ABSTRACT. In this paper, I claim that both being and meaning constitute human actions. We can only apprehend their meaning through our phenomenological experiences of them as being. The methodology to explore and support such a proposal is both a phenomenological approach indebted to Sartre and a version of Panofsky’s iconology grounded in the understanding of the symbolical dimension of human being. The argument put forth is that since every phenomenon within a series responds to a principle that can be considered its essence, it logically follows that the phenomenological images of perceived actions, that is, the actions as they appear to our consciousness (praxical image), are also principled by an essence, and since actions are enrooted within a particular culture, therefore, the principle must be cultural as well; and given that the principle rules the series of phenomenological images from inside as well as from outside, then, it can be held that the principle is a cultural image of human being (anthropical image) which constitutes the essential meaning of the series of actions that accounts for a form of life, and thus, it can be concluded that the phenomenological images are already invested with cultural (symbolical) meaning, which endows the agent with identity.

Keywords: praxical and anthropical images; iconology; phenomenology; actions; Sartre; Merleau-Ponty

The appearance does not hide the essence, it reveals it; it is the essence. The essence of an existent is no longer a property sunk in the cavity of this existent; it is the manifest law which presides over the succession of its appearances, it is the principle of the series (Sartre, 1956: 46).
Introduction

There are some preliminary observations that I ought to make: 1. I assume, in this paper, that actions can be viewed and must be studied in two compatible and complementary dimensions, that is, within a causal explanation of the physical process\(^1\) and through a comprehensive account of their intrinsic cultural meaning. In this paper, I submit a cultural account on actions held as being from the point of view of two traditions: phenomenology and iconology (symbolical or cultural studies). 2. The phenomenology is *sui generis* for I aim to prove that our phenomenological images are cultural by principle. And the iconological method is suggested as the path to decode the symbolical meaning of our actions held as phenomenological images. I aim thus to show that the “essence” of actions is cultural and thus the phenomenological description although necessary is not enough to grasp their ultimate meaning, which can be traced to a symbolical image of being human, proposed as the essential counterpart of a form of life. According to the above, any suitable methodology to deal with human actions must give an account of actions in terms of being as well as cultural meaning. And thus throughout the sections, I draw a modest attempt to outline this cultural phenomenology.

The argument put forth through the paper is thus that since every phenomenon within a series responds to a principle that can be considered its essence, it logically follows that the phenomenological images of perceived actions, that is, the actions as they appear to our consciousness (praxical image), are also principled by an essence, and since actions are enrooted within a particular culture, therefore, the principle must be cultural as well; and given that the principle rules the series of phenomenological images from inside as well as from outside, then, it can be held that the principle is a cultural image of human being (anthropical image) which constitutes the series of actions that account for a form of life, and thus, it can be concluded that the phenomenological images are already invested with cultural (symbolical) meaning, which endows the agent with cultural identity through her self-perception.

I aim at supporting this argument by providing reasons for each of its statements separately throughout the sections. And for the sake of clarity, I place the relevant line of the argument at the beginning of each section. The organization of the paper is, thus, as follows:

In section 1, I present and discuss Sartre’s statement that every phenomenon within a series responds to a principle that can be considered its essence.

In section 2, in the light of Sartre’s thought, I elaborate my proposal to understand actions as bringing about a total mode of being human, arguing that since the phenomenological images of perceived actions, that is, the actions as they appear to our consciousness, are also principled by an essence, and since actions are enrooted within a particular culture (or form of life), therefore, the principle must be cultural as well. An important token of this argument is the contribution of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of perception, which entails that the phenomenological images grasp the intrinsic characteristics of the perceived action. I consider that if
the principle rules the series of phenomenological images (praxical images) from inside as well as from outside, then, it can be held that the principle is a cultural image of human being (anthropical image) which constitutes the essential meaning of the series of actions that accounts for a form of life and cultural identity through the agent’s self-perception.

In section 3, inferring from Sartre’s statement and supported by Panofsky’s work and the semiotic tradition, I provide reasons to make plausible to consider the image of human being as a symbolical image whose meaning is connoted by the intrinsic meaning of the phenomenological images, which are thus configured by the former. In any case, the symbolical image is a culturally constructed image that constitutes the ultimate meaning of the phenomenological images of our actions, as the principle of the series, and I discuss the possibility to habilitate a cultural phenomenology in line with iconology and the semiotic of the visual for passing from the phenomenological images to the symbolical image.

In section 4, I submit my proposal to confront with the recently emerged trend in contemporary philosophy known as New Realism, which virtually posits a predicament regarding the nature of the image of the human being (anthropical image) as endorsed in this paper. However, in refuting their notion of reality as well as the status given to actions within their ontology, I am able to conclude that the phenomenological images of our actions are already invested with cultural (symbolical) meaning and that they are ontologically diverse from their principle of being as actuality and potentiality respectively.

1. The Phenomena and the Principle of the Series: The Being of Actions

The argument that I submit in this section is of the greatest relevance for the remainder of the paper and it endorses that phenomena respond to a principle that is within each phenomenon as well as over the series. In other words, the argument is stated as follows:

(i) X is a phenomenon and X belongs to the series X¹, X², X³… And if the series responds to the principle Y, then X responds to the principle Y. And X is a phenomenon of that series, therefore, X responds to the principle Y (as well as its series does).

Sartre’s phenomenology, as presented in Being and Nothing (1956), gives a firm account of the nature of actions on the basis of the distinction between the phenomenon and being. But to make more explicit the articulation between these two members of the opposition, he adduces that the phenomenon can be better considered as finite and being in terms of infinite, what qualifies it for “the structure of the appearance” or “the principle of the series”:

This new opposition, the “finite and the infinite”, or better, “the infinite in the finite”, replaces the dualism of being and appearance. What appears
in fact is only an aspect of the object, and the object is altogether in that aspect and altogether outside of it. It is altogether within, in that it manifests itself in that aspect; it shows itself as the structure of the appearance, which is at the same time the principle of the series. It is altogether outside, for the series itself will never appear nor can it appear (1956: 47).

I must emphasize that in the above quotation can be found the foundation of this paper’s proposal. And that is why I proceed now to discuss it and prove its plausibility for a new phenomenology of actions. The first idea to be discussed is that of the infinite in the finite, which Sartre said that comes to replace the phenomenological dualism: being and appearance. So if it comes to replace the old opposition mentioned, what is the contribution of this new opposition to our understanding of our phenomenological experiences? On the one hand, this new distinction gives the sense of the inexhaustibility of being, which is infinite, and thus, although within the appearance, not reduced to it. And on the other hand, to see the phenomenon as intrinsically finite is to recognize that in our experience we cannot directly grasp the being of the phenomenon, although, somehow it is as the background and the possibility for our phenomenological experience. Sartre makes a practical indication of how what is finite can be grasped as infinite. But the appearance although finite, because it can only be understood in relation to the series to which it belongs, it must be grasped as infinite: “If the phenomenon is to reveal itself as transcendent, it is necessary that the subject himself transcend the appearance toward the total series of which it is a member. He must seize Red through his impression of red. By Red is meant the principle of the series” (Sartre, 1956: 47). Sartre offers a powerfully intuitive statement to account for the principle or structure of the series within the phenomenological experience. And the question that he really tries to answer is the question that I need to settle to be able to consider the phenomena outside of the reductive view that conceives of them as identical to being and conversely thus to posit that the being of the phenomena is not exhausted within the phenomena. If we continue with the example that Sartre himself proposed, Red would accomplish for the principle of my phenomenological experiences of red objects, and, thus, Color would have to be the principle of my phenomenological experiences of colored objects. And if this is true, I would have a principle for every series of phenomena. And certainly, those principles would grasp the being of the series as well as of each of its phenomena. But a question is still demanding an answer: what is the relation between the series and the phenomenon, and, in particular, what is what makes the phenomenon a phenomenon of the series. That leads us to explore the relation between the phenomenon of being and the being of the phenomenon, which can be of help to understand how phenomenological images get in relation to their principle. The phenomenon of being is what something is itself, it refers to itself; whereas the being of the phenomenon, a more complex concept, is not what is beyond the phenomenon but a kind of condition of possibility of the phenomenon: the table exists qua table, justified in its being no more than what it appears and “the being of the phenomenon although
coextensive with the phenomenon, cannot be subject to the phenomenal condition – which is to exist only in so far as it reveals itself – and that consequently it surpasses the knowledge which we have of it and provides the basis for such knowledge” (1956: 50). The being of the phenomenon is thus something that does not reveal itself totally in the knowledge we have of the phenomenon. For Sartre, the being of the appearance is not just appearing; that would account for Berkeley’s approach of “esse est percipi.” He does not reduce the being of the phenomenon to what can be known of it. Our knowledge is only regarding the phenomenon of being.

But let take one step further to provide the foundation for the next section of this paper. If the phenomenon reveals being, and at the same time the being of the phenomenon is outside of it, as what does not appear, what exactly is this outside? In order to be able to answer this question, namely the relationship between the being and the appearance, Sartre adds in his analysis the third element: the object. Until now it has been presupposed, now we are to identify its fundamental position within the conceptual outline just drawn. So we could inquire for a more precise meaning of what we can hold to be outside and within at the same time, for Sartre himself indicated that what appears, that is, the phenomenon, is only an aspect of the object but the object is altogether in that aspect and altogether outside of it. For the object, we must understand the being of what appears to us. The following paragraph provides Sartre’s main insight into the object to help us solving our previous inquiry:

The object does not possess being, and its existence is not a participation in being, nor any other kind of relation. It is. That is the only way to define its manner of being; the object does not hide being, but neither does it reveal being. The object does not hide it, for it would be futile to try to push aside certain qualities of the existent in order to find the being behind them; being is being of them all equally. The object does not reveal being, for it would be futile to address oneself to the object in order to apprehend its being. The existent is a phenomenon; this means that it designates itself as an organized totality of qualities. It designates itself and not its being. Being is simply the condition of all revelation. It is being-for-revealing (être-pour-dévoiler) and not revealed being (être dévoile) (Sartre, 1956: 49).

The important notion to be addressed here is that of the identity between the object and being: The object does not reveal being, but it is being (and being is all its qualities). In the object we have the foundation of our experiences; it is considered metaphorically the hard rock that cannot be drilled in beyond. And as the foundation does not reveal being, but it is the being revealed by the phenomena held as the essence. Being is the condition of all revelations, it is not revealed being, but being for revealing. So in this sense, we apprehend the existent, the object, as a phenomenon, that is, as an organized totality of qualities. In keeping the object as the being itself, Sartre’s conceptualization in its ontological scope has cancelled the possibility
of dealing with cultural objects, as I hold human actions to be, for they do not designate themselves but a deeper cultural principle that can be taken as the possibility of a particular series of actions. Next section is devoted to developing further this statement.

