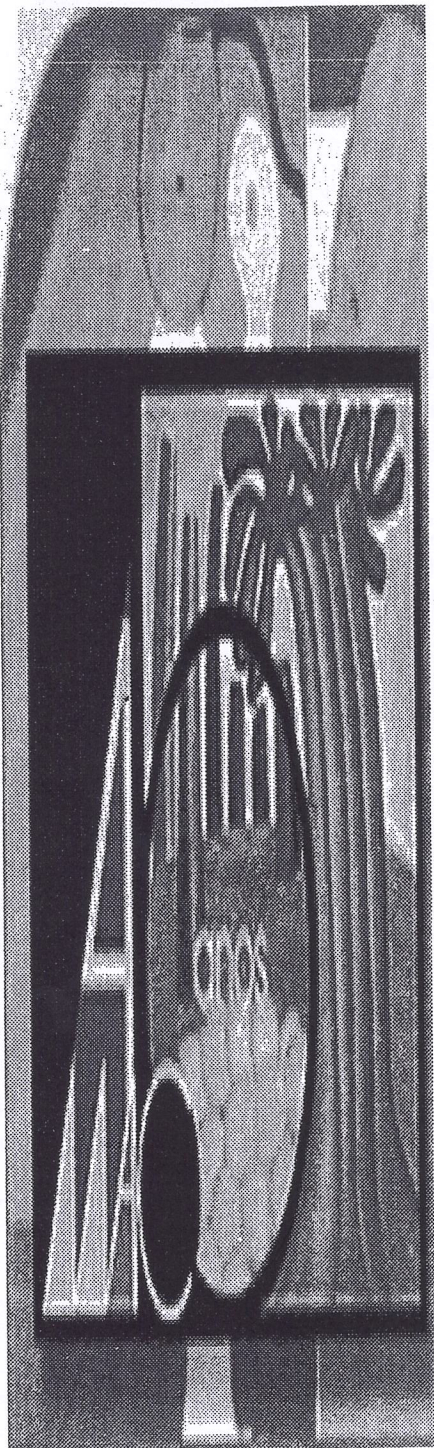


ARTIGO

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EXERCISES OF THE STARE AT MAC USP

Carmen S. G. Aranha

Resumo

O presente artigo propõe tornar visíveis certas movimentações do desvelar do conhecimento estético-visual discutidas pelo pensador francês Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Apresentamos um contínuo de desenhos do artista Geraldo de Barros, objetivando: 1) oferecer um modo de compreensão e interpretação do objeto estético e 2) uma proposta metodológica construída para essa finalidade.

Palavras-chave

Fenomenologia, percepção, visualidade.

Abstract

The aim of this article is to establish a visibility for aesthetic knowledge from some aspects of phenomenology of perception discussed by the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

One visual trajectory from the Brazilian artist Geraldo de Barros is presented in order to discuss and attempt to bring into light the visual phenomena of the works of art. A methodological proposal is systematized at the end of the discussion.

The result of this research, *A visual trajectory through MAC USP Collection*¹, was developed as visual materials to help teachers of elementary and secondary education, as well as to document 65 works of art from the MAC USP Collection.

Key words

Phenomenology, perception, stare

Presentation

The Museum of Contemporary Art of University of São Paulo offers ongoing exhibitions of its collection. The proximity to the curatorial processes enabled the development of the research *A visual trajectory through MAC USP Collection* (*Percursos Visuais no Acervo do MAC USP*). We created nine "visual sentences" from the exhibited works, aiming at proposing some aesthetic questions that, in the beginning, came from the visitors but, afterwards, became questions of the own research.

A visual trajectory through MAC USP Collection (*Percursos Visuais no Acervo do MAC USP*) is a research about the relevance of creating a literary description in front of the work of art.

In the course of this work we realize that the words to such mediation should also translate the *place of the stare*¹, that is, to translate the dimension of the knowledge that at first sees the world, and from that moment, interprets it with its own logic. Then, we tried to understand in what moment the human being starts to codify in his experiences the elements that are part of the construction of the artistic-visual expression² so that they approach us to the movements of the stare that allow the creation of correlations³ among these visual elements, correlations which form the base of this comprehension and interpretation.

Finally, we try to borrow from the stare all its dimension of *seeing the world* to write a text about the visual work of art.

