

Urban Perception: interlacement between Lucrecia Ferrara and Armando Silva's thinking

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ABSTRACT

In face of the constant spatial, functional, social and symbolic changes in the city, understanding it beyond its physical aspects is the first step to discover its identity and how its spontaneous transformations take place. In this context, urban perception serves as theoretical and methodological support to understand the city and its subjective aspects. Identifying the relations between the user and the urban space, how the city expresses itself, its symbols and meanings present, go beyond the conventional, aesthetic and spatial understanding of the city to comprehend its relationships, its dynamics, and socio-space. Therefore, the article aims to discuss urban perception based on the theoretical contribution of two authors: Armando Silva and Lucrécia Ferrara. To seek analysis and possible reflections on the topic, the research presents as methodology a literature review focused on the study of the city from these two authors. Despite different directions, these researchers consider the city as a living organism in constant transformation, emphasizing, mainly, the perception of the inhabitants about the city as a research methodology. It was observed that, when considering a study of the city under a perceptive and multidisciplinary look, it escapes its traditional static reading and potentially reveals the cultural and social elements that characterize and identify it, allowing to comprehend the logic of spatial transformations from different points of view of different citizens.

KEYWORDS: Urban perception. Urban imaginary. Urban semiotics.

INTRODUCTION

The relation between man and space, in the environmental context, has been questioned not only for the formation of human behavior (OKAMOTO; 2007, p. 9), but also for the transformations of the environment (CAVALCANTE; ELALI, 2011). In this context, environmental perception emerged as a multidisciplinary theme, originating from the beginning of environmental psychology, to study and learn how the relations between person and environment happen, under different dimensions (CAVALCANTE; ELALI, 2011).

It explains, therefore, the emergence and consolidation of Environmental Psychology (EP) as an area or **field of knowledge** (SOMMER, 2000; SIME, 1999; STOCKOLS, 1995; POL, 1993) focused on the study of **reciprocal relationships between the person and the environment**, whose goal is **to understand the construction of meanings and behaviors** related to the different living spaces, as well as **the changes and influences** brought about by our subjectivity in these environments. (Cavalcanti and Elali, 2011, p. 14, emphasis added)

Environmental perception is related not only to the physical aspects of the environment but also to the individual's life experiences, his age and the period of time he attends a certain environment (HIGUCHI; KUNHEN; BOMFIM, 2011, p. 107).

Including components such as cognition, affection, meaning, valuation, preferences and environmental aesthetics (ITTELSON, 1978), in addition to the person's purposes in the situation (ITTELSON, 1973), **environmental perception** is related to the way people experience the environmental aspects

present in their surroundings, for which not only the **physical aspects** are important, but also the **social, cultural and historical aspects**. Thanks to its role of interpretation and **construction of meanings**, environmental perception plays a fundamental role in the processes of **appropriation and identification** of spaces and environments (KUNHEN; HIGUCHI, 2011, p. 250, emphasis added).

In face of the constant spatial, functional, social and symbolic changes of cities, understanding them beyond their physical aspects is the first step to know their identity, present in urban contexts and also how their transformations take place. The urban perception of the individual and / or society then serves as theoretical and methodological support for decoding the city and investigating subjective aspects correlated to its physical-spatial systems. In this scenario, perceiving the city can involve several factors, from a qualitative analysis of its physical spaces to the search for understanding how the character of its subjectivity occurs, be it cultural, symbolic, historical, social or aesthetic. Identifying the possible relations between users and the urban space, through their activities, social role (norms, characteristics, group behaviors, etc.), relationships and interactions with the systems circumscribed to it (BRONFENBRENNER, 1996, p. 27), in addition to their present symbols and meanings, leads to overcoming the conventional and environmental understanding of cities to understand personal and interpersonal relationships, social dynamics and physical-spatial transformations.

Facing everyday routines, city spaces are often understood habitually and homogeneously, not realizing how intrinsic meanings are given to the elements that compose them and their forms of expression. However, despite the complexity, it is important to emphasize the importance of research involving urban perception, since they seek to propose a reading of the city and, consequently, of its urban spaces, fostering an understanding of the logic behind spatial transformations and the possible mediations existing between its inhabitants and the built environment. According to Ferrara (1988, p. 5), "the perception or reading of the urban environment, as instruments of its interpretation, brings into the action on the city real parameters of the space meaning for the user".

