

MICROAGGRESSIONS REPRESENTED IN IDENTITY AND IMAGINARY OF DISABILITY IN MUSEUMS

HÉLIA FILIPE SARAIVA*

I explore the articulation between representations, identities and disability through the juxtaposition of present contributions in the research carried out, in the field of my doctoral project, besides alluding to the qualitative contributions led by the scholars who participated in the international meeting *Representing Disability in Museums. Imaginary and Identities*. How can we correlate premises of complex issues and after the discovery how can we equate them in a transversely perceptible way? The breadth of its dimensions is intrinsically linked to the transition from the biomedical model to social model as well as to lifting the obscuring veil of sociocultural oppression experienced by people with disabilities and emphasize their pertinent dignity and diversity. I articulate them with the concept of microaggression, in the sense that evidencing the targets of the microaggressors should allow us to uncover and experience their spatial identity, therefore we can become aware of the influential tension present in the salience of the reductive and limiting representational elements; on the grounds that they are based on attitudinal, behavioural and identity constructs, resulting from processes of adaptation to guidelines instilled in a society characterized by capacitating and normalizing stereotypes¹, which tend to compress and to stereotype the frailty of the human condition. This statement is particularly noticeable when we report it to the cognitive

* PhD candidate at the University Fernando Pessoa and researcher at CEAUP, Porto, Portugal. saraiva.helia@gmail.com.

¹ DAVIS, 1995.

field of representative standardizations that tend to be portrayed as metonymic images. Its imagetic metonymical nature is not very flexible, and often shows aggressiveness, particularly when interpreters accommodated to the above-mentioned standardizations are faced with diverse, unusual and unique perceptions. This assertion is based on the fact that their combat provides because, according to Helgeson, when people disclose counterstereotypical conducts, they could be disciplined by antistereotyped behaviour and are dissuaded to «publicizing counterstereotypical behaviour, and by undermining performance in counterstereotypical domains»². The perplexities raised by his statement lead me to some questions aroused by Hannah Arendt in the work entitled «The Human Condition», enunciated in the assertion «what we are doing, or think we are doing, in the world we have to live in»³. Its reflexive appeal is crucial, although the rejoinder is neither simplistic nor linear, I venture to say that some proposals were debated during the international meeting *Representing Disability in Museums, Imaginary and Identities* in relation to the link between representation, disability and the imaginaries. The assumption of the intense complexity, evident in the (a)representativeness process of interpretation of the incomplete interstices, that is to say, in the gaps of the blank spaces in the interpretative challenges. I point out my agreement with this logic by equating the representation of the work(s) exposed in institutions such as museums with the declaration that the text(s) is (are) lazy mechanism(s)⁴, whose non-linear understanding obeys the appreciation made by the receiver, because the change of a model with a prescriptive prism add a change in the above mentioned models leading us to understand that «the text wants to leave the reader the interpretative initiative, although it is interpreted with a sufficient margin of univocity»⁵ embedded in the fissures, intermittences and (in) visible scars present in the articulation between representativeness and imaginary. The intricate composition of the appealing interpretative performance, notorious both in the arendtian formulation and in the equian perspective, safeguarding the due differences between the two authors, seeks to emphasize the diversity of human life, manifested in the tacit acceptance of the translatable challenge in a demeaning work mentioned in the variously framed functionalities of the persecuted and «haunted» individual by the label of vulnerability and disability. For this reason, we should scan the vein attached to the challenge posed by the philosopher and the semiologist and, simultaneously, decipher the «blank spaces» in the paradoxical visibility overshadowed by the representations of people with disabilities. The above mentioned papers highlights the pregnant analysis, ironically expressed by Eco's «sloth», wich requires and stimulates competencies that ables us to face representations as pages, empty screens, whose cracks and crevices

² HELGESON, 2015: 92.

³ ARENDT, 1998: 322.

⁴ ECO, 1998.

⁵ ECO, 1998: 37. Our Translation.

disclose discriminations, microaggressions and persecutions both verbal and non-verbal that are still inflicted in the people in question. We admit that the delicacy of this subject induces some perplexity because the link between representation, identity and the discovery of seminal imaginaries in the so called «white spaces» can cause doubts. Nevertheless, its elucidation is intelligible, provided there is the notion that its analysis does not hinder access to interpretative decoding nor the rights that involve the enjoyment of functional diversity and trust, under penalty of being voted to live a damaging skepticism and even failure of self-esteem derived from monolithism, lack of personal autonomy and the need for knowledge, as Axel Honneth stated:

*As in the case of love, the child, through the prolonged experience of maternal dedication, gains the confidence to make his needs known without hindrance, as the adult individual, by the experience of legal recognition, conquers the possibility of conceiving his act as an exteriorization, respected by all, of the own autonomy*⁶.

