Bredekamp, H. (2015). *Teoria do acto icónico.* Lisbon: KKYM

Isabel Macedo

Art historian, Horst Bredekamp (Kiel, 1947) is a professor at Humboldt University, a permanent member of the Institute for Advanced Studies in Berlin and president of the Interdisciplinary Laboratory, Image, Knowledge and Form. From 2000, he orients a multidisciplinary group that works on the technical image in the field of sciences, technologies and medicine. The theme of image mediation has been at the heart of his activity since his PhD thesis *Kunst als medium sozialer konflikte* [Art as a medium of social conflict] (1975) , and continues to inform his activity as an art historian. He is co-editor of several studies on theory and history of the images, and co-directed the critical edition of the complete work of Aby Warburg. The book *Teoria do acto icónico* [Theory of the Image-Act] (2015), which is presented in this review, involves a vast temporal period, from prehistory to the present day, and focuses on very precise objects, with huge consequences for the understanding of the role of art in history, society, and science[1]. Among Horst Bredekamp most outstanding studies are: *Antikensehnsucht und maschinenglauben* [The nostalgia of the old and the worship of the machine] (1993); *Thomas Hobbes visuelle strategien, der leviathan* [Visual strategies of Thomas Hobbes, the leviathan] (1999); *Darwins korallen* [The corals of Darwin] (2005) and *Le déclin du platonisme* (The decline of neo-platonism) (2005)[2]. The author combines the historicist perspective, the analysis of documentary sources, the analysis of changes in images over time, with theoretical contributions from several scientific fields. The interdisciplinary reflection developed by Bredekamp, for decades, culminated in the work Teoria do acto icónico (2015), where one rehearses a "phenomenology of the active image" (p. 13), or of the image as act.

The number of images with which we are confronted in contemporaneity and the uses that are made of them have generated several studies and reflections, intensified in the last decades. Through the media, in political life, in conflicts, in the sciences or in the area of law, images are currently "experienced and treated as elements at the very centre of social life" (p. 9). In fact, the author begins his reflection by pointing out the role of images, for example, in political everyday life, stating that they "can be allied or treacherous of political power" (p. 8) and, through the media and the internet, have the potential to guide armed conflicts "or even take their place" (p. 8). For the author, the current world can only be truly understood if we consider the iconic element.

A commentary by Leonardo da Vinci gives rise to the work of Horst Bredekamp. For the author, the expression "do not reveal, if liberty is precious to you; my face is the

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[1] YMAGO, retrieved from http://cargocollective.com/ymago/bredekamp-tutti

[2] YMAGO, retrieved from http://cargocollective.com/ymago/bredekamp-tutti

prison of love" (p. 9), exposes the problem of the autonomy of the image. In his opinion, the image after being created "becomes independent and an object of reverent admiration, but also of fear, as the strongest sensation" (p. 11). However, since the Enlightenment the idea of living images has been relegated to the object of study of anthropology and ethnology. The discussion about the inorganicity and the life itself of the image has generated several controversies. Warburg already recognized the vitality of images, their ability to injure, what the author calls "phenomenology of the active image" (p. 13), or "enárgeia". Towards living images, Da Vinci argues, the spectator can "renounce the contemplation of the work of art or lose its freedom" (p. 13). To understand this concept of image act, the author draws a parallel with the concept of language act, developed by Searle and Austin[3].

After a long introduction in which he clarifies the concepts under analysis, the author outlines a typology of the image act. This conceptual clarification was accompanied by a demonstration using several images, coming from different geographic areas, but also from different time periods. The author refers, for example, to a set of perforated shells of about 75,000 years old, supposed to have been part of an ornament, as an example of the potentiality of man in the transformation of natural materials into images, giving them a sphere of their own, associated with a common and shared practice. In this period, the images were not an aesthetic addition, but the "promotion of the primordial cultures" (p. 19), reinforcing the idea of the image as "essential determination of the human species" (p. 19). In a first sense, the concept of image encompasses any and all modelled forms, not establishing a separation between image and art. Bredekamp mobilizes Alberti's understanding of image (*simulacrum*), which conceives images as modelled forms with a minimum of human manipulation (p. 21).

The author seeks to specify his concepts with the support of Platão, Heidegger and Lacan. In his view, Platão was against the images he saw as a threat to the community, while welcoming and defending the images he recognized as a factor of civilization. Between the two extremes lies a deeply rooted anguish, according to Bredekamp, that of appearing that image belongs to a sphere that escapes philosophical control (p. 26). Heidegger and Lacan were also dominated by Platão anguish over the effects of images, and Lacan, in confrontation with the 'indomitable image" (p. 31), mobilized his gaze into the world of non-artistic artefacts.

Despite the various attempts to apply theories of the language act to the image, the author considers that unlike the language act, "the problem of the iconic act consists in identifying the force that allows the image, in contemplation or touch, to jump from a state of latency, for external effectiveness in the context of feeling, thinking and acting" (p.34). In this sense, the author conceives the iconic act as having an effect "on the plane of feeling, thought and action, which derives from the strength of the image and the interaction with those who look, touch and listen it" (p. 34).

Bredekamp shows that the first Greek statues 'spoke' in the first person to 'enunciate' its owner or its author. Each object carries this speech in some way. This tradition

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[3] See *Speech-act* de J. R. Searle (1969) e *How to do things with words* de J. L. Austin (1962).

continues in some of the signatures of works in the Middle Age, in the renaissance paintings (notably those of Jan Van Eyck), in the possession of certain weapons, statues like the Pasquino of Rome and, finally, in the work of Nikki de Saint Phalle, *Tu Est Moi*, where the artist juxtaposes objects with violent connotations, such as guns and hammers, on plaster and wood supports. This type of manifestation, works that speak in the 'I-form' "attest and confirm the impression that emerges clearly in all ages and in every culture, that artefacts, although made with an artistic purpose, have a life of their own" (p. 68), being this finding "strange and disturbing" (p. 68). For the author, in works like this, which 'speak in the I-form', lay the foundations for the theory of the image act.