With this study, we wanted to get nearer to what is seen, to investigate the course of this vision and to change them into words. So, we used some concepts by Merleau-Ponty⁴, in his discussions about the aesthetic

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knowledge. This appropriation helped us to organize the work and allowed us to choose 65 works of art from MAC USP collection, among 6.000 of them, in nine different thematic groups, some aesthetical phenomena visually perceived in the exhibitions.

From these observations, we formulated our hypothesis: *some movements, defined by Maurice Merleau-Ponty in relation to the unveiling of the aesthetic-visual knowledge can be transformed in a continuous show of works of art and can offer a mode of comprehension and interpretation to the aesthetic object, based on the methodological proposal elaborated for this aim.*

Some theoretical premises

The education of the stare is within the cultural panorama of a society, mainly when we reflect about the approaches between work of art and the public made by cultural agents that work in museums and similar spaces. In this case, it is necessary to formulate some questions:

1. If we consider the work of visual art as something produced by the artist that planned cultural senses in this aesthetic object, so what can we see?
2. How could we understand the cultural meanings "deposited" in an aesthetic object?
3. How could we interpret this comprehension with words?

The motivation of this research started by the verification that we wanted to get closer to a *creative stare*, that is, a stare that represents the world as a project of visualizations. So, we did not want to refer to the description of the work of art only as a strip of the history of art.

We searched, in the same way, the visual knowledge with the aesthetic object, approaching the intentions of the artistic producer and mainly of the reverberations that this intention creates in our stare and culture, movements that make us highlight certain objects among many seen.

In a forest, I felt many times that it was not me who looked at it. On some days, I felt that the trees looked and talked to me... I was there listening to them. I believe the painter should not go through the universe, the universe should go through him...⁵

5. Merleau-Ponty, M. O olho e o Espírito, 2004. (The Eye and the Spirit) p. 22

According to this point of view, the attempt to describe this stare could only happen by approximation as it is a phenomenon⁶ of human knowledge.

It finally means that having a covering of 'invisible is proper to the visible, that it makes present with a certain absence'⁷.

Life in the world

When reality offers us some visual spectacles, we suffer an intense reverberation, as if these experiences made us touch a known and unknown dimension at the same time. Which strip is the one we have? Are they collages of impressions and visual signs?

It seems to be an *order* that breaks apart with its tradition because it does not order. This order let itself be seen in a network of meanings, with the objects of the world. It is among them that it offers itself to any stare, but it is inhibited and recoiled when it receives orders from outside, opposing to and rejecting any other positive description.

In adults, the common reality is the human reality and when manufactured objects from the daily life with its human marks are put in different context such as in nature - a glove on the green grass - these objects are contemplated as things in itself for the first time, or when events in the street - people, an accident - are seen through the window that silence its sounds and brought to the condition of pure spectacle, invested with a kind of eternity, we have the impression of having access to another world, to a 'surreality', because the involvement that links us to human world is broken for the first time, because nature 'in itself allows to be shown'⁸.

The study Maurice Merleau-Ponty develops in his texts *The Structure of Behavior*⁹, *Phenomenology of Perception*¹⁰ and *The Eye and the Spirit*¹¹ constitutes the theoretical axis that gave foundation and form to the vestiges of visual knowledge which are realized.

Next, we mention¹² the concepts that would allow the visibility of structural aspects of aesthetic-visual phenomena¹³.

6. Phenomenon: what appears or manifest itself to the consciousness. Neves, M. C. D. & Carvalho, W. L. P. O mecanismo da física na psicologia e a perspectiva fenomenológica, 1990. p. 82. [The mechanism of physics in psychology and the phenomenological perspective].
7. Merleau-Ponty, M., 2004. Op.Cit. Pp. 18-19.
8. Idem. The Structure of Behavior, 1963. p. 167.
9. Merleau-Ponty, M. The Structure of Behavior, 1963.
10. Idem. Phenomenology of Perception, 1978.
11. Idem. O olho e o Espírito, 2004. (The Eye and the Spirit).
12. Idem. In: The Structure of Behavior, 1963.
13. The structure of the phenomenon is known by the eidetic reduction, that is, by the approximation of the *form of the essence of the phenomenon*.

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Phenomenological perception

In the "Human Order", chapter from *The Structure of Behavior*, Merleau-Ponty introduces the idea that *phenomenological perception* is an act of human consciousness¹⁴ that is directed to the senses of the dialectic being-world¹⁵ when distinguishing, e.g., a gesture from a sum of movements.

