

The Sacralization of Nature and the 'Naturalization' of the Sacred: theoretical contributions for the comprehension of the intercrossing between health, ecology and spirituality

The "cultivating self": health, ecology and spirituality

A sacralização da natureza e a 'naturalização' do sagrado: aportes teóricos para a compreensão dos entrecruzamentos entre saúde, ecologia e espiritualidade

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the practices of self-perfection and care for the environment, intended to the health and to the physical, mental and spiritual well being. It focuses on the points of intersection between ecological and religious practices that engender processes of "sacralization of nature" and the "naturalization of the sacred". The empirical field of interest is the religious practices of ecological groups and the ecological practices of religious groups. As methodological and theoretical references, we have elected the contributions of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of perception, Bateson's ecological psychology, Thomas Csordas' phenomenological anthropology and the ecological epistemology of Tim Ingold, in a way that these perspectives are joined together with the intention to collapse the dualities between mind and body, subject and environment, nature and culture. When considered as the body of the world, we find in the landscape concept a point of convergence of these different approaches. Thus, the hypothesis that we suggest is that the landscape, while the body of the world, may be taken as the soil of culture, in the sense that the human subject, in his/her corporal condition of a being in the world, is not only implicated in the landscape, but that the landscape is his/her very condition of engaging in the world and in culture.

Keywords: Ecology. Religion. Health. Phenomenology. Subjectivity.

RESUMO

O presente artigo discute as práticas de aperfeiçoamento de si e do cuidado com o ambiente, voltadas para a saúde e o bem estar físico, mental e espiritual. O foco desta discussão está dirigida para os pontos de interseção entre práticas ecológicas e religiosas, que dão origem a processos de sacralização da natureza e de "naturalização" do sagrado. O campo de interesse

empírico são as práticas religiosas de grupos ecológicos e as práticas ecológicas de grupos religiosos. Elegemos como referenciais metodológicos e teóricos as contribuições da filosofia da percepção de Merleau-Ponty, da psicologia ecológica de Bateson, da antropologia fenomenológica de Thomas Csordas e da epistemologia ecológica de Tim Ingold, na medida em que estas perspectivas somam-se no intento de colapsar as dualidades mente e corpo, sujeito e ambiente, natureza e cultura. Encontramos no conceito de paisagem, enquanto corpo do mundo, um ponto de convergência destas diferentes abordagens. Assim, a hipótese que acionamos é a de que a paisagem, enquanto corpo do mundo, pode ser tomada como o solo da cultura, no sentido de que o sujeito humano, em sua condição corporal de ser no mundo, está não apenas implicado na paisagem, mas essa é a condição de seu engajamento no mundo e na cultura.

Palavras-chave: Ecologia. Religião. Saúde. Fenomenologia. Subjetividade.

1 Introduction

It is not difficult to realize the increasing acceptance of a holistic idea of health that is related to the physical, mental and spiritual exercise among groups and individuals ecologically orientated. The desire for this ideal of health has become constitutive of various ecological practices, such as walking, mountaineering, trekking, ecological tourism, as well as religious pilgrimages, experiences, meditation and shamanic rituals. In the same direction, it is also becoming common to evoke an ecological ascesis for a set of spiritual practices, in the sense of internalizing the ecological feelings and procedures which come to be seen, under this context, as a religious mediation in the search for the sacred. In this way, ecological habits of responsible care towards the environment and nature come to be part of religious creeds' systems that aim at situating the individual in the world, in society and in nature, at the same time he/she experiences the sacred, in the sense that the reconnection with nature comes to be part of a system of ecological creeds. The convergence between these two universes of practices seems to indicate common imaginative horizons between ecology and spirituality, which we will call practices of self-cultivation, as the path to health and the physical, mental and spiritual well being.

The idea of cultivation will adopt two meanings in this paper, which we will try to consider in an articulated way: one that refers to the subject-self and the other to the environment. When referred to the subject-self, self-cultivation incorporates a set of self-educative practices that we will identify as being a form of ascesis in the world, which is intended for one's personal improvement through the care of body and soul (FOOTNOTE 1). Therefore, while the care of the body supposes learning about healthy eating, physical exercise and the use of alternative

forms of medicine, the care of the soul equally comprehends the domain of knowledge relative to the new forms of spirituality, alternative therapies, meditation, among others.

In turn, the cultivation of the environment mainly refers to the ecological preoccupation with the sustainability of nature, the environmental education and the survival of the planet. In this field of practices, ecological consumption, recycling and the agro-ecological architecture can be highlighted, among others. Even though the self and environmental cultivation do not always appear interlinked, the probability of this nexus is highly recurrent, pointing as much towards complementary processes of sacralization of nature, as the 'naturalization' of the sacred.

The ground that sustains these practices of self-cultivation could be related to a certain 'spirit of time', in accordance to the tendencies and transformations observed in the very concept of contemporary religion, which points towards the displacement from transcendence to immanence (CAMPBELL, 1997). Thus, when placed outside the world, the God of the transcendence religions goes little by little giving way to a God in the world, which appears under the form of psychic-mystic energies and experiences, characterizing what has been denominated as religions of the self.

