

The image phenomenon in social psychology: some configurations¹

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Abstract: In this article, the iconological method was revised through a phenomenological approach. The axis of this understanding was established by a series of images of the Church of São Francisco de Assis (Ouro Preto, Minas Gerais, Brazil). This axis allowed us to observe meanings in relation to the historical time and social space. In the end, we propose the domain of image in social psychology as the study of social processes in which the image is not only a physical-chemical thing, but the mediation between the iconic object, the body and the mental image of the observers, in a social and historical context. The result of this reflection indicates two preliminary syntheses around the concept of *mimesis* and the participation of the body, both articulated by the aesthetic experience.

Keywords: social psychology of image, psychology and aesthetics, phenomenology.

Introduction

On Christmas 2011, a greeting card circulated on the Internet, wishing a happy new year to the friends of Inke Atelier. The image, released by electronic address, reproduced a watercolor painting on paper made by the artist Ricardo Inke, featuring a view of the city of Ouro Preto, more particularly a landscape of mountainous horizon, highlighting the Church of São Francisco de Assis. The parvis is at the bottom of the painting, while the temple is located on a small elevation, flanked by alleys and a few houses, in a perspective slightly moved to the right of the observer, from which one can see the imposing façade and some lateral walls leaving room for the rising mountains under the sky of Minas Gerais. In the background, the Itacolomi state park. It is a digital image that allows to glimpse or imagine the texture of the paper on which the watercolor colors partially conceal the lines of the original pencil sketch.

Ricardo Inke lives in Paraty (RJ), where he works with watercolor; he loves the unpredictability of this technique: “You go about doing it and you are a participant, not quite the author of that work, you are

a co-participant.”² The water, fluidity, color overlap, watery colors are “magical”. The main theme is the local landscape, both for personal interest and the commercial aspect. Many artists from Paraty do not hesitate to say their works are aimed at specific audiences, especially tourists; they are not heralds of autonomy. On the one hand, moved by the watercolorist’s work, the theme becomes almost irrelevant; Inke selects landscapes and seascapes according to the public interest. On the other hand, he asserts himself as an illustrator, for, notwithstanding his preference for the ink plays, the choice of theme is part of the whole process.

The watercolor on paper depicting the Church of São Francisco de Assis and the computer screen contain the same image on different medium. It is remarkable a point of view that is very similar to what a traveler of Ouro Preto would have. But is it really the same image? This question is open to several possible answers, from communication sciences to visual arts theories. In this article, we chose to follow a descriptive phenomenological approach (Berleant, 1992) rather than a theoretical reflection on phenomenological concepts (Escoubas, 2005). Going through some perspectives, we try to consider this phenomenon in the field of social psychology and the interface with the studies of images. The result of this approach indicates two preliminary syntheses around the concept of *mimesis* and the participation of the body, both articulated by the aesthetic experience.

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1 When I began collecting the images of the Church of São Francisco de Assis in Ouro Preto, I was talking to Paulo César Xavier Pereira (FAU/USP), then to João Frayze-Pereira (IP/USP), to whom I own much about this discussion’s approach. The first manuscript of this text was read and commented on by Leny Sato (IP/USP), Sylvia Leser de Mello (IP/USP), Marcos Ferreira Santos (FE/USP), and Bader Burihan Sawaia (PUC/SP). I especially thank Annateresa Farbis’ (ECA/USP) critical reading. This research was supported by the São Paulo Research Foundation (Fapesp).

2 Information collected from an interview with Ricardo Inke and Marília Inke in October 2009.



Figure 1. Ricardo Inke, *Landscape of Ouro Preto*, 2011. Greeting card for 2012, circulation via electronic address

Source: Ricardo Inke, 2011.

Chapel of the Third Order of São Francisco de Assis, Ouro Preto

The Church of São Francisco de Assis is a national monument, both for the history of art and the history of Brazil. Once built, the temple has become an integral part of the urban area of Villa Rica and object of perception of those who visited the old locality. The statement is not directly valid for all travelers' reports. The sage Auguste de Saint-Hilaire (1779-1853) was uninterested and walked past the temple on his voyage in 1816; but he dwelled on the two main churches (Saint-Hilaire, 1830/1975).

In the wanderings of the zoologist Hermann Burmeister (1807/1892), the building was well noticed; besides being noticed by the traveler, it was recorded in pen and ink, from a very similar point of view to Ricardo Inke's, but from further away: a landscape of mountainous horizon, with the Church of São Francisco de Assis; the parvis is at the bottom of the painting, while the temple is located on a small elevation; in perspective, one can see the imposing façade and some lateral walls leaving room for the rising mountains under the sky of Minas Gerais; in the background, the Itacolomi state park. In the picture, inserted in the book *Viagem ao Brasil através das províncias do Rio de Janeiro*

*e Minas Gerais*³ (Burmeister, 1853/1980), the stroke is thin and refined. The temple occupies a smaller portion of the left half of the image, leaving space ahead of the parvis (and below the image) for the insertion of a column, probably a pillory, nonexistent today. In the book, there was an exchange of names and the building was wrongly called Church of São Francisco de Paula: "the graceful and elegant church." The traveler considered it better than the two main churches: "I drew it as the model of the most elegant Brazilian style and I refrain from describing its details because the drawing speaks for itself" (p. 225).

