



# Specular Autonomy: An Interrelation between Self Image and Subjectivity in Situations of Psychological Distress

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## Abstract

This work presents the concept of Specular Autonomy<sup>1</sup> as a resource for understanding relationships that permeate the subjectivity of subjects with accentuated psychic conflicts. The analysis of phenomenological processes was made: the return to the subject's experience and its descriptive analysis at the levels of lived experiences, such as the ones proposed in the perspective of the human person's formation in Husserl's and Stein's phenomenology. The empirical study involved qualified listening and the application of the Significant Module<sup>ii</sup> for the Drawing of the Human Figure. In the vital space that comprises the materials, the proposer and the participants, were observed resignifications in the specular imagery, as well as it was verified the Specular Autonomy in the alterity relations through potentialized subjective resources.

**Keywords:** Specular Autonomy; Identity; Alterity; Mental Health

<sup>1</sup>Update of the self-image through artistic resources and qualified listening.

<sup>ii</sup>Wooden modules that offer body contour's image, allowing the participant to produce the body design through its outline. This bodily trace evokes an imagetic memory of the body which is apprehended by the subject's unconscious in a certain context of his life. In this sense, it becomes a significant material when it resonates the subject's primordial image.

## Introduction

*I moved into the world of images.  
It changed a soul to something else.  
Images take a soul out of people.  
(Fernando Diniz)<sup>1</sup>*

The image's functions are the same as in the course of history, also all properly human production's, which proposed to establish a relationship with the world. According to Arnheim [1], to considerate a subject's visual experience in front of an image, is much more than to considerate only his optical experience. It is to understand the fabric of broader relations between the subject and the image, which go far

beyond their relationship with aesthetics, mobilizing the perceptual ability, emotional ability, memory, affections and knowledge.

In this context, Didi-Huberman [2] presents the image as "full of folds"<sup>2</sup>, as a subtle and sophisticated organization of the subject's potentialities.

Within this approach, appreciating an image is much more than identifying something that you see or can see in reality, it is something that "opens itself" through that image. Such relationships work in a procedural way, between the visual system's properties and the subject's psychic reality.

1 He was an intern at the Psychiatric Hospital Pedro II, in Rio de Janeiro / Brazil, referring by the psychiatrist Nise da Silveira to the occupational therapy workshop created by her in 1949, becoming a recognized plastic artist.

2 The fold comes from the instability through successive connections, potentialities, peculiarities, relationships that unfold intensively. Was discovered by the psychiatrist Nise da Silveira in 1949, at the psychiatric hospital

And this relational aspect between the subject and the work of art shows itself intrinsic to the being human's condition, guiding a refinement of self-perception.

An epistemological conception that offers the image's interpretation as one of the plastic elements of thinking, recalling and recording the subject's mnemonic visual dimension and transforming it into meaningful experience, must take into account, according to Mahfoud [3], the corporeality and the experience's subject. Therefore, it is understood that the aesthetic foundations of artistic expression collaborate considerably in the re-elaboration of significant issues of corporeality<sup>3</sup>.

In this sense, it could be said that an "archeology of meanings"<sup>4</sup> is awakened by an image and, coming to meet this perspective, much is mobilized in the process of making a self-portrait. In the image's philosophical conception suggested by Didi-Huberman [2], what we see looks back at us. Involving a relational specular process that is established between the image and the subject. And it goes beyond the concept of mediation, with a logic's change of the use of the image as occurs in exclusively artistic activities.

In this way, the most "naïve" self-portrait opens up to an "archeology of the senses", activating multiple potentials through the generated self-image. Thus, the image of the self, in addition to its mimetic relationship with the real, conveys a sensory and coded knowledge about the subject. For Didi-Huberman [2], this latency of image is integrated in this knowledge, such as the aura, spacing inherent to the encounter between the "observer" and the eye; and the dialectical image, which can be understood as a moment of awakening, a memory that is immersed in a project of plastic conception, throws the subject out of forgotten memory. Didi-Huberman understands that there is an ethical proposal for the treatment of images. In this sense, Pereira [4] states that the image of the body sometimes goes through modes of arrangement that gives it a visuality uncommitted to ethics. Then, their analyzes produce implications that go beyond aesthetic investigations; that is, there is an ethical proposition for the treatment of images on the part of Didi-Huberman.