2 The self as the place of the 'authentic' experience

The religions of the self will produce a displacement of the 'order of certification of truth' from the classical institutional mediations of the religious field – churches, doctrines and dogmas – to the experience lived by the individual, as the last instance capable of attesting the authentication of the sacred. This displacement of the place of certification of authenticity, from the institutional to the individual, which presents itself as a trace of the post-authentic contemporary world, translates itself in the religious field by the prevalence of the personal experience of the sacred against the objective forms and doctrines of the institutionalized religions (FOOTNOTE 2). On the other hand, if there is a sense of loss of the institutionalized ritual forms belonging to the traditional religions, there is also a reiterated desire to rediscover them, no longer in an external instance of the individual, but in his or her own interior.

Even when adopting an analytical perspective to enable the questioning of the authenticity of the religious experience certified by the individuals, its permanence and its eloquence invite us to be conscientious of the points of coincidence and connection between the search for authenticity in the realm of spirituality and ecology. The authenticity appears in both realms

as the underpinning in the subjectivities formation, which seems to reaffirm the irreducibility of the experience in relation to the process of objectiveness by language or of institutionalization by the social. From a phenomenological point of view, it is possible to think that the human condition always keeps something in the order of resistance to his or her complete objectiveness, in a sense by which he or she holds an immediate dimension (pre-objective) in his or her own first meeting with the world, which guarantees the inexhaustibility of the human in the face of production of cultural meanings in the symbolic plan.

Following Soares argument, this search for authenticity finds in nature and in the individual self the places of references for the constitution of religious subjects by nature, which connects in an innovative way the preoccupation with the planet and the, each time more intimate, discovery of the self (SOARES, 1994). The practices of groups and individuals that are situated in the permeable frontier of ecological experiences that incorporate the religious dimension, and vice-versa, could be seen in this perspective. Orientated either ecologically or religiously, for those who make the ideal of an immediate relation with nature the path to personal integration (religare) with a totality, this experience refers to the realization of a physical, mental and spiritual well-being that makes interchangeable the health of the planet and that of the individual. These individuals can be identified in the religious groups that are moved by a spirit of the New Era, searching for the sacred and for themselves in places, ritual spaces and pilgrimages where nature has the protagonist role, as well as in ecological groups aiming at practicing harmonious social integration with nature and the formation of ecological subjects through environmental education that incorporates, in way or another, the idea of a nature invested of restoring forces and energies of the body, the soul and of ethical virtues for the social living.

3 In the direction of a phenomenology of the self: dialogs between philosophy, anthropology and psychology

The questions raised in this article have lines of convergence that are situated on the horizon of three areas of knowledge: philosophy, anthropology and psychology. Considering the theoretical contributions of these areas, we aim at thinking about the relations between body, mind, self and society, a theme that has an old tradition in these areas of knowledge. We draw attention to the following authors: Marcel Mauss (1985), Lévi-Strauss (1974), Bateson (1972)

and Tim Ingold (2000) in anthropology; Norbert Elias (1994) in sociology; Merleau-Ponty (1971; 2007) in philosophy; and Sigmund Freud (1974) in psychoanalysis (FOOTNOTE 3).

In the conjugation of these fields of knowledge, we highlight the contribution of five concepts that guide us in the comprehension of the theoretical intertwining that have been described above. The first one is the notion of flesh, announced and discussed by Merleau-Ponty in 'The Visible and the Invisible', which emphasizes the continuity between the body of the world and the human body (MERLEAU-PONTY, 2007). The second one is the concept of embodiment, which has been used by Thomas Csordas as a paradigm of comprehension of the human subjects in culture (CSORDAS, 1990). The third concept is that of landscape, which will be used in this paper according to the ecological anthropology perspective proposed by Tim Ingold, where the landscape is thought of as the horizon of convergence of human and non-human bodies and organisms with the environment encompassing them, pointing towards the landscape embodiment (INGOLD, 2000). The fourth and fifth concepts are, respectively, the notion of environmental behaviour of Alfred Hallowell (1955), and the ecology of the mind, belonging to Gregory Bateson (1972; 1980). Both are in the interface between anthropology and psychology, in an approach that refers to actors that situate themselves in the area of psychological anthropology (FOOTNOTE 4).

These concepts were decisive for the development of a new approach in psychology and anthropology, which have come to operate with the assumption of an indistinct frontier between individual subject and environment. Therefore, the authors here considered are fundamental for developing our argument, in a way that they endeavour to deconstruct the internal-external and the subject-environment dualities, refusing the organic frontier of the mind in relation to the environment that used to confine it to the brain of the individual. For these authors, thus, the mind is neither locked in the brain, nor exists as an autonomous reality in the external world, but constitutes itself in the active engagement of the individual in the environment or landscape.

4 The 'flesh' of the world

The phenomenological approach presents itself as a path that we will endeavor to walk on, aiming at deepening the connections between self and environment. This path, in turn, finds in the contributions brought by Merleau-Ponty its starting point and the directions that orient it. Since his classical work, 'The Phenomenology of Perception' (1971), Merleau-Ponty, is concerned to move away from a cognitive sight of the perceptive processes and affirm an

articulated comprehension of being in the world while a place to dwell, mediated by the embodiment. When considering the perceptive processes, he is concerned with the physical dimensions of the environment and the biological dimensions of the body, however, he does not accept the reductionists' explanations of perception as an organic or mental process. These dimensions are not denied, but situated within a virtuoso circle, where subject and object constitute themselves mutually in a practice that is at the same time creative and structured. In other words, at the same time the subject acts in the direction of the world and the objects, he or she is also constituted by the world and by the objects in the direction of which he or she moves to. For Merleau-Ponty, the world sustains the subject-body and moves with him/her, demarcating his/her field of perceptual and experiential exploration. As a corporal condition of the subject, the world is experienced as constitutive of the subject-body that inhabits it and not anymore as an external and objective reference to the subject that moves in it.

