

## **Social Imaginary and Social Representations of Brazil**

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The image of the country has been an issue in Brazil since it became a nation (1822). This text will present some research aimed at understanding the change of social thought referring to Brazil. The theoretical concern were the dynamics of SR, their transformation, and images: How and when do hegemonic representations, which are an important component of social thought, change? How are images woven into this fabric? How can we see it in the construction of SR? Three studies (two of which used moving images) will be introduced as the path to a major research work based on mental maps. This paper describes the path to this research, its relation with the imaginary institution of Brazil. It will start with some historical background to help understand the context of the object studied. Then the research work previous to this study will be summarized. The second part will present the work with mental maps of Brazil. At last, some considerations about the potential of the use of drawings in social representation research will be made.

***Keywords:*** *imaginaries, social representations, Brazil, mental maps*

In 2001 a group of researchers from Latin America and France got together in Paris, with the support of the Maison de Sciences de l'Homme/European Laboratory of Social Psychology. They

intended to discuss the social imaginary in their countries by means of research. They met once a year until 2005. The result of their research came out in a book in 2007 (Arruda & de Alba, 2007), published in Spain and Mexico. In Brazil we had a twofold project: about the social imaginary and representations of Brazil, on one hand, and about the school in Brazil, on the other. This paper will focus on the first one and has two sections. The first one describes the path to the last research work, its relation with the imaginary institution of Brazil (Anderson, 1983; Castoriadis, 1976). It will start with some historical background to help understand the context of the objects studied. Then three research works previous to the study with mental maps - the first attempts to approach the social imaginary about Brazil - will be summarized. The second part will present the work with mental maps of Brazil. At last, some considerations about the potential of the use of drawings in social representation (SR) research.

## **BEFORE THE MENTAL MAPS RESEARCH**

### **Going to the Roots**

The idea of studying SR and social imaginary in Brazil was inspired by the so-called 5th centenary of Brazil in 2000, which motivated events and media production. The Brazilian government by that time was committed to follow the hegemonic globalization rules.

The search for an image of the nation, had been a deep concern in the last two centuries. Would it still be so? Was this image changing again? In order to approach such issues, a historical review about the Brazilian imaginary roots would prove very helpful for the subsequent research. I will summarize this review before going into the three previous studies, two of which dealt with images.

Two main categories of knowledge were said to define the interpretive framework of the Brazilian reality until the 20th century: race and the environment (Ortiz, 1994). This led me to study the imaginary institution of our society from the arrival of the Europeans in 1500 (Arruda, 1998). The first official letter to the king of Portugal (April 1500) is considered to be our birth certificate even if it was only revealed in the 19th century. It was both precise and admiring the land and the people. Its descriptions, repeated by many of those who came later on, confirmed the

invention of this territory, and its images would strongly influence the new ideas circulating in the Old World in the 17th century. The new lands were initially anchored in the image of Paradise on Earth. Thiesse (1999) describes how a nation and even a continent re-invents itself in order to create a worthy past to be celebrated: linked to major cultural changes and political situations, the myth of origin, the image of the people, the memory of the past and the dream of the future become other. As Castoriadis (2002) puts it, each country chooses its symbolism, each society is instituted in its own way. The specificity of each society is homologous to a central core of imaginary meanings through which that society creates, organizes and gives meaning to the world. Each society “institutes” its real.

A web of meanings is created that paves the country’s existence. This is the imaginary institution of the society. Rather than physical places or established rules, institutions are the result of a creative process that takes place socially and historically. Instituting processes may be identified at different moments of our history (Arruda, 1998) such as when Brazil became “independent” from Portugal, or when it became a republic (Carvalho, 1990). Whenever a new image was required, the imaginary institution of Brazil was activated. Going through these historical facts and periods helped understand the imaginary institution of Brazil and its changes. It also helped to identify the same processes of construction of SR when the Europeans needed to find an explanation for the new world:

Divine action, the discovery of Brazil unveiled the heavenly nature that so many would associate to that Paradise on Earth: they sought the identification elements of the new land in the stock of the imaginary. To associate fertility, the luxurious vegetation, the mildness of the climate to the traditional descriptions of the Paradise on Earth made the distant unknown land closer and familiar to the European (Mello e Souza, 1994, p.35, my translation).

The historian describes the process of anchoring by means of analogies of images. Images may be iconic or linguistic. Imagery may come as metaphors that accomplish the anchoring. This is what happens when components of those strange new lands were associated to the idea of Heaven on Earth. We could also think, inspired by Wagner & Hayes (2005), that the European

visual, bodily and emotional experience was the ground for that association, established by contrast.