Marc Ferrez (1843-1923) took a photograph from that same point of view, around 1880 (Instituto Moreira Salles collection). There is no identity between the drawn and photographed environments, because modifications are remarkable, especially in the surroundings of the building. A few decades after Burmeister, the photographer recorded a reformulated environment, without the wall that surrounded the parvis, now without pavement. Farther away from the object, in the wide space to the left of the observer and at the front of the temple is the long roof of the market, the movement of horses and merchants removes from the temple

3 Journey to Brazil through the provinces of Rio de Janeiro and Minas Gerais

the centrality in the space of the photograph. Moreover, for that century, a radical transformation of the senses took place, as summarized by Annateresa Fabris (2006, p. 164): “Once the eye takes precedence over hand, determining a new relationship between aesthetic effect and temporality”, photography automates the representation and reproduction, reconfiguring the social status of image. The drawing and the photograph set the image distinctly for the observer.

The setting and beginning of the works of Chapel of São Francisco de Assis date from 1766, although previous events had defined the site and other elements of the construction (Mourão, 1986, p. 117). The work was finished by Domingos Moreira de Oliveira and the project was attributed to Antônio Francisco Lisboa, dubbed

Aleijadinho, but since there is no document that mentions the author of the sketch, a whole debate on this issue was held in the middle of the twentieth century. In any case, the architectural result was the rounding of the façade, the round towers, the domes surmounted by pinnacles. The pediment was finished in volutes, surmounted by the patriarchal cross in the center. The stone columns delimit the entrance, centered by the doorway and medallion in rich sculpture in soapstone. In 1771, the temple was open to the faithful, but the works continued; Antônio Francisco set the pulpits to completion, and the architectural works were contracted with Henrique Gomes de Brito and Luís Pinheiro Lobo. Other names of officers and artificers appear in the works of the building throughout the nineteenth century.



Figure 2. Hermann Burmeister, *Church of São Francisco de Assis*, 1853

Source: Burmeister, 1980.

In the three images of the Church of São Francisco, one is surprised by the point of view shared by the zoologist, the photographer and the watercolor artist, the latter separated from the former by about 150 years. This raises the question whether the three of them belong to the same visual experience. On the one hand, it has been argued that the change in medium results in changes in perception, therefore, in the experience of the image. On the other hand, there is a stable correspondence in relation to the building, its implantation, the geography, the remitting to a specific environment. Considering correspondences and differences, the experience of perception contains a similarity, which, however, holds a sense of difference.

Moreira Pinto (1907) made a detailed comment about the Church of São Francisco de Assis: “It rises on the square of the Municipal Market. It has an octave shape. Its style is stern and in harmony with the humility of its patron” (p. 706). Two pages of detailed description follows, starting with the frontispiece, going through the composition, forms and iconography, then all the decorations and furnishings of the nave and altars, the symbolism of panels and sculptures, each sacred image is named and described. It ends with the

presentation of the sacristy, furniture and paintings, providing a rationale of the sculptural work attributed to the master Antônio Francisco Lisboa (the *Aleijadinho*), an artist that was little known by the Brazilian intellectuals at that time.

Among the writings published in the book celebrating the bicentenary of Ouro Preto, the text of the historian Diogo de Vasconcellos, author of seminal works such as the *História Antiga de Minas Gerais* (1914). In the article entitled “Art in Ouro Preto,” Vasconcellos (1911/1934) recorded that, in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, “fortunately the Jesuit style was already modified; and works were undertaken more artistically” (p. 30). From this period, the Church of São Francisco de Assis shows itself as the “most perfect and finished” work (p. 39). The historian avoids classifications, it is not the European Baroque, neither Brazilian art, and praises the qualities owing to the architectural set and its author, master Antonio Francisco Lisboa.

The addition of iconographic and stylistic information provided by the writings does not fail to set apart a place for records in drawing or printed photograph. In the photographs inserted in the book by Vasconcellos, that point of view which accompanied us hitherto is precisely posted: the Church of São Francisco de Assis, with the parvis at the bottom of the painting,

the temple on a small elevation and, in perspective, the imposing façade and some side walls, leaving room for the rising mountains under the sky of Minas Gerais. It should be remembered that, in the *Monumentos históricos, artísticos e religiosos de Minas Gerais*, Anibal Mattos (1935) reserves a board at the frontispiece of the temple in this exact configuration.

The images of painting, drawing or photography have a third dimension caused by both optical illusion and the observer's imagination. The depth of the image world has been widely studied in the fields of art history, in reference to remote pasts or specific periods of meaning production. In our itinerary, the conjunction of written sources on the Church of São Francisco de Assis provides the viewer with an interior, invisible on the surface of the image, with the iconographic and poetic description of its sculptures, paintings and ornaments. All this configuration between surface, forms and meanings organizes the data of vision and produces both the visual and the imaginative experience.