In an instigative article on Merleau-Ponty and the environmental issue, Abram (1996) argues in favor of the phenomenology contribution for comprehending the relationship between human and environment, particularly in the last work of Merleau-Ponty, 'The Visible and the Invisible', as the fundament for a philosophy of nature that points towards the possibility of overcoming the impasses of the ecology inherited from the mechanistic biology tradition:

The civilized skepticism we have of our senses and of our body engenders a metaphysical separation from the sensitive world – this feeds the illusion that we are not part of the world we study, from which we can keep ourselves apart, as spectators, therefore determining its working conditions from the outside. A renewed attention to the corporal experience, however, allows us to recognize and affirm our inevitable involvement towards that which we observe, our corporal immersion into the depths of a body that breathes and which is much bigger than our own body (ABRAM, 1996, p.85).

In the Merleau-Ponty work, 'The Visible and the Invisible', this communion between the human body and the body of the world, which encompasses and transcends the individual self, is found through the usage of the 'flesh' terminology, and presents itself as the common link between the two orders, the sentient human and the sensitive world. In the expression of Merleau-Ponty:

Thus, we say that our body, as a sheet of paper, is a being of two faces, on one side, thing among things and, on the other, that which sees them and touches them; because it is evident, we say that we find in it these two properties, and its double belonging to the order of 'object' and to the order of 'subject' reveals very unexpected relations between these two orders (MERLEAU-PONTY, 2007, p. 133).

Merleau-Ponty radicalizes what he had already pointed out about the notion of body, but now in the sense of a transcendence of the subject-self in the world of which the human body is an expression. Instead of the Cartesian notion of a subject who thinks and, thus, exists, or still, who thinks of the world with a mind apart from this world, in the phenomenological perspective, the world thinks of a subject that exists in the relationship of continuity and distinction, as one of the expressions of the flesh of the world, in which the difference is found in the form of exercising the reflexivity (FOOTNOTE 5). As Merleau-Ponty affirms, ‘if the body is only one body in its two phases, it incorporates all that is sensitive and, due to the same movement, it also incorporates itself in a ‘sensitive within itself’ (MERLEAU-PONTY, 2007, p. 134).

It is important to observe that the flesh concept present in Merleau-Ponty’s work, significantly contributes to the overcoming of the anthropocentric position that transforms all that is non-human into a mere object. Differently from the deep ecology critique that, when positioning itself in favor of biocentrism against anthropocentrism only changes poles without altering the relation of submission between humans and non-humans, Merleau-Ponty calls attention to the deep and extensive intertwining between these poles as part of the same flesh and recognizes, at the same time, that the process of self-consciousness in each one of them is not identical. Therefore, the flesh that thinks about the human being does not think in the same way about the other sentient beings. Its position avoids as much the fusion and the dissolution of the human singularity in the ‘bios’ of the world as it does to the human arrogance that places itself outside the world. Thus, we can conclude that at the same time the flesh concept of Merleau-Ponty establishes a continuity between human body and the flesh of the world, it also maintains the alterity between these poles as constitutive of the experience, which reveals itself as much through the ecological path of the meeting between the human-subject and nature, as in the human-subject’s own intimacy when experiencing the sacred (CSORDAS, 2004).

5 Embodiment as a paradigm

In an effort to translate phenomenology to the field of anthropology, we get from the notion of embodiment developed by Thomas Csordas the main reference to introduce the cultural question in the relationship between the human-body and the flesh of the world. In the perspective of this author, more than a concept, the notion of embodiment is a paradigmatic proposal that envisages collapsing dichotomies, such as self/society, mind/body,

practices/structure, nature/culture, without denying the tension and the alterity between these poles of humans' experiences in the world.

In the sense thought by Csordas, the embodiment concept is mainly based in Merleau-Ponty's analysis of perception and in the social practice theory formulated by Pierre Bourdieu. As argued by him, his theoretical project 'begins with a critical exam of these two theories of embodiment: Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962), who elaborates the embodiment concept in the issue of perception, and Pierre Bourdieu (1977), who situates the embodiment in a anthropological discourse of practice'(CSORDAS, 2002, P.58). Therefore, while Merleau-Ponty's theory of perception will be the main reference for surmounting the subject-object duality, Bourdieu's theory of action will allow questioning the structure-practice duality. In Csordas reading of these authors:

(...) both try not to mediate, but to collapse the dualities, and embodiment is the methodological principal evoked by both of them. The collapse of the dualities in the embodiment demands that the body, while a methodological figure, be itself non-dualistic, in other words, not distinct of – or in interaction with – an antagonistic principal of the mind. Thus, for Merleau-Ponty the body is 'a context in relation to the world', and the consciousness is the body projecting itself in the world; for Bourdieu, the body socially informed is the 'generating and unifying principal of all practices', and the consciousness is a form of strategic calculus merged with a system of objective potentialities. I have to briefly elaborate these ideas as they are synthesized in the pre-objective concept of Merleau-Ponty and in the habitus concept of Bourdieu (CSORDAS, 2002, p. 60).