That metaphor was present in the invention of Brazil by and for the Europeans. It appears as part of the instituting process, which blends old images and new visions. Making the unfamiliar familiar produces an evolving movement of images so as to compose something new. Soon travelers and priests would point other contrasts: the climate and the land, its swamps, poisonous insects and animals. Nature was scary and dangerous (Mello e Souza, 1994). The candid inhabitants of the Paradise would turn into an unfaithful people, in the view of the Catholic Church. Demonization was the result of a selection of aspects redesigned according to European fantasy, beliefs and interests. It would justify the treatment to be given to those populations. The New World became ambivalent, good and bad, heavenly and hellish.

Instituting movements appear whenever a new political/cultural project for the nation is implemented and their creative development goes through the processes of anchoring and objectification to produce what Castoriadis (1976) calls the effective imaginary – the imagined (*l'imaginé*, p.221), the organization of meanings so that we can understand the “choice” each nation makes of an institutional symbolism. As he says, every society has tried to answer some fundamental questions: Who are we, as a collective? What do we want, what do we desire, what do we lack? Society must define its identity. The role of imaginary meanings is to provide an answer to these questions, answers, of course, neither reality nor rationality can provide...” (Castoriadis, 1976, p.221, my translation).

I cannot elaborate on this here, but there is some similarity between imaginary significations and SR, inasmuch as both seem to express the constituents of identity so as to allow for their understanding. Both work as webs of articulated meanings that set the ground for further symbolization. Both integrate epistemological projects that go against the mainstream scientific paradigms in Human and in Social Sciences and bring an innovative proposal, as explained by Lozada in this issue. Moscovici's and Jodelet's idea about the social representation theory is also about operationalizing it and empirically identifying SR, while Castoriadis offers a philosophical perspective. Nonetheless, the imaginary dimension of SR of a country seems to satisfy the philosopher's interrogation: to help answer those questions, to provide imaginary meanings to it.

### **The Three Studies**

The movements in the social imaginary of Brazil accompany the change in the national project. The 30's became one of those image-renewal moments. The Modernist movement rejected the literature and painting based on European models. Social sciences analyses started to value the contribution of the "three races" that formed the nation. Focus was on miscegenation as a positive characteristic of Brazil. The myth of racial democracy was created. Promoting a national culture was politically important. Cultural policy went hand in hand with the national project. Industry became the focus of the economy, contributing to major changes in society. The period inaugurated the official preaching of nationalism.

The first research, in 1998, was a study of the first Brazilian historical film, from 1937: *The Discovery of Brazil*, by Humberto Mauro. It was distributed by the Ministry of Education to schools all over the country. It is emblematic of the creation of a new meaning for the founding myth.

#### *Moving and static images: a film, a television soap opera and discourse about Brazil*

This research aimed to identify the SR of the "discovery" conveyed by the film in such a historical moment. It was our first experience in working with images. Camargo's research on short films (1997), was quite helpful. The analysis is a big challenge in working with images if these are to be taken into account in themselves. In that study the unit of analysis was the scene; for each scene several items were registered: the actors, the actions, the attitudes.

Mauro's *Discovery of Brazil* is almost a silent film, and the screenplay was the first letter from Brazil to the king of Portugal. The letter went through a content analysis and scenes were described against this script. The scenes were timed and analyzed one by one considering the characters, their activities, facial expression, body language, gestures, the visual context and the music (composed by Villa Lobos). The aim of this study was to identify changes from the text to the screenplay: they were supposed to contain some SR about the discovery and Brazil itself. The closer the action was to the letter, the less it would be influenced by the director's own views.

In fact, Mauro's translation of the letter into images showed some relation to his cultural and political context. The analysis showed three moments in the film: the journey, the arrival and the stay of the Portuguese in Brazil in 1500. The field of representation included the same protagonists as in the letter – the Portuguese (the captain, the pilot, the priest, the registrar, some individuals and the crew), the natives, and nature. However, the letter did not mention the travel, which took 1/3 of the film (21 minutes) during which the captain and the pilot read maps, dealt with navigation instruments and calculations. The discovery thus appeared as the result of the Portuguese navigation expertise, not as the work of God, as they believed in the 16th century.