In the images of the Church of São Francisco de Assis, poetry has occupied a very significant place because it travels a wider social space than the studies of history do, although not as broad as the travel guides. The verses of Carlos Drummond de Andrade (1992) are highlighted:

Senhor, não mereço isso.
Não creio em vós para vos amar.
Trouxestes-me a São Francisco
e me fazeis vosso escravo.⁴

Previously, Mário de Andrade wandered around the cities of Minas Gerais, which arose in the colonial period. The intellectual from São Paulo, apart from being a poet, was a noted musicologist, folklorist and arts scholar. On the occasion of his trip, in 1919, he was searching for a national sense for the Minas Gerais heritage, reading the writings of Diogo de Vasconcellos, Furtado de Menezes and D. Silverio Gomes Pimenta. In that State, he came across “the supreme glorification of the curved line, the most characteristic style, of an excellent originality” (Andrade, 1920, p. 103).

There, the Church frees itself from the influences of Portugal, “the baroque style got stylized,” something national had appeared. More precisely, the phase of the beautiful Brazilian temples the writer referred to is the second quarter of the eighteenth century, for example, the time of the erection of the towers of Nossa Senhora do Carmo de São João del Rei, Nossa Senhora do Rosário and São Francisco de Assis de Ouro Preto. In formation of the Brazilian perspective, the view of the Church of São Francisco de Assis appeared in the articulation between the national heritage and the greatest achievement of an artistic style, at the origin of the ties between contemporary perception, Brazilian monuments and the image of Art; Mário de Andrade stated a national project woven in the psychological bonds of the Brazilian identity.

On the Holy Week celebrations of 1924, the modernists from São Paulo toured to Minas Gerais searching for national

references. Among them, in addition to Mário de Andrade himself, there were Oswald de Andrade and his son Nonê, Tarsila do Amaral, Olívia Guedes Penteadado, René Thiollier, Blaise Cendrars and Godofredo da Silva Telles. Oswald (1924/1990, p. 135) brought to the literate public the images captured on the trip, through the “*Pau Brasil* poetry Manifesto”:

Vamos visitar São Francisco de Assis
Igreja feita pela gente de Minas
O sacristão que é vizinho da Maria Cana-Verde
Abre e mostra o abandono
Os púlpitos do Aleijadinho
O teto do Ataíde
Mas a dramatização finalizou⁵

Another poet that paid attention to the old capital of Minas Gerais was Manuel Bandeira, but in the wording of a distinct genre: the tour guide. The first guide of Ouro Preto, published in 1938, had a great political meaning in the midst of the editions of the Ministry of Education and Health, during the Vargas Era. As well as his colleague from São Paulo, Bandeira worked with a sense of nationality.

Manuel Bandeira's guide was illustrated by Luis Jardim, artist representative of the regionalism in the Northeast, whose designs were also published in Gilberto Freyre's guides, dedicated to Recife and Olinda. There is the Church of São Francisco: a landscape of a mountainous horizon, with the Church of São Francisco de Assis on the right, the parvis is the base of the painting, while the temple is located on a small elevation, in perspective, displaying the imposing façade and some walls sides, leaving room for the elevation of the mountains under the sky of Minas Gerais, in the background, the Itacolomi state park.

The consecration of a monument

The consecration of this monument is related to the process described by Pierre Bourdieu (1994) of the passage between the *imago pietatis* and the artistic image. The first was studied by Panofsky and Belting, referring to religious use according to their magical and not entirely aesthetic qualities. Bourdieu observed the visitors of the Santa Maria Novella Church (Florence, Italy), particularly the ones before the frescoes by Domenico Ghirlandaio. According to the sociologist, the religious and artistic disposition differed over centuries, requesting codes of conduct that distinguish people in the social space. On one hand, the religious piety of the faithful; on the other hand, an object of “artistic devotion” of viewers, organized in forms of social and economic distinction, synchronically and diachronically.

When considering relevant the relationship between image and text in the formation of new looks, the proposal of iconology by Mitchell (1986) also refers to Panofsky, considering the iconology as both the resumption of *logos* (word, idea,

4 Sir, I do not deserve this. I do not believe in you to love you. You brought me to São Francisco. And made me your slave.

5 Let's visit São Francisco de Assis/Church made by the people of Minas Gerais/The sacristan who is the neighbor of Maria Cana-erde/Opens and shows abandonment/The pulpits of *Aleijadinho*/The roof of Ataíde/But the drama ended

discourse, science) and the icons (image, similarity, picture). The iconologist explored the double meaning of the “rhetoric of imagery”: on one side, what is said about images, interpretations; on the other hand, what images say, stories, descriptions. Thus, in the long tradition that arose in the Renaissance with the guide of symbolic and allegorical images, notably with Cesare Ripa, until the research by Panofsky, in the early twentieth century. The latter marked the division between iconography (based on the description of symbols) and iconology – project of general interpretation of symbols in historical panorama.