In this sense, Agamben [5] states:

Aesthetics therefore fulfills, in some way, the same task that tradition performed before its rupture: by tying new or

3 Corporeality or corporeal Mind is a philosophy's term to designate the way in which the brain recognizes and uses the body as a relational instrument with the world.

4 Relationship building method by which the proposer as well as the archaeologist must describe the existence of the experiences and or materials contained therein

broken threads in the past, it resolves that conflict between old and new without reconciliation of which man - the one who he lost his time and what was found again, and for those who are at stake, therefore, for an instant, his own past and his own future - he is unable to live.

### The Specular Autonomy

For an approach that supports both the singularity and the multiplicity that emerge from the subject, it is essential to think about the relational aspect between psychic experience and artistic productions.

In the phenomenology of Husserl and Edith Stein it is postulated the existence of dimensions that are integrated in a constitutive dialectic of the subject and privilege the concept of continuous development of that subject. Therefore, for these authors, the perception of an object is not limited to its visual contact, but when accessing that object, touching it and examining it, the subject's own powers are activated [3].

Thus, in the words of Ales Bello [6]: "the territory of experience, of which we are aware, is both the way to reap the otherness and the same confirmation of the presence of the same territory in the otherness, through the experience of empathy". The philosopher also affirms that it is necessary to work like the archaeologist who carries out an excavation operation, given the "effectiveness of phenomenology, precisely because it is an anti-speculative stance, which cannot be tested except in field research and in analysis of the phenomena that attract attention"(1998, p. 13).

In this study, the elaboration of a drawing related to self-image (using the signifier module) is not limited to the rational conception of oneself, not even to an expressive act. The image of the self calls into question the subject to a fundamental opening, which in this context, seeks Specular Autonomy. The relationships that emerge from the mentioned practice, through self-image and mnemonic graphics, and suspensive listening<sup>5</sup>, lead to an encounter with the singularity when realizing the corporeality, and implies an opening to a range of sensations [7] and the experiential narrative.

Thus, the apprehension of the nuclei of meaning contained in the discourse and in the subjects' productions occurs both by the word and by the act as a saying, as explained by Ansermet [8].

5 Suspensive listening consists of a relationship of two personal poles, distinct and necessary for an intersubjective production of an experience report: one pole is open and actively directed to the experience of others, another expressive of the experience itself, redoubled over the lived in order to reactivate it affectively.

With the use of the module, which produces an outline of the body silhouette based on the concept of evidence, as proposed by Joly [9], not only as a graphic trace, but the direct mark of a contact that acts through the imaginary memory that the participant has his body and, with this, the relationship of what is presented graphically in the subject's imaginary space is reproduced in the drawing's own lines, that is, in the symbolic space.

As soon as the outline with the module is made, the participant discards it, enlarging the image beyond the outline of the module, that is, from his memorial records. This conception arises from the concept of infinite space by Lygia Clark, presented by Fabbrini [10], in which the artist seeks to orient the line by displacing the natural margins of the painting, with the breaking of the frame itself.

In this dimension of otherness that, when producing an image previously conceived in the psychic and mnemonic plane, and which, through the module, expands to the graphic plane, in the same act the subject itself and the multiplicity of its relations with the world are opened in representation. According to Aguiar et al. [11,12], "[...] the need does not know its object of satisfaction, it completes its function when it discovers it by the other" (p. 228).

According to Stein, our ability or freedom is not so much in inventing new experiences, but in taking a position in relation to what happens to us [3]. With this, the concept of Specular Autonomy, in which the inscription of the subject's own visuality presupposes an intersubjective dialectic, leading to the resignification of the image itself, has subsidy in the phenomenological conception of the structure of the human person through the levels: of reaction in contact with reality; opening the impressions that the self-references bring; and understanding the process even in its potential for self-actualization of world understanding.

In a process that unfolds in the body and psychic dimensions at the same time, according to Campos [13], the body image and the 'I' are recreated simultaneously. However, the unity of the instances of the structure of the human person is not something achieved at the end of the process, but it is present in all its stages. Thus, according to the phenomenology of Edith Stein, the recognition of oneself closely related to what is beyond me occurs in a particular way in the interpersonal relationship and is completed in the experience. In this case, the experience proposed as a process that can lead to Specular Autonomy.