Thus, this article has as main objective the discussion of urban perception from the contribution of two theorists: Armando Silva, with a perception focused on the imaginary, social and symbolic aspects of Latin American cities, and Lucrecia Ferrara, with focus on meanings and non-verbal communicative aspects present in the city. Despite different directions, the authors consider the city as a living organism in constant transformation, emphasizing, mainly, the inhabitants' perception of the city as a research methodology.

METHODOLOGY

This research is basic in nature, exploratory and qualitative, fundamented on a literature review. More specifically, this article is the result of research that, from a methodological point of view, proposes analysis, critical reflection and comparison between two understandings on the theme of urban perception. The authors were selected due to their

different backgrounds and theoretical views and also their great contributions to the study of cities.

To establish the main convergences and divergences between the thoughts of Armando Silva and Lucrécia D'Aléssio Ferrara, we analyzed, on one hand, the books by Armando Silva: "Urban Imaginaries" (2001) and "Imaginary, urban strangenesses" (2014) and, on the other hand, two pieces of work by Lucrécia D'Aléssio Ferrara: "See the city" (1988), "Peripheral look" (1993) and "Urban meanings" (2000).

The analyzes focused on the understanding of the theoretical instruments providing support for the propositions presented by Armando Silva and Lucrécia Ferrara on urban perception, as well as for the methodological procedures used by the authors in their empirical research in the city. Attention was also paid to some categories that emerge from the reflections of the two authors, such as "urban imaginary" and "image of the city".

URBAN PERCEPTION UNDER LUCRÉCIA D'ALÉSSIO FERRARA'S POINT OF VIEW

Graduated in Neo-Latin Languages at the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo (1959) and Ph.D. in Brazilian Literature at the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo (1964), Lucrécia D'Alessio Ferrara presents studies and experiences on communication and semiotics in urban spaces, which generated publications of several publications that contribute to studies focused on the theme of urban perception (FERRARA, 2020). With a semiotic look at the city, the author seeks to identify it as a means of expression and information.

For Ferrara, urban perception can be understood as a cultural practice that needs a certain understanding of the city and is supported by urban use and the physical image of the city, which is formed by images of habitual fragments such as the square, the block, the streets, among other elements (FERRARA, 1988, p. 3). Ferrara (2000, p. 158, emphasis added) proposes to understand "architecture as a **cultural intervention** through the shape and quality of space, being something that goes far beyond simple projective performance." According to the author, "to understand **architecture as a language** is to assume it as an instrument of cultural intervention; **architect and user** interact as well as **space and use**. (FERRARA, 2000, p. 158, emphasis added). The author proposes a study of the city that surpasses the user's routine perception and seeks a perception of several unusual angles in the city, to apprehend its signs and its ways of expressing itself and to communicate.

According to Ferrara (1993, p. 18, emphasis added),

decoding this urban, understanding its logic, supposes the recognition of the syntax, of the way of forming that identifies it, [...] of the possibility of breaking that homogeneity to project elements of predication, of qualification. We call this operation **urban perception**, as a way of retaining and generating information about the city. **Perception is information**.

In this context,

information space is that physical, social, economic and cultural environment that wraps a type of behavior resulting from a way of life, a way of

production. These behaviors are revealed through a language whose signs are **uses and habits** (FERRARA, 1993, p. 151, emphasis added).

Therefore, urban space and information are interdependent elements and are mutually exclusive, making it possible to predict a change in a given space when there are new stimuli, causing new learning and behavioral changes in those who inhabit it (FERRARA, 1993, p. 151-512). Ferrara (1993, p. 153) emphasizes signs as a means of expression and information of the city, highlighting the use of urban space and habits, comparing them with signs or means that express the relationships between space and the user, their ways of living and living in the city. Furthermore, the author highlights other signs present in the city such as architectures, colors, lines, monuments, the industrial design of the equipment, the sounds present in the space, advertising, mass communication vehicles, among other elements that generate information for the user in the city at the same time that they express its identity (FERRARA, 1988, p. 4). Through the association between these signs found in a dispersed and discontinuous way in the city, we generate meanings and perform a non-verbal reading of the city (FERRARA, 1988, p. 15). This non-verbal reading of the city takes place in a disorganized way, without a pre-established or systematized order and is affected by the reader's own perception that presents his own experiences in the use of codes and languages (FERRARA, 1988, p. 16).