The iconology, born from the project by Warburg and developed as a method by Panofsky, questioned the survival of classical meanings on the contents of the current imagery. An important contribution of these studies was the treatment given to the series of images, in contrast to studies of single images, sometimes without context. The images of landscapes, among which could place our registry of the Church of São Francisco, have been very little explored by iconology, perhaps because of the referential design of its content. I mean, the fact that the image of a landscape is believed to represent merely a world in common, with well-known natural and cultural objects, would not leave room for questions about their meanings. The path trodden this far indicates otherwise.

Panofsky (1939/1967) considered that even the landscape painting, still life or genre painting, as any other artistic manifestations, which could be interpreted according to the iconological method. He claimed that in view of images in which “the whole sphere of secondary or conventional subject matter is eliminated, and a direct transition from motifs to content is effected” (p. 8).

The historian Peter Burke (2004) reviewed also the iconographic interpretation, noting that trees and fields, rocks and rivers, “all these elements contain conscious or unconscious associations for the viewers. Paintings reveal a variety of values,

including innocence, freedom, and the transcendental, it was designed on Earth.” (p. 53). This time, the author expands the field of investigation: “The landscape evokes political associations, or it even expresses an ideology, such as nationalism” (p. 54).

From this general comment, we can cite the compliment of Giulio Carlo Argan (1980, p. 19) when he marked the suitability of the Panofskyan method for the treatment of landscapes and portraits:

The iconology of a portrait is in the pose, in the clothing, the social or psychological meaning that can be assigned to the picture; the iconology of a landscape or a still life is the perspective model, the settings, the situation of the places and significant things.

Iconology is presented in terms of choices of naturalistic components, trees, rocks, water, clouds, also in the selection of the hour, day and season. Even the morphology is full of meanings. The correlations established in research may not have objective proof, but they indicate unconscious levels.

According to the iconological approach, a landscape is full of meanings. In Luiz Fontana’s photography, *Paisagem de Ouro Preto*, taken in May 1948, the social production of the image is well defined: the church on the left of the image, as the convention, attached from top to bottom; the parvis is a reference of the floor; the mountainous horizon with the Itacolomi state park. We can observe the entanglement of the nationalist discourses with the process of signification of images related to Ouro Preto, from which the meaning of that state park becomes more understandable. This is the natural landmark of the *Bandeirante* mythology, whose job was to signal to travelers and explorers who crossed the region the position of parishes of Nossa Senhora da Conceição and Nossa Senhora do Pilar.



Figure 3. Luiz Fontana, *Paisagem de Ouro Preto*. Photo, Ouro Preto (MG), May 2, 1948

Source: Collection from the Institute of Philosophy and Arts of Ouro Preto (MG), 1948.

More specifically, the design of Baroque in Brazil makes explicit a linkage between the political projects of preservation and national memory, the development of tourist resorts and the field of history and art criticism (Andriolo, 2010; Dias, 1972; Durand, 1989; Hansen, 1997). The image of the Church of São Francisco de Assis occupies a central place in the enunciations, which indicated the permanence of conservative forms of representation in terms of politics and religion. In one of the arguments between conservatives and modernists, during the construction works of the Pampulha neighborhood, Belo Horizonte, the image of the Church of São Francisco de Assis de Ouro Preto was evoked again. As Annateresa Fabris noted (2000, p. 187), before the impasse caused by the architectural project by Oscar Niemeyer for the Church of São Francisco de Assis da Pampulha, not admitted by the ecclesiastical movement as a temple to be consecrated, a construction of a new building “identical to that of São Francisco in Ouro Preto” was proposed.

The verification of a researcher in the 1970s about the interests of visitors from Ouro Preto only confirms this observation: “Among the categories, the most outstanding was the one represented by Churches” (Cançado, 1974, p. 120). In this marketing research, the Church of São Francisco appeared as the greatest tourist attraction of Ouro Preto, with 69.51% of the preference of tourists. In the 1960s, the Chapel of São Francisco de Assis “was the favorite motif of painters who sought to fix on the canvas, with harmonious combination of inks, landscape aspects of the ancient ex-capital of Minas Gerais” (Mourão, 1986, p. 118).

The process of consecration of the image does not abandon the religious content, it articulates to other forms, especially the artistic works. Bourdieu (1994, p. 72) would say that these two forms can co-exist in the same space, but in people occupying different social positions. Furthermore, such forms can be combined in a single disposition, included in the body.

At a first level of meaning, a portrait of a church with “colonial architecture” sends the observer to Minas Gerais, particularly to Ouro Preto. More specifically, the façade of the Church of São Francisco de Assis assumed a higher position, representing all churches. That is because, in addition to being a religious temple, participant of the national memory as a symbol of the colonial past, it represented a milestone of “Baroque,” “legitimate national” works, maximum expression of *Aleijadinho*. In the words of Lourival G. Machado (1978, p. 214) the temple was the “masterpiece”: “pure and authentic Baroque elements. In one word, in São Francisco the Baroque impress, but the Brazilian Baroque of Minas Gerais”. It seduced the modernists and other intellectuals, becoming, through its graveyard, the grave of the painter Veiga Guignard, in 1962.