At this point of the argument, we are ready to introduce the other key concept to understand the relationship between the principle or structure and the series of phenomena. Sartre conceives of a dialectical relationship between being and phenomenon in terms of potentiality and actuality: “Thus the outside is opposed in a new way to the inside, and the being which-does-not-appear, to the appearance. Similarly, a certain ‘potency’ returns to inhabit the phenomenon and confer on it its very transcendence, a potency to be developed in a series of real or possible appearances” (1956: 48). It is important to highlight that the potentiality it is given to the appearance by the being which-does-not-appear. That absent being is conversely actualized by the series of phenomena, and this series can be multiplied precisely because the phenomena are the actualization of a certain being that we have already stated to be the being taken as an object, that is, as being itself. This provides the real possibility of having several and distinctive experiences of the same object, and all of them can be understood as actualizations of the intrinsic possibilities of the same object, which is not exhausted in these actualizations (see Agamben on potentiality and actuality, 1995: 23).

When we apply the above conceptualization, related to the series and the principle, to the subject/agent of actions, then we hold that actions are apprehended as phenomena and they are in the position of showing to the subject their essence within the phenomenological experience (as Husserl envisaged in terms of “being already there,” see Sartre, 1956: LI), and after a reflection grounded in self-consciousness, which, according to Sartre, are the way the subject makes possible the being of the appearance: “it is the non-reflective consciousness which renders the reflection possible. […] Thus in order to count, it is necessary to be conscious of counting. […] In other words, every positional consciousness of an object is at the same time a non-positional consciousness of itself” (1956: LIII). Only by being aware of what we are doing can we do it and only by doing it consciously we establish the being of the phenomenological images of my doing to appear. Although that seems true of actions in terms of phenomenological images, it is not the same if we deal with a perceived action taken as an object, which we have shown above that it is considered to be the being or principle of the series (of actions); being does not appear itself, for it is an object; so we cannot apprehend the object as present but only as absent (1956: LX). And here is where comes along the concept of nothingness or the being as non-being, which makes possible the being of the appearances. Thus being is concluded to be a transphenomenal being, that is, the possibility and the principle of the phenomena. Being for Sartre is thus revealed in its existence through its essence, for the phenomena of the series imply the object as the constitutive principle, which cannot be known in the way it is known its essence through the phenomena, but only it can be apprehended as a revealing
intuition in the consciousness. After Husserl, Sartre defines consciousness as the consciousness of something, that is, the consciousness of being conscious (1956: LXI). And that consciousness is the perfect match for being, because “consciousness is a being whose existence posits its essence, and inversely it is consciousness of a being, whose essence implies its existence; that is, in which appearance lays claim to being” (1956: LXII). And this transphenomenal being for consciousness is itself in itself (lui-même en soi). The above indications of Sartre’s phenomenology amounts to consider the action as object, the being of our images of it, and, thus, the principle of the series, a principle that it is presupposed for the phenomenological images to be possible (and that it is in itself, not designating something out of it), and finally, a principle that can only be intuited in our own consciousness, as the possibility of our experience but never be reduced to our very same experience; one of the concepts this one of the absence of being that makes Sartre’s phenomenology depart greatly from Husserl’s (Weik, 2017).

In this section, I have dealt with Sartre’s phenomenology to present a plausible theoretical frame from which to enhance a comprehensive account of human actions referring to their constitutive principle, which I aim to prove that it is intrinsically cultural. And that is what now I turn to work on.

2. Phenomenological Images and the Symbolical Principle:
   The Meaning of Actions

The phenomenological images of perceived actions, that is, the actions as they appear to our consciousness are also principled by an essence, and since actions are enrooted within a particular culture (which entails a form of life), the principle must be culturally constructed. If the principle rules the series of phenomenological images (praxical images) from inside as well as from outside, then, it can be held that the principle is a cultural image of human being (anthropical image) which constitutes the essential meaning of the series of actions that account for a form of life. The symbolical image of human being is a culturally constructed image that constitutes the ultimate meaning of the phenomenological images of our actions.

I submit that since actions are culturally constituted, then our phenomenological images of them are also “structured” or constituted by that same cultural principle under which the actions are performed. In other words, the argument can be stated as follows:

(ii) If a person S does X, held that X has a cultural genesis (S has seen R and T doing X), to our consciousness X appears as culturally formed by a principle Y (cultural meaning).

Following Sartre’s argument, then, actions as existent are being, that is, the possibility of the phenomenon; actions have in turn an essence, but because actions are not a given in nature and rather are embedded in socially organized communities, actions are culturally constituted. Hence, the essence of being is cultural, but being
is the possibility of the phenomenon, which is the one that reveals being (the phenomenon really reveals being in its essence, what Merleau-Ponty calls the intrinsic characteristics of the object). But because the being of the phenomena is not exhausted within the phenomena, as stated above together with Sartre, yet it rules over the series of phenomena endowing them with unity, that is why the being of the phenomena is also the being of the series. And likewise, if the phenomenon reveals the being of an action (which is the essence of an existent), and that being is its cultural constitution (as the conventional behaviors of a form of life), then, as culturally constituted, that action is not isolated but within a network of meanings. This conclusion fits with the poststructuralist claims such as that of Foucault (Bagg, 2018) who viewed the subject as a cultural construction, and partially that of Judith Butler related to gender (who denies the equivalence rather frequent in philosophical debates of poststructuralism and constructivism, see Butler, 2018) and generally connects with that trend of philosophical inquires parting from Nietzsche (1974), and together with the hermeneutic tradition itself, that holds that the world is given to us in interpretations (for Nietzsche’s constructivism, see Remhof, 2017).

However, if the view that I endorse is in line with the tradition above mentioned, actions although cultural products are seen still as objects and thus as part of a cultural ontology. Drawing from the statements (i) and (ii), I am prepared to argue in this section that the phenomena (as phenomenological images of actions), although made possible by being as existent, are essentially cultural as a single phenomenon as well as a part of a series, and I show that, if referring to a singular action, the unity of the series of phenomena is provided by the action as object as well as by the essential meaning of the action as presented both to our consciousness, in a like manner the unity of several actions is provided by a form of life and its essential meaning as the principles that rule the former and as their possibility of being and meaning.

There are here some key concepts that need to be articulated within a wider phenomenological view, in particular, that of Merleau-Ponty, for whom phenomenology is the study of essences; and it holds that all problems amount to defining essences. […] And yet phenomenology is also a philosophy that places essences back into existence, and thinks that the only way to understand man and the world is by beginning from their ‘facticity.’ […] It is the attempt to provide a direct description of our experience such as it is (2012: 7).

The question that I then take in this section is that actions are part of the world and in order to give a proper account of them, it requires the phenomenological reduction to essence, but if actions have a cultural genesis and principle (in terms of cultural behavior) as even evolutionary biology have proved (Bagg, 2018), are we not entitled to infer that our phenomenological images of actions (essence) are culturally formed? I submit that the answer cannot be negative for human actions neither
belongs to a material nor to an idealistic ontology (Barker and Jago, 2018), that is, actions are neither solely material nor ideal objects, but cultural or symbolical, which implies the interdependence between both of the mentioned realms, for that is what a symbol can be taken for (at least in the semiotic tradition): a conventional relationship between a material (expression) object and a meaning (content). Therefore, if we hold that phenomenology searches for the essence of actions, and actions are as defined above, then their essence must necessarily entail a cultural principle (understood as the intrinsic meaning of phenomenological images and the identity and unity of the series). This last remark might be thought to conflict with Merleau-Ponty’s claim that phenomenology “places back essence into existence,” if we understand existence as a bare life, but certainly is not the case if instead we hold that human life is anchored in a particular society and a particular form of life, and that, consequently, human existence is given in a cultural world, then the existence is also cultural and thus meaningful, that is, we place essence into existence and existence into essence, without obliterating none of them.

But in order to hold that our phenomenological images grasp the action’s principle, we need to admit that what we perceive is based on some intrinsic characteristics of objects and not merely associations or transfers from our inner world (as empiricism wants), then we can give a proper account of human life (2012: 48–49). It is important to emphasize within this phenomenological tradition that in describing our images of actions, we are able to identify intrinsic characteristics of the action performed or been performing and that those are not characteristics added by the subject or somehow merely a subjective construction. This claim can be supported by the well-known fact that phenomenology contests the universal synthesis of Kant, for which the object becomes united in our experience. And that Husserl consequently believed that the object already had unity and that we experience it as united, hence the noetic analysis means a description and not a reconstruction of the object. That is, our mind does not construct the object by means of psychological synthesis, yet the object is as such present to our intuition or consciousness, and only then we describe it in its essential features, the noema (Merleau-Ponty, 2012: 10).

So far thus, we have argued that actions are part of the world I have experience of. But actions more than any other aspect of the world are qualified to be considered culturally formed. Therefore, actions, as given in my phenomenological experience, are also culturally formed in terms of being principled by a cultural construction that rules the series of phenomena. So parting from Sartre, we find in Merleau-Ponty another source for the phenomenological approach here endorsing. If Sartre advanced that phenomena must have a principle that gives them structure and identity, we hold with Merleau-Ponty that the phenomenological images of actions are in fact telling us intrinsic characteristics of them, characteristics that informed the images and that can be known by reflection upon its description. And to that point, the horizon of the world is the horizon of the consciousness.
Now, even if the argument put forth above had been proved successfully, still we could reject the methodology on the grounds that it is not strictly a phenomenological approach. However, in defense of my approach, I would respond that already in the introduction to the paper I noticed that the approach I attempt to launch here corresponds to a *sui generis* phenomenology, and that is for two reasons. The first of these reasons is precisely because it does not follow closely Husserl’s phenomenology but two particular phenomenological standpoints related to Heidegger’s ontology of Dasein (1962: 79–90): Sartre’s principle of a series (of phenomena) and Merleau-Ponty’s habilitation of the phenomenon to grasp the essence of the object perceived in terms of intrinsic characteristics, which is granted by the definition of the man in the world. The second reason has to do with the fact that actions are culturally embedded and symbolically constituted, which entails that actions as phenomena are already a cultural construction; in other words, the phenomenology of actions it needs to be complemented with the study of the symbolical meaning of the phenomenological images and their cultural principle, and that is what I am prepared to demonstrate in the next sections. Notice that I did not mention the hermeneutic as the complemented tradition of phenomenology, but a discipline dealing with symbolical meaning, for phenomena are from my standpoint essentially images which require an iconological method and not a hermeneutic one: actions are not texts and cannot be reduced to texts (Grondin, 2005). I take up this topic in section 3.