In the new land, nature was exuberant, natives were portrayed as friendly, innocent, even childish. They helped the Portuguese and attended the first mass in those lands (Bezerra, 2008). The First Mass in Brazil is a famous painting (1860, by Victor Meirelles), and became a milestone of that historical moment. Even though the name of the new territory<sup>1</sup> implied God's defeat by the commerce, the religious leadership regained its place in the social imaginary institution of Brazil.

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<sup>1</sup> Baptized as Land of the Holy Cross (Terra de Santa Cruz), soon it would be named after the coveted plant the Portuguese picked to extinction a hundred years later: the Brazil wood (from "brasa", flame, the color of the wood).



Figure 1. A Primeira Missa no Brasil – Victor Meirelles, 1860.

Everything seemed to be tuned to the official concern for the nation unity in the film; the harmonious relations between the colonizer and the natives were emphasized. Technology was the new element introduced by Mauro. It was present in the industrial development that began in the 30's, objectifying the myth of progress. Nature was another important element, not only as landscape, but as natural resource. Mauro's translation of the letter into images contained a SR of the discovery related to the cultural and political context (Arruda, 1998).

The second research was an exploratory study, not dealing with moving images. 'Being a Brazilian in Rio de Janeiro' took place in 1999-2000 and intended to find SR of the Brazilian in a moment when hegemonic globalization was on the political agenda. It started with focus groups and later on 40 young workers, employed and unemployed, were interviewed. In this study the SR of Brazil still carried the old images of a luxurious timeless nature and of the mixture of races, two landmarks of our definition, but social inequality and corruption were stronger features. At the same time Brazilians were frequently seen as hard workers, contrary to the social imaginary of the lazy Latin American (Martin-Baró, 1987). Despite the permanence of the postal

card view, social issues were the main aspect associated to Brazil, in line with the respondents' social conditions.

The third research started in 2000. It analyzed the SR conveyed by a television soap opera. "Uga Uga" was a parody<sup>2</sup>. Some of the main characters could be considered as updated metaphors for foundational figures of the Brazilian nationality. They were profiled as: the foreigner who became rich exploring Brazilian natural and human resources; the candid Indian (*bon sauvage*) – a white boy raised by the Indians, like Tarzan – was forced to return to his white family but resisted to be tamed; a traditional Catholic girl among beautiful women with different agendas. We recorded the soap opera for 6 months. The scenes were the unit of analysis again. Their transcription registered their duration, dialogues, how long each character was on stage, clothing, activities and interaction, the emotional expressions, the soundtrack. The verbal material went through a content analysis, but the images – visual context, body language, movement, colors – and the music, determined the intensity and tone of the scenes. The soundtrack included a musical theme for each character according to his/her personality. The plot, and the ending, depended on the audience opinion, which were also followed (Cruz, Arruda & Novaes, 2003).

The daily critique on the press and the weekly polls led to changes in the status of characters according to the audience response and were also taken into consideration. The Brazilian television soap opera was a successful market product, an advertising space and a vehicle for the creation of myths in the sense Barthes puts it (1957). Viewers started wearing clothes like the characters', using phrases from their lines, buying products shown in the scenes. In the course of the story the candid Indian boy missed the natural habitat, and was harassed by the city girls. In the end, however, thanks to the love of the Catholic girl he was redeemed, almost as in our founding novel, *O Guarani* (Alencar, 1857). The parody placed and renewed the old romantic story in the present society, where women's sexual liberation stands for the mythical 'natural' sexuality of the natives. However, it was the conventional female behavior that brought the Indian to reconcile with 'civilization' (Cruz, Arruda, Novaes, 2003).

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<sup>2</sup> This title tries to reproduce sounds similar to some indigenous language.



*First advances*

To conclude, some of the issues and advances these works brought up will be discussed. They were not previously designed as a research program but they had a common motive: to understand from a psychosocial perspective the change of social thought referring to an object shared by a very big number of people from different contexts, a country. The theoretical concern were the dynamics of SR, their transformation, and images in this context: How and when hegemonic representations, which are an important component of social thought, change? Also, how are images woven into this fabric? How can we see it in the construction of SR?

History offers good opportunities to identify the moments when this movement is triggered in the long run. It teaches us that SR of Brazil change when a new national project, interwoven with a cultural proposal, is embraced by (or imposed to) the nation (Lima, 1989). The journey to the origins restarts each time so as to review the founding myth, retouch its characters, similarly to what Thiesse (1999) and Hall (2002) described as the invention of tradition. Images are part of these projects.