The stable image

The image approach led to the formation of the notion of heritage and national memory regarding the development of tourism in Brazil. The image is historically

situated in a series of notebooks and special numbers of newspapers and magazines, also in the interventions of public organizations. Since December 1962, the state of Minas Gerais, through its State Department of Information, have published its first “tourist itinerary” (Gomes, 1962). Such a document brings in the first text page the list of “historic cities,” 27 locations in all, surmounted by the photo of the Church of São Francisco de Assis.

As we have seen in the series of images collected, the shift in perspective with the opening of the mountainous horizon and the Itacolomi state park became recurring. We could then list the permanence of a stable image, an imagery formula. In the process of image transformation, between artists and viewers distributed in time, it is impossible to sustain an essentialist vision, whether in terms of form, whether in terms of meaning. We also could not find anything such as a reflection of the social experience on the image, though they are always related to the signification processes.

Ulpiano Meneses (2002) remembered that the “escopic systems” are not stable over time in social spaces of image circulation. For this historian, the visual documents must also be considered as material objects and not just as “an abstract semiotic emitter” (p. 144). The resumption of space itself referred to the image and the construction of meaning allow us to traverse the series of images in a different way.

We live in a society in which technological images predominate in a highly accelerated pace of diffusion. In Latin origin, image was related with the portrait of a dead person. This was the *imago*, in the form of paintings, sculptures, and mainly of death masks. It was an object elaborated from death, to keep away its fear and ensure the survival of the dead. The communication philosopher Norval Baitello Júnior (2005) describes the image as the creation of a second reality in a play between presence and absence. Every image has a double face, one is visible to the eye, the other is invisible; both move and change through the human historical experience.

On that understanding, the image appears on the iconic object, but is not limited to it, it organizes itself in different media at the same time that takes on new meanings. Temporal dynamics of images, Baitello Júnior (2005) finds two forms of “iconophagy,” one “pure,” and the other “impure.” The pure iconophagy is one that follows for centuries the making of manual images, on painting or sculpture, in the appropriation of themes, forms and traditional conventions, which have been greatly studied by Warburg, Saxl and Panofsky. The impure iconophagy results from a critical conception of contemporary processes of images, especially the technological ones, which come from that procedure known in the history of images, now intensified by the accelerated reproduction and distribution with high degree of penetration in the observer, in his/her body, the result is a crisis of visibility, consisting of an inflation of images and a suffering of the eyes (Baitello Júnior, 2005, p. 96).

It is noteworthy to consider that the images do not exist in themselves, because, as Hans Belting (2006) said, the images happen. They are transmitted and perceived through specific means, inserting themselves into historic moments in which the processes of signification are distinguished from other moments. Hence Belting's iconological approach considering the social distinctions and the contemporary time, placing the body itself in the investigation process; the interaction of mental and physical images, through the body, establishes its political dimension.

It is an important moment in the image process of the Church of São Francisco de Assis when their meanings are used by companies related to tourism, but little recognized as such. In 1957, an advertisement of automobile engine oil used the image of the Church of São Francisco de Assis as a true sign, indicating the road to Ouro Preto, in the same size as the product being offered. The position of the observer, in this case, is the same set in aforesaid portraits.

It is not exactly about a hotel, or a travel agency, but a manufacturer of lubricating oil. A multinational company whose market has been extended using automobiles, the deployment of the highways in the Brazilian inner cities, and points of interest that should be reached by tourists. We must consider those numbers listed earlier, which demonstrate the preference of the traveler in the 1970s of going by private car to Ouro Preto (Cançado, 1974). The advertisement deals with the private desires of the consumers of the newspaper, marked by images that make them common.

The figure includes half of the page vertically, bringing up the title "Ouro Preto" (Black Gold) with a double meaning, because below the drawing of the Church of São Francisco, the words "Basta o nome!" (The name is enough) appear. The gold referred to by the propaganda is the motor oil (processed oil), with which the traveler can reach long distances as the local represented by the Church (Ouro Preto). The inscription is tiny in relation to the drawing, only for the most curious people, since the image itself transmitted the message:

And it is clear what we are talking about. Shell X-100 Motor Oil is always the greatest protection in long journeys or even when the engine stops, due to its alkaline additives that are more active in combating the corrosive acids from combustion. When it comes to oils, the name is enough – SHELL X-100 MOTOR OIL. (Shell, 1957)

In front of the drawing of the temple there is a donkey waiting patiently for its owner. It is a figurative metaphor of the past, about a genuine tradition of the ancient capital of Minas Gerais, when people and cargo were transported on the back of animals; residue of colonial times confronted with the modernity of lubricating oil and the motor vehicle. Ouro Preto, expressed in the church, symbolizes the past, but with a modern approach, accessible only by new means.



Figure 4. Advertisement of automotive oil Shell X-100

Source: *O Estado de São Paulo*, April 12, 1957, p. 9.

Before the migration of the image, another step in the exercise of description and interpretation is required; a social iconology. From different perspectives (Baitello Júnior, 2005; Belting, 2006; Mitchell, 1986), the social psychology is dedicated to the social processes in which the image is not just a physical thing, but a movement of mediations among iconic objects, body images and mental images of the observers. Image transformation movements are understood as imagery phenomenon in the social process, in the intersubjective life, such as a field of aesthetic, political, economic and cultural signification. In this respect, the social psychology dialogues with sociology, history and anthropology, at the same time it opens as a specific field of knowledge.