So, the user identifies the city as a place, as it relates to the urban space, uses and apprehends it, transforming it into a socio-cultural manifestation that breaks with the idealistic characterization of projected space (FERRARA, 1988, p. 14). By proposing a study of urban spaces, understanding the city as a producer of information and as a “producer and participant of non-verbal texts” (FERRARA, 1988, p. 14), we surpassed the mere understanding of the city's physical organizations.

According to Ferrara (2000, p. 118), both the term “image of the city” and the term “urban imaginary” are categories of perceptual analysis not only “in the city” but “from the city”, since they qualify it. They are related to the person's cognitive capacity to apprehend, reflect and produce information (in all their interaction and interrelationships) in the city and about the city. In this context, the image of the city refers to some information of unique meaning that expresses something constructed and concrete from the city (FERRARA, 2000, p. 118), that is, the image is concrete, identifiable, descriptive and recognized.

The imaginary of the city, on the other hand, corresponds to the need for human beings to produce knowledge through the multiplication of meanings, attributing meanings to the meanings, that is, it is the associative capacity to produce several images from a concrete image (FERRARA, 2000, p. 118 -119). While the urban image is a collective enjoyment, the imaginary is triggered by loneliness (FERRARA, 2000, p. 121). In other words, “through the imaginary, the urban image of places, monuments, emblems, public or private spaces starts to mean more by incorporating extra and autonomous meanings than about the basic image that gave rise to it” (FERRARA, 2000, p. 118). It is worth mentioning that the author emphasizes the perception of the image of the city as an indispensable means for the production of urban identity and meanings (FERRARA, 2000, p. 11).

Regarding the methodologies, Ferrara (1988, p. 78-79) highlights that research in the scope of semiotic reading of the city can focus on some of the following six dimensions: (i) the physical-contextual characteristics: current stage and its transformation; (ii) memory and environmental history: the urban repertoire; (iii) the institutionalized and spontaneous public space, and its relation with the user; (iv) the institutionalized and spontaneous infrastructure; (v) the relation between public and private space; and (vi) the urban environment in its interfering micro-languages: the city and the environmental extensions of the various media. Despite the different approaches, Ferrara (1988, p. 79) argues that all six categories must consider the parameters of observation, user testimonies, comparisons and associations.

Besides, the author points to other methodological resources, such as observations of strategic places at specified times and days, journalistic documentation, testimonies about the selected region, iconographic documentation (maps, sketches, plans, photos, drawings), audiovisual documentation, photographs, interviews with selected users, among others (FERRARA, 1988, p. 79-80). The author emphasizes that this type of research is fragmented and inductive and, the larger the samples collected in the research, the safer it becomes (FERRARA, 1988, p. 77). In other words, it is necessary to fragment the city into informed places, that is, to overcome its homogeneous totality, to discover and translate its places, where information is materialized through its signs, uses and present habits (FERRARA, 1993, p. 153).

Ferrara (1988, p. 76) points out three methodologies that can be used in surveys of the city's environmental perception: (i) having direct contact between the researcher and the city, which means collecting the information we need about the city by going to it; (ii) understanding that what we seek is found within the city; and (iii) understanding the city as a researcher's space, that is, understanding that the researcher himself must be able to read and interpret the information emitted by the users of the urban space as they relate to the latter. It is important that, during the research, researchers are removed from the homogeneous and habitual image they have of the city, moving away from routines and proposing a reading and understanding of urban environments through unusual shapes and angles, perceiving it qualitatively and recognizing meanings, means of expression and identity (FERRARA, 1993, p. 153).

The author also highlights photographs as a means of perceiving and studying the city, capturing forms, volumes and movements present in spaces. When photographing, the user creates a certain estrangement with the usual place, allowing an explicit image of the city, in addition to being surprised by the selected angles, which are supposedly related to their daily lives (FERRARA, 1988, p. 77). Besides, photographing urban spaces "leads man to capture, confront and inform identical, close or diverging spaces" (FERRARA, 1988, p. 77-78), being such a comparison, for the author, a fundamental method in research of environmental perception (FERRARA, 1988, p. 77-78). Also, the comparison between past and present photographs of the same urban locations when commented on by city users is a method that brings to mind the context of the city's perception (FERRARA, 1988, p. 78).

URBAN PERCEPTION UNDER ARMANDO SILVA'S POINT OF VIEW

Armando Silva has a Ph.D. from the University of California, with studies in philosophy, semiotics and psychoanalysis. The author has researched Latin American cities for more than a decade, using mainly the imaginary to investigate and identify socio-symbolic practices (SILVA, 2001).

