse Analysis* was the methodological approach used for the development of the reading pathway. Supported by Bakhtin's theory, it seeks, by means of concrete utterances, the production of meanings generated by the interaction between socially and historically situated subjects. This way, based on Bakhtin's theoretical assumptions and given that he understands *utterances* as socio-interactive acts, the emphasis of the *Dialogic Discourse Analysis* is on the concept of *interaction*.

We thus seek to bring Gerchman's images into dialogue with other artistic and literary works in an attempt to understand his works in more depth. The article is guided by the following question: What discourses are in motion within Rubens Gerchman's images?

In order to organize the explanation of the proposed reading that stems from this question, this study is divided into two sections. In the first, we present a brief history of the Bakhtinian theory and some key concepts that contributed to the creation of the proposed pathway for image reading. In the second, we start along the dialogic pathway by contextually analyzing the artist and the aesthetic elements present in his work. We then seek to establish connections between these aspects and other artistic works in

which a dialogic process can be observed. As such, we aim to understand the analyzed *corpus* in a broader way.

## 1 Key Concepts for the Reading of Images

In addressing verbal communication, philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin (1986) emphasizes that the construction of an utterance does not only stem from the encounter between the world-view of the speaker (his values, emotions and the object of his discourse) and the linguistic resources used. For him, this phenomenon also involves other utterances, for utterances are produced as a response to previous utterances.

Utterances are not indifferent to one another, and are not self-sufficient; they are aware of and mutually reflect one another. [...] Every utterance must be regarded primarily as a response to preceding utterances of the given sphere (we understand the word “response” here in the broadest sense). Each utterance refutes, affirms, supplements, and relies on the others, presupposes them to be known, and somehow takes them into account (BAKHTIN, 1986, p.91; italics in original).<sup>1</sup>

In this context, the concept of *polyphony* postulated by Bakhtin adds the idea of interaction between different voices present in an utterance. For Bakhtin, verbal communication is a dialogic process of interaction and contradiction between different points of view (BEZERRA, 2010). In searching through the aesthetics of Dostoyevsky’s novels and analyzing the process of verbal creation, Bakhtin developed the concept of polyphonic novel. He highlights the different voices present within a text and points to the importance of understanding the dialogue established between the various utterances, as one link in the chain of verbal communication.

Bakhtin (1986)<sup>2</sup> thus proposes a dialogic interaction between varied utterances that are produced in diverse spaces/times and that show themselves to be connected by this *link*. That is to say, the idea of polyphony brings together discourses and recognizes the presence of various voices in the process of their construction.

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<sup>1</sup> BAKHTIN, M. The Problem of Speech Genres. In: \_\_\_\_\_. *Speech Genres & Other Late Essays*. Edited by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist; translated by Vern W. Mcgee. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1986, pp.60-102.

<sup>2</sup> For reference, see footnote 1.

This innovative concept provoked heated academic debates in the 1960s. Despite some negative criticism at that time, two important language theoreticians, Roman Jakobson and Viktor Chklovsky, cited the Russian author in their studies. Furthermore, some renowned critics defended the “[...] originality of the polyphony concept, with its valuable polyphonic view of the world that, according to them, allows many ideas and ideologies to appear side by side in a single text” (BRAIT, 2009, p.54).<sup>3</sup>

Within this dialogic concept of culture, every and any cultural act is located on the boundary of other previous and subsequent acts. Therefore, it is through this metaphor of *in-betweenness* that we must understand the aesthetic object and its historicity: “The aesthetic, without losing its specificity, is rooted in history and culture, and takes from them its meanings and values and absorbs history and culture, transporting itself to a different axiological plane” (FARACO, 2009, p.101).<sup>4</sup>

The dialogic pathway that this article presents proposes a connection between the aesthetic qualities of Gerchman’s work and other cultural productions. The visual power of these images is thereby increased, as they allow us, by means of their construction and poetry, to look at and enter into other worlds, images, and texts. In practice, what we are proposing to do is to look at Gerchman’s artistic output to observe the signs of the presence of other voices and other texts. This dialogic pathway for the reading of artistic images intends to increase the possibilities to critically analyze the works. It takes the view that artistic images present innumerable possibilities for dialogue, as proposed by the poet João Cabral de Mello Neto (1976) in his poem *The Lesson of Painting* (1994, p.163):<sup>5</sup>

No painting is ever finished  
a certain painter said;  
it could be continued endlessly,  
first, beyond another painting

that, properly executed, has,  
hidden in the canvas, a door

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<sup>3</sup> Text in original: “[...] originalidade do conceito de polifonia, no valioso ponto de vista polifônico sobre o mundo, o qual permite, segundo eles, que muitas ideias e ideologias apareçam lado a lado num único texto.”

<sup>4</sup> Text in original: “O estético, sem perder sua especificidade, está enraizado na história e na cultura, tira daí seus sentidos e valores e absorve em si a história e a cultura, transpondo-as para um outro plano axiológico.”