Image, *mimesis* and body

The axis of this discussion was the image of the Church of São Francisco de Assis, in Ouro Preto, a mediator of social and aesthetic processes. The observation about the imagery phenomenon led to two syntheses: the play of similarities between the images and the relevance of the observers' body regarding this image with the world in common.

As Fabris (2006) had stated, the passages of the manual image composition for the automatic image and for the digital image imply change of meaning. The meanings are situated in the social status of the image, in representation meanings and in the media that makes possible the experience of the image; painting on canvas, the postcard, the tourism guide's page etc. A play of recognition of the figure presented in the image begins, at the same time that accentuates oppositions in permanence and change, stability and instability.

The way the problem has been imposed, in the series of pictures, to consider them a unit organized in different media was a choice for the permanence of a specific content, to the detriment of differences, on the trail of the imagery formula that feeds and feeds on several social processes. However, it is not merely a model. The path of the image that showed the permanence of mimetic traces did not make it through a unique model; this is a movement of forms and meanings through a stable configuration.

Before images referring to a monument, a place, the nature or landscape, the concept of imitation (*imitatio*) traverses the meanings from the concept of *mimesis* of the classical tradition to the subsequent uses. Denoting the imitation, representation or portrait, *mimesis* is also associated to the concept of *imago*, the image in the Latin mind. From the Greek *mimesis*, the term is sometimes identified with the imitation of the gesture, voice or word of others, of the representation of the real in the artistic or literary image. At the origin, it referred to the person who imitates or represents, in a dramatization, with body movements, dances, songs and recitations, affecting the soul in a therapeutic sense (Ribon, 1991).

In social psychology, the mimetic activity is related to life in society and to intersubjectivity, it is not restricted to the imitation of models. The passage to the psychological and sociological debate was based on Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno, finding a useful contemporary debate with

the anthropologist Michael Taussig and the historian René Girard (Puetz, 2002). Synthetically, in these authors' works, *mimesis* appears on formulations associated to the otherness, desire and politics, when the design emerges as which the *mimesis*, when operating the game of imitation between humans, it paradoxically promotes the notion of difference between the self and the other.

For this article, we follow the fundamental proposition of Luiz Costa Lima (1981), in which *mimesis* is not imitation in the contemporary sense, because there is no match in our languages to the Greek meaning. On the other hand, the approaches to the notion of imitation suggest another term in the debate on *mimesis*, which is verisimilitude. Costa Lima proposes the resumption of *mimesis*, in spite of the end of its classical way, organized by *imitatio*: "the experience of *mimesis* is historically and culturally variable . . . the literary *mimesis* assumes the sensation of similarity, which soon adds the sense of difference" (Costa Lima, 1989, p. 68).

In the 16th and 17th centuries, "the manual production of *imago* was defined by the *imitatio* model, through which the *mimesis* limited the task of the images in the experience transmission and to the cult of reason" (Costa Lima, 1989, p. 39). During the Romanticism and its fight against the Classicism, the notion of limitation was replaced by the imitation of speech, in which the participation of the individual is accentuated. Against the *imitatio*, the artwork acquired veracity by the expression of life (p. 62). In the assertion of an individual subjectivity to be expressed in the image space, the concept of *mimesis*, then associated with the classical imitation, fades into obscurity (p. 106).

The path proposed in Costa Lima (1989, p. 62) clarifies that the imaginary theme is not formed by a poetic theory, but by a review of the *mimesis*, to be understood in the social movement of the image space, between author and receiver, whose imaginative activity creates new worlds. The resumption of *mimesis*, therefore, should question its correspondence to the classical imitation to be thought of as a social phenomenon that produces the difference (p. 268).

The series of images of the Church of São Francisco de Assis de Ouro Preto can be understood by the concept of *mimesis*, in a transposition of the literature for the Visual Arts, in the field of social psychology: the concept of *mimesis* should articulate the image to the social experience. For Costa Lima, the problem of *mimesis* implements a psychosocial dimension when asserting the understanding of everyday fiction, a fiction that is not confined to literature and arts.

In its current usage, the concept of *mimesis* assumes a uniformity between the represented (referent) and the representative (object of *mimesis* or *mimema*), the latter "matters while illustrates a particular worldview" (Costa Lima, 1981, p. 227). However, from the point of view of the producer, "the *mimesis* consists in, through a special use of language, pretending to be another thing" (p. 229). This point concentrates the assertion of the author: *mimesis* is about opening to the otherness through the aesthetic experience.

The term that articulates this form of aesthetic experience is “similarity.” The similarity between mimetic representation and representations of the viewer organize the *mimesis* experience in two opposing and synchronous vectors: 1) identification, similarity, pleasure; 2) difference, distance, questioning (Costa Lima, 1981, p. 232). According to Costa Lima, the viewer, by acting only on the first vector, identification, converts the object into *kitsch* and eliminates the paradox of the mimetic experience: *mimesis* becomes a compensatory phenomenon. When the second vector appears, in the critical distance, the mimetic experience becomes theoretical experience, it starts to be a part of the conceptual plan, abandoning the aesthetic experience field.

