

The photograph as a symbolic catalyst – Notes for a hermeneutics of the fantastic in technical images*

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Abstract

This paper provides a few inputs for us to build the theoretical conscience and the heuristics required to study symbolic images at large and photographs in particular. Based on the postulate by the Studies of the Imaginary about the existence of a common basis between the imaginary and intellectual work, we seek some philosophical consequences from valuing the one and the multiple on the systems of image and thought. We make a distinction between the approaches to the photograph as an iconic shaper and symbolic catalyst. By taking into account this difference that is reflected by that which we can didactically call levels of the imaginary, as well as the differences between verbal and visual language, we come to the conclusion that the symbolic hermeneutics of photographs requires its own methodological construction. One that gets to advance over Durand's mythology, but which construction may be even shut down by the fact that the symbol is not an attribute of the image but instead a condition for it to happen.

Keywords: Imaginary. Photograph. Communication. Philosophy. Methodologies.

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Introduction

Sporting a smile brought on by the quirky element in the story, the teacher tells his students that some peoples do not let themselves be photographed because they are afraid their souls will be stolen. The smile that underlines the quirky element in the story is there only because the person telling it fails to understand the meaning of *image*, and takes it for the meaning of photograph. It is not the photographic object that captures the soul, but instead the image it is capable of stirring up. The photograph may be a symptom of the image, but there is no reversibility between photograph and image. The equivalences the common sense establishes between the various words connected to the studies of the imaginary require meticulous attention from researchers. This text looks into some of the nuances we believe are important for the study of the photograph in its dynamics as a symbolic image and which can be extrapolated to the dynamics of symbolic images in technical images in a broader manner.

Heuristic challenges about lexicon-related issues

Is the imaginary the collective of image? Is image the same as a visual representation? The word processor we work on offers twelve synonyms for symbol: sign, representation, character, figure, mark, icon, pictogram, emblem, image, indication, badge, logo. None of them suits us. Lexicon-related issues in the Studies of the Imaginary are not more than a symptom of another problem, as more important as it is less visible: the absence of heuristics, which will consequently cause method-related difficulties and mistakes and lead to conclusions that are as confusing as the original semantics.

Making distinctions – a procedure dear to Cartesians and harshly criticized by scholars advocating the need for paradigm shifts – allows the construction of a field of knowledge in scientific terms. In the first half of the 20th century, Bachelard (2001; 2008; 2010) claimed common sense was disturbing science and postulated the need for epistemological breaks so that scientific

knowledge could move forward. In the second half of the same century, Santos (1989) referred to this split with common sense as a growth crisis. However, he asserted that the science thus set up gets to a point in which it is no longer able to respond to the issues raised by society and goes into a degeneration crisis. Therefore, the solution would lie in transcending science and common sense towards some enlightened practical knowledge. Nevertheless, moving past this first stage in which clearing up concepts seems historically necessary does not authorize the epistemological barbarism characterized by the lack of heuristic differentiation, even in the name of intuition or the poetics.

Would it be possible for a fledgling field of knowledge to take a single leap past the growth and degeneration crises and land directly on ground beyond science and common sense? In fact, that would seem to be the calling of the Studies of the Imaginary: their necessary interdisciplinarity and fundamental transdisciplinarity point to nothing other than their emergence in a field where the frontiers between the disciplines fade and, along with reason and the already cemented scientific knowledge, imagination and traditional knowledge play an active role¹. However, we cannot

¹ Tradition here follows the meaning given by Durand (2008) in *Science of Man and Tradition*. In that book, the author places the traditional man in opposition to the philosophical man. The traditional man is the one who does not differentiate the I from the not I, whose knowledge is one and whose conscience is systemic, whose thought “is placed within the hermeneutic perspective that wishes to penetrate, decipher the secret” (DURAND, 2008, p.45-6), that is, Gnostic thought, an appeased man because his “effort consists of individuating the I over the symbolic model of the one nature – of the Creation – and in this experience he becomes certain the Unifying Principle exists” (DURAND, 2008, p.52). On the other hand, the philosophical man is the one who distinguishes the I from the world, whose conscience is fragmented, to whom the oneness is in the person standing before the “despair-inducing plurality of the world” (DURAND, 2008, p.38), to whom space, time, and causality are categories devoid of understanding, cognizant of “only questions instead of secrets” (SAUVAGE *apud* DURAND, 2008, p.45), whose thought is agnostic, in short, a man that is in crisis because “he advocates some I that he intends to be one, and which is therefore hollow given a world and world-appropriating techniques that are increasingly more plural and alienating” (DURAND, 2008, p.51).

