

**(RE)PRESENTING ONTOLOGIES  
IMAGE AND PRESENCE FROM ICONS TO NFTS<sup>1</sup>**

Felipe Loureiro<sup>2</sup>

**Resumo**

Enquanto o modelo de história cultural de Flusser (Flusser, 2011) sugere um processo linear de abstração crescente, Victor Buchli argumenta que “o imaterial é sempre produzido materialmente”, e que esse aparente paradoxo “é seu poder gerador e o que cinge os dualismos produtivos do social vida e sustenta a metafísica que assegura nossas ontologias dadas” (Buchli, 2016). Com base em Buchli e Flusser, o artigo traça paralelos entre as estruturas ontológicas ancoradas em duas mídias aparentemente muito diferentes: as imagens (tradicionalis) de ícones bizantinos e as imagens digitais (técnicas) contemporâneas.

**Palavras-chave:** Aparelhos. Imagens técnicas. Ícones. Imaterialidade.

**Abstract**

While Flusser’s model of cultural history (Flusser, 2011) suggests a linear process of increasing abstraction, Victor Buchli argues that “the immaterial is always produced materially”, and that this apparent paradox “is its generative power and what girds the productive dualisms of social life and sustains the metaphysics that secure our given ontologies” (Buchli, 2016). Drawing from Buchli and Flusser, the paper traces parallels between the ontological structures anchored in two apparently widely different media: the (traditional) imagery of Byzantine icons and contemporary digital (technical) images.

**Keywords:** Apparatuses. Technical images. Icons. Immateriality.

In his account of the Apollo 11 mission, Norman Mailer argued that the magnitude of the numerous technical challenges behind the moon landing “set electronic engineers and computer programs to dreaming of ways to attack the problems of society as well as they had attacked the problems of putting men on the moon” (Mailer, 1970). Today, the discussions regarding “smart cities” point toward a similar disposition - “many have become enamored with the same idea: What if the people who build circuits and social networks could build

---

<sup>1</sup>Trabalho apresentado ao Grupo de Trabalho “Imagem e Imaginação”, do VII ComCult, Faculdade de Comunicação da FAAP - Fundação Armando Álvares Penteado, São Paulo – Brasil, 13 a 17 de setembro de 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Mestre (doutorado em andamento), LTDS/COPPE/UFRJ, loureiro.fgsf@gmail.com

cities, too?” (Badger, 2018). The (apparent) efficiency of the interconnected digital devices we use every day induces us to dream about a time when our cities – or even the environment as a whole – will function with the same speed and reliability we find in our smartphones, tablets and notebooks, and this idea seems to resonate with the very *flusserian* notion that societies are shaped by the medium that dominates the organization of their cultures – smart cities would be a “natural” product of a society shaped by apparatuses. However, as Flusser himself points out, our relationship with the apparatuses in which we rely on to perform many of our daily activities has a peculiarity: most of us have no idea of how these apparatuses work.

While the linear structure of texts is evident for every literate person in the world - and even the illiterate can still capture it in speech - electronic apparatuses are “black boxes” - we know how to work with them, but their inner workings are completely opaque to most of us. This opaqueness does not stop us, however, from trusting these black boxes. The Hyper Suprime Cam installed on the Subaru Telescope has recently allowed astronomers to discover Virgo I, a new ultra-faint galaxy that could not be seen through previous telescopes. An ultra-faint galaxy is obviously something that we understand as foreign, and it seems reasonable that we can only experience it through a sophisticated apparatus such as a telescope. To say that we can only see something through an apparatus is the same as saying that we can only experience it as an image, something that seems perfectly fine in the case of an ultra-faint galaxy. However, in our increasingly immaterial / digital culture, it is common to treat things that are very close to us in a similar manner.

In 2013, a composite image became popular throughout the Internet: the picture at the top showed Vatican square in 2005, during the announcement of Pope Benedict XVI; the picture at the bottom showed the same place in 2013 - the announcement of Pope Francis. In the first image, we can only see the back of dozens of heads, while, in the second image, there is a sea of screens - apparatuses - being held up in the air, trying to “capture” the event. Many discussions unfolded on-line and offline, since the composition illustrated how so much had

change in such a short period of time, and especially how people now seemed to feel the need to create personal records of events - or just to insert an apparatus between themselves and the world.



