

Original Paper

Notes of Epistemology of the Images

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Abstract

This article has as its subject of analysis the images as they are perceived by the observer. As a heuristic symphony this work is a paradigmatic crossover of the phenomenology, the genetic epistemology and the hermeneutics, amalgamated by semiotics. In the first paragraph, a phenomenological reflection of the images is carried out, reaching a division between internal images and external images and between objective images and sign images. In the second paragraph, a genetic analysis of a thought in images is carried out, reaching a division of the sign images in signal images, index images, icon images, symbol images and sign images with its correspondingly levels of abstraction and societal. Finally, in the third paragraph, hermeneutics of the object images as a cultural unit or culturema is carried out. It ends by framing the present study in visual studies and highlighting their relevance in the context of visual culture.

Keywords

inner images, external images, object image, sign image, fusion of interpretative horizons

1. Introduction

The visual culture has been approached by the visual studies; an evolutionary branch of the art history. However, this mode of approach does not have considered the image as a subject of analysis in depth until now. The epistemological investigations it has limited to define the cultural conditions and social effects of the pictorial images and technical images. Therefore, the analysis of the image per se as a subject has been delayed. Maybe, because the sand box of the world of the images, covers, with its open world of options, the conceptual repertoires that with its sense allow us to grasp the images. This also constitutes a doxa's creed rather reduced to an anachronistic conception of true as a correspondence or coherence between the image or statement and the referred object.

The following text aims to bring the true to the light (Heidegger, 2004), in the logical sense of discovering certain concepts of conceptual repertoires covered by the doxa's creed. This as a form of

contribution to fill the conceptual gap related to the semantization of the image phenomenon. The perspective from where is done the contribution is an humanistic position, from where the textual work have the purpose of elicit the humanization in the reader, namely, to rich his or her conceptual repertories (Edward & Potter, 1992; Harré, 1994; Potter & Wetherell, 1987), and consequently, to rich his or her human condition of symbolic being (Cassirer, 1968).

To that end, an heuristic symphony it is articulated. The phenomenological reflections have the objective of grasp and describe the experience that we have with the images in the quotidian world (Van Manen, 2014). For this purpose, the epoché and the reduction are used; the first step is to put bracket to our experience with the images respect to our projections on they (Husserl, 1962), and the second step is to going to the things itself, that is to say, to the images in itself (Heidegger, 2015). The elements for a genetic epistemology of the images have the goal of founding a thought in image. For this, a comparative argument between the logical development of genetic epistemology (Piaget, 2013) and the semiotic categorization of signs (Saussure, 1994; Peirce, 1931) is used. For its part, the proposal for an hermeneutics of the object images, has the goal to illustrate a way of reading the images, thinking they as a cultural unit or culturema. For this, an interpretative argument of the images is used, that conjugate arguments from Belting; Ortega y Gasset; Flusser; Corea, Lewkowicz Cantarelli; Gadamer; Barthes and Eco.

With the above, a new conceptual repertoire with its corresponding senses is unveiled. Which obeys a broader horizon of to bring to the light a metacultural conceptual repertoire, a conceptual network that afford to clarify the experience in the context of visual culture, and with this, continuously improve our discursive-position-in-the-moral-world, in terms of fashion ourselves as more responsible cultural subject-agents (Harré, 1994).

2. Development

2.1 Phenomenological Reflections about the Images

To think that the image is an icon that we observe of the objective thing, through the perception, it is to resort to a symbolic mediation separated from the object, which suppose a thing itself of the object, unfathomable by the consciousness (Husserl, 1962). Also, the above suppose that the iconic image which refers to the objective thing, would have some similarity with it, therefore, the criteria of concordance of the objective thing with the image, but, how can we know that exist a correspondence of the image with the objective thing, if only we can access to the objective thing through images?, this is clearly a contradiction. We must suppose that there is an objective thing to which the image refers, but in the moment of suppose the thing, we objective it with a new image that would does reference to the objective thing, which however, again, we access through an image, therefore the first image refers to a second image and this refers to a third image, and thus, in a unlimited semiosis chain (Eco, 2000).