Horst Bredekamp proposes the typology of schematic, substitutive and intrinsic image act. The first identified form is the schematic image act where all imitations of the apparent form of life are grouped together: the model is a paradigmatic example; in its articulation it produces the illusion of life. It is the human body that is mainly schematized to give that impression. Thus, the living image, the paintings based on live paintings, and more recently the performances of Gilbert and Georges and the photographs of Cindy Sherman, are manifestations of the image schematic act. These works play with the feeling of empathy, but also with the distance. In fact, "an internal movement has been infused, because they are fixed and immobilized; finally, thanks to an artificial intervention, they were emotionally animated, because they were deprived of feeling" (p. 122). The second mode of the iconic schematic act is the automaton. The figures simulate schemes, impressing the spectator through "their autonomous vitality" (p. 102). In summary, the image schematic act consists in making the image alive by assimilating body and life, thus nullifying the distance between inanimate and animation.

The second category developed by the author is the image substitute act, in which bodies are treated as images and images as bodies. *Vera icon* (true image) manifests this substitution, "the body is fully present, although it is no longer constituted by living matter" (p. 134). By printing the body in the image, the authenticity and the intrinsic activity of the artefact are certified. However, the substitution of people for the image also enables iconoclasm, and "the interpretation of bodies as images can ultimately mean that human beings are treated in an iconoclastic way" (p. 172). Thus, in addition to considering the disturbing power of the image, the author also addresses its destructive power. The 'war of images', cited by the author, refers to the fact that throughout the history, bodies of enemy soldiers and officials have been used, showing them "not as an image because they had been killed, but to kill them in view of Its use as an image" (p. 170). The media have a central role here. Crimes and tortures are committed and contemplated through the internet, blurring the distance between action, image and observation. It is therefore necessary to recognize and combat the substitutive image act in its destructive form. Horst Bredekamp (2016) argues that by observing the conflicts over the past few decades around images, "no image education will live up to the present challenges, if the duty of distance, neglected in almost all areas of life, has not recovered its importance". With the act of substitution, which concerns the exchange of bodies and images, the boundary between bodies and images becomes a matter of life and death. After the

attack of Charlie Hebdo, for the author it was clear that the image act is not a game of spirit, but a bitter reality (Bredekamp, 2016).

The third category, the intrinsic image act produces its effects from the "irresistibility of form as form" (p. 256). The look of the image, the agility of its form, its expressive dynamics are some of the factors that give active force to the image. In the final part of the book, the author analyses the image act based on a philosophical anthropology that comes from Warburg, but also from Cassirer and Adorno. According to him, the man is a symbolic animal, because the corporal activity and the conceptualization are inseparable. It is in the body, ultimately, that creative power lives. The image act thus encompasses the "spheres of life, of exchange and of form; encompasses the scheme, the substitution and the intrinsic action of the form free from any purpose" (p. 252). The author ends by stating that images are not a deviation from reality, but one of its conditions.

The author brings to the field of art history the contemporary tide of images, looking at the world as an image. However, critical voices like Gunthert (2016) consider that the author mobilizes examples mainly from the field of art, neglecting artistic forms like engraving or photography, or common uses of the image. According to this author, Bredekamp does not follow the advances proposed by the art historian Ernst Gombrich (1996), attentive to graffiti, comics or media. There are also studies that refer to the positive effects of visual forms, such as advertising, that were not considered. In this sense, citing a Michael Jackson performance or mobilizing an image of Metropolis by Fritz Lang does not change, in Gunthert's view (2016), the author approach that see the iconic act as an act of art. Although we consider that it would be important to mobilize other views for the discussion about the image act, it is easy to understand that art, being the field where the author works, constitutes the central axis of his analysis. In addition, recently, the author points out that in order to understand current problems, it is essential to include the world of artefacts in the definition of active thinking and people's thinking (Bredekamp, 2016).

The question that caught our attention in this work is related to the deterministic character associated with images and their destructive power, particularly in the case of the substitutive image act. The analysis of the author is based on concrete events, images that have travelled the digital world and entered in the house and in the minds of people. Thus, it is important to discuss whether critical and reflexive education about images will play a decisive role in the construction of citizens who question, who deconstruct, who distance themselves from the image in order to better understand and interrogate it. Studies about how young people reconstruct moving images (Macedo, 2016; Furtado, Macedo & Cabecinhas) show that when there is a reflection and discussion of the image meanings, there is the potential for reconstruction of visions about others, about the world and about the images themselves. This exercise of image critical analysis could be a mean to fight against the destructive power of substitutive image act, for social change and peace.

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Biographical note

Isabel Macedo holds a PhD in Cultural Studies from University of Minho. She is a researcher at the Communication and Society Research Centre and her main research interests combine the areas of cultural memory, social identity, social representations and Portuguese cinema. Her publications include "Diasporic Identity(ies) and the Meaning of Home in Autobiographical Documentary Films"; "Audiovisual Post-colonial Narratives: Dealing with the Past in Dundo, Colonial"; "(Post)-conflict Memories and Identity Narratives in the Documentary Series 'I Am África'".

E-mail: isabelmaced@gmail.com

Communication and Society Research Centre, Instituto de Ciências Sociais, Campus de Gualtar, 4710-057 Braga, Portugal