2.1. Praxical image and anthropical image
To the phenomenological images of an action as intrinsically meaningful, I call them praxical images (meaningful phenomena). And henceforth in this paper, to be precise, I shall refer to them with that expression. On this apprehension, and only on it, can be founded a phenomenology of actions in line with Sartre’s thought and Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy of perception (Merleau-Ponty, 2012). The importance of the perception resides in the connection with the world (with the Heideggerian *Dasein* or “being-in-the-world”) and the intrinsic characteristics of the objects. Praxical images are, hence, the denomination I give, for the sake of clarity, to what in section 1 I have been referring to with the expression of phenomenological images as revealing the being of the action, a being that is intrinsically cultural, and thus meaningful. In other words, the essence of an action, it is the phenomenon of being, and that being, as it has a cultural genesis, is also meaning; that is what I denominate “praxical image”: a meaningful phenomenon, which not only shows us being in its essence but also the cultural meaning intrinsic to actions as being. Hence, praxical images are the first level of analysis to give a proper account of human actions and to grasp their meaning. An action itself cannot be known, it is known only as what appears to us, and drawing from arguments (i) and (ii), what appears to us is culturally meaningful.
I quote here a long paragraph of Bourdieu’s *Logic of Practice* which is of special relevance to understand what I call the praxical image and the next level of analysis, namely the anthropical image:

The mode of knowledge that can be called ‘phenomenological’ sets out to reflect an experience which, by definition, does not reflect itself, the primary relationship of familiarity with the familiar environment, and thereby to bring to light the truth of that experience which, however illusory it may appear from the ‘objective’ viewpoint, remains perfectly certain, qua experience. But it cannot go beyond a description of what specifically characterizes ‘lived’ experience of the social world, that is, apprehension of the world as self-evident, ‘taken for granted.’ This is because it excludes the question of the conditions of possibility of this experience, namely the coincidence of the objective structures and the internalized structures which provides the illusion of immediate understanding, characteristic of practical experience of the familiar universe, and which at the same time excludes from that experience any enquiry as to its own conditions of possibility (1990: 25–26).

According to Bourdieu, the objective structures and internalized structures coincide in our practical experience or phenomenological knowledge. This creates a kind of illusion of “immediate understanding,” which contributes to concealing and excluding any enquiry about the conditions of possibility of that experience. This means that, in what I have called praxical image, we obtain knowledge that needs to be complemented with its conditions of possibility, which he calls objective structures, and also refers to as *habitus* (1990: 55). These objective structures (putting aside related feelings and values) have to do with the modes of acting of a given society or class. These are the conditions of possibility of the praxical images. And here, the contours of what I denominate “anthropical image” begin to shape. And while praxical images actualize these objective structures within society, the subject is subsumed in his own immediate experience of what appears to her. According to Bourdieu, as the phenomenological experience of our actions is localized and limited knowledge (Fasching, 2009), a cultural and sociological approach is needed to reach the objective structures of social behavior; these objective structures have the same philosophical genesis than the structure or principle of the series of Sartre as shown in section 1. The antecedent of my proposal regarding the distinctions between our phenomenological experience and its conditions of possibility thus can be traced back in this sense to structuralist philosophy, although in the view endorsed in this paper an important difference must be stressed: the objective structures in terms of forms of life cannot be known and indeed only apprehended in its essential meaning or meaningful being (anthropical image) through its actualization in our phenomenological experiences (praxical image), and, thus, the coincidence between the series and the principle referred by Bourdieu is based on the relationship of potentiality and actuality, where what is in potentiality as such cannot be examined, let alone the analysis of objective structures in terms
of his sociological approach. For the series, as Sartre himself realized, not only shows what the principle can be known of but they also actualized that principle in our consciousness. Hence, it is important to underline that in our subjective experience (praxical image) already can be found a cultural principle (anthropical image).

The anthropical image is thus what makes possible the actions, for if the anthropical image did not exist, neither would the actions and their praxical images. Praxical images are the actuality of the anthropical image. But how are actions different from praxical images and anthropical images? The answer is that if actions are apprehended by praxical images, which show their cultural essence, the symbolical image of human being or anthropical image is the counterpart of a form of life. I mean to bracket the definition that Wittgenstein gave to that expression to my purpose in this paper (1986: section 11), and I am to refer to it as a particular series of actions viewed as a unity. Thereby defined, the expression “form of life” is what unifies a particular series of actions, and the meaning of that form of life is the symbolical image of human being, henceforth in this paper refers to as anthropical image. I have chosen anthropical and not anthropological, for the meaning that I intend to convey has to do with the human being (insula), not with the science of human being (anthropology). Hence, “anthropo-” is the base selected for the suffix “-ical” that forms the adjective. Anthropical images are related to Plato’s archetypes as conveyed in Chapter VII of The Republic. However, they neither are material nor ideal objects as posited by new realism (Ferrrari, 2014: 112); they have a sort of subject’s dependent existence visible only through the praxical images: this revelation of the anthropical image by the praxical images is related to what Heidegger called the “phenomenology of the invisible or inconspicuous” (Alvis, 2018) and Sartre’s non-being as foundation of being. In a fundamental sense, in order to understand what I convey in this section and in the next a thought must be borne in mind: in the same way that the being of the actions is the possibility of the praxical image, in an existent-essence relationship, also the form of life (series of actions) is the possibility of the anthropical image, in a existent-essence relationship. The praxical image as the essence of an action is at the same time image (phenomenon) and meaning for it is a meaningful image or symbol that we experience in our consciousness. But this image could not be meaningful if it is not of an action, which is a culturally constituted product, and it is, in turn, cultural because it belongs and it is generated within a network of actions that we call “form of life” and whose essence is also symbolical: the anthropical image, which can be understood as a symbolical image made of every praxical image of the series. And the ways of meaning each other is what I turn to in section 3.

2.2. Form of life and agent’s cultural identity

2.2.1. Agents’ cultural identity
Once I have outlined the basic concepts that make the framework of this paper, here I aim at the two possible perspectives in which an action can be apprehended:
on the one hand we can describe the praxical images of our own actions as founded by our form of life in terms of a sequence of actions we have performed and keep performing under the same principle; and on the other hand, an action can be apprehended as the praxical image of a third person’s action as principled by a form of life.

Starting with the first concern, held that the praxical image (phenomenological images of actions with cultural meaning) brings about the symbolical meaning that renders possible its comprehension, when the praxical image is about the agent’s own action, that meaning, in terms of cultural essence, confers identity to that agent. I address here the comprehension of the praxical image and the anthropical image from the agent’s perspective.

The narrative identity shows our subjectivity as already interpreted images of ourselves from the external point of view of a narrator in a hierarchical sequence, “where both history and fiction are found blended together” (Ricoeur, 1991: 37). By contrast, for the view I am drawing here from the foundations above, we perceive our own actions as analogical cases to other people’s actions; thereby, our subjectivity, in terms of personal identity, resides in the actual apprehension of the image of ourselves acting as external agents, that is, in the phenomenological experience that we have of our actions (what from a psychological point of view has been proved through the experiments in self-perception theory and cognitive dissonance, see Daryl, 1972); an experience that, as revealed to our consciousness, leads us to identify ourselves with its grasped intrinsic meaning, but moreover, and beyond our consciousness (and only through the consciousness of being conscious, recalling the definition of consciousness of being in Sartre), that praxical image of ourselves acting and the essential meaning within it could bring us, by reflection to the principle of the series, the ultimate meaning of our image and the essence of our form of life and the actions that make up its unity. However, in order to understand other agent’s actions, one can find a chance through the apprehension and interpretation of the praxical images of their actions in terms of the connotations of an anthropical image (see section 3). But the praxical image of other agent’s actions does not endow us with identity. This reading of Sartre is altogether enabled by Sartre himself, who argued that actions were good candidates for being donors, having solved the problem of what in fact is the being of acting itself: “If we granted that being is revealed to man in ‘acting,’ it would still be necessary to guarantee the being of acting apart from the action” (1956: 52). The way of addressing this matter is that acting reveals the being as the principle of a series of actions, a principle that must be, in a logical sense, prior to the series but, in a phenomenological sense, also within the series (for narrative series as the foundation for a phenomenology of identity, see Capek, 2017).

In that last sense, the cultural meaning that constitutes our actions, that is the anthropical image, is our cultural identity (what unifies human communities, Ritchie, 2018). And as a consequence, with the elimination of every single anthropical image, hypothetically we could face the Kantian “noumenon,” that is, the undetermined,
unknown and unnameable: the nothingness or what makes possible the being of man in the world, put in Sartre’s words, “Man is the being through whom nothingness comes to the world” (1956: 24); but in a logical sense, nothing can be said about what does not have a particular existence (Parmenides’s logical axiom). Hence, the anthropical images are really, through the phenomenological experiences of our own doing, what gives us the being, and thus, our cultural identity (Stratmann, 2018). From these considerations, although beyond the scope of this paper, we could indicate as a line of investigation, taking Sartre’s thought, that human beings, identified with consciousness, are empty and non-beings, but they endow themselves with being and meaning through the praxical images of their own doing because, as endorsed in the paper, actions are being and meaning, that is, an essentially meaningful being. The non-being, is, therefore, the root of the mystical and unspeakable (a void that grounds poetic and religious knowledge, see Kayuko, 2017; Aguilar-Álvarez, 2014). And that hypothetical noumenian being, which is emptiness, is the principle that makes possible the assimilation of a plurality of anthropical images (or masks) with not exclusive correspondence to any of them (Vlad, 2017). Anthropical images seem to be all that we can account for in relation to the way we live and behave. We have no identity, but pure possibilities of being, in Sartre’s words, “facticity of freedom” (see Olivier, 2018).