<sup>5</sup> MELO NETO, J. *The Lesson of Painting*. Translated by Djelal Kadir. In: \_\_\_\_\_. *Selected Poetry, 1937-1990*. Edited by Djelal Kadir. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1994.

that leads to a corridor that opens  
up to another and to many others.

Thus, in analysing Gerchman's images and creative process, and in dialogue with this article's guiding question, we are looking for these "concealed doors." In line with the proposed methodological approach, we present Gerchman in light of the contributions of art critics and journalists who, like this current study, seek to understand his diverse and extensive work, because "[t]hat which I do not recognise, I need to know, to be able to analyze" (GERALDI, 2012, p.32).<sup>6</sup> In this initial approach, we aim to identify the aesthetic and poetic elements present in his artistic output in order to, subsequently, seek to establish connections between these elements and other artistic productions in which we see a dialogic process.

## **2 Rubens Gerchman: The Artistic Journey**

Researchers of Gerchman's work identify everyday reality and its social issues as a significant guiding thread in his artistic output. Let us see, then, how his life story precipitated his encounter with art and with the thematic drivers of his productions. Gerchman was born in Rio de Janeiro in 1942 to a Jewish family, the first of seven brothers. Escallón (2013) states that his family life was full of art: his father was an advertising designer and his mother produced embroidery and tapestry. Gerchman grew up in Ipanema and lived part of his life in Copacabana.<sup>7</sup> From childhood he felt attracted to art and to stories covered by the media.

His childhood representations were totally connected to reality. He was not interested in creating fantasies but rather in interpreting the radio news. *Repórter Esso* was the program that told of world events. Thus, reality was already the thread of his playful story (ESCALLÓN, 2013, p.60).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Text in original: "Aquilo que não reconheço preciso conhecer para poder analisar."

<sup>7</sup> TN. Ipanema and Copacabana are districts of the city of Rio the Janeiro.

<sup>8</sup> Text in original: "As suas representações infantis eram totalmente ligadas à realidade. Não lhe interessava inventar fantasias, mas sim interpretar as notícias do rádio. O Repórter Esso era o programa que contava os acontecimentos do mundo. Assim a realidade era já o eixo de sua história lúdica."

When he was young, one of those responsible for Gerchman's encounter with the universe of art was a drawing teacher who encouraged the young Rubens to produce numerous graphic representations. This was because he based his evaluations on the quantity of drawings that his pupils produced, i.e., the more drawings, the better the grade. In 1956, after high school and under these influences, he entered the *Escola Nacional de Belas-Artes* [National School of Fine Arts],<sup>9</sup> a course which was interrupted when he had to carry out his military service.

After military service he returned to the same institution but did not finish his studies because he rejected the mandatory and authoritarian academic teaching, attending just a few open courses offered by the Institution. Escallón (2013) observed that the diversity of languages (painting, engraving, objects, *happenings*, interventions) with which the artist expressed himself throughout his career demonstrates that he had held this nonconformist and rebellious posture since the beginning of his professional life. According to Escallón, Gerchman always demonstrated a distrust of the established order in his works and actions. Sometime later (1975-1979), opposed to academic teaching, he assumed the directorship of the former *Instituto de Belas-Artes* [Institute of Fine Arts] in Rio de Janeiro, transforming it into the *Escola de Artes Visuais do Parque Lage* [Lage Park School of Visual Arts]. To this day this school retains the innovative spirit injected by the artist, who valued experimentation and was interested in contemporary works and in interaction between artistic languages.

In 1968 Gerchman won a trip to New York as a prize for achieving first place at the Salão de Arte Moderna [Modern Art Salon] the previous year. During his stay in the United States, he took part in various exhibitions with works engaged in Pop Art and Conceptual Art. During this visit he experienced difficult times because he did not have the financial resources to support himself. He stayed in New York until 1972, and in 1974, shortly after his return to Brazil, he took on the role of co-editor of the magazine *Malasartes*.

Morais (2013) noted a diverse and versatile pathway in Gerchman's work that showed, between 1960 and 1970, some metamorphosis in his artistic output, which deserves an in-depth investigation. The journalist summarizes as follows:

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<sup>9</sup> TN. Today it is called Escola de Belas Artes [School of Fine Arts]. It is a College of the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro [Federal University of Rio de Janeiro], which offers 11 undergraduate programs and a graduate program in visual arts.

Let's say, to simplify, that at first his eyes were turned to what was happening outside, in the *urbs*, in the mass media. The 1960s, black phase, strong images, markedly social. In the 1970s, more reflective, Gerchman internalized these images, or rather sought them in his nearest and most intimate circle, as he exchanged the newspaper for the family album (MORAIS, 2013, p.41).<sup>10</sup>

In the 1980s and 1990s he developed a series of paintings centred on popular topics, such as soccer, courting couples, television programs, public transportation, the suburbs, and automobiles. This imaginary *everyday*, created by Gerchman, was influenced by the artist's professional experiences of the print media. At the beginning of his professional career he worked as a layout artist at Editora Manchete [Manchete Publishing House], working with both journalistic materials and the photo soap operas published by the magazine *Sétimo Céu* [Seventh Heaven]. Escallón (2013) remarks that these experiences gave the artist contact with both reality, within the social context of the time, and the imaginary and fantastical within the stories in the photo soap operas.