Therefore, if we do, with Husserl (1962), the difference between to perceive an image and to perceive the thing itself, it is understood that when we are perceiving an image with a symbolic mediation, we

are perceiving something that it is not the objective thing, but a symbolic object that make reference to another object which would be the thing itself, so that that through the the first we take in consideration the second. While that to perceive directly the thing without symbolic mediation, but objectifying it in the perception, it is an act of consciousness that we rationally intuit that it is so (Husserl, 1962). But this do not signified to perceive the thing in it itself, because that would be perceive it in it totality, and this is not possible, since our senses, particularly our vision as pregnant sense, perceive the things in perspective, that is to say, perceive an aspect or form of the thing and no all of it, hence, that Husserl (1962) argue that the things transcend us and what we can to objectify from these are strokes and foreshortenings.

However, there are not the forms of the things that we objectify as strokes and foreshortenings of they, images? It is intuited that it is so; we perceive the superficial forms of the things, the object it is not the thing, but images of it, but these are not necessarily signs that refers to another thing, but to it itself as forms of the thing. From this it is follows a double understanding of the image, not only as a symbolic mediation that represent, but also as an objective form that presents the thing itself. Therefore, the sign image should be studied in its representative relation with objective images, to understand its symbolic function. As well, the form of the object images should be studied to understand its inner logic as observable surface of the objectified things.

When we are setting up the object images through the perception of the surrounding world, coemerge inner images in the subtle matter of the stream of consciousness. In a first moment, the inner images appears as immediate object images, because they are taken by the consciousness in its natural attitude, as Husserl put it (1962), like immediate related with the object images of the surrounding world, as if they were partakers of the same substance. However, through the phenomenal reflection that puts in practice our epistemological liberty, disconnecting or putting between brackets our imagetic perceptions respect to our surrounding world, starting to question its correspondence (Husserl, 1962); we infer that the immediate inner object images are inner sign images of the object images from the surrounding world. Something similar occur with the inner images of the external sign images; in a first moment in that the consciousness is in a natural attitude, the inner images coemerge as immediate object images of the sign images from the external world, being the latter considered also as object images and both belonging to one and the same substance. The reflection changes the mode of the immediate inner object images to inner sign images of the external images, and simultaneously, changes the mode of the external images from object images to sign images.

Also, we must consider the inner images as object images and sign images self-referents. For the fact that the consciousness in its natural attitude is projected onto the object images from the external world, both types of images in the consciousness, at first, are not noticed, either are not considered in its form or function, but they are immediate to the perceived objects. By the reflection, that questions the surrounding world, it is possible for the consciousness to move to an immanent attitude, where considers its images as object images or eidetic forms and as sign of the others inner images. This is the

born of the mind, and a necessary condition for the Being itself (Campos-Winter, 2020). With this, it is demonstrated that the mind is not a priori, but a phenomenon which we must do it each time.

These inner images, in addition to differentiate from the other images by belonging to consciousness, are images with affective, euphoric, dysphoric or euthymic charge, depending if its appearance, consideration and utilization, increase, decrease or keeps regular the stream of consciousness. This becomes evident because although the object images of the external world are affected in its motion for other object images, we cannot be sure that the images from the external world have affects in the sense of emotional energy, unless they immediately, an only immediately, belong to living beings like us in terms of “sistemas moleculares autopoiéticos” (Maturana & Varela, 2003; Maturana & Dávila, 2015) and things with intrinsic principle of motion, that is to say, intrinsic actualization of its potency (Aristotle cit. in Oliver 2019); so, by imagetic similarity, we can infer that they do have affection.

From the previous, it follows that the external images should be considered as object images to understand its formal structure and as sign images to understand its referential function. Likewise, the inner images must be considered as object images and as sign images to understand its own structure as eidetic forms in the first case, and its referential functions of the surrounding images from the external world and references between the images from the inner world of the consciousness, in the second case.