Figure 1 – St. Peter’s square in 2005 and 2013 (Taylor, 2013). Available at <https://www.businessinsider.com/vatican-square-2005-and-2013-2013-3>.

These two examples have a twofold meaning: firstly, they exemplify our faith in digital apparatuses - we cannot see the ultra-faint galaxy with our eyes, but we believe that it does exist because the apparatus “tells us” that it does. Likewise, we believe the “story” told by the composition, which illustrates and apparently confirms our feeling that the world is changing at an increasingly disorienting pace. The fact that the picture at the top was taken during the funeral procession of Pope John Paul II – a very different kind of ceremony - has not gone viral, so the story lives on, on-line and offline. Second, in the ultra-faint galaxy, the apparatus is a necessity, while in the announcement of Pope Francis it is a “choice”. A ultra-faint galaxy demands the mediation of an apparatus, and so our experience of it does not

really occur in space - only the encounter with the apparatus through which we see its image happens in space. When people that are standing in Vatican square as Pope Francis is announced a few meters away feel the need to insert an apparatus between them and the event, they seem to be creating a different space inside the space of the square. This is a relational space, a special kind of space that the square - the historical stereotype of the urban public space - now seems to lack.

Heidegger used the term *Ereignis* – translated into English as *appropriation* or *enowning* - to describe the event of catching sight of something - “to see with the mind's eye, to see face-to-face” (Stambaug, in Heidegger, 1969, p. 14) -, and argued that it has a “technological ‘veiling’”. In the case of Virgo I, the technological veiling is a precondition for enowning, and since “positionality is the ‘photographic negative’ of enowning” (Mitchell, Raffoul in Heidegger, 2012, p. xii), it becomes clear that, in this case, there are two positionalities that do not meet: the apparatus is positioned in order to apprehend the object, while we position ourselves not in relation to the apparatus, but to the images produced by it. Flusser uses the term apparatus to refer specifically to this kind of device that does not intend to transform the world, but to reveal it: “From one side there is the emergence of machines that aim to discover, and not to change the world, the so-called ‘apparatuses’. It can be said that the telescope is good for seeing the mountains of the moon, as much as the mill is good for making flour, but it cannot be said that the mountains of the moon must be something else, as wheat must become flour. Apparatuses are good, but not good for something” (Flusser, 2012).

Apparatuses are objects that allow us to discover and experience other objects. In the case of an ultra-faint galaxy, they are the only way through which we can experience the object; and people holding up apparatuses high above their heads, trying to see Pope Francis through them instead of through their own eyes, seem to be trying to move back from the event, turning it into an “ultra-faint event”. These examples also illustrate two different

approaches to the creation of technical images; referring to categories of photographers defined by Andreas Müller-Pohle, Flusser argues that a documentarist “sits behind a wall with a hole in it and tries to record the world as much and as painstakingly as possible through that one hole”, while a visualist “also sits behind that wall but tries to create a new hole to gain a new perspective on the world” (Flusser, 1982 apud Van Gelder & Westgeest, 2011, p. 200). We may be prone to think of the scientists operating telescopes as documentarists, and the people recording Pope Francis as visualists; but it is hard not to see the revelation of never-before-seen confines of the universe as an attempt to “gain a new perspective on the world”, and the recording of a historical event of worldwide appeal as an urge to capture the event as much as possible from one specific “hole”. It becomes obvious how difficult it is to assert the difference between objectivity and subjectivity in our “universe of technical images”.

The opaqueness of technical images may well be unprecedented, but the tension between the material and immaterial dimensions of culture is by no means a new issue. Victor Buchli argues that “the immaterial is always produced materially”, and that “This apparent paradox, (...) is its generative power and what girds the productive dualisms of social life and sustains the metaphysics that secure our given ontologies” (Buchli, 2016, p. vii-viii). This notion drives Buchli’s analysis of the history of the relationship between the material and immaterial aspects of culture and its impact on the ontological structures of past and present societies - an analysis that begins in Byzantium, a culture dominated by the debates between iconoclasts and iconophiles over the complexities of a new form of image-making that would play a fundamental role in the shaping of Western culture. The controversies between iconoclasts – those who condemned the production of religious images, identifying it with idolatry - and iconophiles – those who argued that these images were capable of communicating a transcendental meaning - that marked the eighth and ninth centuries were “concerned with the question of how to presence the divine” – a fundamental ontological

question at the time –, “producing the immaterial and the material means to do so” (Buchli, 2016, p. 52).