2.2.2. Form of life
Facing the second consideration posed above, we should ask if it is at all possible to comprehend through our praxical images an anthropical image other than that of our own form of life. Facing that question, I intuitively hold that an anthropical image, if it is the ultimate meaning of a form of life, then it can only be understood by living within a particular society and culture or from the criteria and codes (meaning) of behavior of a particular society and culture through our praxical images. If it is understood only by living within a particular society or culture, then two different cultures would be mutually incomprehensible. That is the view developed from the defenders of incommensurability. The impossibility of mutual comprehension and dialogue is what Rorty has defended in terms of incommensurability, argument based on Kuhn and Feyerabend’s definition of true in science (Gargiulo, 2017), which substitutes the referential true (that speaks about what is out there, a reference, and then makes progress in the knowledge of that object), for the true within a conceptual scheme or framework: “views about the incommensurability of alternative theories suggested that the only notions of ‘truth’ and ‘reference’ we really understood were those which were relativized to a ‘conceptual scheme’” (Rorty, 1980: 275). If, by contrast, an anthropical image is considered the ultimate meaning of a form of life as the criteria and code (meaning) of behavior of a particular society and culture, then the comprehension is plausible whenever those criteria or codes are known. Hence, the key to answer this question, I believe, lies in the distinction between: 1) the assimilation of an anthropical image, as a form of life, and 2) the comprehension of an anthropical image, as a type of paradigm
and its meaning. In line with the second claim, I could comprehend the anthropical image of somebody else by identifying actions through their praxical images and the symbols actualized by them, which stand for the meaning of that given image and, thus, for that particular interpretation of being human, that means that comprehension could happen from a grounding work related to an intuitive and interpretative approach within the boundaries of each framework. However, in relation to the first claim, the assimilation of another image of human being in terms of the principles that constitute and drive us to be what we are, *prima facie*, seems against logical statements, for the anthropical image gives us what we are (and actually it tends to be conceived as our nature or essence), and we cannot be two distinct persons at the same time, so at least it may be plausible to defend this argument from the point of view that personalities are a substantive block rather than the modes in which we act and the kind of actions we do, as endorsed in this paper; but, in the latter sense, saved from the monolithic logic of the essentialist view (Sandstad, 2016), it seems clear that, to some extent, we can gradually assimilate another people’s anthropical image, in terms of acting according to it, as far as we have a relevant exposure to their anthropical image (their form of life), which gives unity to our praxical images (or meaningful experiences) of their actions and ours, for only by grasping the essential meaning of actions and forms of life would we be able to really assimilate another image of human being.

Having said that, it seems that even when two anthropical images are assimilated, on the one hand, one of them is the hegemonic and the other is the submitted one, for we cannot live on altogether within two hegemonic images as, for instance, the hegemonic Christian image and the Hegemonic Hinduism-Buddhism image. That is, as studies in bilingualism show, languages being powerful aspects of a culture, it seems that the user develops the competence in one of the languages more than in the other, and also we have to consider the principle of specialization of the language to a particular context or situation (for instance, in school we use English and at home we use Spanish or Chinese). In a like manner, we can live on within two related anthropical images, for instance, Christian and Capitalist, being both different anthropical images. But, on the other hand, we cannot translate one of the forms of life into the other, that is, we follow them in their internal rules each time by doing what a particular anthropical image expects from us (Marín-Casanova, 2014). This is where the incommensurability defended by Rorty finds its place within my proposal, and, at the same time, links with Wittgenstein’s conception of a language game, for each anthropical image is a game with its own rules and criteria (another aspect of the principle-series relationship), which cannot be used to judge another one in terms of the phenomenological content of its actions. Those rules and criteria are the meanings connoted (praxical image) by the anthropical image. Hence, anthropical images, although setting out the person that we are to be and, thus, making difficult the total assimilation of another image of being human as well as impossible its translation, or the transfer of meaning between two considered as “living (more than conceptual) frameworks,” however, it can be
comprehended by grasping the symbolical meaning of the praxical images principled by it, and this argument justifies the search for a methodology to carry out the symbolical interpretation as stated in section 3.

The view here presented thus, embraces a tolerant approach, for it understands that every anthropical image is the actualization of human possibilities (Asay, 2018). And, hence, the actualization of those inherent possibilities is thought to be necessary for the community in which they take effect (for a discussion about tolerance based on the understanding of the necessity versus liberal tolerance based on autonomy and civility, see Owens, 2015). That community of people does not find compelling to act in a way other than in the one imposed by the anthropical image that they actualize through their form of life (series of actions). To ignore this is to ignore the powerful influence of culture and political correctness in our behavior (which also reaches academia and paper reviews, see, Katzav and Vaesen, 2017). That does not mean to erase human being’s freedom. On the contrary, it takes it as a condition of possibility (Pettigrew and Titelbaum, 2014). For the imposition of the anthropical image is not in modern societies violent and constraining but rather in the form of a strong persuasion, whose alternative choice of action is only to become an alienated individual with regard to the other members of the community. By no means can be understood this imposition as determination in the sense that has in natural science, but rather a strong persuasion to act, what makes it necessary within a given image. When we decide to do B and not A, we are free in our decision (see the debate on *liberum arbitrium* in Hoffman and Michon, 2017). We decide to do B because we have been strongly persuaded in the sense that we accept that human beings of the kind we are should do B, for we are the kind of people who do B as identified with the praxical image of our own doing (as explain by cognitive dissonance theory). Although we could do A instead, and in that case, we would be acting in a way that only those who are not the kind of human beings we are would act (as in Foucault’s poststructuralist account: agency coincides with the socio-political structure, see Bagg, 2018). Those are the others, seen scarcely as human beings, for instance, the members of another hegemonic anthropical image. Another type of action would be that of the people considered different because they have chosen to act in a no-B way, for they followed the inverse pattern (although out of the scope of this work, note that the decision does not imply a deliberation in this account, only the acceptance and actualization of an anthropical image through their previous experiences of praxical images); still they are within the anthropical image, and they can be thought of as humans equally as those within the image, but they are considered wrong people, who need to be attracted to the way they all behave, that is, subjects to be redeemed. Many examples come to mind, from unmotivated students to minor criminals or psychopaths. In both types of actions, the persuasion to act in a particular manner coincides with the subject’s will (on the problem of free will there is a wide literature, see Botting, 2017; Firestone, 2017; Goldstein, 2016; Hart, 2017; Lawless, 2018; Leclerc, 2017; O’Connor and Franklin, 2018; Rychter, 2017; Sartorio, 2017; Sripada, 2016). Within
the same anthropical image, as the principle of the series of praxical images, can be found groups or members that show opposition to it and to its imposed behavior; thus, they congregate in small groups and develop a culture that opposes that of the dominant, which is known as contra-culture (for resistance, see Miikka, 2015) and projects an anthropical image in contradiction to that in which it is included as negation. This image is in rebellion against the image in which it is contained, but unwillingly creates the resistance needed by the hegemonic one: “Where there is power there is resistance” (Foucault, 1978: 95). When an image of human being has been sanctioned by some elites and it has spread through cultural manifestations and the mass media, the possibility of being in that way becomes a necessity. Thus, what is possible within human freedom, as one of the multiple faces or masks that can have human beings as phenomena or appearance, turns against himself, oppressing him and enslaving him to an exclusive mask, which then becomes necessary to live with. The kingdom of the possibilities and freedom as such can only be, within social and cultural organizations, a kingdom of a limited form and a singular way. Hence, what men and women can be is restricted to the anthropical image that is imposed as natural to them in their forms of life and through their own praxical images. Paradoxical is this tendency of our openness that draws a fixed way of being and living (Rius, 2016). Although out of the scope of this paper, in this last paragraph, I have just indicated a line of investigation that can be followed from the point of view of the anthropical image studied as the essential meaning of a form of life, and by means of the symbolical interpretation of our praxical images.

3. From Being to the Meaning of Actions: A Cultural Phenomenology

Inferring from Sartre’s statement and supported by Panofsky’s work and the semiotic tradition, I provide reasons to make plausible to consider the anthropical image as a symbolical image whose meaning is connoted by the intrinsic meaning of the praxical images, which are thus configured by the former.

The third move in my argument is twofold: first, to test what are exactly the connections between the praxical image of an action and the anthropical image; and to provide reasons to endorse that, following the first statement of the argument (namely, that every series of phenomena is ruled by a principle), the anthropical image is the principle of the praxical images as the meaning of the connoted meanings. And second, to review the methods for interpreting the praxical image of an action, from iconology to semiotics, leaving open the research to a more appropriate methodology still to come but in line with the two traditions above mentioned, in order to be in conditions of grasping, through the symbolical meaning, the image of the human being (anthropical image) that constitutes the phenomenological image of the actions (praxical image). The argument hence in this section is as follows:

(iii) If X is an action and X’ is its phenomenological image, then X’ holds the essence of X. And if the essence of X is held by X’, then the image Y of human
being is the essential meaning of X as held by X’. And we have stated that X is an action and X’ is its phenomenological image, therefore, the image Y of human being is the essential meaning of X as held by X’.

Notice that essence or structure stands for the being of the form of life (and its actions) and its essential meaning stands for the anthropical image. Hence, the form of life makes possible its actions as well as the anthropical image makes possible its praxical images, but only through the identification of the meaning of the latter in terms of symbolical image can we really reach an anthropical image as the symbolical principle that regulates it (and the series). For, actually, the anthropical image is made of praxical images, and the meaning grasped in the praxical image connotes (as I am to argue) the meaning of the anthropical image. Then, the question to answer in this section is how we can pass from the praxical image to the anthropical image. The iconological and semiotic tradition can provide us with an insight to answer that question.

3.1. Panofsky’s iconology and semiotic developments
In Panofsky’s approach to works of art can be found an efficient guide to comprehend human actions from the starting point of view of the visual input. Thus, Panofsky differentiates, within a visual work of art, its form (which must be described), its theme or topic (which must be analyzed within a tradition) and its content (which must be interpreted in the light of the artistic symbols) (1955: 16; 1972: 5). To Panofsky is indebted the so-called iconological approach. In several of his most insightful works like Meaning in the Visual Arts (1955) and Studies on Iconology (1972), he outlined the personal method that he employed to understand a work of art and, thus, to explore a human creation within the human sciences or Humanities (for some recent use of the iconological and iconographical method, see Dayyeri & Egbali, 2017; Lenetter, 2016).

