



An essay on iconographic analysis: relations between the theory of art and the archaeological method

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ABSTRACT. In this paper, we investigate the theory of art that subsidizes Michel Foucault's work and we analyze some aesthetic and historical aspects of anatomical disproportions in European painting. From the essay *The words and images* of Michel Foucault, it is possible to visualize the analytical method of Erwin Panofsky. The influence of the art historian on the French philosopher is evident in the phase of 'iconological interpretation' proposed by Panofsky, in which the cultural symptomatology finds its notorious place. This symptomatology is searched in the analysis we conducted on three European artists: Peter Paul Rubens, Sandro Botticelli and Jean-Auguste Dominique Ingres.

Keywords: Michel Foucault, Erwin Panofsky, discourse, painting, body.

Um ensaio de análise iconográfica: laços entre a teoria da arte e o método arqueológico

RESUMO. Neste artigo, investigamos a teoria da arte que subsidia o pensamento de Michel Foucault e analisamos aspectos estéticos e históricos de desproporções anatômicas na pintura europeia. A partir do ensaio *As palavras e as imagens*, de Foucault, é possível visualizar o método analítico de Erwin Panofsky. A influência do historiador da arte sobre o filósofo francês evidencia-se na fase de 'interpretação iconológica' proposta por Panofsky, em que a sintomatologia cultural encontra lugar de destaque. Essa sintomatologia é buscada nas análises que realizamos de três artistas da Europa: Peter Paul Rubens, Sandro Botticelli e Jean-Auguste Dominique Ingres.

Palavras-chave: Michel Foucault, Erwin Panofsky, discurso, pintura, corpo.

Introduction

Michel Foucault addressed frequently, in his studies, the visual arts. They served, either as exemplifications of his concepts, or as places of visibility from which it was possible the formulation of theoretical paradigms. In the case of the resumption of the *Ship of fools*, of Jérôme Bosch, Foucault (1978) discusses about the constitution of the discourses on the madness in the Middle Ages. In the case of the studies on Édouard Manet, Foucault (2004) analyzes the painting *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* as a discursive event anchored in the practices of representation circulating in that moment – at the end of the 19th century in France – according to the artistic movements that would result in the impressionist school. By addressing the visual arts, Foucault proceeded according to his archaeological method¹ and according to methods already established in the field of history and theory of arts: those of Erwin Panofsky.

Between Foucault (2000) and Panofsky (2009), some dialogues were traced with regard to the plastic materiality of the statements. From them, we intend to analyze some aesthetic aspects of the body deformities in art. It is about visualizing, from the categories and methodologies proposed by Panofsky, the discursive dimension of a classical image. For this purpose, this research was divided into two parts: first, we investigated the reading of Panofsky taken by Foucault, seeking, in the text *The words and images*, of Foucault (2000), the references to the essays present in the *Meaning in the visual arts*, of Panofsky (2009), explaining the method proposed by this latter; and then we discussed the relationship between the artistic beauty built from the anatomical disproportions observed in European paintings.

The art theory that subsidizes the Foucauldian thinking

Foucault has as main reference for the study of visual arts the Erwin Panofsky's work, whose studies allow thinking the discursive dimension of the

¹ This hypothesis was investigated during our doctoral thesis, entitled *Discurso e imagem: transformação dos cânones visuais nas mídias digitais* (MAZZOLA, 2014).

painting, that is, a degree of analysis that can lead to concepts theorized in *The Archaeology of knowledge* or to represent them, as 'discursive formation', 'discursive practice', 'event', 'file', among others.

*The words and images*², of Foucault (2000), makes direct reference to some essays³ of Panofsky (2009). Foucault proposes to say what he found of new in these texts, dealing with two examples: the analysis of the relationships between discourse and visible, and the analysis of the representative function of the painting in the *Essais d'iconologie*. The first example leads to the fruitful issue between word and image, distinct materiality with complex bonds of sense. On the hand, the discourse-image relationship is of other nature, once that the 'discourse' leads to multiple theoretical definitions, depending on the perspective by which we start. We believe that by speaking of discourse, Foucault leads to his own archaeological positioning. This text about Panofsky is from 1967, moment in which Foucault is inserted in the reflections that will take shape in *The archaeology of knowledge*, from 1969. This moment was also the peak of the French structuralism, which highlighted the linguistic discipline:

We are convinced, 'we know' that everything speaks in a culture: the language structures give shape to the order of things. [...] analyzing a capital, an illuminated manuscript was to manifest what 'this would mean': restore the discourse wherever, speaking directly, it was deprived of its words (FOUCAULT, 2000, p. 78-79, author's underlinde).