2.2 Elements for a Genetic Epistemology of the Images

A development proposal of the emergence of the abstraction of the knowledge with which we must see us each time, is elaborated below, starting from a thought in images. For this, it is useful to follow the trail of the definition of genetic epistemology made by Piaget (2013), who considers that the knowledge of the world should be studied starting from the development of the thought. This is evolutionarily organized in formal totalities or mental models, that in this text they are considered as equivalent to images. Piaget (2013) claims that the sensorimotor intelligence stage is the fountain of the development of the thought and that the named stage is not only found in the origins of the thought, but that this stage is lifelong present in a recursive mode with other stages. From which it is possible to infer that with each assimilative construction of new knowledge, starting from the physical actions and mental operations of the subjects-agents (Piaget, 2013), a process of cognitive epigenesis that influence distinct levels of abstraction is reproduced. This, in consistency with the further cognitive term “enacción”, elaborated by Varela (1997, 2000, 2001, 2006).

These levels of abstraction are possibles due to the symbolic function, which, according to Piaget (2013), it begins to be completely functional from the operational stage of thought in symbol mode. With the exception that, according to the psychologist of Neuchatel (cit. in Bermesoso, 2001), such function is already present in the sensorimotor stage, in our terms, as object images that are sign images in a signal level of abstraction. This difference has its origin from appropriation of the theory of signs raised by Pierce (1931). For Pierce (1931), the signs differ in index, icons and symbols, to which Piaget (2013) adds a distinction between signs and symbols, following to Saussure (1994), this is,

between the arbitrariness of the firsts and the motivation of the seconds, and between signals and index's, namely, between the automatism of the first and the predictability of the seconds (Piaget, 2003).

In these text it is hypothesized, from a reading of Bajtin/Voloshinov (1976), that the signal is the sign image present since the beginning of our consciousness and at all times in that we found in a natural attitude, in which it is not noticed its discreet and functional unity, but it is rather like a continuity between the perceived object image, its perceptual background and the reflex response that we perform, without take notice of these actions, if not a posteriori. Well then, now we can name what we have called in the previous fragment immediate object image as what it is, namely, a sign image in its mode of signal image.

In the first instance, the signal images emerge as a surrounding image that absorb the consciousness with a corresponding unconscious emotionality in the no thetic meaning. This explains that in front to the signal images one is like an automaton, mobilized according to the laws of the classical conditioning. It is from the reflection, as a structure of our epistemological liberty, that we can abstract us from the signal images and consider them as such, although with this they lose their absolute sovereignty with respect to our cognition. From Piaget (2013), the matter of this reflection can be the assimilation of our own actions on the images of the surrounding world.

On the other hand, according to Vygotsky (1978, 1995), the object of the reflection are the images of our peers, from which, we consider the possibility of inner images with a major level of abstraction, which propels us to areas of development of new levels of abstraction. These endogenous and heterogeneous reflective process that achieve imagetic conjunction and synthesis, are conditions of overcoming not only of the signal images, but of each level of abstraction represented by the distinct types of sign images.

For his part, the external sign images in its condition of signals, are perceives in the first instance as object images, this is, as forms of the objects. It is required an effort of the intellect to separate the external signal image from the object image, from which remain an index or icon image of the object image, but without affection.

From the reflection on the signals images that we consider in our consciousness, we identify patterns of signals images that are synthesized in index of the object images from the external world. The index images, unlike the signal images, are related to the object images in their absence in cause-effect and part-whole mode, what gives rise to the representation, to the memory and the records that compose it. From the index images it is possible to conceive a major level of self-consciousness in relation to the determination gives for the surrounding world, managing to evoke it theoretically, by bringing to the consciousness index images. We can also conceive recursive relations between the phenomena of the consciousness, what is the basis of the inner world, this is, we can transpose index images in other index images and infer of these, signal images. Likewise, the index images of the external world are recognized from the questioning of the signal images as identical to the object images, from which an index image of an object image, as a part, or cause-effect of it, is subtracted.