Sensu stricto, iconology has to do with the symbolical realm that can be grasped from the analysis of a work of art, what he calls the content. This content is not the subject matter but every piece of information that contributed in some ways to the configuration of the work of art. They inform us about the historical moments in which it was created, the social and moral underlines of that period as well as scientific, religious and philosophical conceptions and assumptions. Only by ascending to this level of the analysis, can a work of art be understood in its wider sense. Iconology is then the study of the logos or thought transmitted by the icon or image, which means, the interpretation of the image, whereas Iconography is the description of the image by identifying motives and concepts (1972: 5). Both are the successive phases of an approach whose goal is to determine the meaning of a human creation within the complexity of its cultural relationships. Nevertheless, Panofsky’s endeavors remain within a neo-Kantian view (González, 2014), and thus his limitations, for which ultimately it is the human symbolical faculty, echoing Cassirer’s philosophy on man and culture (1944), that can be grasped from a work of art (on Cassirer’s symbolism, see Sánchez Rodríguez, 2015).
Panofsky delineated in *Studies on Iconology* the method for studying images, and takes actually the case of a human action such as a greeting to explain what he meant to do with works of art but at the same time suggesting a wide and promising line of research on human actions in relation to his method (1972: 15).

In the description of the human action, Panofsky distinguishes three levels of analysis, and each of them conveys a type of meaning: the primary meaning is a natural meaning related to the material elements of the image composition, facial expressions or natural movements; the secondary meaning has to do with the conventional meaning, and the last level of analysis is for him the symbolical meaning proper:

Therefore, when I interpret the removal of a hat as a polite greeting, I recognize in it a meaning, which may be called secondary or conventional; it differs from the primary or natural in that it is intelligible instead of being sensible, and in that it has been consciously imparted to the practical action by which it is conveyed. And finally: besides constituting a natural event in space and time, besides naturally indicating moods or feelings, besides conveying a conventional greeting, the action of my acquaintance can reveal to an experienced observer all that goes to make up his ‘personality’ (1972: 4).

Panofsky considers thus important the cultural knowledge to interpret the images in a wide sense. But what escapes to his theoretical foundation is the ontological insight that explains or makes possible the meaning that he searches for. The meaning is intrinsic to cultural creations and, with regard to the scope of my work certainly, actions can be treated as meaningful beings. Therefore, we can outline Panofsky’s levels of analysis, insisting on the hidden ontological dimension:

**Description: Motifs or forms.** This is what Panofsky calls primary or natural subject matter (factual and expressional). For our purpose, at this level, we deal with the formal configuration of the action and objects or persons involved. When we recognize forms, according to Panofsky, we are deploying our past experience. So here we already have our first encounter with the circle of the hermeneutics tradition as “the fore-structure of understanding” (Gadamer, 2004: 268–273), which Panofsky defines as “organic situation.” At this level of analysis, from the arguments above drawn, and elaborating on Panofsky’s theory (which is not identical to what I am defending), the phenomenological experience here is completed with the knowledge that we have of the formal configurations of objects and settings, which at the same time must be within the phenomenological image of the action as its intrinsic configuration.

Analysis: Concepts. According to Panofsky, this is the level of secondary or conventional subject matter. It deals with culturally embedded concepts, what can be defined for our purpose as cultural patterns, and the history of these patterns can aid us in their identification. In acknowledging the concepts from a given cultural
pattern, we are also interpreting it in the light of our knowledge of that cultural paradigm and tradition; a circle again (Grondin, 2005). Here thus our task is that of identifying the concept or meaning within a particular praxical image as to form a symbol. Those meanings are within the essence of the action and thus necessarily they are principled by the anthropical image of the form of life. I insist on this aspect because, in order to identify the meaning of the praxical image, we must bear in mind that it obeys a principle that also constitutes the other praxical images of the series.

Interpretation: Symbols. Panofsky refers to it as intrinsic meaning or content within the realm of the symbolical, what at the same time is shown and hidden; with his words, the content is “that which the work betrays (show something unintentionally) but does not parade (it doesn’t show it obviously). It is the basic attitude of a nation, a period, a class, a religious or philosophical persuasion, all this unconsciously qualified by one personality, and condensed into a one work” (1955: 14). For the purpose of this investigation, and taking further Panofsky’s secondary level of analysis, a concept is intrinsic to the image, and by making it explicit, we reveal the conventional conjunction between image and meaning, which is by definition the symbol; the symbols accordingly identified bear the meaning of the praxical image; that is, when we experience a phenomenological image of an action, we already have a symbol to interpret (image and meaning); and precisely the identification of the praxical image as a symbolical image is what can lead us to the principle of the series, the anthropical image, which is made by the series of praxical images. For that purpose, the approach needs the aid of the science of symbols, and that is what semiotic is about.

The analyses and interpretations carried out by iconology nevertheless must be distinguished from those implemented by the linguistic turn of semiologists such as Roland Barthes. In particular, what Panofsky offered us is a mode of facing and comprehending a visual work of art, that is, an image. And it does it maintaining its status of image while exploring its meaning as a human creation within a vast culture.

Actions can be referred, to some extent and without reducing them to the psychological and linguistic approach, as what semiotic tradition considers “signs.” And more precisely the kind of signs that convey an arbitrary relation between the signifier and the signified or what according to Pierce was to be considered the symbol (Cardoso, 2019). Now, the symbolical (“mythology” in the work of Roland Barthes) is the realm in which the study of anthropical images sets out its main task. Ernst Cassirer, author of the Philosophy of the Symbolic Forms (1980 [1955]), is an unavoidable source for the studies into the symbolical realm of human culture, and also had a great influence on Panofsky’s Iconology. As Cassirer declared in An Essay on Man (1944: 43), it was Jakobs von Uexküll’s research on the sign process in animals (the beginning of the current biosemiotics) that opened a window for his investigation on the faculty of symbolical forms in human beings between the
instinctive stimuli and responses (within the so-called “functional circle”). Thus, the study of signs or semiotics is at work also in Cassirer’s approach. In a like manner, semiotics can provide inestimable help in the study of human actions and the images of human beings that they actualize, taking actions for signs in line with Pierce’s definition of sign, for they are “something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity” (1931: 2.228). Be aware that when talking of signs in this paragraph I hold them as symbols in the Pierce’s view that I stated above (an arbitrary relation that constitutes them).

Roland Barthes, following Panofsky’s method very closely, examines what he calls “myth” as having a form and a concept (description and analysis, roughly what Panofsky understands as iconography), and a signification, which is the interpretation of its symbolical meaning (thus, conforming to what we refer to as iconology). And as he puts it, “we can see that the signification is the myth itself, just as the Saussurean sign is the word (or more accurately the concrete unit)” (1991: 120).

When, in Mythologies (1991: 120–126), Barthes analyses a magazine photograph of a black soldier wearing the French military uniform and doing the salute to the tricolor, he concludes that the signification or myth there is the French imperialism, after separating the form (linguistic signifier) from the concept (cultural context); the photograph has a signification that can only be present to communicate what France is through its citizens, as well as citizens from around the world who share the same feelings of devotion and commitment to their country as any other French person, i.e. a multicultural but united, imperialist France. This image and its signification, which is that of imperialist France, are not tied together, for the same signification can be transmitted by another image. So if the images can change but the signification is the same, what supports that signification? That is, if a completely different image, like, for example, a French product advertised in a remote French colony, also tells us about French imperialism, what makes the signification remain and what are the connections with the images? It is doubtful that the answers to any of these questions lie in the linguistic forms used, for they are totally different in terms of linguistic units; it is not more plausible to think that the solution resides in the concepts, for, on the one hand, they are supported by different forms and, on the other hand, in the first image, we are allowed no more than to grasp the military devotion and commitment of French people and, in the second image, the furthest we could understand is the economic expansion of the French market and culture. So, what makes it possible for both to have the same signification? There are two possible answers: 1) A plausible solution would be to negate that they both have the same signification. In that case, we have a first image that signifies the French military expansion and then the second image with the signification of French commercial and marketing expansion. However, we can still notice some relation between the two significations. Both refer to French expansion. The expansion of a country over other lands usually has been called an imperialist act or imperialism: the image of an imperialist France. But if we arrive at this conclusion, both significations are now put together under the same signification; in
other words, we have subsumed their previous signification within a broader one, and we could do the same with other images with similar significations. From these arguments, we can explain that what indeed gives the same signification to the two images is a wider image which signifies both images; this presupposed image is an abstract one and, so to speak, is the condition of possibility of the other two. There can be images of military imperialism and commercial and cultural imperialism because there is an image of what it is to be French, which, at that time, was equal to being an imperialist. This means that the whole cannot exist without the parts and the parts (series) cannot exist together, as bearing the same essential meaning, without a whole or principle (Rueda Garrido, 2018). These two images exist only as the actualization of a previous image that made them possible. And here we have transformed the linguistic approach to a one dealing with images through the dialectic of the principle and the series: the anthropical image of imperialist France that rules over and within the praxical images as members of the same series. 2) Given the previous account, the second answer is trivial, for if we affirm that both have the same signification, we can say that they are subsumed by a higher signification (solution 1) or they are the very same image.

Through this semiotic analysis of Barthes’s case, I have been using “signification” as equal to symbolical meaning (“the common phrase ‘symbolical meaning’ is often used as a simple synonym for signification,” Lotman, 1990: 102). However, this symbolical meaning does not match exactly the meaning of symbol that I am endorsing in this paper, for in Barthes symbol and signification refers to text and linguistic meaning. A paradigmatic case of the definition of symbol as a pure linguistic unit is that of semiotics as a theory of culture as put forth by Jury Lotman in his work of 1990, where he provides a definition of symbol in this sense:

A symbol, as commonly understood, involves the idea of a content which in its turn serves as expression level for another content, one which is as a rule more highly valued in that culture. We must distinguish a symbol from a reminiscence or quotation since in them the ‘outer’ level of content-expression is not independent but rather a kind of index-sign pointing to a larger text with which it is in a metonymic relationship. Whereas a symbol both in expression level and in content level is always a text (the italics are mine), i.e. it has a single, self-contained meaning value and a clearly demarcated boundary which makes it possible to isolate it from the surrounding semiotic context. We believe that this latter circumstance is especially important for the ability to ‘be a symbol’ (1990: 103).