This pathway allows us to note some fundamental markers for the understanding of his work: his rebelliousness in relation to academic art, his experience with the aesthetics of print media, his living in the urban space of Rio de Janeiro, and his curiosity about popular everyday life. We note, therefore, that his productions are rooted in his past, his culture and his curiosity about the context in which he found himself:

To walk, travel by car, or to wander around a city with this Brazilian painter is to listen to a continuous commentary on what is going on around you: for him, ugliness or beauty do not exist; all that counts is the visible, and, as he is utterly curious, everything seems worth capturing so that one day, one week, one month or one year later it appears in one of his works, reworked and converted into something else that we call a painting (BAYÓN, 2013, p.51).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Text in original: "Digamos, para simplificar, que de início seu olhar estava voltado para o que acontecia do lado de fora, na *urbs*, nos meios de comunicação massiva. Anos 60, fase negra, imagens fortes, marcadamente sociais. Nos anos 70, mais reflexivo, Gerchman interiorizou estas imagens, ou melhor, buscou-as no seu circuito mais próximo e íntimo, como que trocou o jornal pelo álbum de família."

<sup>11</sup> Text in original: "Caminhar, andar de automóvel, circular por uma cidade com esse pintor brasileiro é escutar um comentário permanente do que acontece a seu redor: para ele não há feio nem bonito, só conta o visível. E como ele é absolutamente curioso, tudo lhe parece digno de ser registrado, para que um dia, uma semana, um mês ou um ano mais tarde apareça numa obra sua, reelaborada e convertida em outra coisa que chamaremos um quadro."

His curious and inquisitive outlook on the urban space, produced by his life in the densely populated and quirky district of Copacabana, is further underlined by Escallón (2013):

The aesthetic attitude of Rubens Gerchman has a multifaceted behavior that links to a single subject: the urban. And the reflection on this inexhaustible world, which includes a deep human dimension, is imbued with all the vertiginousness of the last half of the 20th century, a period that in its fullness includes multiplicity, speed, visibility and preparing itself for the next century, as Ítalo Calvino referenced (ESCALLÓN, 2013, p.55).<sup>12</sup>

Gerchman's viewpoint is always the same; It is through the eye of a *voyeur*, of a distant witness, that observes crowds from far away and couples up close. It is as if it were a witness that observes everything from social behavior to the intimacy of others. This point of view, at certain moments of distant complicity, confers on his couples a special eroticism charged with seduction (ESCALLÓN, 2013, p.56).<sup>13</sup>

The meanings extracted from his urban and social life were transformed into artistic images that went on to provoke new reflections about the everyday that surrounds us. The systemization of Gerchman's artistic pathway, from the words of journalists and art critics, aims to aid the pursuit of the dialogic pathway proposed by this article. Since the understanding of the particularities of Gerchman's work is fundamental for us to address discourses, the recognition of the presence of different voices in artistic images will be analyzed below. It is important to emphasize that the dialogic interactions presented here do not exhaust the possible readings of Gerchman's work. On the contrary, they seek to provoke new reflections about the diverse and restless Gerchmanian iconography.

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<sup>12</sup> Text in original: "A atitude estética de Rubens Gerchman tem um comportamento multifacetado que corresponde a um único objetivo: o urbano. E a reflexão sobre este inesgotável mundo que inclui a profunda dimensão humana está impregnada de toda a vertiginosidade da última metade do século XX, período que em toda a sua plenitude inclui multiplicidade, rapidez, visibilidade e prepara-se para o próximo milênio, como referiu Ítalo Calvino."

<sup>13</sup> Text in original: "O ponto de vista de Gerchman é sempre o mesmo: trata-se de um olhar de voyeur, de uma testemunha distante, que observa multidões de longe e casais de perto. É como se fosse uma testemunha que observa desde comportamentos sociais até a intimidade dos outros. Esse ponto de vista, em certos momentos de cumplicidade distante, é que confere a seus casais um erotismo especial carregado de sedução."



## 2.1 The Aesthetics of Soccer in Gerchman's Work

Through the artist's pathway presented earlier, we noted the predominance of the discourse of the popular everyday in his works. This aspect motivated Morais (2013) to attribute an anthropomorphic and sociological importance to his works, beyond the aesthetics. We find soccer included amongst the wide array of common subjects that Gerchman transposed into the world of art. The movements, the players and the idols that make up the imagery of the game were portrayed by Gerchman, a self-confessed admirer of this popular sport in different phases of his output.

The majority of the images analyzed in this study integrated the exhibition titled *Estética do futebol e outras imagens* [Aesthetics of Soccer and Other Images], which was composed of prints produced in the 1980s. However, for us to understand the way in which the discourse of soccer is encountered in the exhibited works, we have placed the images in dialogue with paintings created in other phases of Gerchman's output.