According to Silva (2001, p. XXIV), the city can be understood as a dense symbolic network under construction and expansion and, to perceive it, it is not enough to understand its image in the appreciation of its physical extension or only in its visual representations, it is necessary to carry out a continuous research exercise, considering the participation of citizens in the symbolic constructions of the city, how they use and imagine it. The author states that:

if we tried to know where and how the shape of the city is produced today, we would probably have to admit that it is not only architecture, buildings or streets that mark this condition and that, every day, much more ethereal objects appear, like advertisements, digital products or signs, and even invisible, from an iconic point of view, like lights or bits of cyberspace. All of this means that there is a “dematerialization” of the urban references, which follows the new citizen perceptions, in such a way that a city of time overlaps with the city of space, thus impregnating the citizen representations of contemporary subjectivity. (SILVA, 2014, p. 21-22).

Therefore,

[...] if today we are facing a brand new phenomenon, which is the non-correspondence between city and urbanism, because urbanism exceeds the city framework, **the imaginaries** appears as a strategy (precisely more temporal than spatial), to account for urbanization processes that are not only **manifestations of a city**, but also of the world in which it urbanizes. (SILVA, 2001, p. X, emphasis added).

In this scenario, it can be said that the urban breaks with the pre-established physical and geographical limits of the city (SILVA, 2001, p. X). In other words, the vision of the urban, according to Silva (2001, p. X), goes beyond the understanding of the physical-spatial limit of the city and considers the several factors that are present in it, for example: art, technologies, media, the internet, billboards, advertising, graffiti, signposts, movie posters, among others, which together build an urban mentality (SILVA, 2001, p. XXV).

Understanding the city in the context of urban perception is, then, to propose a look that goes beyond the dimensions of the Cartesian space of the city, since it supposes to consider subjective aspects present in its environment and that assure its vitality, assuring it as a place of expression and information. Therefore, what differs from one city to another is not only its physical-formal characteristics but also the symbols present, which the inhabitants build to represent it (2001, XXVI). These symbols, on their own, undergo constant changes as well as the collective's fantasies, creating the urbanization of the city (SILVA, 2001, p. XXVI).

For Silva, the term “symbol” has a philosophical meaning, different from the definition given by the language sciences, as it is not something uniquely determined, but something that seeks to express the multiple meanings of things (SILVA, 2001). Therefore, when mentioning symbols or a symbolic dimension, Silva (2001) refers to what is understood beyond words, through the different senses and feelings. When referring to urban imaginary, the city is not only a scenario of languages but also of evocations and dreams, images and various writings (SILVA, 2001).

The blunt and deterministic idea that what matters in the city is the “real”, the “economic”, the “social” left out other, more abstract, but no less real considerations: we can say that what is real of a city is not only its economy, its physical planning or its social conflicts but also the imagined images built from such phenomena, and also the imaginations built outside of them, as a fabulous exercise, as a representation of its spaces and its writings (SILVA, 2001, p. 79, emphasis added).

For the author, “the city mixes habits, perceptions, stories, in short, it is 'culture-making itself like sewing” and “it is precisely in the fusion of all these intermediations and seams that the urbanity or collective personality of the city emerges” (SILVA, 2001, p. 26). This multiple relations between the subject and the citizen in a city, on its own, not only creates collective image of the city but also transforms it.

Regarding urban imaginary, Silva (2001, p. X) expresses the term as what comes from our desires and can be understood as the group ways of seeing, living, inhabiting and uninhabiting our cities. Each city will be understood (from a cultural point of view) through the hypothetical sum of its urban imaginary, since these imaginary can be distinguished due to the different opinions of citizens (SILVA, 2001, p. XI). About the image of the city, it is formed through the imaginary cuts of its residents on the city lived, interiorized and projected (SILVA, 2001, p. XXVI-XXVII), being formed then, through the subjectivity of citizens. In this context, Silva (2001) highlights the uses of the city as forming the city's image.

Within the methodologies of studies on the city, according to Silva (2001, p. 20), research is still insufficient on the notion of the city image:

[...] research on the urban remains within criteria of known common sense or within traditional approaches, generally dominated by sociological or economic analyzes in which, when questions related to their image arise, they are resolved as visual problems, without precisely problematizing the very notion of image (SILVA, 2001, p. 20).