The interest of Foucault in the art historian lies in the fact that Panofsky raises the privilege of the discourse,

[...] not to claim the autonomy of the plastic universe, but to describe the complexity of its relationships: intertwining, isomorphism, transformation, translation, in short, all this section of the visible and utterable that characterizes a culture in a moment of its history (FOUCAULT, 2000, p. 79, author's underlinde).

The relationships between word and image in the arts are explored as follows: while a same literary source can originate several plastic motifs (Mythology tells us about the abduction of Europe and the visual arts can represent it violently or not;

or then the bible tells us about Christ and the visual arts give him a certain semblance, etc.), a same plastic motif can symbolize different values and themes (the naked woman that is Vice in the Middle Ages and Love in the Renaissance). To Foucault (2000 p.79), "[...] the discourse and shape move toward each other". We can therefore say that the painting and literature, in certain moments of the art history, are characterized by a movement of attraction and repulsion, ruled under complex relationships. They do not become, for this reason, neither very independent, nor very dependent. With this merge, they maintain their individualities. Neither the art, as a form, hides a saying:

In what men do, everything is not, after all, a decipherable noise. Discourse and figure have each one, their way of being, but they maintain complex and shuffled relationships with each other. It is all about to describe their mutual functioning (FOUCAULT, 2000, p. 80).

In a second moment of *The words and images*, Foucault leads to the paradigm of the representation⁴ that dominated the western painting until the end of the 19th century. From Gombrich (2001, p. 570, our translation, emphasis added), we can understand this paradigm according to degrees of figuration: "We emphasized frequently that the term 'abstract' is not very fortunate, and we proposed to replace it by non-figurative"⁵. The abstract paintings, for instance, are non-figurative, that is, do not maintain necessarily a relationship with objects, men, animals, things or gods, as they were represented in predecessor schools. Some names of the non-figurative paradigm are Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944) and Piet Mondrian (1872-1944).

To Foucault, four rules manipulate the representation present in a painting of the 15th century: a) style; b) convention; c) typology; d) symptomatology. From the articulation of these four elements, emerges a work of art. "The representation is neither external nor indifferent to the form. It is linked to the form by a functioning that can be described [...]" (FOUCAULT, 2000, p. 80).

The relationships between discourse and image, especially when dealing with visual materiality according to the own combinations, involve many theoretical risks. Foucault (2000, p. 80) affirms: "Multiple problems are raised – and very difficult to solve when you want to exceed the limits of language". From Panofsky (2009), we will

² Original reference in French language: Foucault (1967).

³ The book *Meaning in the visual arts* is a collection of essays of Panofsky. We refer specifically to the Introduction and the first chapter of this book, because in both is found the methodology developed by Panofsky, theme of the reflections of Foucault. The introduction was published with the same title in *The meaning of the Humanities* (GREENE, 1940). The first chapter was published as "Introductory" in *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1939, p. 3-31 (PANOFSKY, 2009).

⁴ We do not ignore the reflections of Foucault himself on the *epistémé* of the representation present in *Words and things*.

⁵ On a souvent fait remarquer que le terme 'abstrait' n'est pas très heureux et on a proposé d'y substituer 'non-figuratif' (GOMBRICH, 2001, p. 570).

understand minimally the forms to classify the visual elements of a painting, which were taken over by Foucault (2000) in the treatment of the discursive dimension of images. Initially, the field of art history composes the field of human sciences. The art history is an humanistic discipline:

Historically, the word *humanitas* has two meanings clearly distinguishable, the first comes from the contrast between the man and what is less than him; the second, between the man and what is more than him. In the first case, *humanitas* means a value, in the second, a limitation (PANOFISKY, 2009, p. 20).

In the first case, the concept of 'humanity' leads to the quality that differentiates men from animals; in the second case, particularly in the Middle Ages, the concept leads to something contrary to 'divinity'.