The consequences of the circumstances arising from the aluded representative sectarianism are reflected in the perplexities felt by the excluded person, because they sustain interpellations from the fence by participating in the verbalization of their will, as well as in the consequent loss of social protection and dignity. The implications of this are important due to the existence of microaggressions felt indelibly in the individuals concerned and liable to stigmatize the imagery created around them, since they are susceptible of being entrenched, as we shall see, on the derogation effect. I now mention that microaggressions are defined as «brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioural and environmental indignities»⁷ which may occur intentionally. Although they are often carried out unintentionally, perpetrated in an automatic manner, leaving both aggressors and assaulted uncertain about the nature of the stereotypical or prejudiced nature of the acts performed. The ballast of the above-mentioned uncertainty influences decisively the derogations in the sense that they produce resonant psychological impacts, both in the people who utter them as in the receivers. Accordingly, the provisions tend to generate feelings of humiliation and denigration of a person or group; unleashing intense fragilizations and prostrations in the injured, causing long-term serious health implications for targets and creating stereotypes that are cramped and liable to trigger animosity because — according to the following perspective — the enunciation of insults tends to cause insurgents to overreach, to transpose a line which «opens up possibilities for addressing discrimination and prejudice»⁸. This disruptive communication leads to the above mentioned derogations becoming harmful when referring marginalized groups

⁶ HONNETH, 1997: 145. Our translation.

⁷ SUE *et al.*, 2007: 273.

⁸ CHARMAZ *et al.*, 2018: 242.

as well as minorities excluded by society due to what I call exonormality. In other words, some of the more distressing provisions with a transmissibility effect, according to the oil stain effect, involve ableist, gender, racial and sexual stereotypes. However, I emphasize that these degrading expressions do not appear to contain harmful implications, nor do they have an aggressive character similar to that of an aggression involving injuries resulting from bodily offenses. In this regard, I remember one of the images exhibited by Professor Cordula Nolte during the ministry of her communication entitled «Down and Out and Disabled in the Middle Ages? Medieval Attitudes, Modern Assumptions and Public Dis/ability History» when was shown a reproduction of a 16th century painting: «Bildnis eines behinderten Mannes». Respect and safeguard the right of the scholar to choose the said engraving, since it is illustrative of the perspective explained in her paper. Nevertheless, I would like to underline the microaggressive tendencies in the image mainly by the psychological affectation of the identity representation of people with disabilities, and to influence, in a non-flattery way, the look of the visitors on the cabinet de curiosités. The dyadic reading of this intention is very striking in the ambiguous nature of the microaggression, expository in the human being portrayed, due to the binomial assumption present in the mentioned portrait. By one hand, affection is transmitted in the way the man was dressed with a red cape and an apparently dignifying collar, but on the other hand, we cannot deny a less respectful nuance, given the exposure of his vulnerable and naked body, which can be understood as a way of disdain and causing discomfort due to the eventual mockery and the alleged compliments that can be pronounced when the painting is observed. The effects associated with this type of images with an ambiguously derogatory feature leave a path of hurt and invisible wounds much deeper than a glance reveals, given the inexistence of the pictorial insertion of traumatismos resulting from physical blows or indelible injuries, such as prostheses and facilitators that inhibit bipedalism, by detracting the belief that oral or pictorial communication has no secondary effects, nor consequences embodied in the derogations. However, they produce several symptomatic impacts such as low self-esteem, ostracism, and resistance in contributing to cohesion and inclusion. The role that fits us as scholars, researchers and citizens interested in this field of study can be understood in the light of the Barthesian distinction between text of pleasure, «he who contends, fills, gives euphoria; he who comes from culture, who does not break with it, is bound up with a comfortable practice of reading»⁹, and text of fruition «he who puts in a state of loss, until a certain annoyance), makes the historical, cultural, psychological bases of the reader, the consistency of their tastes, their values and their memories waver, makes their relationship with language in crisis»¹⁰. The admission of an uninterpreted discom-

⁹ BARTHES, 1987: 21. Our translation.

¹⁰ BARTHES, 1987: 21-22. Our translation.

fort begins on the one hand, through the constant appeal to the process of representation when, *ad exemplum*, traditional norms and expectations are subverted, in the sense of the profound control exercised over the representation of disability identities. In this sense, the interpreter, as well as the visitor, of a museum is not warned for the conjunctural character, but is summoned to emerge in an imaginary based on the exposition of «factual sloths», that is to say, a deficient exposition of the individuals about whom we have pronounced. It should be remembered that these words, apart from being instituted as reflective exercises, are inextricably inscribed as marks of the work implicit in an unprecedented process of representation: perversion of the serious layer of normality, diagonally crossed by the exposition/denunciation of addictive and selective features, presents in the research carried out by this sphere's professionals. Indeed, the discourse designed to make this field knowable emerge inculcated by an anachronistic homogeneity, perhaps anodyne in other situations, but here it is revisited with an antithetical intention to the canon's consecration and the monocular version that a large number of representations impute to the surroundings of the people with disability.

The qualitative contribution of the presentations presented by the speakers were fundamentally aimed, in my view, to restore the injustice of the meager representation, both at the imaginary level and at the level of identity, which has been consecrated to their existence. We have, therefore, been in contact with the viewing, the tactility and the nominalization of high-quality lectures, as well as works related to the themes in question, which in some way give visibility and contribute to further research in this field, since filling spaces through theories concerning the biomedical model echo are being deprecated, as we move towards the social model, preventing the imaginary of the people mentioned from being viewed in a non-evolutionary way, but as part of a holistic and inclusive construct. Therefore, we can erect, as I hope, a critical process that is not anchored in anachronistic, frivolous, stigmatizing or excluded representations.

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