Before entering into Buchli’s analysis, it is important to underline that, in Late Antiquity, paintings were conceived and perceived in very specific ways that are quite different from modern and contemporary notions. In his 1919 essay “Reverse Perspective”, Pavel Florensky confronts the centrality of representation in the history of Western art with an analysis of the religious icons of the Russian orthodox tradition. Florensky argues that, until the Renaissance, linear perspective was reserved to applied arts that tried to create “illusions”, especially in the theatre. A painting used as scenery, as a background for another art, had no life of its own. In fact, he argues, even a “independent” figurative painting that tried to replicate nature as we see it would already be a minor work – it would not be “pure” painting. For Florensky, the task of painting “is not to duplicate reality, but to give the most profound penetration of its architectonics, of its material, of its meaning”, while “theatre decoration wants as much as possible to replace reality with its outward appearance” (Florensky, 2003, p. 209). Painting has its own ways of communicating through symbols, not by imitating what the eye sees in the “real” world. Likewise, drawing from Barber (2002) and Frank (2000), Buchli argues that the icon was an image made to be looked “through”, and not “at” - “the ‘icon’ was a devotional image that served as an intermediary between the viewer and the person represented... the sacred portrait is best understood as a transparent window that the viewer looks through (to the ‘prototype’, the actual person represented) rather than at: the gaze does not stop at the surface of the panel, but goes to the prototype’ (Brubaker, cited in Barber, 2002, p. 29).

According to Barber, an icon was therefore, the depiction of a prototype, while also functioning as a relic - “being both original and a copy – a copy in the sense that it is a copy of the original prototypical image, and a relic in the ‘haptic’ sense by which it has had ‘contact’ with the prototype” (Buchli, 2016, p. 57). The icon was a special kind of painting,

since its composition followed not only the rules of a style, but a prototype – and this prototype was not merely visual. Florensky argued that, when a painting tries to replicate the outward appearance of reality, “The aesthetics of this outward appearance lie in the inner connectedness of its elements”, while the icon is “the symbolic signifying of the prototype via the image, realised by means of artistic technique” (Florensky, 2003, p. 209). Although an icon is a material object, its surface provides a relational space, a “site for exchange” in which the image mediates a contact with the divine.

These conclusions presented by Brubaker and Barber were drawn from arguments made by iconophiles between the seventh and eighth centuries – arguments that were met with a strong resistance from iconoclasts. Apart from the theological and political issues that divided these groups, one of the key issues in their debates was rather practical, even technical: can a material medium make present the divine? Some iconoclasts relied on the gospels to argue that bread and wine were the only materials that could act as both depiction (or sign) and relic, while iconophiles such as Nikephoros argued that “Making the absent present by manifesting the similarity and memory of the shape [the icon] maintains [with its archetype] an uninterrupted relation throughout its existence’ (Nikephoros cited in Barber 2002, p. 119).

The focus on the “shape” of the icon - the composition of the image depicted in its surface – reinforces the material dimension of the archetype, assuming that the compositional rules that must be followed have somehow emanated from the prototype itself, or at least from its “realm”. The material medium of the icon may be, by itself, unable to “touch” the divine, but the act of covering its surface with an image composed according to divine rules would turn the composite object – medium + media – into a transparent window, offering a view of the prototype. It becomes necessary, then, to assert the divine origin of the “shape” – otherwise, the result would be a mere depiction, not a relic. A similar argument is made by Floriinsky regarding the Russian tradition – the painter of icons does not create the painting,

but reveals it (Uspieski, 1976, p. 16 in Floriênski, 2012, p. 25). This revelation is achieved by following compositional rules that came from the realm inhabited by the prototype, whose presence in the material realm was made present by the icon. However, the artist could not copy the prototype, focusing “in the inner connectedness of its elements” – if he did that, he would be replacing the prototype with its outward appearance. Therefore, each icon must provide a unique image – even while being produced according to the same (divine) compositional rules.