From this ambivalent conception of *humanitas*, humanism was born. From the humanistic prism, it is inevitable to distinguish, within the field of the creation, the spheres of the nature and culture, "[...] and to define the first with reference to the last, that is, nature as the totality of the world accessible to the senses, except 'the records left by the man'" (PANOFISKY, 2009, p. 23, autor's underline). The humanist, thus, will study these records, because they have the quality to emerge from the flow of time. The art history is rises from this need of interpreting the records, symbolic traces that help to understand the man himself.

Essentially, humanities and science⁶ are in a relationship of complementarity, and not of opposition. According to Panofsky (2009, p. 24-25),

[...] while the science tries to transform the chaotic variety of the natural phenomena into to what we would call cosmos of nature, the humanities try to transform the chaotic variety of the human records into to what we would call cosmos of culture.

The art historian is a humanist whose primary material consists of the records received in the form of work of art. To Panofsky (2009, p. 30), "[...] the work of art is not always created with the sole purpose of being appreciated, or, using a more academic expression, of being aesthetically experienced." In order to experience aesthetically the full object (whether natural or man-made), it is necessary not to relate it, intellectually or emotionally, to nothing out of the object itself. Most of the objects that require aesthetic experience are

works of art. Some of them, even conceived without the purpose of appreciation, require appreciation. The work of art, under certain perspective of approach – whether literature, painting, sculpture, architecture or music –, unfolds into form and content. These two dimensions, however, are learnt simultaneously at the time of the appreciation (aesthetic experimentation). How do we decode, therefore, the form⁷ of a work of art? How do we separate the simultaneity of visual elements that, together, mean an image? Panofsky (2009, p. 36) lists three components:

Whoever confronts a work of art, whether aesthetically recreating it, or rationally investigating it, is affected by its three components: materialized form, idea (i.e., theme, in the visual arts) and content. [...] In the aesthetic experience it is performed the unity of these three elements, and all the three go into, in what we call, aesthetic joy of art.

The form, theme and content, together, contribute for the meaning of the visual art. One of the elements of form, and perhaps the main of them, is the trace, which transforms the chaos of the forms into the perceptible cosmos, recognizable and interpretable. Perhaps the trace is one of the basic primary category for the visual arts.

By distinguishing between the use of line as 'contour' and, quoting Balzac, the use of line as 'le moyen par lequel l'homme se rend compte de l'effet de la lumière sur les objets', we refer to the same problem, although giving special attention to another: 'line *versus* areas of color'. If we reflect on the issue, we will see that there is a limited number of these problems [...] [that] ultimately can be derive from a basic antithesis: differentiation *versus* continuity. (PANOFISKY, 2009, p. 41, emphasis added).

Differentiation, on one side, because contrasts light and dark, smooth and rough, exterior and interior. Continuity, on the other, because forms have a limited extent by the trace – the cosmos of the forms. Fundamentally, these reflections demonstrate how the art historian is positioned before the artistic objects and, how the historian characterizes, describes, diagnoses, and interprets them. It is in this movement that the art history and art theory complement each other. To Panofsky (2009), there are three stages of apprehension of the visual art, according to which we can visualize a method:

⁶ Panofsky (2009, p. 24) contrasts the roles of humanist and scientist, insofar as "[...] the scientist works with human records, mainly with the works of its predecessors. However, the scientist treats them not as something to be investigated, but as something that helps in the investigation. In other words, the scientist is interested by the records, not insofar as they emerge from the flow of time, but insofar as they are absorbed by it". To Panofsky (2009), the 'science' represents the exact and biological sciences – 'natural', while the humanities deal with the 'culture'.

⁷ "[...] the element 'form' is present in every object without exception [...]. If I write to a friend, inviting him to dinner, my letter is, firstly a communication. However, the closer I move the emphasis to the form of my writing, the more my writing will become a work of calligraphy; and the more I emphasize the form of my language [...] the more the letter will be converted in a work of literature or poetry". (PANOFISKY, 2009, p. 32).

- i. pre-iconographic description;
- ii. iconographic analysis;
- iii. iconological interpretation.