Therefore, in Merleau-Ponty's existential phenomenology (1962), Csordas argues in favor of the corporal experience as a point of departure for cultural analysis, which finds in the pre-objective level the existential basis for the linguistic and interpretative elaborations of human beings' experience in the world. According to Csordas, however, the pre-objective does not mean a moment prior to culture, but the manner in which the subjects spontaneously engage themselves in the world and in ordinary life (FOOTNOTE 6). Thus, as argued by Merleau-Ponty, the cultural objects, no less than the natural objects such as rocks and trees, are the final products of an abstraction process of a perceptive consciousness in which the sentient human body is an opening to an undetermined field, unrestricted and inexhaustible: the world (CSORDAS, 2002).

It is central to his suggestion to comprehend that the human body is not an object under any condition, but always the subject of perception. The person does not realize his or her own body; the person is his or her own body and through it realizes as much in the sense of it being a perfect familiar tool (MAUSS, 1950), as in the sense of being self and body, coexisting perfectly. Thus, to realize a body as an object is to have developed a process of

abstraction from the perspective experience. In a certain way, it is down to the sentient subjects to traverse their senses in the direction of the world, instead of realizing the world through the senses; the senses are on the path between subject and world. The body comes to exist then as 'the existential land of culture' (CSORDAS, 2002, p.4), where subject and object, knowledge and self-knowledge, subjectivity and alterity articulate themselves. The embodiment is the synthesis of this cultural incarnation that constitutes historically situated human beings and the privileged locus of articulation between the subject and object duality and their succedaneums, as is proposed by the notion of hermeneutic circle. From this perspective, according to Csordas:

The body is not only biological, but equally religious, linguistic, historical, cognitive, emotional and artistic [I would add ecological]. On the other hand, if the language can be presented thereafter as an expression of embodiment and not as a representative function of the Cartesian Code, it becomes clear that it is not the case of defining culture only in terms of symbols, frames, rules, customs, texts or communications, but equally in terms of senses, movements, inter-subjectivity, specialties, habits, desires, evocations and intuitions. The convergence of these two realizations takes us to a conceptualization of the self based in embodiment. The argument is that, through the collapse of the distinction between mind and body, subject and object, the language becomes comprehensible as a process of the self when it is seen not as a representation, but as the institution of a way of being in the world (CSORDAS, 2002, p. 4).

Parallel to Merleau-Ponty's effort in collapsing the subject-object duality in the theory of perception, the aim of Bourdieu is to collapse the sign-signification under the concept of habitus (FOOTNOTE 7), articulating in the analysis of the social fact the action as opus operatum and as modus operandi of social life. Thus, Bourdieu defines habitus as a 'system of durable dispositions, an unconscious and collective principal inculcated for the generation and structuring of practices and representations' (1977, p. 72). In Bourdieu's theory this definition is highlighted by Csordas because, when focusing on the psychologically internalized concept of environmental behavior (HALLOWELL, 1974), the habitus appears as 'the generating and unifying principal of all practices, the system of the inseparable cognitive and evaluative structures that organize the view of the world according to the objective structures of a determined social world state' (BOURDIEU, 1977, p. 124).

While the generating and unifying principal of practices, the habitus is define by Bourdieu as:

(...) the socially informed body, with its likes and dislikes, its compulsions and repulsions, in one word, with all its senses, meaning not only the traditional five senses – which never escape from the structuring action of the social determinisms – but also the sense of necessity and the sense of obligation, the sense of direction and the sense of reality, the sense of equilibrium and the sense of beauty, the common sense and the sense of the sacred, the sense of tactics and the sense of responsibility,

the sense for business and the sense of property, the sense of humor and the sense of absurd, the moral sense and the practical sense, and henceforth. (1977, p. 124)

Following his exposition about Bourdieu's contribution in the elaboration of the embodiment paradigm, Csordas emphasizes that the habitus locus is the conjunction between the objective conditions of life and the totality of aspirations and practices compatible with such conditions. 'Objective conditions neither cause practices, nor do practices determine objective conditions' (CSORDAS, 2002, p. 63). Instead, 'it is the habitus, while universalizing mediation, that makes the practice of an individual agent, without explicit reason or meaningful proposal, 'sensible' and 'reasonable'' (BOURDIEU, 1977, p. 79). Therefore, with the habitus concept, Bourdieu offers an analysis of the social practice as a necessity transformed into virtue, in a way that the obscure practices under the eyes of their own producers gain an ordering that makes them objectively adjusted to other practices and to the structures, where the principal of production is itself a product.

Thus, Csordas's effort to articulate the apparently contradictory methodological contributions of phenomenology and dialectic structuralism were fundamental for the constitution of what he calls an embodiment paradigm. The singularity of his theoretical proposal rests in collapsing the dualities in embodiment through a 'non-dualistic body' conception, in other words, not distinct from – or in interaction with – an antagonist principal of the mind (CSORDAS, 2002, p.65). Our effort, in turn, will be that of extending this notion of body to the one of landscape, following the same movement of Merleau-Ponty in the direction towards the body of the world, and rearticulating it with Bourdieu's concept of habitus, in the direction of a context in which the ecological behavior and values have been imposing themselves as an objective condition for the individuals and social groups at the beginning of the second millennium of the Christian era.

