

RE A M D

Expended Summary

The eye and the hand: the phenomenology of perception in the graphies of portrait and Self-portrait

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1 Introduction

This article reports on a pedagogical experience developed in the Arts subject at the Federal Institute of Santa Catarina – Campus Tubarão, with first-year classes of the high school integrated technical courses in Administration and Industrial Automation. Its objective is to analyze, from the perspective of complex thought (Morin, 2015), the phenomenology of perception (Merleau-Ponty, 2018) applied to portrait and self-portrait drawing practices, understood as a field of production of meaning (Hall, 2016) in the processes of graphic authorship.

Traditionally, the cognitive function has been attributed to the gaze and the operative function to the hand, as if the gesture were merely a translation of an image previously constituted in consciousness. This model reproduces polarizations that distance the subject from the world, theory from practice, thought from graphic activity. This division is problematized within the scope of the phenomenology of perception (Merleau-Ponty, 2018). The author proposes that sensory perception is configured as the subject's first point of contact with the world. Perception and its complex set of perceptual sensors influence consciousness, activating the subject's relationships with the awareness of reality. In this context, the Cartesian tradition is displaced, since there is no translation of the world solely through consciousness, but in the intertwining between the subject who thinks and the subject who feels.

The title of this article synthesizes the central hypothesis of this research: drawing is experiencing the interdependence between perception and gesture, between tradition and reinvention, between identity and symbolic construction. The article explores how the phenomenology of the gaze can constitute a methodological foundation for teaching portraiture and self-portraiture. The hypothesis argues that when the student's gaze is mobilized as a reflective and relational experience, beyond optical perception, a complex field of meanings is activated through the subjectivation and reinscription of the visual historical heritage (Hall, 2016). The research, of a descriptive-interpretative nature, articulates cartography as a methodological principle guiding the graphic path, understood as a process traversed by relationships and displacements.

2 Development

The phenomenology of perception thus introduces an understanding in which corporeality participates simultaneously in the field of the sensible and the perceptual field. The notion of a sentient body shifts the understanding of the body as a passive object subjected to external stimuli and conceives it as a living instance of perception. So that sensitivity implies insertion into the perceived world, the body that touches is touched. The body does not figure as an inert thing among things.

The eye-hand equation, which opens this debate, does not designate a sum of functions, but reversibility, since perceiving is an implicated act, a way of positioning oneself in experience. The theme in question is based on the assumption supported by Merleau-Ponty (2018) about the shift of the gaze from an optical function to ontological experience. In this sense, aesthetic education focuses on sensitivity and on the modes of organization of the visible, shifting the subject from an instrumental logic to a relational logic.

If portraiture and self-portraiture are understood only as exercises in mimesis, the practice of the sensible is reduced to technical skill. Stuart Hall (2016) contributes to this problematization by stating that representation is a discursive practice that produces meaning. Drawing, therefore, is not restricted to what is figurative, but involves regimes of visibility that traverse the gaze.

The epicenter of all problematization about representational practice, strained in the graphic representations of drawing, is anchored in the complex thought of Edgar Morin (2015), who understands that part and totality mutually imply each other. The singular gesture condenses historical determinations of the gaze, while these determinations retroact on the produced trace. The binomial eye and hand constitutes a relational system in which perception and gesture are not isolated instances. They configure interdependent dimensions of the same perceptual, graphic, and symbolic experience.

The language of portraiture and self-portraiture, in this sense, is configured as a central apparatus of symbolic production, in which the gaze assumes a crucial role. The problem is not limited to who appears in the image, but

involves how we look and how we are looked at by the set of images that reach us through historical narrative. The question of the transitivity of the gaze acquires philosophical density when displaced to the field of the phenomenology of perception. To ask whether the gaze is transitive implies problematizing the very structure of the relationship between subject and world. If the gaze were only transitive, it would presuppose a sovereign subject who directs his consciousness to an external object, keeping intact the separation between who sees and what is seen.

3 Conclusion

The phenomenology of perception demonstrates, however, that the gaze is simultaneously direction and exposure, action and reception, transitivity and reflexivity. The gaze does not traverse the world without being, at the same time, traversed by it; in this recursiveness (Morin, 2015), it is understood that to see is to be implicated. This is not a purely optical operation that starts from an autonomous subject towards a neutral object. The relationship between subject and object is not established by linear causality, but by circularity. The subject looks at the image, but the image, as a historical and symbolic condensation, acts back on the subject.

By referring to Hall (2016), it is understood that meaning does not pre-exist in things, nor does it reside in objects or people. It is produced within cultural systems that organize experience through shared codes. Hall (2016) shifts the notion of representation as a mirroring of reality and shows that meaning is articulated through culturally established correspondences.

It is claimed that, by shifting the students' gaze from recognition to implication, drawing begins to operate as a relational field of production of meaning, in which identity, image, and experience are dynamically constituted. In this way, the practice of drawing, understood as a critical and relational experience, shifts the representational paradigm from portrait and self-portrait to the shared production of meaning. More than just producing images, through the techniques of photomontage and contextualized drawing, this educational program enables one to learn to see in different ways: recognizing that all visuality is historically constituted; it is collectively organized and remains open to reinvention. It

is within this horizon that the eye and the hand converge as figures of the same aesthetic, sensitive, and political learning¹.

¹ English revision carried out by:
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