To understand these three stages, it is necessary to differentiate iconography and iconology. According to Panofsky (2009, p. 47),

[...] iconography is the branch of the art history that deals with the theme or message [secondary or conventional themes] of the works of art in opposition to their forms [primary or natural themes].

These themes or messages have three levels:

I. Primary or natural theme, subdivided into 'formal' or 'expressional'. It is apprehended by the identification of the pure forms, that is: certain settings of lines and colors, or certain pieces of bronze or stone with peculiar forms, as representatives of natural objects such as human beings, animals, plants, houses, tools and so on; by the identification of its mutual relationships as events; and by the perception of some expressional qualities, as the sorry character of a pose or gesture, or the homely and peaceful atmosphere of an interior. The world of the pure forms thus recognized as holders of primary or natural meanings can be referred to as world of artistic motifs. An enumeration of these motifs would constitute a pre-iconographic description of a work of art.

II. Secondary or conventional theme: is apprehended by the perception that a male figure with a knife represents St. Bartholomew, a female figure with a peach in the hand is the personification of veracity, a group of figures seated at a dining table in a given disposal and pose, represents the *Last Supper*, or that two figures fighting each other, in a given position, represents the Struggle between Virtue and Vice. Thus, we connect the artistic motifs and the combinations of artistic motifs (compositions) with subjects and concepts. Motifs recognized as holders of a secondary or conventional meaning can be referred to as images, since combinations of images are what the ancient theorists of art call *invenzioni*; we usually call them stories and allegories. The identification of such images, stories and allegories is the domain of what is usually known as 'iconography'⁸.

III. Intrinsic meaning or content: is apprehended by determining those underlying principles that reveal the basic attitude of a nation, of a period, social class,

religious or philosophical belief – qualified by a personality and condensed in a work. A truly exhaustive interpretation of the intrinsic meaning or content could even to show us techniques characteristic to a certain country, period or artist, for instance, the preference of Michelangelo for stone sculpture, instead of bronze, or the peculiar use of shades in his drawings, are symptomatic of a same basic attitude that is discernible in all the other specific qualities of his style (PANOFSKY, 2009, p. 50-52, emphasis added).

Add to this the following assertion:

While we limit ourselves to affirm that, the famous fresco of Leonardo da Vinci shows a group of thirteen men around a dining table and that this group of men represents the Last Supper, we treat the work of art as such, and interpret its compositional and iconographic characteristics as qualifications and properties inherent to it. However, when we try to understand it as a document of the personality of Leonardo, or of the civilization of the High Italian renaissance, or of a particular religious attitude, we treat the work of art as a symptom of something else that is expressed in an uncountable variety of other symptoms and we interpret its compositional and iconographic characteristics as more particularized evidence of this 'something else'. The discovery and interpretation of these symbolic values (that, many times, are unknown by the own artist and can, even, differ emphatically from what he consciously tried to express) is the object of what could be termed the 'iconology' in opposition to 'iconography' (PANOFSKY, 2009, p. 52-53, emphasis added).

The stage (iii) of iconological interpretation requires the historical element to be made. This is when (apprehension of the work of art) we believe being possible to trace a dialogue with the discourse analysis through the historic component that governs the symptomatology (FOUCAULT, 2000) represented in the set of works of art and discursive practices of a same period. It is in the stage of iconological interpretation that the art historian goes beyond the limits of the picture frame to understand it, seeking the production conditions of the paintings, the socio-historical factors that enabled the existence of such work, the individuals involved, etc.

Therefore, the stage in which we can establish a dialogue between art theory and discursive theory is the iconological interpretation, without, however, ignoring the contribution of the previous stages, namely, pre-iconographic description and iconographic analysis.