Costa Lima (1981) concludes that the *mimesis* experience imposes fundamental antithesis between the two vectors, cathartic identification and critical distance. In this conception, the privilege of interpretation does not belong to the analyst, holder of the normative or aesthetic purism of art for art’s sake, the meanings fit in the historical time and in the social space.

In this context, *mimesis* assumes the participation of the body. Roughly speaking, the phenomenological approach proposes a conception of body aimed at overcoming the dichotomies between the subject and object of knowledge, as well as those that oppose an intangible psyche to a physical body. The dichotomous views result in the loss of the full understanding of a “lived body,” as Husserl and Merleau-Ponty proposed (Richir, 1993).

The notion of body created by Edmund Husserl, despite aiming at the structures of consciousness, at any time abandon the corporeal experience. As his disciple Alfred Schutz (1975) summarized, the animated body does not equate to physical elements once it establishes a perspective on things and reflects on the sensations. The human beings are not just a body with states of consciousness, they are a psychological structure that become conscious of their sensations through the body. “Psyche, as the unity of these experiences that fall under the rubric of consciousness, is a reality of its own, although always founded on the reality of the body, which, in its turn, is founded on the reality of material things” (p. 42).

The philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty was established from the indivisibility of the person in three significant orders: physical chemistry, vital and symbolic. There is where the notion of “lifeworld” is situated, in which and through which one lives in a body. The body is an “expressive space” and the power of the movement takes place through it. “The main parts of my body are devoted to actions, they participate in its value,” he said, the body is the expression movement itself, “what projects the signification onto the exterior by giving them a place” (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1999, p. 202).

After participating in the world social imagistic transactions, the theme of spatiality acquires a fundamental place. When the image of a building is

disposed to the perception, whether in the form of representation, whether in the world’s own space in common, merely aspects are not perceived, but the point of view of a body that situates the whole world, there are no limits to the visual field.

The perception of things and of the world cannot be built from different profiles, just as the binocular vision of an object cannot be built from two monocular images, and my experiences of the world integrate only one world. In the interior or exterior of the horizon or of the landscape, there is a co-presence or a co-existence of the profiles that tie themselves through space and time. (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1999, p. 442)

Between the body, the image and the world, *mimesis* operates a set of similarity and difference organized from its own social experience, between artists and viewers. This was the second synthesis formulated from the series of images of São Francisco de Assis, Ouro Preto. The body’s activity articulates both the stability of the image and its instability, through the aesthetic experience of *mimesis*.

Variations in relation to that formula also stand out in the travel documentary by Lourival Machado (1978), originally published in 1949, in which the photo explores other perspectives, whether in a frontal portrait, whether in the front diagonal clipping leaning to the right. In the same vein, Cerqueira Falcão (1946) made his photo shoot above the towns from Minas Gerais, *Relíquias da Terra do Ouro*. The Church of São Francisco de Assis was contemplated with 28 photos. It presents less stable patterns, in dialogue with the architecture and the volumetry of the building, as well as the set of shapes with rooftops and mountains.

The possibilities are very diverse in other artists. For example, the painting by Carlos Bracher, *Igreja de São Francisco de Assis* (1968, 81 x 60 cm, Romulo Fialdini collection) does not operate as our series of images, but it provokes the observer in unexpected perspectives. This change of look, however, does not abandon completely the *mimesis*, although it does not assume a “unit of exterior truth” (Hansen, 1998, p. 41).

The French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty emphasized our anchoring in the world – horizontal, vertical, near, distant etc. Things are structured by our relation as incarnate beings in the world. “The world only has meaning because it has a direction; all locations of objects in the world assume my location; in a sense, the object of perception continues to tell us about the man; it is our expression as incarnated subjects.” (Merleau-Ponty, 1990, p. 291, emphasis in the original).

The body itself performs the unit of senses in the sensitive experience of the world. According to Frayze-Pereira (2006, p. 163), from the experience of the incarnated being, “the sensory aspects of a thing constitute together one

same thing, as my look, my touch and all my other senses are, together, the powers of a single body integrated into a single action.”

The images constitute themselves as social process between sensitive bodies, in an intersubjective and integrated way. The design of image brought by Baitello Júnior (2005) was also not limited to the domain of visibility, because it is present in all senses, in an experience unified by the body.

Berleant (1992) would say that the problems of the division of the senses stand out especially when it comes to the perception of the environment. Particularly, before our series of images, the unit of experience that relates image, environment and body offers a social understanding in a specific environment, a world in common. This is more remarkable in the architecture experience, in which the viewer is a participant and the construction is inseparable from the place. In the aesthetic experience field, there are no selfless actions: it is “an involvement that transcends the usual limits of subjective and objective, encouraging mutual participation in the aesthetic situation, which gathers both object and observer, within a unified domain” (Berleant, 1992, p. 156).