We will start the proposed approach with the title of the exhibition that could contribute to the investigation of this thematic set of images. How is the concept of aesthetics considered in the title? After all, does soccer have to be art to be considered aesthetic? Does being represented artistically make it become aesthetic, as in the case of this exhibition?

For the lovers of this sport, the intelligence of a player, a bewildering dribble, the opportunism of a player who steals the ball, a precise defence or even the flight of the ball towards the goal are considered so beautiful that they come close to being art.

In art, the word *aesthetics* can designate a set of rules, formal characteristics or technical procedures that cause, in a given social, political and economic context, a certain type of production and expression to be considered artistic. As a consequence of this idea, we have the popular expression *soccer art*. However, what is soccer art? Would it be individual beautiful "moves" or memorable games? The big teams or their immortal players?

This expression emerged in the popular Brazilian consciousness between the 1930s and 1970s, the era of the country's great football legends and the strengthening of the Brazilian national team. Moraes (2002) refers to a particular manner of play that brings the sport close to art: an improvised shot, a dribble that appears like a dance, or

the creativity to set up a “move.” The genius, the originality and the “moves” of the players, considered artists with the ball, were valued more than the tactics and strategy of the game.

Besides these characteristics, ball-control is a fundamental part of soccer art. Players can control the ball using their heads, chests, abdomens, thighs, legs and feet, just not their hands. The challenge is ultimately to generate aesthetic movements in football that come close to being a dance or a “brilliant” move. Without using their arms, during a game, the players must control the ball, think about the next move and avoid having the ball stolen by an opponent. The ball has to be steered with control and, when necessary, speed and agility, always advancing towards the goal.

The aesthetics that makes up the title of the exhibition dialogue with these aspects found in the language of soccer. Nonetheless, it also refers to the poetics of the artist who takes the realities of the social and cultural context into the artistic dimension. Images that occupy the mass media come to be placed in Gerchman’s prints. In this way, the newspaper headlines or the daily experience of a soccer match acquire the aesthetic dimension mentioned in the title of the exhibition.

Gerchman, who lived in the era of players, such as Pelé, Garrincha, Didi, Gérson, Tostão and, later, Zico, Romário, Ronaldo e Ronaldinho Gaúcho, depicts his idols with the passion of a fan. At the same time, in works of the 1960s, the critical posture of the artist in relation to his political and social context prevented his gaze from being simply dazzled by these players.

In line with the discourse of *Pop Art*, which arrived in Brazil in the 1960s, Gerchman seeks out the ordinary individuals in Brazilian culture who were transformed into heroes by the national passion: *soccer*. His 1965 work *Os super homens* [Supermen] (Fig. 1), which did not make up part of the exhibition *Estética do futebol e outras imagens* [Aesthetics of Soccer and Other Images], shows a team positioned for a pre-match photograph. The subtle critical characteristic of the artist can be seen in the phrase written above the players, which gives the work its title. In the context of the tension and repression of the era, it was up to these men, transformed by circumstances into heroes, to bring the joy of victory, thereby numbing the people in relation to the reality of their political context.

Fig. 1 – GERCHMAN (1965). *Os super homens* [Supermen]



Source: Licensed by inARTS.com

Whilst Andy Warhol discussed the transformation of people into products for the culture industry, Gerchman's discourse was directed at the military dictatorship, which used the Brazilian passion for football to divert people's attention from political events.

Gerchman's work spans the political changes that occurred in the country from the dictatorial period of the 1960 and 1970s until the opening up of politics in the 1980s. The silk-prints in the show, produced in a less repressive political context, allowed the artist to continue the soccer theme with more lightness and freedom. In the images below we can see that the formal and contextual aspects remain in dialogue with the discourse of *Pop Art*: aesthetic representations of the popular imagination. In the exhibition *Estética do futebol e outras imagens* [Aesthetics of Soccer and Other Images] various portrayals were presented with differentiated compositions that can be analyzed as much for their similarities as for their differences.

Figs. 2, 3 & 4 – GERCHMAN (1998) *Romário*; GERCHMAN (1998) *Pelé*; GERCHMAN (1998) *Garrincha*

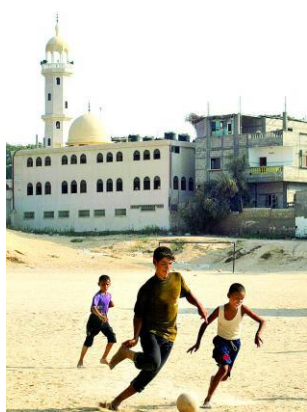


Source: Licensed by inARTS.com

In some prints we get close to the players, as we see in the images of Pelé (Fig. 3) and Garrincha (Fig. 4). The discourse of the traditional portrait is present in these works, highlighting the facial expression of the players with their features marked by the shadow, light and contrast permitted by the print technique. This approach generates an intimate and human appearance in these images of these world soccer idols. On the other hand, the print that portrays Romário (Fig. 2) provokes an aversion of the eye, directing attention to the action of the player and his body movement. The presence of the ball, the field and even the *Nike* logo on the socks and boots embodies in the person portrayed the role that he plays in this context: a soccer idol. The way in which Gerchman portrays Romário comes close to the language of journalism, the photographic images that adorn the newspapers, showing the beautiful moves and controversial shots that happen during the game.