but acknowledge that in the process of establishing themselves the Studies of the Imaginary have become debtors to other fields of knowledge, each one at various stages of development at the time. The legacy of notions, concepts, and accumulated information was not bequeathed without the traits from the soil on which it grew. Indeed, the Studies of the Imaginary carry the sin of the promiscuity between science and common sense and also between the sciences themselves. Therefore, it is not free from the need for epistemological breaks, although not to carefully set apart the two types of knowledge but instead to build a theoretical conscience.

These breaks also seem necessary for the young Communication Sciences, at least with respect to the issues of image. Here, given the recurrence of empirical objects comprising movies, photographs, and videos, oftentimes an association between technical images and the imaginary is made without greater conceptual or even notional concerns. Reducing an image down to a technical image flows back in a nearly self-evident manner to reducing the imaginary to a set of visual images nuanced at the most by some psychologist reading that will turn the image back into the symptom of some other thing, while in fact the end purpose of the study is to find out what this other thing is.

Exactly because its empirical field holds the plethora of images that characterizes our contemporary times, Communication is given the crucial responsibility of drawing theoretical consequences from the heuristic hallmarks that have been establishing the Studies of the Imaginary, at least since Bachelard (1999) and his *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*.

Rules for the fantastic as well

The imaginary has operating rules that have been indirectly pointed out by Cassirer (2000), Freud (1983, 2012), Jung (1991), and Lévi-Strauss (2012). Bachelard (1999) more assertively posits the existence of an organization of the imaginary. However, Gilbert Durand (1997) took it upon himself to take his master's project further and designed a typology capable of organizing

symbolic images, which he called figurative structuralism. They are intellectual structures, although figurative, that is, they are never autonomous on the logical plane. They are inseparable from imagination, their source and realm of expression at the same time. Durand (1997) shows that the intellect's logic is figurative because it is rooted in figures that exist in the space-time, motivated by and motivating the *schèmes*. Durand (1997) built on Novalis' program with his transcendental fantastic to say the fantastic is imagination that stems not from the intellect but from the soul's fundamental power of representation. Hence, the Studies of the Imaginary are placed at their founder's level, going against the empiricist and rationalists schools of thought at the same time by saying the major source of knowledge is not outside, in the eyes, the ears, and also that not everything is already there in the mind. No, neither perception nor intellection are the source, but instead the imagination, the fantastic. There is an aspect in this fantastic that is many, many times overlooked in studies whose empiric body comprises visual images: it is *transcendental* because it is not secondary imagination, feeding off perception, post-perceptive, reproductive. It is primary, creative imagination independent from the memory and the senses.

There are several postulates in the Studies of the Imaginary that face considerable intellectual resistance. Such resistance varies according to the historic time and the field that reacts. Hence, in the 1960s, many scholars found it hard to stomach Durand's idea (1997) that an ascending myth, along with a descending myth, makes society more dynamic by circulating between the institutions, between the accepted and marginalized social roles and also in the archetypical underground of these levels. The very existence of this archetypical underground bringing humanity together through time and space remains controversial to this day.

Perhaps the greatest difficulty is in fact Durand's postulate regarding imagination's ontological anteriority over reason, the figurative meaning's antecedence over the meaning itself. However, this postulate is so essential for the Studies of the Imaginary to the

point that disregarding it robs these studies of their place of speech and blends into other heuristic and methodological fields such as semiotics and discourse analysis. That is because a symbolic image disconnected from its pregnancy is no longer a symbolic image but becomes a sign. Now, we need not make it difficult to understand signs by introducing an entity that is foreign to them and presumably unnecessary. In this case, the imaginary. Occam's razor is tasked with doing that.

Durand's ideas find a common logic organizing the imaginary and intellectual activity. In a way, the major question every research connected to the Studies of the Imaginary makes is: what are the symbolic images' axioms in this system? How is this choice made? Is it arbitrary or motivated?