Figure 2 - Left: Icon of Christ Pantocrator, 6th century, Saint Catherine's Monastery, Mount Sinai, Egypt.

Available at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Spas\\_vsederzhitel\\_sinay.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Spas_vsederzhitel_sinay.jpg)

Right: Christ Pantocrator, 12th century (estimated), Hagia Sophia, Istanbul, Turkey. Available at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Christ\\_Pantocrator\\_Deesis\\_mosaic\\_Hagia\\_Sophia.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Christ_Pantocrator_Deesis_mosaic_Hagia_Sophia.jpg).

This understanding of the role of icons in byzantine culture leads to two conclusions: first of all, the icon was essentially a “site for exchange”, a window through which mortals could have a glimpse of a higher reality; it was, therefore, a relational object that depended on “the phenomenon of the co-presence of viewer, icon and divine prototype” (Buchli, 2016, p. 4). Secondly, since the production of icons had to follow specific rules that were believed to have a divine origin, and since the artist was seen more as a “developer” than a creator, icons



may also be understood as proto technical images – images produced “automatically” by “programmed apparatuses”.

According to Flusser’s (2011) model of cultural history, all images produced by human hands - without the use or mediation of apparatuses – should be understood as traditional images. There would be no substantial difference, then, between religious icons and the representational paintings derided by Florensky. However, the relationship between the icon and the prototype suggests that these two kinds of images may be too different to share the same category. At this point, we must remember that one of the main arguments made by iconoclasts was that icons were in fact idols - images that could be worshiped by themselves, replacing the prototypes they were supposed to make present. However, as Buchli argues, “when an idol is destroyed then the divinity that inheres within the idol is destroyed along with it”, while “The icon distributes presence rather than being localized; it is distributed because it refers to an immaterial prototype” (Buchli, 2016, p. 154). The destruction of an icon does not damage the prototype, since it is only the destruction of one among many possible paths towards the prototype. Thus, “Within the nexus of propinquity which constitutes the icon, the material artefact as thing is relational – it is a conduit” (Buchli, 2016, p. 154). In a way, the production of different icons from the same prototype protects it from destruction.

According to Buchli, “Our notions of heritage and conservation as concerns museum artefacts is characterized by a similar understanding of visual and physical co-presence that one might attribute to an idol” (Buchli, 2016, p. 155). Most of our conservation efforts are focused on “unique” objects that are considered irreplaceable, but the increasing dematerialization of our experience of culture points towards a shift that may bring us closer to the logics of icons. Conventional works of art “do not work within the material register of the icon, whereas the 3-D printed artefact does, since the immaterial prototype, the .stl file itself, is never harmed when the artefact is destroyed: it can be printed again indefinitely”

(Buchli, 2016, p. 155-156). One may argue that this approximation to the relationship between icon and prototype is already present in industrial design, and that many mass-produced objects are displayed in museums. In this case, there may not be a .stl file - but there are blueprints, construction drawings, specifications, etc. The main difference between a conventional, mass produced industrial object and a 3-D printed artefact is the fact that the processes that produce the first are usually transparent and mechanical, whereas the latter seems to be produced automatically by a black box. Managing a production line with several specialized apparatuses is very different from just clicking on a “print” or “build” icon. The appeal of the 3-D printer is also relational – it also relies on the co-presence of user, printer and code.

Buchli argues that Byzantine icons were conceived and experienced in a different “sensorium”, and aimed at transforming this sensorium, echoing Flusser’s notion that a cultural medium may shape a whole new ontology - “The presencing technologies of the icon required a new way of cognizing presence and the theology of the era served to reconstitute this new form of perception and vision” (Buchli, 2016, p. 170). Since God made himself present in this world, a reappraisal of presence was necessary, even urgent - “The figure of Christ suggested a new understanding of the material in the face of the Old Testament, which permits the use of images as material manifestations of the divine without being idolatrous” (Buchli, 2016, p. 6-7). This new sensorium, shaped by religious icons, was fundamental for the establishment and dissemination of Christian culture in Late Antiquity; our current sensorium, however, is much closer to the overall structure established after the Renaissance, a new conception of the senses that “privileged a disembodied form of vision over other senses with the result that other sensually based forms of knowledge derived from touch and hearing are diminished in significance” (Buchli, 2016, p. 5).