The suffix 'graphy' comes from the Greek verb *graphein*, 'write'; implies a method of proceeding

⁸ "In fact, by speaking on the 'theme in opposition to the form', we are referring, mainly, to the sphere of the secondary or conventional themes, that is, to the world of the specific subjects or concepts manifested in images, stories and allegories, in opposition to the field of primary or natural themes manifested in the artistic motifs. The 'Formal analysis', according to Wölfflin, is an analysis of the motifs and combinations of motifs (compositions), because in the strict sense of the word, a formal analysis should avoid expressions as 'man', 'horse' or 'column' [...]. It is obvious that a correct iconographic analysis presupposes an exact identification of the motifs" (PANOFSKY, 2009, p. 51, emphasis added).

purely descriptive, or even statistical. The iconography is, therefore, the description and classification of images, as well as the ethnography is the description and classification of the human races. [...] Thus, I conceive the iconology as a iconography that becomes interpretative and, thus, is converted into integral part of the study of art, instead of being limited to the role of the preliminary statistical examination. [...] Iconology, therefore, is a method that emerges from the synthesis more than the analysis. (PANOFSKY, 2009, p. 53-54, emphasis added).

The iconological interpretation allows observing the discourses that pass through the paintings, that is, allows considering the meaning of the work according to its constitutive exterior. In the iconographic analysis, although the knowledge of the themes and specific concepts through the literary sources is enough, method mentioned by Bazin (1989), this does not ensure its accuracy. "To capture these principles, we need a mental faculty 'comparable to a practitioner in his/her diagnoses' [...]" (PANOFSKY, 2009, p. 62, our underline).

We can still make use of three strategies for the understanding of a work of art without incurring to the mistake caused by a pre-iconographic description of the motifs based solely on our practical experience, or then, by the iconographic analysis of the images, stories and allegories based on literary sources. These are, according to Panofsky (2009):

- i. **history of the styles:** seeks to understand how, under different historical conditions, objects and facts were expressed by the forms;
- ii. **history of the types:** seeks to understand how, under different historical conditions, specific themes and concepts were expressed by objects and facts;
- iii. **history of the cultural symptoms:** seeks to understand how, under different historical conditions, the general and essential tendencies of the human mind were expressed by specific themes and concepts.

The third stage of apprehension of the work of art, the iconological interpretation, deals with the third level of the themes or messages previously described by us: the intrinsic meaning or content. The dialogue that we outline between the art history and the thinking of Foucault, through the historical component, did not happen randomly: to Panofsky (2009, p.63),

[...] it is in the research of intrinsic meanings or content that the several humanistic disciplines are found in a common plane, instead of serving solely as created from each other.

Next, a brief exercise of analysis, from the baroque painting⁹ of Rubens (Figure 1).



Figure 1. P. P. Rubens. *The Three Graces*. Around 1635. Oil on canvas, 220,5 x 182cm. Madrid, Prado Museum.

Source: Museo Nacional del Prado (2015).

i. **Pre-iconographic description:** refers to the listing of motifs (pure forms recognized as holders of primary or natural meaning). In the picture, we recognize (we perceive from traces, colors, volumes) three naked female figures in movement of dance: two of the graces look at one direction and the third, at the opposite direction. A veil involves them, and their expressions are of joy. In the same way, we recognize elements of the nature around them, as a tree that serves as frame on the left, a garland of flowers at the top, and a picturesque landscape at the bottom, with goats grazing. There is still a fountain, on the right, where we observe the sculpture of a boy holding a cornucopia from which pours the water. This constitutes the pre-iconographic description: a) identification of pure forms and b) perception of some expressional qualities.

ii. **Iconographic analysis:** refers to the connection of motifs or combinations of motifs (compositions) with the subjects and concepts. It is what we call 'images'; and the combinations of these images are called 'stories' and 'allegories'.

⁹ Remember that, in painting, the baroque (end of the 16th century and middle of the 18th century) and Renaissance (from the 14th to 16th centuries) share the interest in the Classical Antiquity; but the baroque is marked, mainly, by the exuberant splendor.

Thus, the three female motifs together in movement of dance configure the image of the Three Graces, Greek goddesses of dance and movement (Aglaea, Thalia and Euphrosyne), daughters of Zeus with Eurynome; they are followers of Aphrodite and Olympian dancers. It was their job to decorate Aphrodite (Venus) when she left to seduce¹⁰. Initially, they presided all human pleasures, and were thus portrayed by Rafael, in his version of the picture. Subsequently, they started to represent the conversation and works of the spirit, and thus Rubens portrayed them. The fountain, on the right of the picture, together with the cornucopia held by the cherub, is, in the Greek mythology, a symbol of abundance and nutrition. This level of artistic apprehension presupposes much more familiarity with objects and facts. This presupposes the familiarity with specific themes or concepts, just as they are transmitted through the literary sources, whether obtained by deliberate reading or oral tradition. The meaning, in this case, is conventional.