While Gerchman portrayed players who were already acclaimed, photographer Caio Vilela scoured various countries seeking improvised games of soccer. He was interested in the anonymous figures of the famous *peladas*,<sup>14</sup> considered fundamental for the creation of professional players. This is the time before personal recognition takes place on unstructured, improvised fields. Their bare feet do not have the famous brand boots, and this increases the technical difficulty and emphasizes the creativity of the player's movements and "moves."

Figs. 5 & 6 – VILELA (2009) *untitled*; GERCHMAN (1998) *Romário*



Source: Vilela (2009)



Source: Licensed by inARTS.com

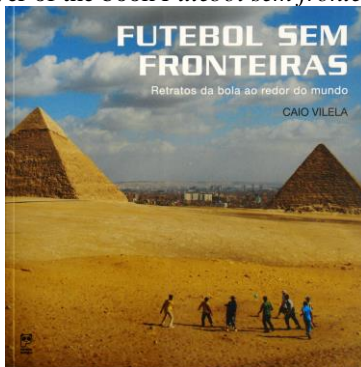
<sup>14</sup> TN. *Peladas* are soccer matches with free rules, usually without concern about field size, shoes, uniforms, basic markings, or game time.

Soccer player Romário (Fig. 6), represented by Gerchman, was, in the past, one of the barefoot boys in Vilela's photograph. It was probably this street soccer, the sore feet, the half-ball and the uneven fields that contributed to making him an idol and an artist with the ball.

Another aspect that we can highlight in the analysis of the images (Figs. 5 & 6) is the composition. In the portrait of Romário, Gerchman presents a background that makes reference to the colors of Brazil and to a soccer field. But which field? Which stadium? These questions play no part in Gerchman's work because the emphasis is on the figure portrayed, i.e., Romário, an acclaimed idol on any field in any country in the world.

On the other hand, in the work of Vilela, the scenery plays an important part in the construction of the images. The characteristic landscapes of each location, such as in the book *Futebol sem fronteiras* [*Soccer without Borders*], contribute to showing the inclusive nature of soccer both in Brazil and the rest of the world by means of the barefoot improvisation on the streets.

Fig. 7 – VILELA (2009) Cover of the book *Futebol sem fronteiras* [*Soccer without Borders*]

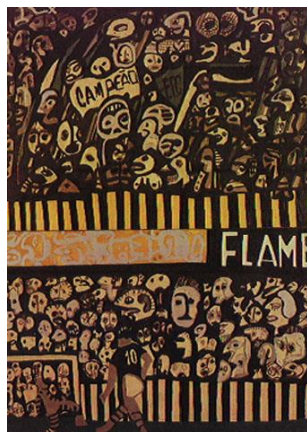


Source: Vilela (2009)

For Gerchman, however, soccer aesthetics did not only form a component of the portraits of athletes produced at the end of the 1990s. We propose now to return to the 1960s, a period considered by Marais (2013) to have been Gerchman's dark phase, with images strongly marked by a social approach. In this era we see that the artist portrayed, in some of his works, the movement and effervescence of the soccer fans. The grandstands, besides being related to the soccer theme, represented yet another subject present in the artist's output. The painting *Futebol. Flamengo campeão* [*Soccer.*

*Flamego, the Champion*] (Fig. 8), which did not integrate the exhibition under analysis, is one of Gerchman's works to represent distorted human figures that are stacked and linked together, forming a unique texture.

Fig. 8 – GERCHMAN (1965) *Futebol. Flamengo campeão campeão* [Soccer. *Flamego, the Champion*]



Source: Licensed by inARTS.com

In the image, the player is on the field, but the absence of perspective transports the *Jersey Number 10* into the grandstands. The figure of the idol mixes with the fans, a connection previously experienced by the artist in the stadium:

I was impressed when I entered the Maracanã and saw that marvelous mass. It was impossible to know who was who. I just recognized the colors, and when there was a goal everything shook! I sat with the Flamengo fans because there everybody stood up producing human waves (GERCHMAN, *apud* MAGALHÃES, 2013b, p.79).<sup>15</sup>

Another important point associated with the image refers to his approach to the artistic discourse of the era in which it was created: the simplification of forms, expressiveness and the distortion of the figures represented. Such characteristics, present in *avant-garde* artistic movements, place Gerchman's aesthetics into debate with the academic discourse of art. This aspect, seen in his art, relates to his consistently critical position in relation to the production and teaching of art in Brazil. The artist's

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<sup>15</sup> Text in original: "Eu ficava impressionado quando entrava no Maracanã e via aquela massa maravilhosa, não dava para saber quem era quem, só reconhecia as cores e quando era gol, tudo vibrava! Eu sentava na torcida do Flamengo porque lá todos se levantavam produzindo ondas humanas."

rebellious and restless spirit, noted by Escallón (2013), can be seen in his aesthetics and professional choices.