Silva (2001) emphasizes, therefore, the importance of studying the image of the city, that is, of what was created through urban imagery and the uses of spaces, for the lived and interiorized city. The author also highlights the views of the citizen in his research methodologies (SILVA, 2001, p. XVII). This point of view is understood as a series of discursive strategies through which citizens narrate the stories of their city, even if such reports can be represented as visual (SILVA, 2001, p. 9).

To understand the cultures and socio-symbolic practices of the citizens of different Latin American cities, Silva (2001) uses methodological procedures in his research, such as: gathering of technical files about episodes in the city and location data, analysis of several photographs of urban events, evaluation of speeches and images of newspapers in comparison with urban events, narrations of citizens, narrative and point of view analyzes, continuous observations and questionnaires about the imaginary projections of citizens. Also, the author highlights six major methodological fields in the perceptual study of the city: (i) those of fieldwork, in qualified statistics of group perception; (ii) techniques for collecting urban narrations; (iii) the semiotics of the city's image in the media; (iv) the enunciations of the city imagined in literary and artistic works, by historical periods; (v) the collection of urban objects, such as city iconographies; (vi) and those of sound, visual, audiovisual and digital production files.

INTERLACEMENTS BETWEEN LUCRÉCIA FERRARA AND ARMANDO SILVA'S OVERVIEWS ABOUT THE STUDY OF THE CITY

Despite different focuses on the study of cities, since Ferrara highlights studies of signs and means of expression in the city and Silva turns to studies on the cultures of Latin American cities through urban imagery, both authors emphasize the relationship between city and user or citizen, more specifically about their perceptions and the uses they make of urban spaces. In general, it is clear that Lucrécia Ferrara seeks to perceive the city mainly from a semiotic perspective, that is, by unveiling how the city expresses itself, communicates and at the same time generates information, highlighting the relationship between the user and the urban space, and the study of signs. Concerning studies on the Latin American cities of Armando Silva, it can be said that they seek to identify urban cultures and their symbolic elements through the citizens' urban imagery.

It was observed that both authors present a perceptual and multidisciplinary look at the city and about the city, considering it as a place of information that is transformed through the needs and relationships between inhabitants and urban spaces. Furthermore, it was noticed that, although different, the theories can complement each other because Silva (2001) highlights the urban imaginary as a form of group ways of seeing, living, inhabiting and uninhabiting our cities, while Ferrara (1993, p. 153) highlights in her theories the signs as means of expression of the latter.

The term imaginary urban, for both authors, is a cognitive process that occurs through the life experience of the user or citizen in the city. Ferrara (2000) exposes the term as a cognitive process that is formed through urban images that are associated with different meanings in our imagination, being of a solitary character, related to the individual. Silva (2001) also relates the term to a cognitive process, but with a collective character as it expresses a common perception of a certain group and influences group ways of seeing, living, inhabiting and uninhabiting our cities.

Regarding the image of the city, Ferrara (2000) conceptualizes it as something physically tangible and built in the city, with a unique meaning, while Silva (2001) characterizes

it as something more subjective formed through the imaginary cuts (that is, by the perceptual process) of its residents on the city lived, interiorized and projected.

Regarding the methodologies, both authors emphasize the importance of the perception of the inhabitants and the observations collected by the researchers themselves. Also, both highlight the importance of the researcher's direct physical contact with the researched city in addition to the importance of reading and interpreting the information issued by users of the urban space. Among the methodologies used by Lucrecia Ferrara, we highlight the analysis of photographs of the images of the city and interviews with users of urban spaces. About the techniques employed by Armando Silva, the use of questionnaires on the urban imaginary of the different groups of citizens that make up the city and the analysis of photographs of urban events, speeches and images from newspapers stand out.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Despite different approaches, Silva and Ferrara are similar to the general understanding of urban perception and their strong relationship with the user or citizen, their behaviors and actions. It is observed that the authors contribute a lot to the understanding of urban perception and the concepts that surround it, as well as to the techniques that can be useful in empirical research.

It was also observed that the city is plural and provides information for those who inhabit it, the subject represents a being who makes use of his cognitive potential to generate feelings, perceptions, meanings and personal and interpersonal imagery, which are responsible for cities' own socio-spatial and cultural changes. By taking into account a perceptual and multidisciplinary study of the city, considering the urban imaginary and / or the study of signs, one can understand in a more holistic way how its transformations take place, whether material or immaterial.

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