iii. **Iconological interpretation:** this is a matter of observing the intrinsic meaning or content of a work; of treat it as a symptom of the society, according to Foucault (2000). In this level, it is more explicit the apprehension of the basic attitudes of a nation, of a period, of a social class, of religious or philosophical beliefs, etc. For instance, we understand the privileged statute that possessed the paintings whose themes were the mythological narratives in this context of the European baroque, in general, and Flemish, in particular. We can also identify a certain pattern of female beauty of the 17th century, without disregarding the issue of the style (WÖLFFLIN, 1989), incarnated by the Three Graces; the plump shapes represented an elegance pattern of that historical moment.

The Beauty constructed from the disproportion

Aristotle, as we know, distances himself from the Platonic idealism. According to his thought, the beauty of an artistic object derives largely from the harmony or ordination existing between the parties and the whole of this same object. In short, the beauty would consist in a unit in the variety. Hence derives the idea that the world, originated from the chaos, became governed by a harmony. However, as if there were still traces of the previous disorder, men would be in constant fight to implant the cosmos over the chaos, that is,

implant order (harmony) in the disorder (variety). According to Aristotle (1966), the beauty requires magnitude or magnificence and, at the same time, proportion and measure. However, this movement of the art in the direction of the beauty is not complete in an unattainable ideal, but incorporates the earthly traces that can contribute to constitute the beauty. The beauty, in its *Poetics*, admits the disorder and ugliness as elements ready for stimulating the creation of the beauty through the art: the comedy, for instance, was considered the art of the ugly.

It is in this sense that we have with intention to analyze some of the following European paintings. In these paintings, we will find elements that, isolated, would be considered disproportionate, deformed, and inharmonious. However, for the painting as a whole, and in accord with other elements that contribute to the cosmos of the meaning produced, perceived in its unit, we observe the emergence of the aesthetic harmony.

We invite the readers to consult again the painting of P. P. Rubens (Figure 1): something seems to draw the attention when we observe the Grace that is found with the back to us, spectators. The back of this central figure, more precisely her backbone, seems to adopt an artificial curvature, although the whole of this motif (The Three Graces) reflects naturalness and harmony of the movement. Would it be this body position impossible to be achieved?

We proposed this hypothesis based on the reports very known on the sacrifice of a certain anatomical realism – that is, of the exact correspondence of the body portrayed with the real body – as a function of the conquest of certain aesthetic effects.

In the case of the painting of Rubens, some exaggeration in the backbone curvature of one of the Graces results in an aesthetic effect of harmonious movement. Bulfinch (2006) lists that the Graces were goddesses of dance, feast, of all social entertainments and fine arts. Among these practices, Rubens shows in his canvas the ability of dance. The harmony of the movement is the aesthetic effect desired. Gombrich (2001, p. 264) thus describes the harmony achieved in *The birth of Venus* (Figure 2), despite some anatomical strangeness of the Greek goddess:

His painting presents a perfect harmony. It is true that Botticelli sacrificed part of the essential elements in the eye of his predecessor: his figures do not have the same solidity and are not drawn as correctly as those of Pollaiuolo or Masaccio. [...]

¹⁰ Hesiod, the Hellenic, catalogued the three daughters of Zeus with Eurynome in his *Theogony*. (MATYSZAK, 2010).

The Venus of Botticelli is so beautiful that we notice with difficulty the strange length of her neck, her dropped shoulders and the clumsiness with which her left arm is attached to the body.

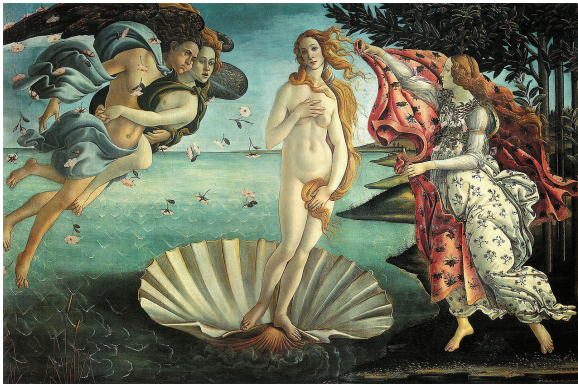


Figure 2. S. Botticelli. *The birth of Venus*. Around 1485. Tempera on canvas. 172,5 x 278,5cm. Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi.
Source: Gombrich (2001, p. 265).