Changes, either insignificant or disruptive, are part of the imaginary institution of society. The Vargas government created policies and institutions to enforce the diffusion of national culture in the 1940's. The myth was being reinvented according to the project of industrial development: Brazil was drawing a new image for itself to meet its wished profile and show it to the other nations. This was the institution of social imaginary meanings; it was important to value its people and the technique. Mauro's educational film and Villa Lobos' music are good examples of this effort which followed the Modernist Movement, on-going in Brazilian literature and painting.

The two studies with images took place with different goals, addressed different groups and could not be compared. However, dealing with moving images, as in any other SR study, requires plunging into different layers of context, or different contexts, as Jesuino (2001) puts it. The closest we can get to them, the better.

Following the historical literature about some period of time, means approaching a context; this is a methodological resource inasmuch as it allows to identify long lasting representations and find out how and when their transformation takes place, as well as how their subtle modifications may preserve them from changing. History enables us to see the anchoring

and objectification in process, to identify their move and motivation as well as their result. The same could go for the perception of themata in movement. Monitoring the contexts then functions as a methodological resource to approach SR as dynamic networks of meanings related to time and place and try to find out the trigger point for change.

Transversal representations (Arruda, 2011) seemed to be a good denomination for those long lasting representations, as they may cross time, places, the social thought, without losing their path, and still be slightly modified here and there. They may either take a different direction and still continue to be transversal, to cross other representations, other people and times, or they may go through a disruption as an opposite project comes true. However, constant direction does not mean being untouchable. The notion of hegemonic representations (Moscovici, 1988) was never quite developed. It is as close as a SR can get to Durkheim's collective representations. This often gives the impression that stability can last forever, although we know hegemonic representations have a beginning, may change in the long run, eventually may have an end, and are not exactly the same for every one in a group: consensus in SR exists at several levels (Rose et al., 1995), even in a well structured group. The discussions about consensus have questioned the idea of a total agreement in a group (Doise & Moscovici, 1992; Clémence, Doise & Lorenzi-Cioldi, 1994; Rose et al., 1995). The studies described above show some differences in a long lasting representation – the representation of Brazil –which goes through some changes at certain periods. And surely there are opponents all the time. As Moscovici (1961) says, consensus is always relative, partial and contingent.

Transversality indicates the movement of crossing lines, somewhere, some time or all the time. While following one single direction, they are crossed by broad and narrow roads with some frequency. Small changes may not show unless they are watched up close. That is why some historical perspectives may seem unaware of insignificant changes. Only disruption would show in the long run.

Transversal representations may show small differences according to different groups, such as the young workers in Rio de Janeiro; or according to the historical moment of the nation. In our case, two periods were combined: on one hand, old imaginary elements translated (and updated) by new metaphors, and on the other hand, modern social actors and situations,

objectified in the Portuguese expertise, the hard working Brazilians, the social problems, and the government, blamed for these problems.

Last but not least, transversal lines are part of a web of lines interconnected. It does not seem to be an isolated representation, nor above the others because it lasts longer or has more followers. These characteristics would suggest the existence of a hard core and supporting elements in the composition of these representations, as in the central core and peripheral elements (Abric, 1994), but perhaps not as two separate systems. They are interwoven in a web. As we are dealing with images, Mondrian's *Broadway Boogie Woogie* (1942-3) might stand for an approximate visual translation of this endless web.