As defined in this quotation, for semiotic, the symbol is always in content level and in expression level a text, which is not very useful when dealing with images at the risk of reducing them to language and thus eliminating their being as phenomenological appearance. However, putting into bracket the linguistic view, from this quotation, we can take a minimal definition of symbol for the purpose of this paper: “a content which in its turn serves as expression level for another content.” Hence, as elaborate above in this section, a praxical image can be considered a symbol,
from the point of view of the meaning, because as a meaningful image, or expression-content, can be held as the expression of a higher content, which is the symbolical content proper. That is, following the example of Panofsky, the image of somebody taking off his hat must be identified with its intrinsic meaning which is a greeting, and, in turn, image and essential meaning must be considered as the expression of a symbolical meaning, which, in this case, is the courtesy of a civilized man (related to cavalry according to Panofsky). A symbol that, although having a singular expression-content, cannot be understood without the other symbols of the series and the symbolical principle; that means that in the view here defended, symbols are more similar to Lotman’s definition of reminiscence than that of symbol as a text, for it can be said of them that are “not independent but rather a kind of index-sign pointing to a larger text (larger image in our case) instead with which it is in a metonymic relationship.” That is, and here I make my point, praxical and anthropical images can be seen as content-expression from the point of view of the symbolical meaning, for the praxical image of an action is a symbol whose meaning connotes or points to the anthropical image as essential meaning of a form of life together with the meanings of other praxical images, but from the point of view of being and thus from its phenomenology, the anthropical image is the symbol of a form of life that principles the series of actions as symbolical images. Thus, from the point of view of the symbolical meaning, they are to be taken as content-expression and from the point of view of being, they are to be taken as the principle and the members of the series respectively: meaningful beings. Therefore, although the semiotic view reinforces Panofsky’s method to link actions to their symbolical meanings within their cultural contexts of production, I refute the overall linguistic foundation of semiotic and I turn to the symbolical images in line with the tradition from Cassirer to Panofsky and the phenomenology of Sartre, in the sense that the symbol is considered the principle or structure of the series (Petocz, 1999: 10), and the series of phenomena are the symbols whereby the infinite manifests in the finite, or with Lotman’s description of symbolist attitude (that recalls Sartre’s view on the relationship between being and the phenomenon), the perception of “people and phenomena of everyday life as symbols and manifestations of the infinite in the finite” (1990: 105).

To conclude this section, I would like to add two observations. First, and summarizing, iconology and semiotics have been shown here as possible hints to follow in our methodology to pass from the series to the principle, in the same way, they pass from the expression to the symbol or from the connotations to the main signification. And, second, it seems that to understand our actions and our own forms of life, we are required to apprehend what they are through what we can know of them, their praxical images. But at the same time, and although the principle or anthropical image that unifies our praxical images is within every one of them, we must methodically advance the principle to be able to know the series; the more praxical images of a given principle we experience the better would be our conditions to advance the principle that put us on the right track, as in the hermeneutic
circle (Grondin, 2016). And this is the only important feature this approach shares with hermeneutic, a feature that nonetheless already is in Sartre’s conceptualization of the principle and the series (presumably indebted to Heidegger) and in the symbolical tradition (Cassirer’s functionalist circle). For instance, as seen in Sartre’s work, the fact that I am drawing a letter is the principle that unifies my series of phenomena described as moving my hand, taking the pen and sliding it over the page: these phenomena are not independent of their principle and obey a kind of “operative intention,” in Sartre’s words. The same could be said about the subject/agent that acts having then a succession or series of praxical images of her acting. In each of this praxical images she must be able to grasp the principle that gives them unity and identity, a principle that can be advanced in each of these images and towards which each of them points as connotations: their anthropical image that accounts for a form of life. This method not only facilitates the study of otherwise impermeable forms of life but also accounts for the revelation of the anthropical images that agents unconsciously actualize by bringing to light the connections between their series of praxical images and the principle connotated. But to be precise, we must here distinguish the essential meaning of the praxical image from the agent’s presumed intention. The praxical image has meaning beyond the intention with which it was made (in the case that the term intention is significant here). When I have the image of someone moving their hand or arm in the distance, I apprehend that image with a built-in cultural meaning, and then I interpret a greeting, beyond a presumed intention that we cannot get to know. In this way, in the subjective space of our consciousness, we can study the objective or cultural principle of our actions (structure as seen in previous authors). The meaning and the being of the action before my consciousness (praxical image) thus form the symbol that will take us to the ultimate principle of our action and our form of life.

3.2. A cultural phenomenology of images

I remind the reader that the interest of these two traditions above reviewed for the purpose of the paper is that they provide accurate examples to follow in my attempt to deal with phenomenological images and decode their symbolical meaning; thus, they give us the cue to suggest a method to hold human actions at the same time as being (image) and meaning, and in particular to come about to grasp the anthropical image (the symbolical meaning of a form of life) from the analysis of the praxical images of our actions (meaningful phenomena).

The purpose of this section is twofold: 1. To set out the outline of the methodology proper for actions view as being and meaning, and 2. To narrow down the notions and arguments that I have been delivering up to this point of my paper.

Thus, drawing from the above traditions, I aim to discuss the type of methodology that, in view of the previous arguments, is the most appropriate to address the being and meaning of human actions: the methodology suggested should provide an account that includes a reflection on what appears to us as the phenomenon of being held as the essence thereby revealed and the identification of it with a cultural
meaning, which in turn designates not itself but a network of meanings (anthropological image). That is to say, the methodology must be both phenomenological and cultural or symbolical. I turn, thus, to provide some relevant reasons of why we cannot just follow exclusively one or another of the above traditions, but both of them, and why also hermeneutic can be refuted as a methodology for interpreting images:

1. Why we cannot study human actions from the phenomenological tradition exclusively: Our experiences are already mediated by cultural principles. If we deploy only a phenomenological approach, we will miss the point related to actions, which, to make sure, are objects (that can be perceived) but not natural yet cultural products. Thus, phenomenology sees actions as it sees any other object in the world (universalism), which I believe it is a mistake, for actions are symbolical in the precise term of being the connection of material realm (as apprehended in phenomenological images) and the realm of cultural meanings. And so, the essence of an action is not only its being as it appears before me, but also its built-in meaning, and that meaning together with the phenomenon cannot really be understood if the cultural principle to which they point is not anticipated in our consciousness (as in Sartre’s being conscious of consciousness), and furthermore, because that principle constitutes all the phenomenological experiences of the same series, its anticipation presupposes these experiences as parts of the totality and that totality is not other than that cultural principle, which, in turn, can show both the being and the meaning of our form of life (anthropological image).

2. Why we cannot follow iconology or semiotic exclusively: because actions are not just meaning, they are cultural objects in the sense of having being and meaning. I grasp myself doing something that only by scrutinizing my image of myself doing it can lead me to apprehend its symbolical meaning and then its inclusion within the total image of human being (anthropological image). Actions are objects, and, in order to have meaning, they need to be first something and be treated as such. A colour can convey a symbolical meaning, for instance, green is the symbol of peace in Western countries, but to be the symbol of peace, the color must be it; it must exist, using Sartre’s terminology. However, this example can be confusing because, as I explain below, it is possible that an object that already exists can be attributed a meaning later, while this does not happen with human actions, because in them the meaning is intrinsic, that is to say, it arises with the action itself.

3. And, finally, why we depart from hermeneutics: our experiences are images (phenomenon) and so it is the symbol of the human being we actualize with our actions and our praxical images as argued above. If we see actions exclusively from the point of view of hermeneutic, we risk making what is visual and phenomenological only a matter of language (Roque, 2009). For the scope of this work, the two most relevant distinctions between language and images that we have to take into consideration are: (a) The presence/absence of double articulation and (b) The nature of words and images as symbols.
(a) The presence/absence of double articulation. From the semiotics’ point of view, and against Eco’s defense of double articulation in codes of social communication other than language (1989: 224–226), I agree with those scholars that endorse the absence of double articulation in images, and in particular there is no double articulation within an anthropical image, which means that images can be polysemic to some extent but they are monosemic within a given “paradigm” (used in the sense of the series ruled by a principle), or put differently, an image has a single meaning within a given form of life, even if the same image could have other meanings in other forms of life. Hence, the signifiers do not combine to change their meaning as happens with the letters of an alphabetic language or with the words within a sentence (Rubio, 2015). A cultural image of human being (anthropical image) contains in itself a single meaning but charged with plenty of connotations. They all are contained in one image, and they all happen simultaneously, previously to any linguistic expression. Thus, in line with the differential grounds of this approach (being/meaning), each of these anthropical images can be seen in their extension (being) and in their intension (meaning), in terms of the logic developed by Stuart Mill in his System of Logic (1843), who introduced the distinction between connotation and denotation: 1. The intension of an anthropical image cannot be but the group of connotations of it. Comprehension is the collection of all such connotations, and thus, the aim of the proposal here developed is to convey a framework for the comprehension of a form of life through its symbolical meaning and connotations; for instance, the Christian Catholic anthropical image can be held as humble, obedient, helpful to others, charitable, and hopeful in his afterlife reward, and so on. 2. The extension of an anthropical image is its range of applicability, that is, the actions under its domain and influence, taken as the existent and thus beyond our phenomenological experience; for instance, the extension of a Christian Catholic anthropical image is every action under such a form of life.

Roland Barthes understood connotations in a similar way to Stuart Mill; he understood connotations not as subjective and individual associations with the referent but as culturally shared meanings, what he called “myths” in his book Mythologies (1991) and he expressed it as close as possible to what Durkheimian sociology calls a “collective representation,” (which) can be read in the anonymous utterances of the press, advertising, mass consumer goods; it is something socially determined, a “reflection” (1977: 165). The concept of myth in Barthes can then be used here to suggest the kind of image’s connotations that I am referring to. The anthropical image held by a given culture may be an image, let us call it sign (or symbol in Pierce tradition), whose connotations pervade the whole culture and, make the related denotation, or human actions (being), appear to us natural and normal, while supporting the elite’s interest (in Barthes’ thought is held the bourgeoisie’s interest and ideology) and keeping them in power; in the words of Theo van Leeuwen, connotations for the French semiologist is thus also seen “as ideological meaning, serving to legitimate the status quo and the interests of those whose power is invested in it” (2005: 38). If the connotations of an anthropical
image held as a symbol are the praxical images of our actions, then Barthes’ theory of ideology throws light on the connection between our praxical images and the interests of power.  