In 1975, when Gerchman founded and directed the *Escola de Artes Visuais do Parque Lage* [Lage Park School of Visual Arts], he took on the discourse of contemporary art, broadening the artistic languages for cinema, photography, intervention, and performance. In this way we can see that on the national artistic scene he contributed to the break from the academic aesthetics that still dominated Brazilian art at that time, through his artistic production and political actions.,.

We have made a brief analysis of the association of soccer with Gerchman's works and their relationships with Vilela's photographs. In the next section, we will advance on our proposed dialogic pathway to show the artist's interest in the everyday of the urban space.

## **2.2 The Voyeuristic Eye and the Everyday**

Gerchman's 1960s productions show a close relationship with the urban panorama that he saw through his window in the famous Rio district of Copacabana. The series *Caixas de morar* [*Boxes for Living*], created in this period, was inspired by the everyday scenes that played out in the little studio apartments opposite his building. We can see that Gerchman's social criticism sets a debate in motion, in relation to the housing problems of the big cities. That is also found in the discourse of the Frenchman Henri Lefebvre (1996). In the same decade Lefebvre warned about the dangers of fragmentation of everyday life in the big cities:

Here is a daily life well divided into fragments: work, transport, private life, leisure [...]. Here is the dismembered, dissociated human being. Here are the senses of smell, taste, sight, touch, hearing – some atrophied, some hypertrophied. Here is functioning separately perception, intelligence and reason (LEFEBVRE, 1996, p.142).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> LEFEBVRE, H. *Writings on Cities*. Edited and translated by Eleonore Kofman and Elisabeth Lebas. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1996.

For Lefebvre, life, thus dismembered, could only be re-formed by processes of integration and by the participation of the people of the city, enabled by urban projects that avoided social segregation and promoted meeting and change.

Fig. 9 – Gerchman (1966) *Caixas de morar* [Boxes for Living]



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This aspect of urban fragmentation, mentioned by Lefebvre (1996),<sup>17</sup> can also be seen in Gerchman's literary productions:

In the city as in everything else, all you see is not.  
All you can see is not either.  
The hidden is only what you can perceive.  
There is the door, the window, the house, the building, the favela.  
They are boxes for living where individuals live an internal time.  
The city is another time.  
It is the time of the journey, the rerun life-work, the time of scenes,  
Masks, meetings, and missed meetings.  
Colourful clothes, rhythmic bodies, with an internal sun.  
People's faces that drag themselves along their momentary paths,  
With faces scowling, or smiles in the corners of the mouth  
(GERCHMAN, 2013, pp.66-67).<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> For reference, see footnote 14.

<sup>18</sup> Text in original: “Na cidade como em tudo, tudo que se vê não é. / Tudo o que se pode ver tampouco é. / O escondido é / somente o que se pode perceber. / Existe a porta, a janela, a casa, o prédio, a favela. / São caixas de morar. Onde os indivíduos vivem um tempo interno. / A cidade é um outro tempo. / É o tempo do percurso, do recorrido vida-trabalho, tempo de cenários, / de máscaras, de encontros e desencontros. / Roupas coloridas, corpos ritimados, com um sol interior. / Rostos de gente que se arrastam em suas trajetórias momentâneas, / com caras amarradas ou sorrisos no canto da boca.”



*Caixas de morar* [Boxes for Living], represented visually in Fig. 9, is reset into a poetic text demonstrating the artist's continued interest in the theme. The poem also presents the dismemberment of life mentioned by the French philosopher. Gerchman observes everyday life divided into two: external life in the urban space and internal life in the *caixas de morar* [boxes for living]. When he uses the words "hidden," "scenes" and "masks" to describe the city or, even more explicitly, when he uses the sentences "In the city as in everything else, all you see is not. All you can see is not either," he presents the city's deceptive and underhanded facets. The discourse of the city as a simulacrum is also found in the fictional work of Calvino (1974, p.44; italics in original):<sup>19</sup>

*Cities, like dreams, are made of desires and fears, even if the thread of their discourse is secret, their rules are absurd, their perspectives deceitful and everything conceals something else.*

These questions addressed by Gerchman, in dialogue with Calvino (1974)<sup>20</sup> and Lefebvre (1996),<sup>21</sup> bring into focus the city and its social and architectural contradictions. In the specific case of Gerchman's production, we can say that the aspects highlighted by him in his visual and textual works are related to the historic layout of Copacabana, which underwent building speculation during the 1960s, making it into a densely populated area. Tall buildings, squeezed together, took over the densely crowded avenues and streets. The buildings constructed in the neighbourhood were spatially close together, leading to inevitable visual intrusion into the neighbouring apartments.