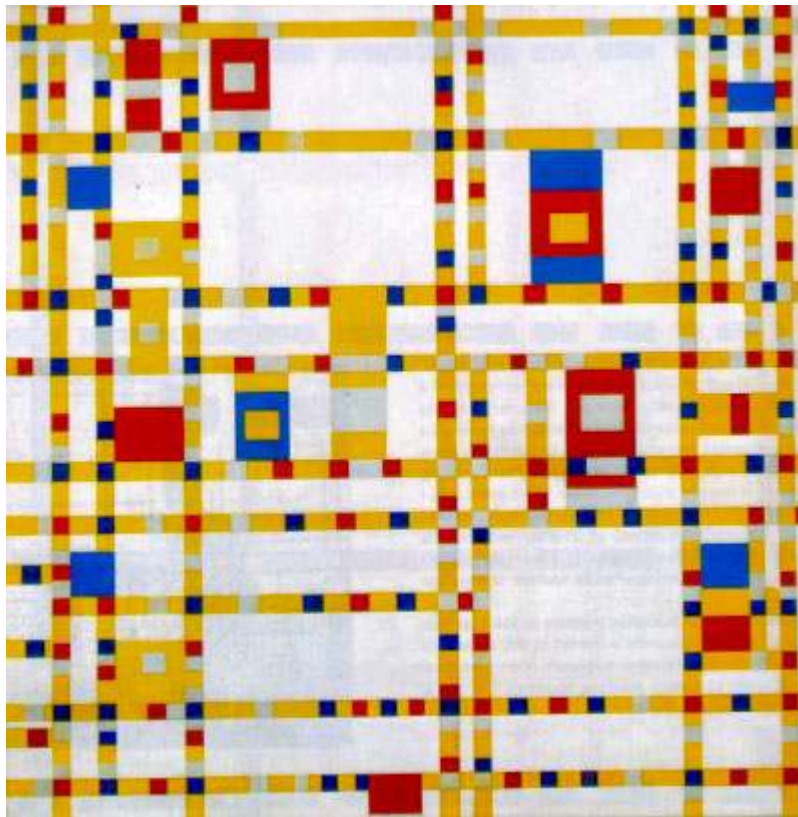


Figure 2. *Broadway Boogie Woogie* – Mondrian, 1942-3.

## **BRAZIL, AN IMAGINED COUNTRY**

### **The Challenge of Mental Maps**

This section will discuss the research about the social imaginary of Brazil by university students, started in 2002 (Sousa & Arruda, 2006). It was focused in the way young university students see/imagine Brazil nowadays. The image of the country has been an issue in Brazil since it became a nation (1822) and may still be. The brief comments below, about the period from 1950 through now will give some idea of the recent imaginary institution of a nation.

From 1950 on, industrialization accelerated. Progress, written on our flag, was reaffirmed as the national dream. Brasilia, founded in 1960, was the point of departure for a future of progress and internalization, pushing development inwards the country. Brasilia turned into a social imaginary institution. Built in the middle of nowhere, its daring architecture would shelter the heart of political power. The search for economical development however did not include everybody. Social inequality kept deepening during the military dictatorship and the subsequent governments. In the last decade nonetheless, Brazil has gone through visible changes. The middle class has substantially increased. New habits, new practices, new images came along. The economy was partially protected from the apex of the crisis and reached a better place in the world. Brazil is now an international player. Is it possible that the SR of Brazil are still the same?

We chose a different methodology than the usual interviews in SR studies. The mental maps followed the inspiration of Milgram and Jodelet's study about New York and Paris<sup>3</sup>. We had a double challenge: to discuss the imaginary dimension in the SR and to analyze their expression in drawings. The results of this research came out in articles, communications and the book mentioned above (Arruda & de Alba, 2007). This effort continued in theses and new explorations of the data. I will not focus on the issue of the imaginary dimension of the SR nor on the results. The focus here is the course of the research, its methodological journey, the challenge of working with mental maps.

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<sup>3</sup> Denise Jodelet participated in the preparation of the instrument for data production in Brazil. It was based on her research with Milgram.

The follow-up of this research ten years later seems a chance to find eventual changes in the SR of Brazil. This research has recently started. Social imaginary significations are probably in the move again.

### **The Mental Maps**

I cannot go into the discussion of the concept of mental maps, its history and state of the art in the field of SR. These topics have been discussed by Jodelet (1976, 1982), Milgram and Jodelet (1976), de Alba (2004), Guerrero Tapia (2007) and de Rosa (in this issue), among others. Sousa Santos (1988) considers the way the physical and symbolic space is imagined as a key to imagine reality, to understand social relations:

All the concepts with which we represent reality and build the different social sciences and their specialities, (...), national identity and the world system (...), have a space, physical and symbolic, a context which has escaped us because our analytical tools had their back turned to it. But we can see now it is the key to understand social relations from which each of these concepts were weaved. So being, the way we imagine the spatial real[ity] may become the benchmark with which we imagine all the other aspects of reality (Sousa Santos, 1988, p.141).

This seems to converge with the proposal of mental maps, which contains at the same time a conception of the relation between space, social relations and imaginary, and a methodology to find representations that could convey these interrelated aspects. The mental maps are a methodological tool which tries to figure this imagination. They can be explored with different focuses. We chose the space of a nation, but we could have chosen the map of misery, or of natural resources. Our choice should lead to an imaginary of the country containing its main features; it should also allow for the expression of affects. In short, the map could show us the path to understand the “real space” called Brazil as seen by those young students.

This choice intended to obtain more spontaneous answers, so as to allow for the expression of the imaginary dimension, but had its limitations. The students’ lack of drawing

skills reduced the possibility of expressing more accurately what was intended to or felt by them. Another limitation was the strong presence of school knowledge and media information (although this could also be taken positively). In the age of information, an imagined community (Anderson, 1983) risked to appear as a ready made product. Still another difficulty was the lack of similar studies, dedicated to analyze the images of a country in their own right.