6 The landscape as the body of the world

In the effort to articulate ecology, religion and health, we find in the landscape concept, as it has been elaborated in the anthropological literature, a point of connection with the contributions given by Merleau-Ponty and Csordas that we have just mentioned above. Therefore, the questions considered in this paper are not only related to a knowledge that speaks about the landscape as an object, rather they relate to the landscape while the condition of being in the world, where culture, nature and the subject-self are all intertwined (LANE, 2002; HIRSCH, 2003; LOW, 2006). In this sense, we can affirm that the landscape

in an ecological paradigm occupies a similar place to the one of the body in the embodiment paradigm. When approximating these two paradigms, the anthropology of landscape has frequently referred itself to the notion of embodied spaces (LOW; LAWRENCE-ZÚÑIGA, 2006) or embodied landscapes (INGOLD, 2000). In other words, and taking as a focus the ecological perspective, we believe that it becomes possible to unfold the condition of embodiment to the environment. In other words, to shift the gaze from the preoccupation of the body, seen as the condition of existence of the individual in the world, to that of the landscape, as the body of the world, the planetary continent that involves humans and non-humans.

When realizing this shifting, the landscape can be taken, analogously to the body, as condition or existential land (FOOTNOTE 8). In this way, we can say that if the body is a manner through which the individual exists as a being-in-the-world, the landscape is a manner through which the beings-in-the-world present themselves to the individual, including him/her. This change in the gaze ends up producing an emphasis on the body or on the flesh of the world, which encompasses more symmetrically humans and non-humans, making relative, in one way or other, the body of individuals or humans as the articulating element between subject-object (LATOUR, 1994).

Keeping ourselves on the track of the embodiment paradigm in the direction of the ecological epistemology, we can think of the concept of landscape as correlated to the one of embodiment, as being the field of perception defined by the engagement in the world. In this sense, Csordas calls attention to the dialectics between body, while material unity of existence, and the embodiment, while condition of existence of subjects in the world reflexively projected and objectified. And, he concludes that at the same time in which the body presents itself as the material condition of the subjects in the world, it is also the locus of revelation of the being in the world that, even though expresses itself in the individual bodies, it is not exhausted in them.

We believe that it would be possible to recognize in the realm of the landscape concept a similar dialectics to the one Csordas applies to the body, where it would be possible to distinguish a material base, the land, and a projected and signified totality that transforms this physical and material unity into a landscape. The tension between the immediate and pre-objective experience in the world (immediacy) and its objectification in language are thus established in a game of alterity between subject and object that happens inside and outside ourselves. This dialectics, implicated in the concept of landscape as the form of engaging in the world, indicates a radical assumption of the symmetry and of the belonging of human

beings and non-humans to the Earth, as well as a consequent agency of the environment in the unveiling of the world in its existences.

Thus, this meaning of landscape permits emphasizing the dynamics of the temporal and social processes that give form to the environment, at the same time as which they constitute and modify the places and ways of inhabiting, allowing them to distance themselves from an objectifying vision that tends to attribute a sense of externality to the human subject in relation to the world. In this sense, when relating the concept of landscape to that of embodiment (the flesh of the world), we understand the landscape as the expression of embodiment of nature, so that the relations of the subjects-selves with the world – their places, ways of being, memories and creeds – are constitutive of their life environment. This relational and symmetric dimension between humans and non-humans in the world converges with the phenomenological anthropology intents in order to collapse the nature-culture, mind-body, subject-object, internal-external dualities. But it is still necessary to add an element of an active character (agency) in the relationship between landscape and the beings that inhabit it together with the natural elements. As has been affirmed by Ingold, ‘as much as the bodies are not previously conceived forms, independent of the beings that genetically constitute them, the landscape forms are not previously prepared for the creatures to occupy’ (INGOLD, 2000, p. 199).

The landscape appears here as the coherent unit of the visible, the field of perception of all those who dwell in it and constitute it, and are constituted by it; the totality within which all the sensitive beings are inserted. In a direct reference to Merleau-Ponty’s thought, Abram argues that ‘the landscape is not the abstract totality of an intelligible universe, but the experienced unit of this continent that houses us in the form of a local world that we call Earth’ (ABRAM, 1996 p. 86). (FOOTNOTE 9)

The aim of this paper has been that of thinking from the human condition immersed in the world in order to apprehend this immersion not only at the level of the individual body, but also at the level of landscape as the body of the world. In other words, the landscape appears here as a complex phenomenon that encompasses at the same time the visible and the invisible, and incorporates the deep land that supports our bodies as much as the fluid atmosphere by which we breathe. This mediation exerted by the landscape between us and the universe is many times forgotten by humanity, in the same way that the mediation of the body is forgotten by the individuals. Therefore, meanwhile in the realm of the individual the erasing of our condition of beings in the world happens through the separation and

autonomization of the mind in relation to the body, in the environmental realm this erasing happens through the separation and externalization of humanity in relation to the landscape.

7 Environmental behavior

In a way, the environmental behavior concept elaborated by Hallowell in the 1950s is foundational to the approach we suggest (FOOTNOTE 10). Through the use of this concept, Hallowell calls attention to the intertwining of the subject with his/her environment, which produces an environment that is always relational. In this sense, the environment is not external to the organism, but the continent that involves it and which gives sense to the human and non-human actions.