These freedoms of Botticelli (1446-1510) in relation to the female anatomy add, according to Gombrich (2001, p. 264), beauty and harmony to the composition, “[...] because they contribute to give us the impression of a creature infinitely tender and delicate wandering towards our backs as a gift of the gods”. If Botticelli opted for a higher anatomical fidelity in the representation of his Venus, perhaps the effect of delicacy and tenderness would not be reached – at least, not in the form that the representation entered a canon and memory.

J. A. D. Ingres (1780-1867), likewise was frequent target of criticisms on the anatomical strangeness found in his works. It is worth remembering that he remained conservative in a context in which was forged little by little a new conception for the arts. France saw the birth, in the 19th century, of a great pictorial revolution, which the art historians usually divide into three stages (GOMBRICH, 2001): a) Romanticism, represented by E. Delacroix (1798-1863); b) Realism, represented by G. Courbet (1819-1877); c) Impressionism, determined by E. Manet (1832-1883). In this context, J. A. D. Ingres valued the “[...] absolute precision in the study of live models and despised improvise and disorder” (GOMBRICH, 2001, p. 504). He was, for this reason, very criticized by his contemporaries, who considered unbearable his *perfection glacée*.

We highlight, then, a detail of the work *Thetis and Jupiter*, of Ingres (Figure 3): the strangeness of the neck of Thetis.

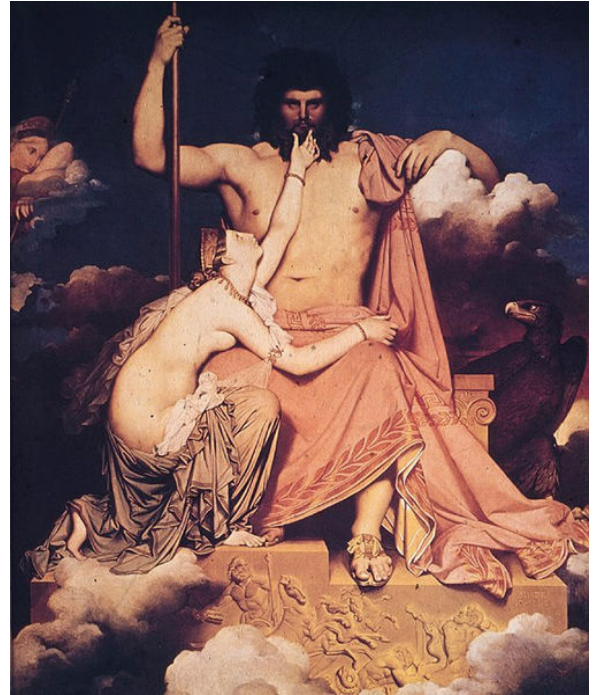


Figure 3. J. A. D. Ingres. *Thetis and Jupiter*. 1811. Oil on canvas. 327 x 260cm. Aix-en-Provence, Musée Granet.
Source: Bulfinch (2006, p. 211).

The painting illustrates a scene from the *Iliad*, of Homer, in which Thetis begs Jupiter to intervene in the Trojan War, sparing the life of her son, Achilles.

Thetis directed herself immediately to the Jove [Jupiter] palace, to whom she asked to do the Greeks to repent of the injustice perpetrated against his son, granting the success to the Trojan weapons (BULFINCH, 2006, p. 211).

This painting was chosen by Ingres to be sent to the Paris Salon.

The theme of *Thetis begging Jupiter* [...] was judged inappropriate for a great picture of history. As for the treatment – exaggerated linearism, intolerable anatomical deformities, total contempt for the perspective –, it could only alienate even more the academic judges. The independence, not to say eccentricity, of Ingres is concentrated in the female figure: the neck strangely outstretched of Thetis, flattening of the figure so that the right and left legs can be confused with each other; everything contributes to make this an abstract body, distant, strange and at the same time strangely sensual (ZERNER, 2005, p. 98).