(b) The nature of words and images as symbols. If we follow Jakobson’s distinction between paradigmatic and syntagmatic axis of meaning (1956: 78–82), in a symbol the expression remains but the content is substituted paradigmatically by another content (Trueman, 2018): the symbolical meaning. For instance, for the word “cross” and the image of a cross there is a meaning “cross” that can be substituted by the meaning “Christianity,” its symbolical meaning. And in this process of meaning substitution there is no difference between the expression, that is, a word or an image, both can be described as the expression of the symbol along the syntagmatic axis (contiguity), whereas the meaning can be substituted by another one on the paradigmatic axis: the meanings are somehow within the expression, for the latter bears the former, and the meaning can be substituted following the principle of similarity between the original and the metaphorical or symbolical. On this semiotic background, this process is supposed to be the same with respect to words and any other mode of expression. However, according to the quotation of Lotman (1990), whose view is quite well accepted between scholars from semiotic and hermeneutic traditions (for a standard definition of hermeneutics, where the intrinsic relationship with linguistic interpretation can be confirmed, see Grondin, 2005: 982), the symbol always is a text, because the expression is always thought in terms of words, hence, words with meanings along a syntagmatic axis make a text; this last remark makes us wonder if an image with meaning is also a text. We need to bear in mind that if we answer affirmatively to that question, we are casting aside the being that bears the meaning in a phenomenological image such as the praxical image. And that is because, if in both cases we have a text, then the image is reduced to words, and if image is like words, then being is reduced to language. And if being is reduced to language, there is not a possibility to have a phenomenological experience of it, and if we cannot have a phenomenological experience of being, for being is the meaning bearer, then it is not possible the meaning neither. Therefore, if phenomenological experiences of images are not possible, then neither are we able to grasp their meaning, and thus consequently, there is nothing we can know about actions held as being and meaning (symbols).  

I understand that it is important to make these considerations to distinguish the task that a praxical image put to us in terms of symbolical interpretation. These definitions follow the logic of my argumentation and set aside other possible definitions of symbol, whose meaning is not the same along the traditions (Lotman, 1990: 102). In fact, the remarks here are against those semiotic and hermeneutic traditions that view the symbol and the symbolical images as text or linguistic units, for, summarizing, symbolical images reduced to text lose their being, which is their appearing to us, and without the appearance it is not possible to grasp their intrinsic meaning.

I submit that, in my view, if what has been said above is accepted, only by combining cultural and ontological approaches can an account on human actions
have both the support of the facts as we experience them and the accuracy of exploring them within a limited network of meanings that constitutes a symbolical human image (anthropical image) and makes possible a particular form of life (Geertz, 1973: 5). Hence, based on the ontological/cultural dimensions, there is a double process here to give an account of. One of them entails the other and vice versa: form of life (cultural principle) – anthropical image; actions – cultural constituted (meaningful) objects; praxical image (essence or phenomenon) – cultural meaning revealed; a series of praxical images (phenomena) – a series of symbolical meanings that connotes a particular symbolical meaning, that is, the anthropical image, which can be found at the beginning and at the end of the cultural process. In the remainder of this section, I engage myself in consolidating each of these notions in turn.

Parting from Sartre, I assume that we are ready to accept that actions are objects (being), and thus they are being in themselves in relation to our phenomenological images, as what render possible to have such experience of them. But they are being that designates other beings in relation to the cultural principle that constitutes them: a form of life, which in previous sections we have defined as a series of actions held as a unity. The constitutive principle is the form of life in which the action is generated, and this principle has an essential meaning which is the anthropical image or symbolical image of human being. Hence, we infer that in the same way that the constitutive principle accomplishes for a series of actions, defined as a form of life, so does the anthropical image for the series of praxical images.

But what reasons do we have to accept that actions refer to a form of life? Is it just a given? In answer to this question, we must both follow our intuitions and infer from our arguments above. Our intuitions as members of a social community is that we perform a number of actions that we share with other members of our community and that our actions are not isolated and unique (what would be seen as a condemnation to the absurd of repeating forever the same action such as in Camus’ *Myth of Sisyphus*, 1942), on the contrary, they seem linked together by some more or less unconscious principle (Schmitz, 2013: 117). And if we hold, as I propose, that a form of life is nothing else but a series of actions viewed in unity, we should be allowed to infer that there are actions that are coherent between them and actions that do not and those actions separate what belongs to one or another form of life. In this sense, if we admit that there are habits, customs, traditions and institutions (which it is hard to deny), we should conclude that such social realities promote certain actions, which in turn account for a particular form of life.

Settled that actions entail forms of life, and actions are objects as well as cultural, meaningful products, we have argued that the essence of an action, held the latter as being in itself, is its praxical image, which is both image and meaning or a meaningful image. That meaning, held as symbolical meaning together with the symbolical meanings of other praxical images of the same series, connotes the symbolical meaning of the anthropical image. That means that the essences of our
actions are cultural. That our actions and the principle that generates them are not reduced to our experience of them, and that we can only know through a phenomenological approach the essence as revealed by the praxical image. So, that implies that the action and the principle that generates them (form of life) are presupposed somehow in our apprehension of the praxical image, but they are not known in themselves, and its meaning, although intrinsic to the image, can only be identified by reflection (conscious of consciousness) and further symbolical interpretation, for they are cultural, and thus they are intertwined with other meanings and designate together the meaning of the cultural principle: the anthropical image. Unlike hermeneutics, in the phenomenological experience, that is, in the praxical image, one can identify the intrinsic conceptual meaning as well as the symbolical meaning of that image with respect to the anthropical image. However, the anticipation of the latter for the understanding of the symbolical meaning of the praxical image requires at the same time analysis, comparison and symbolical interpretation of the members of the series.

If we accept that actions are both being and meaning, we are prepared to elaborate an account that, anchored in phenomenology, requires nonetheless a symbolical study of the culturally essential meaning as revealed in our phenomenological experience. And moreover, this account is in the disposition of: 1. Distinguishing what is cultural in our actions from what makes it possible (the existent which is being not reduced to essence) and 2. Identifying a limited series of possible praxical images within a single anthropical image, that is, a mode of studying human actions within a particular form of life (which really is at least one of the meanings of culture, and certainly it is what I understand by culture for the scope of this paper).

However, one of the main objections we could raise to my exposition of this envisaged cultural phenomenology is an objection concerning the relation between being and meaning. Is it even possible to look at the objects as being and as meaning at the same time? Are meaning and being identical? Is there a causal relationship between them or any other sort of generating process? I believe that all those questions make sense and they need an answer to get some secure grounds for the view endorsed above, to the extent that the soundness of my arguments depends on them. I would like to start facing first the questions related to the possibility of the conjunction of being and meaning and thereafter those questions raised above the relation between being and meaning.

1. The possibility of the conjunction of being and meaning. First, I have to clarify that I endorse this view for the purpose of this paper only in what actions refer to, not to all objects. So, actions are objects, but not all objects are actions. Can being and meaning go together? To start with, I believe it would be useful to take a few moments to reflect on our intuitions on this matter as expressed by commonsense and conveyed by our cultural creations. It is hard to deny that in many occasions we, in looking some people’s behavior, even if we apprehend the behavior as behavior, nonetheless, we lack the “type of knowledge” that would render them
meaningful to us, being such knowledge about what they are and not something outside of them, that is, if we fail to grasp the meaning of moving the arm in a certain way, thus, we fail to recognize this cultural meaning as in missing to recognize a greeting. Here I have to emphasize that the meaning, as argued above, is not a kind of label attached, I refute this view altogether. On the contrary, I endorse that, in cultural settings, meaning is intrinsic to being, as identical to its essence (meaningful phenomena), to the extent that meaning is what being is for, and, in turn, being makes possible the meaning to appear. In terms of logic, only what exists can bear meaning. I could draw from Russell’s logical existents (see Wahl, 1993; Textor, 2017), which were considered the possibility of the predicative component in a proposition, but I think, there is no need for that at the present point of my argumentation, for, from the very same phenomenological tradition starting with Sartre, I can suggest a solution. For Sartre, being was held both as existent and as essence, then to be is to exist in a sense, for the object must exist as condition sine qua non to be apprehended in its being, considered now as essence. In a like manner, an action, in order to have meaning, first has to be, in the sense of existing; but Sartre’s own account gives us also the authority to conclude that it is actually the essence what we apprehend and not the actions in its existence, as bare action. Therefore, in order to be for us, as subjects of phenomenological experiences, actions have to bear some meaning intertwined with the other members of the series. That is to say, although, on the grounds of its own being, an action only counts for us as culturally meaningful.

The proper question to ask at this point is how is it possible that we did not recognize the meaning of actions if we nonetheless are able to recognize them as behavior? To deal with this objection, we need to recall Sartre’s phenomenology as stated above in the statement (i): the principle of the series. We can have the image of somebody moving his arm, and miss that somebody is greeting us, even if moving his arm is the same than greeting us, and not a different action (Schwenkler, 2015). And that is because even if the praxical image is intrinsically meaningful, as image it requires the identification of the essential meaning and a symbolical interpretation that, in turn, requires and presupposes the totality of images or the anthropical image, that is, the principle of the series, in the same way that the praxical image in relation to the action held as being requires and presupposes the form of life. If we think of simple actions such as shaking hands, holding hands or giving a hug, all of them as represented here are objects that only through our phenomenological experience can be apprehended with meaning, for instance, shaking hands means a greeting, holding hands and giving a hug means a way of showing affection for others (and although falls out of the scope of this work, from this statement can be inferred the difference between human actions and animal behavior: animal behavior do not bear meaning, let alone cultural meaning; according to this view, their behavior would be closed up in itself, as bare actions); that is, they are objects that, however, convey a meaning, but that meaning is cultural and that, in turn, entails that it connotes other meaning held as its principle; and more importantly,
as consequence of my arguments, supported by Sartre’s phenomenology, we only can know the meaning within the praxical image and the meaning that is the anthropical image, but remains out of the reach of our knowledge the actions as being object and the form of life as a series of actions/objects. What we can know of in relation to actions thus can only be given in our praxical images (subjective experience) and what we can know of in relation to our forms of life, can only be given in the anthropical image (the image made of praxical images, and the meaning connoted by its series of meanings).

2. The relation between being and meaning. I think that their relationship is less problematic once we have come to terms with the previous question. As already has been argued, actions are objects whose being (essence) can be revealed in the praxical image. That they are objects has to be put in relation with the consideration that they are cultural products (culturally produced), so in the praxical image (its essence), we apprehend the meaning of an action, which is the cultural knowledge we can have of it, and from which we can know the principle of the series, which is the anthropical image as the meaning connoted by the intrinsic meaning of the praxical image, as has been defended throughout the paper. Therefore, meanings connote meanings and phenomena refer to actions, there is not a causal or generating process between meaning and phenomena, they are two sides of the same coin, and each of them follows their own logic: a symbolical interpretation on the one hand, and a phenomenological apprehension on the other. But, of course, as the two sides, they require each other, being for meaning, and meaning for being. And together, drawing from Sartre, they are revealed being and meaning whereas actions and forms of life are being and meaning for revealing.

