

*Epistemological Fundamentals of Image*

Summary of the Doctoral Thesis

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The thesis “Epistemological Fundamentals of the Image” addresses the issues of the image in attempting to analyze its structures, the processes at its basis, the elements influencing it, and also to identify the possible legitimacy of the image. This analysis takes into consideration the epistemological dimensions of the image, although this paper points out the importance of different fields in the study and investigation of the image, emphasizing in that sense the inter-disciplinary perspective. Although the image was discussed in philosophy since antiquity, the epistemological investigation of the image, identity and otherness is not only a new theme, but also of interest for understanding human nature, the understanding of image formation mechanisms being, actually, the understanding of peoples' way of being. As an interdisciplinary exercise, this paper begins by reviewing the main theories and approaches of the image, in that it employs philosophical points of view, with special attention paid to the phenomenology of the image, sociology, psychology, including social, historical, and literary psychology and comparative literature in particular. All of these, as can be read in the first chapter: “Prolegomena to a Theory of the Image,” can be compiled under the generous umbrella of imagology, whose interdisciplinary character allows for the possibility of investigating the image with instruments that overcome the limits of a single paradigm. Therefore, the epistemology of the image requires the identification of its legitimacy and the analysis of its mechanisms through the means of an interdisciplinary investigation. This paper aims to deconstruct the image in order to reach its primary element – the archetype – and its evolution in turn into myths and symbols, which will be further investigated in the second chapter: “The Unconscious Structures of the Image,” in order to analyze the logico-epistemological elements of image – representation, assumption, stereotype and ethnic-stereotype – discussed in the fourth chapter: “The Logico-epistemological Structures of the Image.” In addition, we cannot speak of image in the absence of some elements that play an essential role in its formation, that is the identity/otherness duality, which is analyzed in the third chapter: “Identity, Otherness, Image.”

Within this paper an essential point in the investigation of the image is communication, since we depart from Claude Lévi-Strauss's idea that society is a group of people who communicate. Communication is an essential way of transmitting, maintaining and transforming images in a society because it contains symbols and representations that facilitate the exchange of messages, processes reality, and the promotes of common values. Communication is intrinsic to the problem of image; they share a deep connection since images cannot spread and have an impact at the societal level in the absence of communication, regardless of its form, and communication, by its nature, contains elements of images, with multiple structures of the image being identifiable within the content of communication.

The chapter “Prolegomena to a Theory of the Image” is an incursion into the sphere of the problematic of image from the perspective of human nature, in order to point out both the extent to which the image, as a mental process, is specific only to humans, as well as the importance of the social and cultural environment and historical context on the formation of images.

While the first studies in the field were written through the perspective of social psychology, later these were shaped by comparative literature, with imagologists such as Hugo Dyserinck and Joep Leerssen arguing that comparative literature can be identified with imagology. In that sense, imagology research in Western Europe analyzed images of the other in historical context through literary texts, shaping and explaining through them the

image that individuals in a group have of otherness. The premise from which these studies depart is that literature has an essential impact on the representations of a society, as there is a double relationship. Firstly, the fact that the authors relate what individuals in a society think, and secondly they think that the images dominating a society are reflected in the representations of individuals, with a basis in literary works. Therefore, the double relationship mentioned above places comparative literature as a reflection, as well as a comment on individuals' representations. What is important to remember is that, so far, the dominant problem of imagology studies in Western Europe is that of the other and the representational relationship between otherness and identity.

In the second chapter, "The Unconscious Structures of the Image" we delve into the ahistorical perspective of the image, since from the point of view of the current research, in order to speak of image, we must first investigate ancestral structures – archetypes – and the way of expressing human sentiment – myths and symbols – in order to reach historical forms, logically determined and which ensure the transformation of the unknown into the familiar – representation, assumption and stereotype.