This architectural configuration, an identifying characteristic of the district, that currently houses 150 thousand inhabitants, contributed to the *voyeur's* eye that we see in the work *Caixas de morar* [Boxes for Living] and the aforementioned poem. Both the image and the text emphasize the artist's acute and curious eye, which, as a distant witness, observed and analyzed everyday events, social behaviours, and people's intimacy. This *distant complicity*, pointed out by Escalon (2013), appears, seductively, in numerous works in which Gerchman portrays couples kissing.

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<sup>19</sup> CALVINO, I. *Invisible Cities*. Translated by William Weaver. New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1974.

<sup>20</sup> For reference, see footnote 17.

<sup>21</sup> For reference, see footnote 14.

Here, once again, the artist places himself as a witness to these amorous encounters. However, in this series, the relationship with Copacabana cannot be observed in the formal elements of the works. The scenes represented, as in Figures 10 & 11, do not indicate or suggest specific places. They are images that place the act, the complicity of the kiss, into being in a neutral scene that reveals little about the space where the subjects are located. But, his experiences and memories in the seductive and bohemian city of Rio de Janeiro could have been inspiring elements in this recurring theme in Gerchman's artistic production.

Figs. 10 & 11 – GERCHMAN (1995) *Série beijo* [Kisses Series]; GERCHMAN (1992) *Janela* [Window]



Source: Licensed by inARTS.com

Keeping the discourse of the *voyeur's* eye, in a similar way photographer Robert Doisneau concerned himself with capturing the everyday, and traveled the streets of Paris, surprising the amorous couples of the City of Light.

Figs. 12 & 13 – DOISNEAU (1950) *Beijo do Hotel de Ville* [The Kiss by the Hôtel de Ville]; DOISNEAU (1950) *Le Baiser de l'Opera* [Opera Kiss]



Source: Doisneau (1993)

In Doisneau's images, the city functions as a co-star in the composition. The viewer can identify the locations by their architecture as much as by their titles. On the other hand, Gerchman works with graphics that, in Fig. 10, contribute to provoke a sense of movement in the image and that mix the image and the background. In Fig. 11, the graphics become more static, perhaps because of the central rectangle where the couple are positioned. The colors also contribute to intensify the relationship between the image and the background. In the first, there is no differentiation between the tones used to represent the couple and the scene whilst in the second there is an important contrast between the people and the graphics.

When analysed from the point of view of the *voyeur's* eye, the four images present different compositional aspects. In Figures 11 and 13, the viewer is more distant, as an authentic *voyeur*, whose roaming eye surprises the couple's kiss. But in Figures 10 and 12, the composition generates proximity, turning the observer into a witness to the scene.

This aspect of the *voyeur's* eye within the urban space was also confronted by American artist Edward Hopper. The realist painter produced his canvases between 1920 and 1960. His theme dealt with solitude and eroticism in American cities in the early 20th century. Pechman explains (2014, p.272):

In fact, Hopper always seems to be proposing two worlds, two cities, two possibilities, which are divided between paralysis and isolation and the action and the encounter with the other. The impression one gets is that there is always an expectation in the painter that could lead to unavoidable boredom or an unexpected event. The city happens or "unhappens" in Hopper.<sup>22</sup>

Contrary to what we see in Hopper's work, Gerchman's city is event, meeting, and movement. The urban space is represented by means of the action of the figures in the work: a kiss, reading on the beach, a ride on a bicycle. The urban architecture is not portrayed; it is only suggested by the lines and forms, as in the window in Fig. 11. Pechman (2014) further highlights that, in *Night Windows* (Fig. 15), it is through the window that Hopper's *voyeur's* eye is made real. The city shows itself in its exposed

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<sup>22</sup> Text in original: "Em verdade, Hopper parece estar sempre propondo dois mundos, duas cidades, duas possibilidades, que se dividem entre a paralisia e o isolamento total e a ação e o encontro com o outro. A impressão que se tem é que há sempre uma espera no pintor, que poderá levar a um tédio incontornável ou a um acontecimento inesperado. A cidade acontece ou desacontece em Hopper."

architecture. The city seduces by means of the female body and the red camisole. In Fig. 14, the city is threatening and unreceptive: its windows are closed; its streets, empty.

Figs. 14 & 15 – HOPPER (1921) *Night shadows*; HOPPER (1928) *Night windows*



Source: Renner (1990, pp.31, 14 respectively)<sup>23</sup>

As we have seen, the urban space and architectural configuration were fundamental in Gerchman’s creative process because they provoked the practice of looking across a city that moved and “happened” in his everyday life. However, to place his images in dialogue with the work of Hopper, we can see that the artist from Rio does not represent the city as the oppressor of desires or as responsible for people’s isolation and solitude. Gerchman’s city is noble and its allure is devoid of deliberate intent.

Figs. 16 & 17 – GERCHMAN (1992) *Mulher lendo* [A Woman Reading]; HOPPER (1952) *Morning Sun*



Source: Licensed by inARTS.com

Source: Renner (1990, p.59)<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> RENNER, R. *Edward Hopper 1882-1967: Transformation of the Real*. Edited by Sally Bald; translated by Michael Hulse. Berlin: Taschen, 1990.