This painting was not welcomed in the Paris Salon. The way Ingres represented the neck of the Greek deity constitutes an anatomical strangeness. However, just as the arms of Venus contribute for the purpose of tenderness and delicacy, the neck of Thetis, to Zerner (2005, p. 98), contributes for the

purpose of desire: “[...] it is, in a word, the own inscription of the desire”. It is indeed an exaggerated position of the neck, but it is the way that Ingres found to represent an ask. The consequences of the Jupiter’s decision would fall directly upon Achilles. What we call here ‘strangeness’ or anatomical ‘disproportion’ of the visual wording is, in fact, requirement for the effect of meaning that the work conveys. These details are carefully planned by the great artists in order to achieve the desired effect.

The approach of the visual arts can be undertaken from the archaeological overlook. At the end of *The archaeology of knowledge*, part IV, section 6 (Science and knowledge), subsection ‘F’, nominated as Other archaeologies, Foucault (2007) questions the possibility of designing an archaeological analysis that could make emerge the regularity of a knowledge in other domains different from those of the epistemological figures and sciences. He mentions a series of possible guidelines, as the analysis of the paintings, besides listing procedures:

In order to analyze a picture, it can be reconstructed the dormant universe of the painter; you may want to restore the murmur of the painter’s intentions that are not, ultimately, transcribed in words, but in lines, surfaces and colors; you can try to point out the implied philosophy that, supposedly, forms the painter’s worldview. It is also possible to question the science, or at least the opinions of the time, and seek to recognize what the painter borrowed from them. The archaeological analysis would have another purpose: it would research if the space, distance, depth, color, light, proportions, volumes, contours, were not, at the considered time, named, enunciated, conceptualized in a discursive practice; and if the knowledge resulting from this discursive practice was not, perhaps, inserted in theories and speculations, in forms of teachings and recipes, but also in processes, techniques and almost in the own gesture of the painter. It would not be a question of demonstrating that the painting is a certain way of meaning or ‘saying’, in which would have the characteristic to dismiss words. ‘It would be necessary to show that, in at least one of its dimensions, it is a discursive practice that takes body with techniques and effects’. [...] It is entirely filled – independent on the scientific knowledge and philosophical themes – with the positivity of a knowledge (FOUCAULT, 2007, p. 217, our underline).

The regularity of a knowledge, according to the reflections of Foucault, can also be observed in several expressions of the meaning, in the several discursive materiality. The formal elements of a painting (space, distance, depth, color, light, proportions, volumes, contours) seen as elements of a discursive practice, can be objects of an

archaeological analysis, that is, can be objects – as visual signs of an epoch – of what is called here ‘analysis of the aesthetic discourse’.

Would it be possible to conceive an archeological analysis that would make emerge the regularity of a knowledge, but that does not propose to analyze it toward the direction of the epistemological figures and sciences? (FOUCAULT, 2007, p. 215).

Final considerations

The analysis done in this study sought to demonstrate that, from the overlook of Panofsky, the anatomical disproportion usually found in Rubens, Botticelli and Ingres contributed for the construction of a visual harmony of the painting. This regularity contrasts the knowledge on the human anatomy, on one side; and the disrespect for the proportion in which strangely contributes for the visual harmony, on the other. This knowledge, apparently discordant (of medicine and art, if necessary to classify them), in the case of the examples analyzed, do not belong exclusively to the sphere of the epistemology, but are inserted in a discursive practice that takes body in the techniques and effects of the artistic sphere and that are revealed in the own gesture of the painter.

From the dialogue between Foucault and Panofsky, we demonstrated a path of analysis for the visual wordings in the field of visual arts. Particularly, we highlight a contact point between the iconographic analysis of Panofsky and the archaeological method of Foucault, which emerges from the historical dimension of the arts.

The anatomical strangeness found in the European paintings analyzed show that it is not necessary to have an accurate correspondence between the real body and the body portrayed, provided that they operate according to the aesthetic effects desired by the artists. P. P. Rubens, S. Botticelli and J. A. D. Ingres, through techniques and practices, were all, by sacrificing the anatomy, able to bring up the movement, tenderness and desire.

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