Conclusion

Despite the issue with the image emerging into the sphere of visibility, whether in pictures, whether in the contemporary propositions around the technical images, the phenomenological approach gave us a full understanding of perception, within the scopes of corporeality and of aesthetic experience. First, followed by the procedures of a descriptive phenomenology, dedicated to the phenomenon of image itself, before any conceptualization and theorization. So that the confrontation with the series of images of the Church of São Francisco de Assis, organized in social spaces and specific historical processes, brought out the problems described in this article. Second, the theoretical task opened some comprehensive paths, whether in the phenomenological conception of body in Merleau-Ponty, whether in the concept of mimesis in Costa Lima, going through the sociology of culture by Bourdieu.

As Baitello Júnior (2005) summarized, the phenomenon of image is the creation of a second reality in a game between presence and absence, not restricted to the

object, in a process of meanings. In this sense, this article has circumscribed a few settings on the field of image in social psychology. The theoretical study of those paths or other possibilities were not among the objectives of this text.

From Merleau-Ponty’s perspective, the social and the personal are set in two interconnected wholes through the body. The image performs the mediation process among these totalities, adding its own form and content. For this philosopher, the images are not linked to their meaning by a sign-signification relation, “similar to that which holds between a telephone number and a subscriber’s name”; they include their meaning: “a meaning that is not notional, but rather is a direction of one’s existence” (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1999, p. 382).

Drawing, photography and digital media dispose the image distinctly to the observer, in the form of representation and in its social status, in a process of transformation of meanings. On the other hand, we noted a steady correspondence relative to the image of the Church of São Francisco de Assis, in reference to a specific environment.

The division between iconography and iconology was brought in to reinforce the need for interpreting the images in a historical panorama and according to the social space. Thus, the enunciations about the image indicated the permanence of conservative political and religious discourses, which were associated with the socially situated categories. Bourdieu (1994) would say that these forms of perception refer to different social positions, included in the body itself, especially distinguishing the *imago pietatis* of the artistic image.

Thus, the well-established point of view of the monument, suggesting a bodily situation of the observer’s, highlights the relevance of certain social groups and specific provisions in the social movement of the image. Considering the stability or instability of the image, the experience of perception has led to the social game of *mimesis* as conceptualization by Costa Lima (1989), in which the similarity juxtaposes the feeling of difference. Through the game of *mimesis* and through the phenomenological notion of body, the problem of image in social psychology can become understandable to articulate the aesthetic experience between similarity and difference in the social life.

O fenômeno da imagem em psicologia social: algumas configurações

Resumo: Neste artigo, o método iconológico foi revisado em uma abordagem fenomenológica. O eixo dessa compreensão foi estabelecido por uma série de imagens da Igreja de São Francisco de Assis (Ouro Preto, Minas Gerais, Brasil). Esse eixo torna possível observar a questão dos significados em relação ao tempo histórico e ao espaço social. Ao final, propõe-se o domínio da imagem em psicologia social como o estudo dos processos sociais nos quais a imagem não é apenas uma coisa físico-química, mas a mediação entre o objeto icônico, o corpo e a imagem mental dos observadores, em um contexto social e histórico. O resultado dessa reflexão indica duas sínteses preliminares em torno do conceito de *mimesis* e a participação do corpo, ambos articulados pela experiência estética.

Palavras-chave: psicologia social da imagem, psicologia e estética, percepção, iconologia, fenomenologia.

Le phénomène de l'image en psychologie sociale : quelques configurations

Résumé : Dans cet article, la méthode iconologique a été révisée sur l'approche phénoménologique. L'axe de cette compréhension a été créé par une série d'images de l'église de Saint François d'Assise (Ouro Preto, Minas Gerais, Brésil). Cet axe permet d'observer la question de la signification par rapport au temps historique et l'espace social. À la fin, il est proposé le champ de l'image en psychologie sociale en tant que l'étude des processus sociaux dans lequel l'image n'est pas seulement une chose physique-chimique, mais la médiation entre l'objet iconique, le corps et l'image mentale des observateurs dans un contexte social et historique. Le résultat de cette réflexion propose deux synthèses préliminaires autour du concept de *mimesis* et la participation du corps, à la fois articulé par l'expérience esthétique.

Mots-clés : psychologie sociale de l'image, psychologie et esthétique, perception, iconologie, phénoménologie.

El fenómeno de la imagen en la psicología social: algunas configuraciones

Resumen: En este artículo, el método iconológico fue revisado desde un enfoque fenomenológico. El eje de este entendimiento fue establecido por una serie de imágenes de la Iglesia de San Francisco de Asís (Ouro Preto, Minas Gerais, Brasil). Este eje hace posible observar el tema de significados en relación con el tiempo histórico y el espacio social. Por último, se propone el campo de la imagen en psicología social como el estudio de los procesos sociales en que la imagen no es solo algo físico-químico, pero la mediación entre el objeto icónico, cuerpo e imagen mental de los observadores en un contexto social e histórico. El resultado de esta reflexión señala dos síntesis preliminares en torno al concepto de la *mimesis* y la participación del cuerpo, ambos articulados por la experiencia estética.

Palabras clave: psicología social de la imagen, psicología y estética, percepción, iconología, fenomenología.

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