Therefore, the alterity assimilated by the therapeutic practice, intervenes in what is established in the psychic structure, in the self-image built by illegitimate conceptions of one self, which generates conflicts and suffering. In other

words, the rearrangement of psychic representations arising from the interactions experienced, may contribute to restore the specular autonomy of mental processes that always lead to self-recognition.

Based on a theoretical-epistemological basis, here briefly presented, Specular Autonomy presupposes a set of activities and activities that are contextualized in the concrete production dynamics of the material, based on a broad concept of "drawing the human figure". Such graphic records are performed with the aid of instruments (adapted to each context), which allows re-elaboration of subjective aspects of the subject who produces it, gradually refined by movements of otherness. Throughout the sessions, the "self-portrait" is being modeled and remodeled, in a work fueled by memories that are resignified by present perceptions and the construction of future expectations, and suspensive listening.

So, in line with what Agamben describes:

*Through the destruction of its transmissibility, it recovers negatively or in the past, making intransmissibility or value in the image of aesthetic beauty and, thus, opening to man in a space between past and future in which he can base his action and his knowledge [5].*

In the context of this study, people are mentioned who, upon arriving at a Psychosocial Care Center, find themselves in the midst of serious psychological conflicts. As argued by Amarante [14], a fragmented understanding of what comes to be a subject, supports such practices, compromising most of the time the understanding of an integral being. Silva [15] agrees that as the insufficiency of scientific technical action in terms of human suffering and medicalization is revealed, ... to welcome suffering, we emphasize the importance of considering clinical action as a way of making available to each other." (pp. 82-83).

Therefore, in the context of applied arts in contexts such as the one explored here, sufficient artistic actions are not shown as objective productions aimed only at the mastery of a technique, but they must, above all, consider images, thoughts, memories, fantasies, acts, speech, etc., which are not reduced to experiences of immediate consciousness, but which constitute the subject in his experience in the world and which is causing him suffering.

It is considered here that the relationships that permeate any action directed not only to those who attend psychosocial care centers or hospitals, or participate in any therapeutic process, but to anyone with whom it is intended to contribute in their development should lead to meeting their existential sense.

In this sense, the general objective of the work carried out was that, based on artistic practices centered on the imaginary exercise of oneself through the drawing of the body, which seeks to potentiate alternative modes of self-perception and reframing oneself, to lead the participants to a profound reflection on themselves, encouraging them to gradually let new meanings emerge from their identity imagery; and suspensive listening, in an intersubjective production that articulates the knowledge about the subject, thus contributes to minimize the symptoms of anxiety and psychological suffering.

### Final considerations

From the understanding that it should not be simply adequate or subject to a rigid proposal on a standardized behavior model, but in a certain sense and provisionally, the symptomatic movement of the participant, in order to listen to him qualified which articulation of this proposal. The portrait, an alternative expression that has potential, while the opportunity for continuous (re) meanings, shows itself as a privileged resource in human imagery work. After all, many visual traits in the world can display images, and in a way, it is possible to see a resemblance to reality. This identification with objects and objects, even with the change in reading and interpretation, shows the present in the portrait, be it a painting or a photograph. Therefore, a Representative art also comprises psychological satisfaction, implied in the fact of "rediscovering" a visual experience in an image, that is, an experience of affective memory [16,17].

According to Stein, by allocating himself, in his own way, or to cultural material with what quality, a person can act on his world by configuring it, and that touch reveals something spontaneous and creative; for every action that results from the will and the depths of the self bears its particular seal and signs all the work that results as a creative act.

A technique of body design associated, then, as memories as a subjective resource of extreme importance in the process in which the individual, in the execution of artistic practices oriented towards the exploration of personal images, intensely produces new images of himself and, thus, if there is a difference, as something new and more appreciated by the same that will, even a few, spring up the plasticity that it finds in its resilient and creative instance.

Through the experience conducted here it was possible to activate and enhance the exhibited and collective dimensions, focusing on the personal and relational development of the participants in this work, seeking to promote more harmonious interactions, according to the fundamentals of phenomenology.

It could also be said that this approach presents itself as a non-occupational therapy, in the sense of displacing in the subject what in its first structure it experienced in a way that did not activate openness as its potentialities as self-realization.

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