The third chapter, "Identity, Otherness, Image," highlights two important approaches to identity and otherness: the ontological perspective and that of becoming. From this point of view, identity, which we understand as an ensemble of features defining an individual, and otherness, which reunites the features that define the other, will be analyzed depending on the way their content gives meanings to an object. Thus, although the ontological perspective on identity and otherness will also be considered, an important role in the analysis will be given to authors who perceive identity and otherness as constructions and therefore processes subject to becoming. By analyzing both perspectives, the chapter proposes an interdisciplinary investigation of identity and otherness, since these are the terms that define the human being, which is extremely difficult if not impossible to understand from the perspective of a single field. Therefore, "Identity, Otherness, Image" sets the departure point in the study of identity and otherness with a view to the idea of structures subject to becoming, transformation, in close connection with historical situations and depending on the group mentalities of an era. Identity and otherness are connected to the interaction of a series of factors such as family, religion, class, gender, region, age group or nationality, though it is very difficult to establish their degree of influence, since what matters is the representation that the individual has of these factors, values, meanings and reference systems based on which the process of identity and otherness is formed.

The chapter also attempts to analyze and highlight reports between the *self/non-self*, *I/others* and *we/them*, in the belief that while *self/non-self* implies an ontological relationship, the others pass from the abstract plane to that of becoming, since the changes taking place at the levels of the individual and group depend on how identity and otherness are structured. An essential stage of this process is *becoming unto another*, a phenomenon revealing the fact that identity and otherness exist in a permanent exchange at the level of content.

While investigating archetypal structures and their way of expressing human feelings, myths and symbols, brings to light the representative questions that individuals inherit and the answers old culture had given, respectively, the analysis of historically determined forms of images in the fourth chapter, "The Logico-epistemological Structures of the Image," describes a structural model of processing reality through the investigation of historical elements of image, representation, assumption and stereotype. The prime factor of the analysis is

connected to the fact that a philosophy of the image is a philosophy of man, and, therefore, is linked to elements specific to him, pointing out the transformations taking place at the individual level through image and at the level of the image through social, cultural and historical changes the individual goes through. From this perspective, the logico-epistemological structures of the image are historically conditioned as the product of a society, a culture and the specificity of the environment they were shaped in. Exploring representation, and stereotypes in particular, the investigation of the image in the fourth chapter considers the concept of *meta-image* built by Hercules Millas, a concept that highlights the impact and influence of the image that identity believes otherness has of it, more precisely the image the self believes the *other* has about itself. Thus, the image of perception that *the other* has about *me* is essential in shaping representations of otherness and in defining stereotypes. Most often, the meta-image is activated when direct interaction is missing, as happens in the case of a strong negative feeling about a distant and unknown group.

The paper concludes that image is a permanent search for meaning, regardless whether the conversation is about self-identity, otherness, the world, or of real or imaginary objects. Through image, reality disappears in order to leave place for symbols and meanings. Image is the meeting of subject and object, since not only the object gains meaning through image, but also the subject through the way in which it is positioned in the frame of the representational process, as well as through the way in which it compares to the content of the object. This relationship can be explained by the fact that the subject, in order to exist, needs to relate consciously to itself, and this relationship requires an imagologic process. Self-awareness determines the shaping of an identity and self-image, which is the moment when the subject becomes object to itself. At this level, we are faced with the moment in which the subject comes out of itself in order to perceive and assign meaning, in order to delimit and differentiate itself from others, and at the same time identify elements that liken him or her to the group. The subject gains meaning and transforms into an individual, on condition that it is capable of perceiving itself, as Descartes explained. However, Cartesian rationality does not include in its conclusion, and allows us to deduce, the idea of constructing the subject through image, both through identity and self-image, as well as through the image of the other and that of objects, in general. Thus, as phenomenology claims that there is no object in itself, as it is instead constructed through the way in which conscience relates to it, we can also say that the subject exists to the extent that, through conscience, it relates to itself, or, more precisely, it has an image of its own existence and then the existence of the other. In the absence of representation, the subject does not have a meaning because it does not have self-awareness.

As it involves the idea of construction, image has not only a symbolic character, but also a dynamic one given by the process of communication. Although it is formed at the individual level, the image *lives* at the social level as the result of multiple processes and interactions and at the same time being generated by communication. All the forms of the image that we have discussed, from myths and symbols to social representations, assumptions, stereotypes and ethnic-stereotypes, live through communication and die in its absence. Communication is what, through message, sustains the transmission of representations and symbols, ensures the framework through the development of a certain grammar of the image and sustains representational systems through the interaction of individuals and the exchange of ideas and opinions. In light of this, communication is an act of image because it

hides within it certain metaphysics of representation. The message and the interaction are imagological acts, on which the life of the image depends and in whose power is the possibility to adapt to context since they are the ones that give it flexibility, enrich it or on the contrary eliminates elements.