### *How to work with mental maps*

The methodology of mental maps to study SR of open space, used by Jodelet (1982), Milgram and Jodelet (1976) and de Alba (2007), is not restricted to drawings and their explanation and/or answers to questions. In the case of imaginary spaces as a country, we had three steps to go. The first one was the overview of the country: an imagined map of the whole country sketched by the students, with drawings, their explanation, and questions about the uniqueness of the country. The second step was a more detailed view of Brazil in eight different maps<sup>4</sup>. In total, the students had to answer 24 questions. The third step was the socio-demographic information.

To analyze the mental maps with focus on the images was not an easy task. We started with a reduced sample representative of the universe of 1030 maps: 170 maps in the same proportion as those in the overall sample (students from 7 states, 5 different courses, public and private universities). This sample helped to organize the tools for the examination of the maps. We created two main tools: a protocol for the analysis of the images and a list of categories for the drawings, reviewed by judges. The protocol was similar to the one established in Mexico in a research using the same instrument (Guerrero Tapia, 2007). It included the shape (boundaries and borders), the structure (how the map was construed: in regions, without geographic locations, etc.), the presence or absence of colors (which and where); presence of void spaces (where) and the type of elements (natural, human, built up etc.).

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<sup>4</sup> In these maps they should indicate (1) cultural manifestations; (2) immigrant populations; (3) the distribution of wealth; (4) economical activities; religious manifestations; (5) ethnic groups; important historical facts (6) the name of the states and their capitals; the places they had visited and would like to visit. All these were explained or described. (7) A map of the American continent where Latin America should be colored. At last, sentences starting with the denomination of those born in each state should be completed, such as: Paulistas (those born in São Paulo) are... The map already described as of the 1st questionnaire completes the 8 maps.

## Mental maps of Brazil

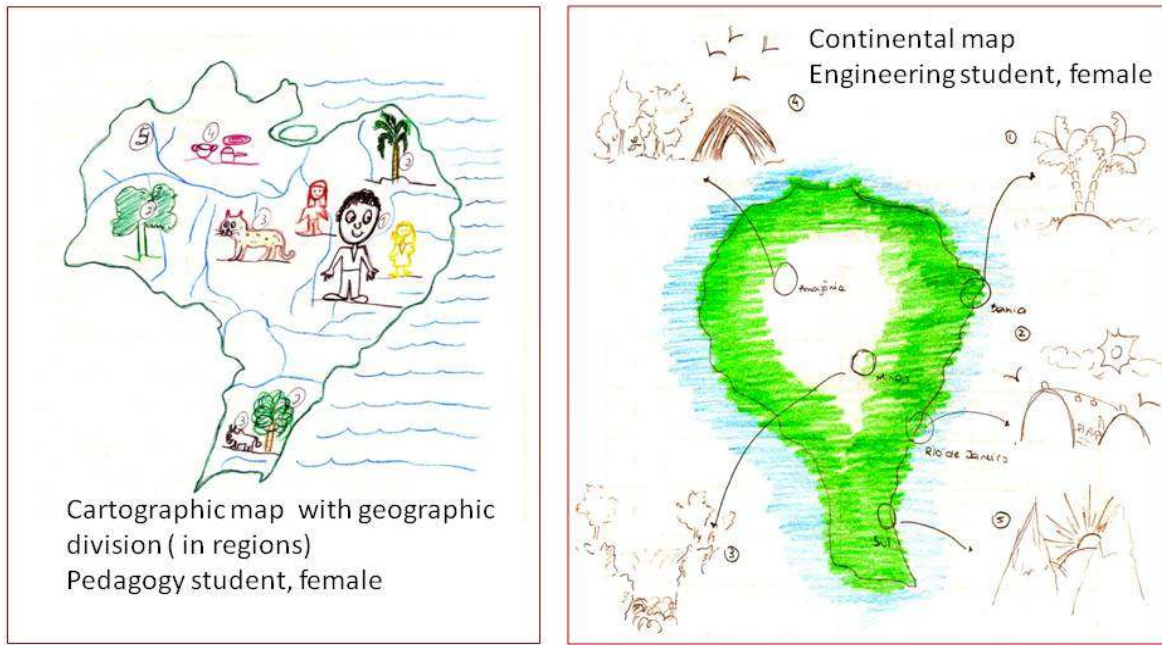


Figure 3. Mental maps of Brazil

The list of categories started with general categories we called dimensions of the country: nature, beauty, contrast etc. Specific aspects such as culture, religion, science, history, social aspects, socio-affective characteristics of the people etc. followed. Each of these had subcategories. This was the basis for the analysis of the questions answered in the other seven maps, with slight modifications. I will stay with the first map, the one which was totally created by the students.