The phenomenon of life appears in the moment in which the extension of a body by the disposition of its movements and by the allusion each one makes to the others turns toward itself and starts to express something to manifest an interior being exteriorized¹⁶.

The "meaning of gesture" is realized because we direct ourselves to the human body and to its several movements in a field of correlations.

I do not have in my possession the laws of the world's construction as if it were an object; it is a field for me to develop all my thoughts and perceptions. The truth does not 'inhabit' only the "interior men", or more precisely, there is not an interior man; the man is in the world and only in the world he knows himself¹⁷.

According to Merleau-Ponty, this dialectic was inaugurated at the moment the being could project his culture in the creation of useful objects bringing, in this way, a manifestation of an "interior" and "exterior", that is, projecting a new "way" in direction to the world.¹⁸

What is mentioned here is that we will not be directing ourselves to the objects or to their pure qualities anymore¹⁹ – heat, cold, white and black – but to realities experienced with these objects or qualities²⁰.

Perception is the dialectical living moment of a concrete subject.²¹

Taking the experiences we live to ourselves as comprehensions and interpretations of our senses is what we are defining as "realizing the world".

14. The notion of consciousness as knowledge of himself must be substituted by the notion of *life of consciousness*, where some structures of action and knowledge in which the consciousness is engaged make its many acts that go over the explicit knowledge of himself.

15. Merleau-Ponty, M. *The structure of Behavior*, 1963. Op. Cit. Pp. 160-184.

16. Idem, *Ibidem*.

17. Idem. *Phenomenology of Perception*, 1978. Op. Cit. Pp. x-xi

18. Idem. *The structure of Behavior*, 1963. P. 162.

19. Idem. *Ibidem*.

20. The concept of "correlation" reappears in this sentence of the philosopher, as an comprehension-interpretation of meaning is made by the existential dialectic "being-in-the-world-as-the-object-(and/or subject)-in-the-experience-lived".

21. Merleau-Ponty, M. *The Structure of Behavior*, 1963. Op. Cit. p. 166.

The field of nascent perception is not given to the being; it is presented as a term immanent in the intentional consciousness... In this moment, the consciousness is nothing more than the dialectics of the environment-action of the subject. Each manoeuvre made by the being changes the profile of the camp and establishes new lines of force in which the action, by its turn, is developed and is completed again, changing the phenomenological camp²².

Finishing the chapter about "Human Order", Merleau-Ponty asserts that the "descriptive dimension of the growing perception requires a reformulation of the notion of consciousness" that will be presented through reflections about the text "The Cogitation"²³.

Phenomenological Cogitation

In the reflections about the *cogitation*, Merleau-Ponty says his life was constantly directed to transcendental things.

I am thinking about the Cartesian *cogitation* to end this work, feeling the cold temperature of the paper on my hand, realizing the trees of the boulevard through the window. My life is constantly directed to transcendental things²⁴.

The experience of transcendental things is a project that, according to the philosopher, is born in the being. It is discovered inside him and its main sense is to affirm the existence of a nature, or essence, which offers itself in the objects of the world, and nothing is known about it.

When I say things are transcendental, it means I do not own them, I do not circumscribe them; they are transcendent as I ignore what they are and, blindly, I affirm their existences²⁵.

When we glance at nature or at the essence of the object in front of us, we get involved in a thought about seeing and about what is being seen. This intentional act calls our attention to a primordial knowledge, where things exist for us to arrange them around us and extract from them their essential sense, their own *core*²⁶.

22. Idem. Pp. 168-9.

23. MERLEAU-PONTY, M. *Phenomenology of Perception*, 1978. Op. Cit. Pp. 369-409.

24. Idem. P. 369.

25. Idem. *Ibidem*.

26. Idem. Pp. 369-370.

The fact of being able to recognize a certain nature of an existence in front of us is attributed to our contact with the thing, that arouses an essential knowledge, that is, that arouses our perceptions that are partial manifestations of a knowledge coexistent with the world²⁷.

To *Cogitate* is an act of comprehension-interpretation of the meanings of the world, of its structures or of spontaneous organizations from its parts. When we direct ourselves to transcendental objects we are not having acts of introspection, intuitive acts or making any irrational or hidden conversion²⁸.