The environmental behavior concept takes into consideration the adaptation properties and necessities of the organism in its interaction with the external world, while constitutive of the real behavioral field in which the activities of human or non-human beings would become more intelligible (HALLOWELL, 1974, p. 87)

When demarcating the action as the generating unit of the relation between subject and his/her environment, Hallowell points towards overcoming the internal-external dichotomy in the sense that ‘it is irrelevant to psychology to consider the human skin as the frontier between the individual and the world’(HALLOWELL, 1974, p. 87). From this premise, he suggests that ‘the organism and its environment should be considered together, as the same creature, making the environmental interaction become the minimum unit that befits the psychology’ (HALLOWELL, 1974, p. 88). When using the expression ‘behavioral environment culturally constituted’, instead of saying that we inhabit a social and cultural environment, Hallowell opposes himself to what he calls cultural objectivism, where the experiential dimension of the subjects is subsumed to the structures and institutions. In a certain way, when emphasizing the active dimension of the environment and the subject action in his/her engaging with the world, his notion of culture anticipates the taskscape notion (FOOTNOTE11) elaborated by Ingold, as a relational modality that constitutes subject and the environment (FOOTNOTE12).

The emphasis on the action and the lived experience of the individuals in their environment as central aspects of culture draws attention to the approximation between the work of nature and that of the culture, between the evolutionary and historical processes. In the same sense, Csordas (2002) calls attention to the approximation of Hallowell’s concept with Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology, for whom the notion of task presents itself as central to the notion of perception, as the engagement of the human beings and non-humans with the world. As

affirms Merleau-Ponty, 'I am more within the task rather than being confronted by it' (1962, p. 416). Thus, we have in the articulation between perception and practice and between self and environmental behavior, elaborated by Hallowell, a fundamental contribution for the phenomenological anthropology.

The environmental behavior concept does not only identify the individual in culture, connecting behavior and objective world, but also links perceptive processes with social restrictions and cultural meanings. Therefore, the focus of Hallowell's formulation was 'orientation' in relation to the self, objects, time and space, motivation and norms. It is in this sense that the term 'practice' is relevant for the description of Hallowell's question (CSORDAS, 2002, p. 59).

In Hallowell's perspective, culture is taken as a resource that provides the basic orientations so that the individual can act in his/her environment (FOOTNOTE 13). His comprehension, however, has nothing in common with the behavioral tradition, which is also called environmentalist, found in the psychological field. Very different from the behavioral or environmentalist psychology, which takes the notion of environment as an external world and attributes to the environmental stimulus the determination of behaviors, for Hallowell, the minimum unit for the comprehension of experience is the interaction.

8 The ecological mind

Bateson's ecological mind concept presents itself as another fundamental reference for developing our argumentation. Bateson is not proposing a metaphor when affirming that the mind is not locked in the cranium, but rather it projects itself in the environment, connecting things in the world, including the human subjects. When postulating a mind that transcends the individual, where the individual mind is only a subsystem, Bateson releases an ecological wave with meaningful consequences for the area of human anthropology and psychology.

From the vast and creative contribution brought by Bateson, for the argument in this paper it interests us to highlight the rebounding of the increase of the mind to the spirituality associated to the nature or to the landscape. Even though Bateson was an agnostic up to the end of his life, he was nevertheless very close to the religious traditions, especially Buddhism and the New Era (FOOTNOTE 14). Even though his reflection on the religious experience has existential traces that remit to the mythical language, it nonetheless was elaborated within the scientific conceptual framework. Thus, when approximating his (ecological) mind conception to the notion of God, he affirms that: '[the mind] is perhaps what some people imagine as being God, but this is still immanent in the totality of the social system that is interconnected to the planetary ecological system' (BATESON, 1972, p. 467). When reflecting on death, the idea of ecological mind projects itself beyond the individual existence of human subjects:

And, at the end there is death. A society that separates the mind from the body is

incomprehensible; we should also try to forget death or constitute mythologies dealing with the survival of the mind transcendence. But, if the mind is immanent not only on those information paths that are located within the body, but also in the external circuits, then death acquires a different meaning. The individual nexus of the circuits that I call 'I' is not so precise anymore, because this nexus is only part of a bigger mind. The ideas that seem to be me, can also become immanent in you. They can survive, if they are true. (BATESON, 1972, p. 465)

It is opportune to evoke how different the comprehension of death elaborated by Bateson, under an ecological perspective, differs from that thought by Freud in the limits of the world of the psychic subject. Thus, if for Freud death is the limit of the subject, the unbearable structural trauma, or, still, as has been put by Lacan, the real that bursts and disorganizes the symbolic function, for Bateson it is a form by which the 'I' can survive and integrate itself in the immanence of the world. In conclusion, we can say that Bateson expanded the mind concept in the opposite direction to the one taken by the Freudian psychoanalysis. In other words, while Freud expanded the mind concept to the interior, embracing an internal communication system – the automatic, the habitual and the vast chain of unconscious processes – Bateson projected the mind concept to the external, in the direction of the world and the environment. Although both agree with the restriction of the conscious sphere of the individual, when facing this limit Bateson immediately refers to what he characterizes as: 'a certain humbleness, tempered by the dignity or happiness of being part of something much bigger. Apart from – if one wants it – God' (BATESON, 1972, p. 267-468). However, if the author evokes God as a possible name for the amplified mind, it is certain that he is not considering the God under a catholic conception, which he criticizes with certain irony:

If one puts God outside him or herself and establishes it vis-à-vis with the creation, and if one has the idea that he/she has been created according to God's image, one will logically and naturally see him or herself as outside and against the things that surround him/her. And, as one vindicates the entire mind for him or herself, one will see the world around as something without mind and, in this sense, not worthy of moral or ethical consideration. The environment will seem to be his/hers to explore. Its surviving unit will be oneself and his/her group against the environment of other social units, other races and the brutes and the vegetables. (BATESON, 1972, p. 468).