The Studies of the Imaginary allow us to go to the end of the metaphor, down into this underground, and make what is underneath intelligible. We propose to go back to the start, to the early questions of philosophy, especially Plato's, that is, the domain of experience, similarity, and difference. Human beings are driven to name things, to say two things are either the same or different, always establishing utterances to think and speak that fall upon the distribution of similarities and differences and also on the reality or appearance of that which we speak about one or the other. Some philosophers believe that, much more than the differences, similarities are the hallmark of fidelity to reality showing there is a triumph of the non-difference over the difference. Plotino (1993) believes everything is the one. Plato (2001) says that, from the height of intelligence, we see that everything makes the one. That means all differences stop and get stuck in the indifference, in the oneness, in the *monos*. For other philosophers, everything that trivializes the difference and exacerbates the similarity is confusion. In other words, they are philosophies that seek separation, seek to take everything back to its identity, such as Descartes (1979).

Starting out from other assumptions, monism wants to lead everything back to the one, reason why it needs to decrease the heterogeneity, the otherness in order to reconcile the oneness.

Hence, monistic philosophy posits there is a co-naturalness in the multiples that makes it possible to bring them together. The one prevails over the multiple, and the multiple is merely a moment, a level of representation. However, should we look beyond it, we would find the one, exactly as in the myth of the mirror, on which studies into a special kind of technical image are based: photography.

The one and the multiple as the bases of the imaginary

Photograph reading in the field of Communication has been steered by a specular mythology (BARROS, 2013a, 2013c). In such context, the photograph is seen as a reflection, distortion, and the double of what is real, all at the same time. However, even when it is a construction of what is real, it is grounded on a *second reality* (KOSSOY, 2000), that is, there is a reality that *precedes* it, which is then the true reality. In philosophy, perhaps it is Plotino (1993) who has best developed the theoretical consequences of this mythology through his *schème* of the mirror. Remitting the photograph to this *schème* raises many questions: that of the real reality and apparent reality, the being and the being's image, the issue of the two, which is the first form of the multiple. Immersing the photograph into the mythology of the mirror tells us that it, the photograph, is a reflection, a duplication of the same, although it fails to get to the true reality: the model is there, but once it disappears the reflection disappears as well. The reflection lacks substance. Therefore, shapes, including photographic ones, are fading duplicators as characterized by their appearance as by their nonexistence.

The mirror is a cognitive model that allows us to think about the proliferation of the multiples, considering the mirror produces images to infinity. It multiplies the one while its multiples lack concrete reality. We could say the mirror allows us to think about a *weak alterity* that is connected to identity. Plotino (1993) says the way the intellect is reflected on the soul, and the soul on the body, that is, the process through which the world of shapes materializes

does not produce the true difference. Therefore, the visible world is a reflection of the intelligible world, without identity, without its own existence. In short, going back to the oneness of the model is the only true path because the rest lacks authentic existence.

If the same *schème* is at the base of the imaginary that holds up something we could call a theory of the photograph, we soon see why the photograph retains all of its testimonial power despite the ever growing awareness of image editors' manipulation possibilities: the *schème* indeed assures us of the reflection, but it is always a reflection of a world that actually exists.

Plotino (1993) further contributes another monistic *schème*: irradiation. In it, everything emanates from the one which through the sun opens up over the symbol of the center. That same sun is omnipresent in Plato's Republic (2012). The rays dilate the circumference and make the multiple proliferate, but everything can be repatriated towards the center. The multiple does not exist by itself but instead is emanated. There is a guaranteed reversibility between the same and the other, between the one and the multiple. Again, the photograph seems to fit the monistic *schème*. The renaissance perspective imposed by the photographic device is exactly this of a single point of view to which the view of all details of the photograph scene converge, as the rays spread out from the same center.

However, the imaginary allows this same image to offer the possibility of another treatment by progressively digging out the difference and giving the other the advantage. We move from the one to the other, while the latter keeps on gaining consistency until it finally shows that, albeit through the same ontological reality of the one, it makes two. Dualist thought, that of the two substances, such as in Descartes (and all philosophers of the Christian religion), is then authorized by the imaginary: there are at least two substances, and each substance is one by itself. That which can be differentiated constitutes an alterity.