This disembodied vision can also be related to the emergence of the scientific method - the eyes were understood as windows to the natural world, providing glimpses of the

prototypes (laws) that lie behind Nature. The interest in the study of vision – from Berkeley to Goethe – seems like an urge to confirm the unbiased character of vision - while covering the Apollo 11 mission, Norman Mailer wrote that “if the great brain of NASA were attached to any particular sense, it was the eye. The eye was the collector of incontrovertible facts” (Mailer, 1970). This new sensorium was therefore centred on what architect Juhani Pallasmaa calls “the nihilistic eye”, a “hegemonic eye” that “seeks domination over all fields of cultural production” (Pallasmaa, p. 22). This nihilism emerged because sight is the most far-reaching of our senses – we can see stars many light years away -, and the most likely to become disembodied - “It is clear that only the distancing and detaching sense of vision is capable of a nihilistic attitude” (Pallasmaa, p. 22). This detachment created the illusion of objectivity – or at least the possibility to deny subjectivity -, which was then transferred to apparatuses such as telescopes, microscopes, cameras, etc.

We trust photographs, videos and satellite images because these images seem to have been generated automatically through an automated, apparently unbiased process - according to Flusser, “From the standpoint of so-called common sense, technical images are objective depictions of things out in the world” (Flusser, 2011, p. 49). However, while Pallasmaa criticizes the illusory objectivity of many modern and contemporary architectural theories - and the detachment from the sensual experience of space that derives from it -, Buchli mentions a “tyranny of the subject” in anthropology, especially in the field of material culture studies. This apparent contradiction is rooted in a more fundamental concept that permeates the social sciences, the idea that “the material was what was inscribed or projected upon by the social and cultural – things were literally mere illustrations of the social” (Buchli, 2016, p. 7). This notion is of course diametrically opposed to the flusserian proposition that the prevailing medium shapes the ontology, but it may help to explain the prevailing disposition in both fields: man-made material artifacts – from knick-knacks to buildings - are understood as formal/concrete expressions of intellectual concepts; thus, those who create artifacts focus

on the pursuit of objective concepts to express, and those who study artifacts try to decipher and reveal the concepts behind them.

In the case of byzantine icons, it would be fair to say that the artist worked inside a framework that can be related to a program - “According to this model, the artificer is a tool working in the service of a higher inspiration. The artisan is necessary to the transformation of mere matter into a sacred object, but the validation for this act rests not with the artist but elsewhere” (Barber, 2002, p. 114). This interpretation approximates the icon to an apparatus, the image on its surface being a sort of proto technical image - the same prototype can be visualized simultaneously in many “screens”. The prototype is never present directly, by itself - the screens are conduits that distribute its presence in the form of a picture. The artist acts like the internal process through which the apparatus generates the image.

There is, however, a crucial difference. In the case of the apparatus/technical image composition, the prototype inhabits the same world - or realm - as the conduits. The icon, on the other hand, distributes a presence that is above/out of this world – the conduit is a channel to another realm of existence. The prototype may be likened to the code that makes up a technical image, while the shape of the icon relates to the visualization of the technical image on the screen of the apparatus. However, the prototype that guides the creation of icons is believed to have a divine origin, and its goal is not only to give instructions on how to make visible a specific image, but to create a window through which a divine presence can be experienced. Thus, the technical image is an end in itself, whereas the shape of the icon aims to create a connection with another existential dimension. Another crucial difference between icons and technical images lies on the fact that, while millions of smartphones will necessarily interpret the same code in the same way, making visible the same technical image, two artists would never produce identical icons. Even while following the same compositional rules given by the divine code, they are still two different human beings creating unique traditional images.