This conception of expanded mind, related by Bateson with the notion of God, allows retaking the connection between sacred, health and ecology, while the focus of our argument. In other words, the ecological mind, in which the subjects live the experience of the sacred and the well-being in harmony with nature, is inside and outside of the individual body. It is, thus, this permeable frontier between the 'I' and the environment that connects the cultural and religious processes with the biological and environmental ones. In Bateson's argument,

this role given to the mind can be approximated to that attributed to the self-body, by Kleinman and Csordas, in the paradigm of embodiment (KLEINMAN, 1997). In other words, the phenomenological body expanded in the perception is also a bridge-body, which makes possible the engagement of the subjects in the world, at the same time in which it remits to the radical alterity of the human subjectivity.

Therefore, on Bateson's path, which identifies in the tension between the individual and the ecological dimension the locus of the constitution of the human subjects, and on the trail of phenomenological anthropology, which highlights the role of the body as a bridge in the subjects engagement in the world, we want to call attention to the landscape, while the body of the world, as the continent of the mind and the bridge that maintains the radical alterity of the experience of the beings that inhabit the world, and which involves them as an encompassing totality. In other words, the mind-body, mind-environment, inside-outside dichotomies are thus collapsed, without negating alterity.

9 The radical alterity in the experience of the sacred

Finally, we understand that it is exactly this structural alterity that constitutes the phenomenological nucleus of language and religion while the experience of an 'other' – pre-objective in the language. It could be related to the numinous (FOOTNOTE 15) in religion – which according to Rappaport expresses the original rupture effectuated by the invention of language in the beginning of humanity (RAPPAPORT, 1979). In this sense, the recurrent search for the sacred, especially in its mythical modality, could be comprehended as the attempt at reconstitution of the lost intimacy that came with the interposition of language between subjects and the world. In other words, the experience of the sacred would be referring to the union of the discursive and non discursive aspects of human experience.

In the effort to overcome the alterity locus of transcendence put outside the subject and the world for the structural alterity experienced in the subject's intimacy, Thomas Csordas takes Rappaport's thought and offers a new reading of the phenomenologists of religion, Rudolf Otto, Mircea Eliade and Van der Leeuw (CSORDAS, 2004). In other words, the 'majestic other' transmutes herself/himself into 'intimate other' in a way that the alterity that was outside the subject comes to be experimented as a structural experience of the irreducible difference between the cultural representations and the corporal reality in her/his individual and ecological expression of 'another', which always escapes the attempt at her/his imprisonment by the web of senses produced by culture. As affirms Csordas, 'the

phenomenologists' mistake was to make a distinction between object and subject of religion, when in reality the real object of religion is the objectification of itself' (2004, p. 168). In other words, the object of religion is not the Other, but the existential aporia of alterity itself. According to Csordas, it follows from this that the 'totally other' and the 'intimate other' are two sides of the same coin, in a way that we do not need to choose between them (2004, p. 169). Moreover, in a reference to Freud, he affirms that 'the other is outside only in that she/he is hidden', always being able to come back as the 'return of the oppressed', in the revenge of alterity against the identity. (Csordas, 2004, p.169)

In this sense, the appeal that the ecological-religious practices exert on individuals in our contemporary world could be thought of as the search for a horizon that opens itself to the experience of the irreducible alterity, which the traditional religions imprisoned in their teleological and doctrinaire representations. Thus, the experience of the sacred embodied in nature, which evokes energies and forces that refers to an alterity which is not exhausted in the cultural and linguistic representations, finds in the contemporary ecological habitus an important point of anchorage and plausibility. In this context of intense ecological sensibility associated to the sacred, we identify the structural alterity referred to by Csordas, which is embodied in the landscape, as the encompassing reference for the dimension of the human experience that, irreducible to a symbolization, points repeatedly to the beyond (or within) of the speakable about oneself and the world.

10 A new ecological-religious asceticism as the pedagogy of perception?

Considering the constitution of subjects in which the orientation of the world is based on ecological values, as well as the emergency of spiritualities where the experience of the sacred is associated to the cultivation of a personal interiority (the self) and to the approximation with nature, it is possible to observe a common field of aspirations and imaginative horizons surrounding the conceptions of health, well-being and cure, as much on an individual level as in a planetary one. Motivated by the belief in self improvement, both the ecologically orientated subjects as well as the supporters of the spiritualities of the self make use of corporal and mental techniques that incorporate the ideas of health and well-being related to physical exercise and to the immersion in nature provided by ecological and religious experiences, such as workshops, courses, living experiences, mountaineering, trekking, peregrinations, ecological and religious tourism. It seems that a pedagogy of perception is being formed, as much common to the religious practices as to the ecological

ones, which emphasizes seeing and feeling the world as part of the formation of an ecological and spiritual sensibility, in which the contours refer to a singular composition of the relations between ecology, religion and health. In this sense, we could ask in which measure the articulation of the ideas of self harmony and harmony with the environment – therein including the dimension of the sacred – would be a new modality of asceticism, one of the ecological-religious type.