<sup>24</sup> For reference, see footnote 21.

Now let us look at this aspect in detail, observing how the two artists represent the female figure. Gerchman's woman in the bikini (Fig. 16) does not possess the mystery of the woman portrayed by Hopper (Fig. 17). The first is involved in action and heat; the second is static, reflective, and questioning. Notwithstanding that the two are alone in the scenes, solitude predominates Hopper's work because the bed is empty and made up, the bedroom is devoid of personal objects and the grandeur of the city outside seems to overwhelm the pensive woman. Even the sun, realistically represented in Hopper's work, takes on a strange iciness in the image. The woman portrayed by Gerchman, meanwhile, seems to be at ease even though she is alone. The heat of the sun is present in the work, despite being suggested only by the hot and intense colours, a recurring visual aspect in Gerchman's iconography.

Beyond the visual and poetic aspects that place the discourse of the artists in these two works into dialogue, it is possible to suppose that such approaches might go beyond the pictorial space and relate to their personal experiences. The solitude portrayed visually in Hopper's works are associated with Gerchman's everyday impressions in the periods when he lived abroad. The urban space showed the artist the difficulty of being a foreigner: "In Berlin I experienced the closest contact with the violence of the city, with loneliness. There was something that caused, the entire time, a disagreeable sensation of not belonging to the city" (GERCHMAN, 2013, p.65).<sup>25</sup> As such, we see that Gerchman's experience generates an approximation with the female figure in Hopper's work (Fig.17), who feels the oppression and isolation of the city, unlike the woman represented in the Gerchman's image (Fig. 16), who seems integrated and welcomed by the tropical urban scene.

To finalize this discourse about the everyday in urban spaces, we propose to go back to the 19th century. From this period, the Industrial Revolution and the growth of cities made the theme of the *everyday* an object of investigation in various areas of study. Philosophers, sociologists, writers, artists and poets have pored over the urban question, lending this subject the sense of being inexhaustible.

We highlight here a group of artists who, such as Gerchman and Hopper, among others, dealt with the theme of the urban space. The Impressionist movement in France

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<sup>25</sup> Text in original: "Em Berlin experimentei o contato mais próximo com a violência da cidade, com a solidão. Havia qualquer coisa que provocava, todo o tempo, a desagradável sensação de não pertencer à cidade."

at the end of the 19th century portrayed the *everyday* urban scenes of Paris through representations of its bars, dances, outings, architectural elements, streets, and amorous encounters. The innovation brought by these forerunners of the *avant-garde* movement was as a result of the pioneering spirit to occupy the urban space in the production of their images. In this way we see that the Impressionists, even though they did not include the social problems and questions debated by Gerchman and Hopper in their pictorial works, were politically active in the artistic context. Similar to Gerchman, Monet and his contemporaries sought to combat the conceptual and formal concepts of academic art. By making the everyday life of the city worthy of being portrayed pictorially, these artists, in different periods, expanded the possibilities of making art in their respective contexts.

Beyond the thematic and conceptual aspects of Gerchman's works, they also resemble the works of the Impressionists (Fig. 18) in their quick strokes. With the intention of capturing an ephemeral everyday moment, both artists sketched the portrayed subject with a few strokes. This brings the works a dynamism that is intensified by the use of lines of various sizes to compose the images. These lines are quite explicit in Gerchman's prints (Figures 10 and 16) and make up both the principle figures and the background of the compositions.

Fig. 18 – RENOIR (1881) *Le déjeuner des canotier* [Luncheon of the Boating Party]



Fonte: Frascina (1998). Public domain

We see that the discourse of the everyday in the urban spaces of Paris, New York, Berlin or of Rio de Janeiro – even though they are distant in time and space – forms, by means of the dialogic analysis, an intertextual network between the works and

the literary texts presented. In this proposed pathway, Rubens Gerchman and the artists with whom the dialogues were established gave different meanings to the everyday in cities. Noting the differences and similarities between the artistic productions generates a broadening of visual perception. The questions that we can raise, stemming from the possible dialogues with Gerchman's images, are numerous. In this process it is fundamental to perceive the presence of other voices and other texts that, in constant dialogue, make the reading meaningful and thought-provoking.

### **Considerations**

To end this article, we return to João Cabral de Melo Neto's poem *The Lesson of Painting* (1994), which we used as a metaphor for the methodological approach proposed for the analysis of the images. The poetic idea of this piece affirms that our proposal was to cause the reader to open just a few concealed doors through our observations. Now it is up to you to venture to open yet other doors.

We find, then, that images can be read in diverse manners and that the ways we choose to do this reading relate to our accumulated life experiences and to the huge bank of images and words that we hold in our memories. Similarly, this dialogic pathway can relate to the concerns and questions that we put before a given artistic work. The fact is that we never look at images in the same way; however, we know that going through these almost infinite possible pathways will form our lives, elevating our experiences and contributing to our reading of the world.

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