A third emergent level of imagetic abstraction are the icon images, which can be conceived as images of an object completely abstracted from its situations of coemergence with the internal image that perceive it. The icon image is already resulted of a reflection on an aggrupation of index images, in such a way that the articulation of the parts reflects roughly the entirety figure of an external object image. As an iconographic image, the icon image is a surface with a logic of read like an object image from the external world. Due to the condition of formal similarity of the icon image with the object image, it authorizes its effective participation in the intersubjective and social world with greater generality than signal images and index images, being the element of conventional social perceptions. In turn, if the logic of the index images shapes the representations, memories and dreams, the icon images are the material of these psychic functions, giving substance to a consciousness that is capable of thinking in images, with witch figurative self-consciousness is achieved, that is able to disconnect almost completely from the surrounding world, in addition to being able to project images in that world. For its part, the icon images from the external world, are result of a social dynamic inversely proportional of materialization of the signal and index images in icon images, as well as an abstraction of the object images to which the icon images refers, in such a way that the icon images becomes not only representatives of object images, product of the objectification of things, but also representatives of object images of ideas.

It implies of the above that the signal images are irreflexive signifiers in a first moment, and thus, with an unconscious or no thetic signified, almost in its totality pragmatic. For its part, the index images, at first are also signifiers with an signified almost in its totality pragmatic, but for its condition of major liberty with regard to its object images, allow semantic participation in its signified, however, both images give us a sense of point-to-point relationship with the object image, from its sensitive situational coemergence, in the case of the signal image, and representational situational contiguity of part-whole or cause-effect, in the case of the index image.

The icon, however, is an image that requires a major reflection on a group of signal and index images with regard to the object images, being this a product of a process of synthesis and formalization that allows a situational separation, different from the signal images, and participative and associative separation, different from the index images, since in its case the relationship is of formal similarity or analogy. From this it follows that the signal images are predominantly subjective, the index images are mostly subjective and intersubjective, and the icon images are subjective, intersubjective and social; given that the more it is separated an inner sign image of its context of emergence, the more probably it is that it becomes part of images that refers to socially conventional situations and objects. It is precisely in the social order where they achieve greater significance due to their potential to be an attractor on account of to their interpretative facility in their link with abstract ideas.

The inner icon images can be conjugated and synthesized in symbol images, that is to say, at a level of abstraction in which they lose their syntactic or formal order similarity to external images, to gain semantic and pragmatic similarities with these, which requires a sustained intellectual effort on the part

of the observer to maintain the connection between inner symbol images and external object images. Just like the icon images, the symbol images belong to the subjective, intersubjective and social spheres, although is in the subjective sphere where they manage major significance, given that the cognitive effort they require to be interpreted causes in the consciousness a qualitative leap to the formal order. The symbol images from the external world, are in a first moment difficult to assimilate, but also in the beginning you have the intuition that these images are in addition to object images, symbol images, given that they carry a halo of mystery with them that causes curiosity. These images absorb the attention of the observers who, when they manage to interpret them, they achieve, likewise that with their internal symbol images, new processes of abstraction in the formal order.

Through reflection that opens the possibility of a sign image that does not require of a relation of coexistence, of cause-effect/part-whole, of syntactic similarity or semantics-pragmatics similarity; a part of the stream of consciousness is structured according to a set of graphic and acoustic images, which obtain their differential meaning from the pure difference between them, that is to say, without any relationship to the object images more than an arbitrary relation purely conventional (Saussure, 1995), what is the same to say that the sign image strictly speaking is always sign images in plural. From Lotman (1996), the sign images, and among these, predominantly the natural language, are properly cultural, in the sense that they transcend subjective, intersubjective and social spheres, giving order and coherence to these and allowing their coemergence.

The sign images, in its narrow sense, are arbitrary with respect to the object images, they cannot be generated by individuals. But, through an endogenous reflection that manage levels of symbolic synthesis, the conditions of formal consciousness for the configuration of inner sign images are generated, first of all in the memory and as symbols. Then, through semiosis exchanges with the peers, what it promotes differentiation and conjunction of inner symbols at higher levels of abstraction (Vygotsky, 1978), the ability to carry systems of sign images is generated.