At the same time, these same practices allow for the identifying of a pedagogical dimension that expresses itself in the learning of a way of looking and perceiving oneself and the environment, constituting what we could call of a pedagogy of perception or pedagogy of sensibilities, which is committed to the formation of subjects that incarnate the virtues of an ecological well-being and of an educational and experiential field turned towards ways of creating existential relations with places, linking human subjects to the landscapes.

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Notes

- 1 The expression cultivation of the self finds some sort of analogy in Foucault's self care or self technology concepts (1985), in a way that it implicates in a manner of regulating the self that expresses a certain ethics and aesthetics of existence. However, although they have a semantic approximation, the notion of cultivation of the self does not include the Foucaultian structure of categories that are constituted as dispositive of power modeled by a sexual morality that inscribes the subject under a disciplinary order.
- 2 According to Gable and Handler, the post-authentic world characterizes itself by 'a permanent image of the modern anxiety that the world we inhabit is no longer authentic – that it has become a fake, plastic and kitschy' (GABLE, 2006).
- 3 A return to the discussion about the relationship between nature and culture can be found in an innovative and critical form in Tim Ingold's book, 'The Perception of the Environment', which will in great part guide our thoughts (INGOLD, 2000).
- 4 We believe that these contributions anticipate and prepare the path for the more contemporary unveilings turned to the ecological epistemologies propositions in works such as Gibson (1977; 1979), where the idea of environmental affordance is highlighted, and Rappaport (1979) who, continuing Bateson's studies, elaborates the cognized environment

concept.

5 According to Abram, Merleau-Ponty never overtook the limit that demarcates the difference between the human and the non-human. Although his notion of the self may suggest this, he never made this position explicit (ABRAM, 1996, p. 89).

6 As is clarified by Csordas, 'when starting with the pre-objective, we are not postulating a pre-cultural, but the pre-abstract. The concept offers to the cultural analysis the open human process of assuming and inhabiting the cultural world in which our existence transcends, but at the same time keeps itself rooted in factual situations' (CSORDAS, 2002, p. 61).

7 According to Csordas, the concept of *habitus* was introduced by Mauss in his seminal essay on body techniques in order to refer to the total sum of the culturally standardized uses of the body in a society (MAUSS, 1950). For Mauss, it was a form of organizing what otherwise would be a miscellaneous of standardized cultural behaviors, deserving only a paragraph of elaboration. Although, in his declaration that the body is simultaneously the original object on which the cultural work develops itself and the main tool in which that work is done, Mauss anticipated how a paradigm of embodiment can mediate fundamental dualities (mind-body, sign-signification, existence-being) (MAUSS, 1950, p. 372). It is at one time, an object of technique, a technical means and the subjective origin of the technique (CSORDAS, 2002, p. 62)

8 We propose in this paper the deployment of the embodiment paradigm from the horizon of psychological anthropology proposed by Csordas to the one of ecology. In order to be able to fulfill the implications that this movement results in, our hypothesis is that the concept of landscape is more adequate than that of the body, in that it remits to the totality of the body of the world, or to the flesh, as Merleau-Ponty named it in 'The Visible and the Invisible'.

9 Here Abram refers to the phenomenological tradition, especially since Husserl, to the notion of 'Land as the original arch', and to Heidegger's vision of 'Land as the element never revealed in contraposition to the sky' (ABRAM, 1996, p.87).

10 Csordas identifies an approximation between the phenomenological approach that gives foundation to the paradigm of embodiment and the relevance of the practice oriented towards the world, found in Hallowell's environmental behavior concept.

11 In the vocable landscape-taskscape, the substitution of the word land for the word task is a resource that allows the author to emphasize the action in contraposition to a view about the landscape which comprehends it as an external element to the individuals or a stage where the drama of culture would be processed.

12 And, if the word task is comprehended here as 'a practical action, performed by a skilled

agent in an environment that is part of what constitutes his/her ordinary occupations', the word taskscape is defined by Ingold as 'the conjunct of intertwined activities'(INGOLD, 2000, p. 195). Thus, what we are invited to see in the landscape is more the action of humans and non-humans intertwining themselves and conforming their surroundings and horizons, and less the passive and untouched nature on which humans would write the action of culture.

13 For Hallowell, there are five basic orientations: self-orientation, object-orientation, space-temporal-orientation, motivational-orientation and normative-orientation. These orientations structure the psychological field in which the subject is prepared to act. Even though the behaviors vary in their relation with the environment, there are common functions that have to be culturally provided in order to maintain a minimum level of psychodynamic adjustment (HALLOWELL, 1974).

14 Bateson was an active member of the Esalen Institute, known for its new age orientation and the incorporation of oriental religions. As told by his daughter, when Bateson became sick, he went to Esalen until his illness became severe, when he had to decide whether he would spend his last days in a Buddhist center or in a hospital. The choice, postponed up to the last instance, was taken by his daughter who took him to a hospital.

15 As Abbagnano (1998) defines, number is a term introduced by Kant to designate the object of intellectual knowledge (the thing in itself). It goes back to a reality that cannot be object of sensibility (sensitive intuition), but only of the intelligible knowledge. The number opposes itself to the phenomenon that is reachable by the sensitive experience.

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