These tools<sup>5</sup> were double-checked by crossing our analysis with the analysis of the same maps by another group of researchers in São Paulo. Once this preparatory work was done, the written answers from the other 7 maps by 1030 students went through categorization and were processed by SPSS, CHIC, ALCESTE, EVOC<sup>6</sup>. Another reduced sample equally representative

<sup>5</sup> The creation of these tools, specially the categories, was also assisted by Denise Jodelet.

<sup>6</sup> Statistics Package for Social Sciences; Cohesive Hierarchical Implicative Classification; Analyse Lexicale par Contexte d'un Ensemble de Segments de Texte; Ensemble de Programmes Permettant l'Analyse des Évocations.

of the universe of 1030 was chosen for the analysis of the images in the first map. This time, with maps of 200 students.

The outcome from this round of analysis brought up some interesting points. The historical background confirmed its importance. It contributed to the time line of the representations of Brazil, thus showing the changes in transversal representations, which enhanced the development of the discussion. Much of the results indicate the social imaginary meanings that weave the social imaginary institution of Brazil in the present; images and explanations related to issues such as violence, poverty, urban problems, tourism and corruption, confirmed this. Images tried to convey more than was portrayed, as some students declared; many drawings were graphic metaphors synthesizing social imaginary meanings, as in the case of Brasilia, frequently depicted by the schematic drawing of the Congress and money bills floating around, indicating the corruption within the nation's power structures.

Processed data from 1030 maps helped to understand the maps from the 200 small sample; the analysis of the first map, the overview of Brazil, did not stand alone but in connection with the information coming from the other questionnaires. The major contribution to the analysis of the drawings and the discussion of the imaginary and SR of Brazil did not come from the quantified inventory of elements in the map, even though this was quite interesting; it had to be considered in connection with the overall qualitative analysis. The development of these results will illustrate this topic.

The next step, after the analysis in detail of the 200 maps, was the study of seven groups of maps corresponding to seven Brazilian states - Pará, Pernambuco, Bahia, Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Rio Grande do Sul, Goiás - analyzed one by one. This brought a new perspective, showing a diversity of SR based on the respondents' different geographic/cultural origin. After this second step, maps of three states became the object of master theses. They followed specific methodological proposals which allowed for the refinement of the analysis. Here is an example.

Two of these theses chose the semiotic paradigm as described by the historian Carlo Ginzburg (1979). One of them (Gonçalves, 2008) analyzed maps coming from Pará, a state of the Amazon region. The semiotic paradigm is an interpretive method based on the significance of minor details, unconsidered or trivial data, considered as detectors of a deeper reality: a



qualitative model based on clues<sup>7</sup>. Ginzburg gives no specific directions to go with this model, but mentions some steps: the search for clues; the selection of clues; the organization of these in an articulate manner; and the inference about the phenomenon. He emphasizes this method is a craftwork, supposed to be applied by an educated researcher, familiar with what is going to be studied.

This approach goes in the opposite direction than content analysis, as it is based on unimportant, marginal data. The search for clues required the exhaustive survey of the drawings and their descriptions so as to notice those particular traits. The material was decomposed into successive pieces smaller and smaller. The first division followed the structure of the maps: by region and without a geographic distribution. Among the maps with a regional distribution four clues were found: the division of the maps in north and south; the drawing of the forest; the coast; and specific aspects of the North. For each one of these clues the images and written answers were thoroughly studied. A protocol of analysis of the images was created, with special emphasis on the analysis of the depicted characteristics.

The maps without a geographical distribution of drawings were in a lesser amount. They appeared to contain an overview of the country: the sketched elements tended to be considered as characteristic of the country as a whole, or distributed all over the territory. These drawings came in a more integrated perspective and were also less subjected to the formality of the map learned at school. Ultimately, this could be a more imaginative version of Brazil, or more holistic.