The acquisition of a language then involves a restructuring of consciousness by the subjects, in terms that the cross between the paradigmatic field of signified related by substitution and the syntagmatic chain of association by contiguity of the signifiers, becomes an attractive code in the consciousness, which permeates, with its structure and dynamics, the other images of consciousness. From this it follows that once a language is learned, we tend to interpret our perceptual and ideational universe in its terms. Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that the signs and, particularly, the linguistic signs, are strictly speaking images as graphs or sounds with forms and functions.

From the previous reflections, a complex conception of epistemology emerges that goes beyond the traditional claim of correspondence or coherence and double-link between representational knowledge and the world, given that we should think of a triple bond of between external object images and sign images and inner sign images, which would lead to a fourth link if we consider inner sign images as object images in order to theoretically reflect. The consequences for the method are the subject of a

reflection that goes beyond the scope of this work; however, it is worth noting the need for this investigation.

2.3 Proposal for Hermeneutics of the Object Images

Notwithstanding that, obviously, all images emerge from differential and equivalence relationships in natural or cultural systems, it is necessary to differentiate between explicitly conventional sign images and the rest of images, for which a specific knowledge is necessary in order to identify them as part of semiotic systems. For this, we must abstract the structural characteristics, common to every thinkable image, as a cultural unit or culturema, that is, as signal, index, icon or symbol image that is distinguishable without the need to relate it to an arbitrary meaning that is the product of its articulation in conventional sign system. Below, an analysis of images in their condition of object is proposed, that complement the functional interpretation of sign images, that is, an analysis of the structure common to all images, thought of as a formal unit or culturema.

In the etymological sense, image means imitation of something else, a definition that is consistent with the notion that an image is an icon of an object, which, the more similar to the object in question, the closer it would be to the ideal definition of image. Therefore, the analytical reading of an image would be a function of its similarity with the referred object, which brings us closer to the notion of the contents of consciousness as representations of the world and to the epistemological principle of correspondence and isomorphism between the object and the representation as true knowledge of the object. Also, this brings us the notion that the images fashion the subjectivity by present us the world (Belting 2007; Onetto 2012).

It can be inferred that this definition is based on a syntactic meaning of image, where it would be considered as a copy of the object. In this way of thinking the image does not authorize us to analyze it in its own right as a self-conclusive matter and form reality with pragmatic effects on the consciousness of the observers.

To think about the image as a culturema, allows us to make hypotheses about the qualities that are universal in the images. In the first place, we can intuit that an image by itself is a discrete material surface, resulting from a structural configuration of elemental contents. Every material surface, no matter how subtle, has a configuration of content that gives it a meaningful form, in such a way that every materiality with which the world is composed has an image. Therefore, we do not agree with Hans Belting (2007) at this point, who states that the image is only configured as such in the individual mind of the observers, since this approach cannot convincingly explain the fact that social images exist independent of individual observers. Rather, what happens is that social images are objectified by perception as particular object images, which coemerge with their corresponding sign images in the currents of individual consciousness. And because the individuals share a similar perspective of the world (Ortega y Gasset, 1970), subjects tend to share similar imaginary phenomena in their individual streams of consciousness from their object images perceived.

Taking into consideration that all matter has an image and that the images are both social and individual, which are the universal characteristics of images? As already stated, all matter has an image according to the configuration of its components in a form, therefore it is innocuous to investigate the sinister material content of each image, but, in academic terms, we must gambit from the analysis of the structure and the form of the image to understand it, that is, from an analysis of the configurations from which the image emerges from its imagetic context. These configurations are none other than the logical that is followed when it is reading an image, abstracting it from the textual logic that conditions our reading of the world, which is linear, unidirectional and analytical-synthetic. In other words, we must analyze the typical reading patterns of an image to understand the form of its structure.