This draws us back to the discussion regarding the value attributed to the uniqueness of (traditional) works of art in an age marked by the reproducibility of images, texts, and sounds. In March 2021, Christie's promoted an online auction to sell its first all-digital artwork, a collage by digital artist Mike Winkelmann (a.k.a. Beeple). The work is titled "Everydays: The first 5.000 days", but the object of the auction was not a high-resolution print of the work, and not even the "original" – and maybe supposedly unique - jpg file created by the artist. Bidders were interested in acquiring a NFT (non-fungible token) file, which is a certificate of authenticity for the jpg file. The link between the jpg file and the NFT certificate is protected by a blockchain, so it cannot be copied or replaced; the token is "non-fungible" because it is unique, unlike a cryptocurrency that emulates conventional currency. Thus, a NFT is a unique certificate related to only one specific object – in this case, Beeple's collage, which only exists as a jpg image file. "The NFT file doesn't contain the digital piece of art (...). It's just a kind of contract, saying 'the owner of this NFT owns this other digital file,' often with a link to the art file itself" (Dean, 2021). The winning bid of over 69 million dollars did not purchase a print nor a jpg file, but "one-of-a-kind bits of code with a verifiable chain of title attached" (Dean, 2021). The uniqueness is not anymore an attribute of the image – that what, in traditional terms, we understand as being the work of art itself -, but of this opaque piece of code that we trust to be really unique.

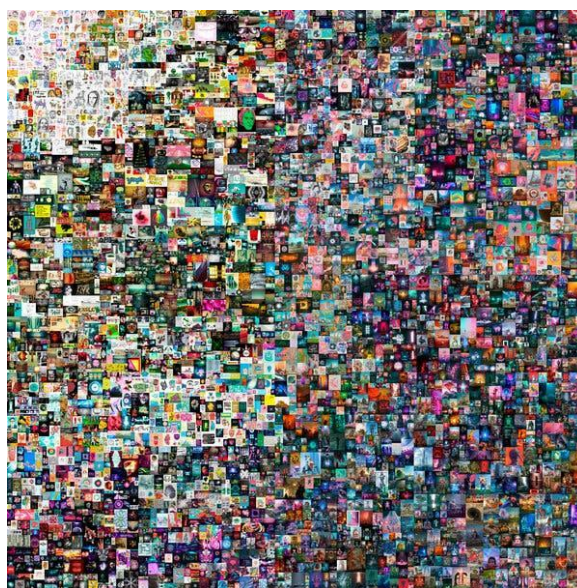


Figure 3 – “Beeple (b. 1981), EVERYDAYS: THE FIRST 5000 DAYS, 2021. Non-fungible token (jpg). 21,069 x 21,069 pixels (319,168,313 bytes)”. Available at [https://www.christies.com/features/Monumental-collage-by-Beeple-is-first-purely-digital-artwork-NFT-to-come-to-auction-11510-7.aspx?sc\\_lang=en&lid=1](https://www.christies.com/features/Monumental-collage-by-Beeple-is-first-purely-digital-artwork-NFT-to-come-to-auction-11510-7.aspx?sc_lang=en&lid=1)

“All an NFT does is authenticate and record the provenance of the NFT itself” (Dean, 2021), so it can be somehow related to official reproductions of photographs or engravings - signed or at least permitted by the artists -, something that can be traced back to the Renaissance. However, in this case the “original” jpg file is a collage of all the images the artist posted on his Instagram account - [https://www.instagram.com/beeple\\_crap/](https://www.instagram.com/beeple_crap/) - between 2007 and 2021. Thus, the work itself is freely available on the internet, and all images can be copied, edited, shared, etc. From the standpoint of the relation with the work of art, the owner of the NFT does not seem to have any privileges, since the collage is not hung or stored somewhere for exclusive personal enjoyment. Thus, a NFT is an attempt to attach a sort of artificial uniqueness to a technical image, reacting against its reproducibility.

However, the artificial scarcity created by NFTs may be more relevant to the art market than to the creation and experience of art - Beeple’s NFT file made him “the third most-expensive living artist after Jeff Koons and David Hockney” (Crow, Ostroff, 2021). Curiously, while the market value of digital art approaches that of conventional or traditional art, its materiality is already surprisingly bulkier: “Processing cryptocurrency transactions takes a massive amount of computing power, which has raised environmental concerns about the boom” (...) “On a larger scale, the computer networks that collectively make up the bitcoin and ethereum blockchains are estimated to use as much electricity as Argentina and Ecuador, respectively, each year” (Dean, 2021).

We are once again reminded of the inescapable materiality of artifacts that we usually believe to be immaterial. What we see as dematerialization may just be the replacement of one material form by another material form that somehow manages to conceal its materiality. This belief in the dematerialization of our culture may come from the perpetuation of a

dualism that is a long-lasting “vestige of the Cartesian mind/body split” (Buchli, 2016, p. 146), but this does not mean, of course, that we should ignore the radical changes brought by these new forms of materiality. Technical images are so fundamentally different from the media that preceded them that we are still learning how to relate to them – but this has not stopped us from building a whole new world based on these mysterious artifacts.