The analysis needed other references than the geographical ones. The affective tone was the clue for understanding the meaning of the Brazilian map. It showed three affective modes: critical, ambivalent and positive. The first one saw the country through the lenses of its social and economic problems; the second one showed the good and bad aspects of the country; the third one showed an optimistic proud perspective. The articulation of the clues revealed the conjunction of polemic and transversal representations. These came from different moments of the invention of the nation: the foundational myth of the heavenly nature objectified by the forest; a more recent one (from the Modernist movement in 1922 and onwards), the mixture of races as

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<sup>7</sup> This model was created by Giovanni Morelli in 1874-1876 to distinguish between originals and copies of ancient paintings. He examined negligible details, those least influenced by the characteristics of the school the painter belonged to: the lobes of the ears, the fingernails... It was compared to the method attributed to Sherlock Holmes by Conan Doyle. Freud considered this method closely related to the technique of psychoanalysis (Ginzburg, 1979).

the social imaginary institution of our society. The polemic representations expressed the present reaction against the destruction of the forest, the exploitation of the natural resources and against the rural violence due to land property (closer to the end of the 20th). They also pointed those responsible for these problems. The polemic representations thus, pulled nature out of its timeless dome and brought it into the present, acknowledging a process of change. The destruction of nature introduced a disruption of the myths: changes in nature unveiled its temporality – and of transversal/hegemonic representations altogether. Hegemonic and polemic representations coexist and compete.

In short, these maps showed the affective dimension as the thread that weaves these representations as a network of meanings in a holistic perspective.

### **FINAL IDEAS: JUST A BEGINNING**

According to Castoriadis, the imaginary is part of the human creative possibility. As we could see, it provided a special context to the construction of SR and this was not always conscious. Social imaginary significations are this “context” which defines what is ‘representable’. It may encompass memories, archaic fantasies, or even the collective unconscious as in the old wall barrier of the *fermiers généraux* Jodelet found in the maps of Paris drawn by its inhabitants. It had disappeared in the 17th century. The Brazilian void spaces may be a similar phenomenon. They are generally situated in the last regions to be colonized, far from the coast. They were considered out of civilization, wild and dangerous until half a century ago. In 2003, even though they had partially become important soy plantations, they still remained unknown lands. As students say: ‘I don’t know what is in there.’

This is an example of the interest in the use of drawings. They show what the interview wouldn’t: void space, blind zones. These imaginary spaces are social imaginary significations that fill gaps in knowledge, exercise creativity and allow the introduction of unconscious elements to the explanation of the world. The imaginary is a pervasive dimension which comes from a larger socio-historical context. It carries, in many cases, a web of meanings with an affective charge (Baczko, 1991).

We do not believe that only figurative images express the imaginary dimension of SR. Wagner and Hayes (2005), de Rosa (in this volume), Kalampalikis (2002) and others have shown the importance of the language and its images – metaphors, metonymy etc. - as part of it. That means that the imaginary is a constituent of the process of knowing, of familiarizing the unknown, be it in words, drawings or other forms of expression. De Alba's research suggested that SR are the mediation between the imaginary and the urban experience. In the case of the country, this experience has a different concreteness, as the nation itself is an imagined object. It may be objectified in SR based on general concepts such as cultural diversity, natural beauty, or in metaphors such as that of the sun as the symbol of joy, "because its people are the most joyful in the world"; and of "the vital strength of its people" (Cruz, 2006). Thus, in the case of objects such as a country, the SR appear as an instance of creation which doubles the objectification by projecting the imaginary into the concrete world, as in this example, (in which we can also notice the strong presence of the affects). The imaginary is part of the creative dimension of the SR and researching about the country, the city was a good choice to appreciate this. Objects with a long past, a controversial history, provide the ground for the manifestation of social imaginary significations in the making of their SR.

Of course, all this needs further development, as research and reflection about the relations between social imaginary and SR are a recent trend, after the pioneer works of Jodelet (1989) and de Rosa (1987). The description of the methodological journey in our project aimed at presenting an effort in this direction, and thereby encourage research and critique. In short, by exposing our work and bringing the matter to discussion, we join the dialogue between the SR and the social imaginary perspectives. Perhaps the follow up to the last research, ten years later, will give some answers to our questions, bring to light a probable change of SR and the process of imaginary institution of Brazilian society at the same time. Perhaps it is too early to find this. I would finish with Castoriadis' words:

Either as instituting or as instituted, society is intrinsically history – that is self-modification. ( ...) perpetual self-change of society is its own being existence manifested in the position of figures and forms relatively fixed and stable, and by

the rupture of these figures-forms that can never be but creation-position of other figures-forms... (Castoriadis, 1976, p.536, my translation).

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