As media philosophers such as Flusser (1973) and semiotics such as Barthes (1990) and Corea, Lewkowicz and Cantarelli (2004) have already stated, the structure of the images is non-partial, non-linear, non-progressive and non-homogeneous, which gives us an idea of the ilimitation in the possibilities of reading the images. Based on this, Flusser (1973) maintains that a possible syntax of an image is synthetic-analytical, first synthetic and then analytical, the total or denotative meaning is captured first and then goes on to the particular or connotative meanings that compose it. First, we get a general idea of what the image presents or represents and then we analyze the concepts that fashion the idea. But how do we go from the denotative of the general idea to the connotative of the particular ideas? Barthes (1990) maintains that the first reading of the image is a floating reading or *studium*, referring to a visualization of the image in its objectivity as a neutral totality with respect to its referent and to itself.

This reading is also analogical, given that the total meaning of an image refers to what it resembles, either a signal that identifies with its emergency situation or a sign identifies with its object. So far, a pure syntactic analogy, but then, semantic analogies will emerge, that is, we will think of the image as a metaphor for other images. Finally, the pragmatic analogy will emerge, from which we assimilate the image with intersubjectivite and social realities. However, this reading remains purely synthetic and objective.

During the *studium*, the observer comes across to an element or a set of particular elements of the image, called *punctum*, which literally punctuate the observer, semiotically subjecting him in his reading. Due to the *punctum*, the observer begins to analyze the image in its structure and then to grant much of meaning to it from his own subjective experiences and as a member of a semiotic community with an interpretative tradition. Simultaneously, hypotheses will emerge about the intention of the image creator as an individual and as a member of an interpretative tradition. Following to Gadamer (1977), this can be considered as a fusion of interpretative horizons between the observer, the image and its creator, which provides multiple meanings to the signifiers that make up the image and, therefore, new formal meanings of the image as a whole. In terms of Eco (1992), a fusion takes place between the *intentio lectoris*, the *intentio operis* and the *intentio autoris*.

At a certain moment, the projective whirlpool resulting from this fusion of interpretative horizons between the observer, the image and the creator of the image, stops at a determined sense. The static caused by the retention force of the consciousness of the observer and by the coercion of the interpretative tradition of his semiotic community, vectorize possible interpretations with a trajectory function, where the possibility of interpretative spontaneity also is found. Thus, in the case of belonging to an academic community, the most likely that the observer stops his projective whirlwind in a return to the structural objectivity of the image, that is, a return to the detailed description of the signifiers, description that justifies certain synthetic interpretations.

In conclusion, we found a possible reading of the image obtained from thinking of it as a formal unit, resulting from the structural configuration of its components or signifiers. In logical terms, the structural configuration of an image is synthetic-analog-analytical-interpretative-descriptive-synthetic. First, the totality in the form of studium is observed; then it is associated with other object images based on syntactic, semantic and pragmatic similarities; thirdly, and starting from the punctum, the objective gaze becomes analytical, passing from the totality to the parts; then it becomes interpretative, filling the image structure with multiple and heterogeneous meanings, due to the fusion of interpretative horizons. Fifth, the interpretation stops at the phenomenological description of the signifiers, which justifies the sixth moment of synthetic interpretations.

3. Discussion

In the three previous paragraphs the images have been addressed as an object of study. In this briefing, phenomenological, genetic and hermeneutical proposals have been made. Thus, in the first paragraph, a division of the images into inner images and external images, and object images and sign images has been reached. Similarly, in the second paragraph, a distinction was made between signal images, index images, icon images, symbol images and sign images, each with its corresponding levels of abstraction and in an order that ranges from the individual to the cultural. Finally, a proposal was made to read the images in a logical order: synthesis-analogy-analysis-interpretation-description-synthesis. As a study suggestion, these analytical exercises invite to development of further investigations that will go beyond in the approach of this crucial subject of study, which can be framed in the broader field of visual studies. The importance of this lies in the world's need to understand the current visual culture in which we find ourselves, beyond the mirages from the dogma's creed, through the study of its unit of analysis, which is the image.

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