Image begins with the archetype and continues with myths and symbols in order to reach logico-epistemological forms, which are the representation if we speak of the social or, if not, the assumption and the stereotype. Although it is the primary element of the image, the archetype does not contain a representation, as analysis and studies presented in this paper would suggest. The discussion of archetype is structured around myths and symbols, and therefore researchers in various fields consider it an image only due to the fact that its extensions, the structures that enliven it, are images. If the archetype is a fundamental question whose answer we find in myths and symbols, what can determine us to consider that it has the same nature as the answers shaped by a society, a culture, an era? The arguments developed by Eliade and Jung, although extremely valuable for the investigation of the archetype and its forms within history, seem to ignore the fact that it withdraws from history, its content remaining outside becoming. But what does the archetype contain if not an image? Why can it generate representations if it is not itself a representation? Carefully studying the myths on the same topic, but encountered in different cultures, we can observe that they contain within them dominant motifs, they refer to a fundamental category that does not contain the necessary attributes to be considered an image. Therefore, the archetype would be an ahistorical question, a primordial reason, received unconsciously by the individual by belonging to the species, a reason that, as we have seen, is objectified, comes alive through myths and symbols historically and socially determined. As we mentioned, the archetype is an incomplete syllogism. By appealing to a category, the archetype indicates the subject that is to be represented, without mentioning anything about the logical subject or the object of representation.

People's representations of the world wear the marks of what their ancestors imagined, as genetic inheritance hold developed contents and symbols invented by the species. These collectively unconscious materials put people in the situation of having representational landmarks, without being aware of them. Conversely, logico-epistemological structures, the image before history represents a pre-representational model, such as the archetype, which participate only in the time of the species, maintaining a certain sense beyond the individual's historical time. In that sense, the individual inherits the capacity of attaching symbols and meanings to the world and creates, depending on the era, different representations guiding him or her in the process of decoding the world.

The messages and visual images surrounding us today are not far from what we would consider to be the traditional myth, to which we refer as a story in a distant time, an invention of people about the world of gods or a fairytale about fantastic adventures. We should ask ourselves, however, why the myth of the happy family, the perfect beauty, the rescuing hero or of the earthly paradise, encountered today, are more authentic and realistic, less utopian or idyllic than the myth of Osiris, fertility myths in their various forms or the myth of the leader chosen by divinity. An analysis of myths needs to begin with a critical analysis of our images, of the way in which we see the world, of images and symbols that we encounter day to day. Only after the critical spirit will survey these can we judge the world of old civilizations and we will be able to label stories as fantasies and make-believe lacking any real support. However, after such an analysis, our critique will be transformed into an understanding of fundamental

feelings that are part of the human experience, of themes that are nothing but objectivity in the certain context of some archetype. The need for myths and symbols is the same; the only difference is in the fact that today they are hidden in the products and services of the contemporary world.

Social representations and stereotypes are dominated by a dynamic character, these logico-epistemological forms of the image being imagological constructions and truly paradoxical processes, since for as long as they limit knowledge through abusive generalizations and selections that split the object and reality, they offer important information on the object of representation, and particularly on its subject. Both social representations and stereotypes are evaluations that are most often realized without a process of direct and profound knowledge in the absence of an interaction with the represented object. In order to see to what extent the two image structures have utility with regards to knowledge, we must think of the role social representation plays in guiding and positioning the individual, while keeping in mind that, in the absence of representation, people could not give meaning to the world, could not have access to the domain of meanings, it would be impossible to communicate and interact within the group because, as we previously mentioned, representation plays an essential role in ensuring social cohesion and maintaining group identity. With regards to the stereotype, the problem of knowledge needs to be directed towards the subject, in the sense that the stereotype offers more information on it and less on the object, although the information is not a characterization of it, as in the case of the image's object, but instead evidence of the way the subject sees the world, the way to relate to otherness in a certain context. Going back, therefore, to the idea that the image is a permanent search for meaning, we can say that it does not necessarily describe the subject, but it does highlight the reasons and interests of it in the representational plane, its intentionality and the way it relates to the object, its position within the framework of the representation and communication dimension of the image. From this point of view, the analysis of social representation, and in particular of stereotypes and ethnic-stereotypes, have meaning first of all in order to understand the subject, at the knowledge level, the content of the stereotype offering information relevant only for analyzing the subject. Thus, from the perspective of the knowledge effort, we should not expect for the image to give complete or real information on the object, but to understand that this is a construction that, although it has an internal logic, does not function according to rational mechanisms, as Popper for example would expect. The logic of the image implies that the way in which its contents are structured can be deduced and explained, understood and even anticipated, but it will never be undertaking a rigorous scientific process, only interdisciplinary debates.