In the root of all our experiences and reflections we find a being that immediately recognizes itself, because it is by knowing ourselves and the other things that we are able to know our own existence, not by the observation of a fact, neither by the interference of any idea about us, but by the direct contact with the world²⁹.

Current body

Realizing and cogitating are operations that approach us to the essence of experience. These conscious acts are developed in the *operating* and *current body*.

A human body is there, between what it sees and is seen, between what it touches and is touched, between an eye and the other, between the hand and the hand, when an accidental situation makes this human being feel things around it differently³⁰, in a way that he or she has never felt before.

According to Merleau-Ponty this body, when interlacing the movements of the sight with its own movements in the world and with the other beings, reveals the phenomenological knowledge from this tangle of movements³¹. And this is an experience peculiar of the creative being because its vision can happen only among the things of the world in order to offer an artistic vision to the profane³². *Seeing among things* is a project of the *phenomenological cogitation* that structures the vision of the real, according to Merleau-Ponty.

27. Idem. P. 370.

28. Idem. P. 374.

29. Idem. Pp. 371-372.

30. Merleau-Ponty, M. O olho e o espírito, 2004. Op. Cit. P. 18.

31. Martins, J& Bicudo, M.A.V. A pesquisa qualitativa em Psicologia. Fundamentos e Recursos Básicos, 1989.

32. Merleau-Ponty, M. O olho e o espírito, 2004. Op. Cit. P. 19.

The vision of the painter is not a sight over the exterior, a simple physical – optical relation with the world. The world is not in front of him just through representation: the painter is born by its concentration and by the arrival of the visible inside it; and finally, the painting does not refer to anything among the empiric things except under the condition of being first ‘self figurative’; it is not an spectacle of something apart from being an ‘spectacle of nothing’, peeling the ‘skin from things’ to show how things become things and the world becomes world³³.

... and so it offers the genesis of the aesthetic-visual knowledge.

An instrument that moves by itself, means that it invents its own finalities, the eye is something that was touched by a certain impact of the world which makes it visible by the traces of the hand. Whatever the civilization in which it is born, whatever the beliefs, the reasons, the thoughts, the ceremonies by which it is surrounded and even when it seems to speak to another, from Lascaux on, figurative, pure or impure, speak or not to the painting never celebrates other enigma unless the one of visibility³⁴.

Showing the basis of phenomenology of perception, Merleau-Ponty approaches us to the *phenomenological cogitate*, that is, to the acts of knowledge that are revealed in the moment of the experience lived by the subject.

The movements of *phenomenological cogitation* approach us to a *pre-scientific world, inhabited by phenomena* that are woven in the basis of the *perceptive dimension* of the consciousness. The *act of seeing that occurs in the reflexive body* evokes a comprehension and an interpretation of these phenomena, but in a visual way. This way we build the visible world. This construction is, at first, a visual codification of the being that knows it will embrace the possibility of correlating what was seen.

To sum up, the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty shows us that knowing the world visually is an operation of the stare and of the movements the being makes in the live world.

With these ideas in mind, we created *A visual trajectory through MAC USP Collection* or *Percursos Visuais no Acervo do MAC USP*³⁵ aiming at making visible, through nine exercises, a process of aesthetic creation in which the stare is the “propulsive spring”.

We delineated a methodological board to guide the choice of the works of art aiming at situating interrogated aesthetic-visible phenomena.

33. Idem. p. 37.

34. Idem. Ibidem. Pp. 19-20.

35. <http://www.macvirtual.usp.br/mac/templates/projetos/percursos/percursos.asp>

In the present work, after the methodological proposal, we situated visually an aesthetic phenomenon through Geraldo de Barros's paintings.

Methodological Board

Though this be madness, yet there is method in it -
Will you walk out of the air, my lord?

Polonius

1ST MOVEMENT

Heating the reflexive body and the act of seeing with visual signs and aesthetic senses.

Visual presentation of formal elements of the artistic language.

Visual presentation of movements of formal elements.

Visual presentation of the first correlations among formal elements.

To see:

- Line and tensions among shapes
- Light on the line and shape
- Line as "shape in action" of the space
- Spaces
- Spatialities
- Materials, techniques and process of production
- Materialities

2ND MOVEMENT

Placing the phenomenological movement in the visual knowledge

View of movements and correlations between formal elements of artistic language.