        Briefly, I should remark some consequences derived from this view. The first consequence is that an action is a part of a form of life and thus in order to study a form of life, we need to study the actions included in it, and conversely, in order to study actions, we need to have a grasp of the form of life that they build up. But then, the second consequence we can extract from the phenomenological perspective here endorsed is that actions and forms of life cannot be studied by themselves but by our praxical and anthropical images of them, by apprehending them as meaningful being. Hence, as being and meaning they require of us to explore them in our consciousness as well as to interpret them as symbols within the series of symbolical meanings connoted by their principle.

4. Actions and the Ontology of New Realism: Some Objections

In this last section, I submit my proposal, as has been critically summarized in the last section, to confront with the recently emerged trend in philosophy known as new realism. In refuting the notion of reality as well as the status given to actions within this contemporary philosophy, I conclude that the phenomenological images of our actions are already invested with cultural (symbolical) meaning and that they
are ontologically diverse from their principle of being as actuality and potentiality respectively.

New realism is the label which is known as a contemporary creation by philosophers from different countries gathered around the idea of an ontology against that of postmodernism and hermeneutics. Their more outstanding members are Maurizio Ferraris, who wrote the *Manifesto of New Realism* in 2015, Giuliano Torrengo and Markus Gabriel. In this section, I mean to present and discuss briefly some of Ferraris’ proposals on social ontology and thus human actions.

Ferraris shares new realism’s ontology on his social approach. According to new realism, everything that is the case is real, and thus exists (Gabriel, 2015: 7). Ferraris makes a first distinction between what he calls ὠ-reality: “what is there whether we know it or not and manifest itself both as a resistance and as positivity” (2014: 111) and ε-reality: “the reality linked to what we think we know about what there is” (2014: 110). The first is an ontological reality, and refers to facts, while the second is an epistemological reality, and indicates the relation between the subject and the first type of reality, and the way in which we know it, which also is real regardless if it is true or false. In this fashion, in new realism overlaps epistemology and ontology. Within this ontology, Ferraris distinguishes four categories of objects: 1) Natural objects, which exist in time and space independently of the subjects; 2) Ideal objects, which exist outside space and time independently of the subjects; 3) Artifacts, which exist in time and space depending on the subjects for their genesis; and 4) Social objects, which exist in time and space depending on the subjects for their genesis and their persistence (2014: 112).

New realism, as seen in Ferraris, distinguishes reality as facts from reality as it is known by subjects. If there are facts, then reality cannot be reduced to interpretations modeled by the subject, and this assertion goes against what Markus Gabriel calls constructivism: “Constructivism assumes that there are absolutely no facts in themselves and that we construct all facts through our multifaceted forms of discourse and scientific methods. There is no reality beyond our language games or discourses” (2015: 3). New realism also claims that there are natural (stones, water, etc.) and ideal objects (numbers), which do not depend on the subjects existing, while artifacts and social objects depend on subjects existing. Therefore, new realism’s conceptualization poses to my proposal some unavoidable questions regarding 1. The status of actions in terms of being and meaning, or meaningful beings. 2. The ontological status of praxical and anthropical images.

Regarding the ontological status of actions, for new realism actions, as depending on subjects, are social objects themselves, for promises and promulgations of constitutions are both social objects. And that they are objects means they are entities, which in addition, are brought about within a social community and life. The existence and persistence of these objects depend on subjects existing, although as objects they are real, regardless our knowledge of them, and thus they belong to the ὠ-reality; so, if actions, as endorsed in this paper, are culturally constructed objects, are they also real regardless our apprehension of them? The question requires that
we focus on the phenomenological distinction between existent and essence in relation to actions. If new realism proposes the definition of social objects within the ontology in which objects are facts independently of our knowledge of them, I have defended that although actions are objects as existent and as the possibility of our praxical images, at the same time, only through our praxical images of them can they be (in essence), for I can only recognize an action as such if I apprehend it in its essential image, that is, in its cultural meaning; but the possibility of their existent is not reduced to my apprehending of them, also requires the form of life in which that action has been generated, which entails for the apprehension of the series of praxical images that are in potentiality within the anthropical image; in other words, actions are not isolated facts, which the sole denomination of facts entails for, and actions would be isolated indeed if it is not because they are meaningful, and their meanings are connected in a network of connotations that constitutes that symbolical image (essentially meaningful) that I denominate anthropical image; only looking at actions as being and meaning, I argue, can we make sense of not only actions as essentially cultural objects but of the forms of life they compose. Hence, cultural constructivism requires ontology and vice versa: the study of intrinsically meaningful objects. Therefore, because I put forward in previous sections of this paper that actions are non-being if they are not for us and they are not given in its essential meaning to us in our experience of them, I refute new realism’s view on the grounds of this lack of insight regarding to actions being intrinsically cultural and thus essentially connected to a network of meanings: bare actions are mere existent, non-being.

Regarding the ontological status of praxical and anthropical images, for new realism everything is real, and even our thoughts are facts (Kastrup, 2017), in the sense that they have a certain ontological consistency regardless our apprehension of them and thus beyond epistemological considerations, as expressed by Markus Gabriel: “New realism assumes that thoughts about facts exist with the same right as the facts at which our thoughts are directed. Thoughts about facts are just more facts” (2015: 6). If what Markus Gabriel says is correct, then we can infer that actions are facts and in the very same logic the meaning of the actions as given to me in my apprehension of them is also a fact: The meaning of the praxical image is a fact. But what does it mean that the meaning is a fact? Although it is a sort of a given, we can define a fact as something that exists (minimal definition). So, according to this definition, at least, at first sight, we cannot say that meaning exists, as in the essential meaning that we take the praxical and the anthropical image for, and the reason is that they precisely are the essence of an existent. However, we could call the essence also the being of the object (actions) as Sartre does, and thus we could rightly say that the being of the form of life is the anthropical image and the being of the actions are the praxical images. Could this allow us to conclude that are both praxical and anthropical images facts? One observation must we bear in mind before we answer that question. As from the definition above can be derived, facts are all facts, there are not types of facts or different ways of being a
fact. I recall that Markus Gabriel himself has been quoted conveying that “thoughts about facts are just more facts.” Hence, if we give our approval to the definition of praxical and anthropical images as facts, we are saying that they have the same ontological consideration that bare actions (existent) and forms of life, and also that there are no distinctions between them, which we have proved above that are respectively the series and the principle of the series. However, that does not seem a sound argument for, on the one hand, if the meaning and the object are equally facts, the relationship between being and essence is broken down, which could be accepted, but not the consequence of it: if both are facts, both can be apprehended separately and with no relation to each other, but how can I apprehend a meaning independently of the object or the essence independently of the existent? And likewise, on the other hand, if praxical and anthropical images are facts (because they are meanings or thoughts), that ontological homogenization erases also the different modes of being from each of them. If both are meaningful images that stand for the essential meaning of an existent, the relationship between them is of potentiality-actuality, for the praxical image is the symbolical image I apprehend in my phenomenological experience of an action, but the anthropical image is the principle of it and of the remainder of the series, which unifies the praxical images from its being in potentiality. The praxical image actualizes both the anthropical image, as the ultimate meaning that every praxical image within the series connotes, and the very being of the action in our consciousness as phenomenon. Likewise, the form of life is the action in potentiality and both actions and forms of life are respectively in a potentiality-actuality relationship with the praxical and the anthropical images. Hence, the potentiality is a way of being different from that of the actuality which gives sense to the relationship between our actions and our forms of life and the anthropical and the praxical images, but if we cancel this difference by means of rendering them mere facts, then we lose sight of the principles and remain attached to the isolated members of the series as bare objects and absurd phenomena.

5. Conclusion

I remind to the reader that even if this paper deals with the intrinsic meaning of actions as cultural objects, in my view, it is perfectly compatible with an account of their causal explanations, which here has been put aside.

Throughout the paper, I have argued that human actions require an account that addresses them both as being and meaning. Drawing from the fundamental thesis of Sartre (1956) about phenomena and being as the principle and the series, I have suggested a cultural phenomenology as the methodology proper to grasp the essential meanings of our actions and forms of life, essential meanings that constitute symbolical (cultural) images: the phenomenological image which is the appearance of the action to our consciousness in its cultural meaning (praxical image) and the symbolical image that is the principle of the phenomenological images, and it is
made of them. The phenomenological image, as image with meaning or meaningful image, requires a symbolical interpretation that connotes the symbolical meaning of a form of life (anthropical image). And in developing my view so, I have highlighted the compatibility between the several philosophical traditions that are combined in the proposal, fundamentally the phenomenological tradition as represented by Sartre and Merleau-Ponty and the iconology or semiotic as studies about the symbolical meaning of images.

I should remark that this proposal comes as a solution to the problem of dealing with human actions whether as objects (ontology-phenomenology) or as mere cultural constructions (poststructuralist trends or even linguistic semiotics). The solution I attempt to make plausible with my work is that actions can be studied as both being and cultural meaning through our praxical images, which opens the research for a better understanding of our actions as ascribed to a particular cultural setting as well as a better understanding of that cultural setting in terms of a form of life, outlining in turn a view that pursue to reveal what are the behaviors that accounts for a particular form of life, and what is the cultural essence of it. And I should underline that what the paper has been accounted for is the philosophical foundation of this view, and thus that the absence on it of a detailed work on a particular anthropical image (related to a form of life) should be compensated somewhere else.

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NOTES

1. Somewhere else I have written about actions from the point of view of the causation. I hold this as a complementary explanation on actions, presupposed and implied by the cultural insight. The causal explanation of actions, however, cannot confuse causes with reasons, which I think it is one of the greatest problems of certain trends in philosophy of action. There is a vast literature on this topic, for instance, Sinclair, 2016; Sartorio, 2017; O’Connor, 2010; and recently Carlos Moya (2017) has also stood for the view that refutes actions as caused by reasons.

2. We can translate a language based on the cognitive experience that undergounds the syntactic (Jakobson, 1959: 232–239), but when it is the cognitive experience (anthropical image) what is different, the possibility of translation is dubious at best.

3. This is just one example of the series and the principle that must be anticipated to understand a praxical image of that series (which does not appear).

4. This paragraph means to suggest another line of investigation related to the view here presented, and thus, another limit for the present paper.

5. Presumably, this is the path chosen by Derrida’s deconstruction when, in Of Grammatology, he wrote that there is nothing outside of the text: “There is no outside-text; it n’ya pas de hors-texte” (1997: 158), then the whole world has been reduced to language,
and, therefore, the possibility of having a phenomenological experience of it has been subtracted, as well as cancelled our prospect of knowledge.

6. Although I contemplate the possibility of further application of the endorsed view to other cultural products, in this paper my only concern is with human actions.

REFERENCES