Another aspect that needs to be emphasized relating to the structures of images is that these can only be fully analyzed and understood through the identity/otherness relationship, since the image of the world and of objects, regardless of their nature, is in close connection with the individual's perception of the self, correlated with the elements that are part of his or her personality. The image is not an ontological category, except in the sense that among the elements constituting and determining it are some that are ontological, such as the archetype or the inborn assumptions of the individual of having an identity and relating to the other. In other words, we need to understand the phenomenology of the image, of identity and otherness with the most appropriate term being *construction undergoing becoming*, point at which we can start debating the problematic of *becoming unto another*, a complex process undergoing a permanent change in the relationship between the self and the other, an exchange that can be

seen as an inborn predisposition of the individual. Although the phenomenon appears predominantly in the case of direct interaction between the subject and the object, becoming unto another can be thought of as a mechanism for structuring the identity/otherness relationship and their content, if we keep in mind that we are talking about processes participating in the historical time of the individual. A contrarian and not a contradictory rapport is established between identity and otherness, unlike what would seem apparent in the work of Aristotle. However, the opposition the ancient philosopher talked about does not imply a subordinating relationship, in the sense that the other becomes the universal statement reuniting the self's individuality, enriching it with all the elements that remain foreign to any particular logic statement. This relationship is encountered particularly in the case of *otherness as a state the self cannot reach*, the dimensions through which the self projects on the other the desirable elements that remain remote, that it cannot reach but that are needed due to the meanings they hold. This is the situation in which, due to the image, the other gains attributes, most often imaginary ones, that resolve issues the self is confronted with, attributes that allow for the other to generously offer the dimension of symbols, to facilitate the access to the world of the sacred and of meanings, to open new worlds that would otherwise remain closed. We are faced with a particular stance of the other, otherness approaching, in this case, the functions of the myths for the archetype: the objectification of a primordial theme. This need of man to project on the other all that it cannot be, also what time cannot aid him into becoming is inscribed in our nature. This other is the deposit of dreams, a release from the shackles of our condition, it is stability in front of life and death, the unification with the universe. We are witnessing a pseudo becoming unto the other, since the dialectic of I/other is interrupted by the situation where the self constructs the other with the aid of the imaginary, and is not transformed by it.

Reality cannot be perceived only through the means of Plato's *copies*, those imperfect shadows that render the object with a severe lack of accuracy. The ideal world in which image renders the object with all of its characteristics and reveals its true nature remains exactly as Plato names it: an ideal. And, as with any ideal, this world will remain inaccessible. For this reason, though not exclusively, the image can be investigated only through an inter-disciplinary approach, its analysis requiring the identification and study of these structures, of the relationships established between them, of the dynamics and elements influencing it. The inter-disciplinary character of the investigation of the image can resolve, at least partially, the issues related to the complexity of this mental representation, can facilitate the understanding of the processes at its basis, with the advantage of instruments that do not remain relegated to a single field. In point of fact, an inter-disciplinary approach of the image allows for the possibility of *seeing* the image in its entirety and in all of the forms it manifests in, from a mental representation to a visual image. The epistemological fundamentals of the image would be an attempt to find a link between the theories of image, to identify its mechanisms and the possible legitimacy that governs it. The latter is mainly connected to the interdependent relationship between the structures of the image, regardless of whether we speak of the ahistorical, unconscious or the logical, or of identity and otherness. As interdependent structures, the dynamics of identity and otherness implies each content of identity is in fact an act of otherness and, respectively, each content of otherness is an act of identity, a mechanism we encounter in the case of representations and stereotypes as well, when the evaluation of the object's representation gives information about the subject. From this point of view, it is

probable that this is the only possible legitimacy of the image and its phenomenology, at least from the perspective of this paper.

Key words: image, epistemology of image, anhistorical image, stereotype, representation