To see/ to research/ to draw:

- There are tensions among the elements "line, light and space"
- Visual correlations among focused elements
- Line,s light and space are placed as conductors strands of the visualities
- Visual interrogations and thematizations
- History of art

3RD MOVEMENT

Correlating visual signs of the world and senses of experiences with the visual interrogation

- To see/ to research:
- Visual continuity, thematization and history of art
- To project: new choices of works

4TH MOVEMENT

Aesthetic phenomenon approach

To see/ to research/ to express:

- "Writing" the visible: visible readings

Exercises of the stare: Geraldo de Barros³⁶

Aesthetic phenomenon placed: "The drawing structuring the space of the painting"

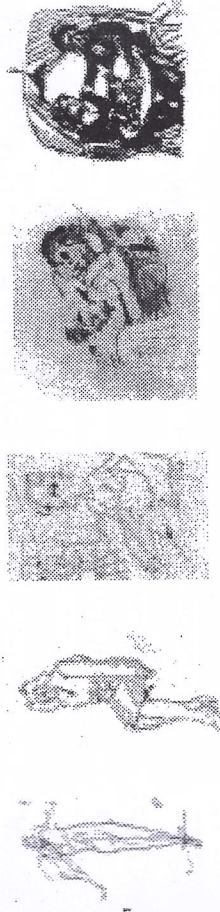


Fig. 1

Fig. 2

Fig. 3

Fig. 4

Fig. 5

Figure 1 – Without title, 1947, Chinese ink on paper, 32,3 x 18,5 cm

This drawing made by Geraldo de Barros offers fast gestures of many movements, lines of different densities and hues that also sketch the expressivity of the human figure. The theme is developed through a central axis that evolves over the trunk, marking an angle in the figure's feet that is cut by a horizontal line, suggesting the only depth of this drawing. The diagonals that come from the tangle of lines, in the part of the face, giving movement to the arms, emphasize the vertical

³⁶. Idem. Ibidem.

equilibrium of the figure, and, at the same time, they create the figure's visual instability.

Figure 2 – *Without title*, 1947, Chinese ink on paper, 27,8 x 21,0 cm

Organic and continuous lines are detached from the previous drawing and join themselves to form a female figure, in more concise traces, with shorter and more rhythmic strokes. Movements and variations of its densities and hues modify the nature of the drawing. The beginning of a movement is suggested in the previous picture. Now, we have the repose. The leaned arm and the angle of her hip with her legs situate the female figure and introduce a new sense of space. The previous picture shows only the space in which it is situated. This drawing involves the figure in a wider sense of space.

Figure 3 – *Without title*, 1948, Chinese ink on paper, 27,0 x 20,6 cm

The same theme, female figure, finds here the same repose. A more concise way of treating lines, with new discontinuities, dots that mark the pauses of the Chinese ink on the paper, and the lack of preoccupation with delineating proportions; the atrophied right arm, the left arm leant on the armchair; the face in profile, with three eyes, two noses and two mouths; finally, all the elements in the picture present the figure in a room, and the space created around the previous figure becomes a scheme: with receding lines, the artist anticipates the figure to the foreground. Classical depth reviewed. However, the lines lose density and light; they gain movement and variations and suggest a new style: cubist traces.

Figure 4 – *Without title*, 1948, Chinese ink and graffiti on paper, 15,3 x 18,0cm.

The figures are dissolved in the space through new materials: the Chinese ink is dissolved in the graffiti. The construction of depth is again a suggestion of the space. From the previous elements, we find many vestiges: lines of density, various lights and movements; dots are transformed into small pastas; their continuities and the organic whole are also transformed.

There is a nervous tension on the traces, previously not seen. Lines interrupt themselves abruptly, they become other traces, and then dilute and turn into smoke.

The depth of the drawing changes: involved in the new luminosity, defined by other links, the figures present a diagonal spatiality.

Figure 5 – *Without title*, 1947, Chinese ink without paper, 20,5 x 21,6 cm. The scene reminds us of the previous drawing. Two people are sitting at the table again. The spaces created here appear as a synthesis of this visual trajectory: the empty spaces, the shapes of the figure's frames, the black hues, the dense lines; the ellipse of the table defines the first, the second and the third levels.

This depth does not repeat the already established and expressed correlations. The Chinese ink, the material of this drawing, is opposed to the white basis, and, without any hues of gray, it introduces the vibration of two tones. Some expansions and geometrical trends of contrasting forms suggest the future constructive language of Geraldo de Barros.

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