It seems, therefore, that we still need to develop a deeper ontological understanding of what it means to live in this “universe of technical images”, and this situation is very similar to the crisis faced by those involved in the iconoclastic controversies of the byzantine period. Early Christian thinkers and artists were puzzled both by the problem of how to communicate the Christian message and by the event of incarnation itself, and understood that it was necessary to develop a new sensorium in order to understand and express this phenomenon (Frank 2000; Barber 2002, apud Buchli, 2019, p. 170). According to Buchli, “The presencing technologies of the icon required a new way of cognizing presence and the theology of the era served to reconstitute this new form of perception and vision” (Buchli, 2016, p. 170). Likewise, Flusser argues that “A true understanding of techno-images – and implicitly of all images – implies a criticism of their mimetic, representational side, a move from objectivity towards intersubjectivity, a focusing on the relationship between subject and object and a constant phenomenological effort at deciphering techno-images both within scientific and everyday contexts” (Guldin, 2009, p. 17). Flusser coined the term “techno-imagination” to refer to this new attitude towards technical images and the world shaped by them, “suggesting that the way we look at the world is ultimately a question of inter-subjective, that is, dialogic convention” (Guldin, 2009, p. 18) – a relational approach that echoes the core of the iconoclastic controversy, that is, the possibility of a direct encounter with the divine through/in the icon. The apparently distant world of traditional images can, therefore, provide valuable insights that may help us to better understand the universe of technical images - the objects being discussed are quite different, but the subject of the discussion is basically the same. Technical images may lead us to believe that our world is more complex and more

opaque than ever; or, in contrast, that it may eventually be completely revealed by/through apparatuses. Anyway, in order to really understand our condition, we may need to overcome a worldview based on the material/immaterial duality, abandon any faith in the objectivity of technical images and articulate a new sensorium that may explore and expand the imaginative possibilities provided by apparatuses.

### **Referências**

- Badger, E. (2018, March 4). "Tech Envisions the Ultimate Start-Up: An Entire City". Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/24/upshot/tech-envisions-the-ultimate-start-up-an-entire-city.html>
- Barber, C. (2002). *Figure and Likeness: On the Limits of Representation in Byzantine Iconoclasm*. Princeton University Press.
- Brubaker, L. (1998). "Icons before Iconoclasm?" *Settimane di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo*, 45: 1216.
- Buchli, V. (2016). *An Archaeology of the Immaterial*. London: Routledge.
- Buchli, V., Lucas, G. (2001). *Archaeologies of the Contemporary Past*. London: Routledge.
- Crow, K., Ostroff, C. (2021, March 11). "Beeple NFT Fetches Record-Breaking \$69 Million in Christie's Sale". Retrieved from <https://www.wsj.com/articles/beeple-nft-fetches-record-breaking-69-million-in-christies-sale-11615477732>
- Dean, S. (2021, March 11). "\$69 million for digital art? The NFT craze, explained". Retrieved from <https://www.latimes.com/business/technology/story/2021-03-11/nft-explainer-crypto-trading-collectible>
- Florensky, P. (2003). *Beyond Vision: Essays on the Perception of Art*. London: Reaktion Books.
- Flusser, V. (2000). *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*. London: Reaktion Books.
- Flusser, V. (2011). *Into the Universe of Technical Images*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Frank, G. (2000) *The Memory of the Eyes: Pilgrims to Living Saints in Christian Late Antiquity*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Guldin, R. (2007). "Iconoclasm and Beyond: Vilém Flusser's Concept of Technoimagination". *Studies in Communication Sciences*, Volume 7, N. 2, p. 63-83.
- Mailer, N. (1970). *Of a Fire on The Moon*. New York: Random House.
- Taylor, A. (2013, March 14). "There Was Something Different About The Vatican Crowd In 2005". Retrieved from <https://www.businessinsider.com/vatican-square-2005-and-2013-2013-3>
- Van Gelder, H., Westgeest, H. (2011). *Photography Theory in Historical Perspective*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.