Plato (2001; 2012) gave the notion of difference all of its portability, a difference that is no longer soluble in the similarity. According to Plato's philosophical methodology, the different

relationships of the one and the other make up the ambivalence of the mirror *schème*: the reflection is not actually a second being. The specular double is used as mediation for us to go towards the source of the entire being, to the shape that makes visibility possible, and it is like that that the two can be reduced to the one. The double is nothing. The reflection is not truly similarity and needs the other to exist.

However, the same specular illusion may become the basis for an alterity experience where the image is given more power than the being reflected in it. The difference is accentuated then, pushed until it breaks, gets cut, separated, generating an irreducible alterity. The duality that sets in is very difficult to bypass because at its core there operates a *schème* as strong as that of the mirror, i.e. combat. The duality is always controversial, antagonistic, between the one and the other, the one against the other. Different beings are not indifferent to one another but differentiate themselves in their opposition. If every shape contains some strength, inert nature behaves according to a differentiation principle.

The true/false, good/evil, beautiful/not beautiful are *schèmes* that prepare the cognitive procedures. Nietzsche's threats (2008) are not enough to destabilize these duos: their dual framework can hardly be bypassed, perhaps not as much in the realm of logic but especially in the realm of morals. That is exactly why the image of the Trinity is so prodigious: a highly useful construct not only in terms of theology but also philosophy as well. Indeed, if we have two, we have something between the two, and hence the ternary *arché* is automatically established. Because if going back to monism so that good and evil may disappear is not desirable, then all that is left is to go towards the three.

Both monism and dichotomy, trichotomy, or whatever the multiple is called, are *schèmes* that set the rules of how thought and also imagination operate. Although it is now common sense to say the imaginary is the source of art, perhaps it is not as uncontroversial to say it is also at the base of science and surely even more controversial to say that the very imaginary has rules. Naturally, it is not the outside world that needs the

one or the multiple but instead the imaginary, and it is such need that sets the rules. The *schèmes* of the one or the multiple are not ontological because they are built into the pillars of western philosophy but because they found the axioms of symbolic images while at the same time organizing the imaginary and the intellectual work derived from it.

On the other hand, some shared parentage does not make images equal in terms of their nature. As previously proposed elsewhere (WUNENBURGER, 2002), we could illustrate the architecture of the imaginary through the picture of a tree: its countless leaves are equivalent to the level of the icon, a sort of copy image that is similar to the sensitive or ideal reality, a representation in the absence of the referent; the trunk is the path through which the vital sap circulates and equivalent to the symbols, images that hold greater complexity because their meaning stems from a primary content and experience at the same time, that is, their meaning is released only by the drive of something *experienced*; finally, the roots correspond to the base of the imaginary. Whether such base is Jung's archetype (1991) or Durand's *schème* (1997), here we have legitimately transcendental images because they do not depend on subjectivity or the cultural baggage of those perceiving them: they impose themselves on the spirit as autonomous mental realities. They are beyond reproduction and fiction. They are like a totem, whose meaning is understood by the entire tribe but which can be explained only by its most experienced, most influential members.

Hence, we have a common basis for the imaginary and reason. This basis has been philosophically identified as axioms that look into the similarity and the difference and whose answers range from the one to the multiple. These rationales guide both the imaginary and the rationality derived from it, while comforting the fundamental gesture of distinction under the dichotomous system, the fundamental gesture of (con)fusion under the monad's system, and the fundamental gesture of conjunction under the triad system, as Durand shows (1997) and as we will be detailing later on.

However, each one of these systems is grounds for the genesis of images which, despite sharing archetypical roots, mobilize different loads of symbolic pregnancy. Naturally, symbolic pregnancy is not the image's property: the same image may speak as a mere icon to someone and activate archetypical contents for someone else. Far from being a predicate, the pregnancy is a condition for the image's symbolism to happen.

That is how, as we study images, we have the choice of approaching them, for instance, as semiotic signs, pregnant symbols, or even imaginal manifestations. Once we understand their heuristic conscience, limits, and reach, all of these approaches are scientifically valid but in various stages of maturity research-wise. Much like a tree's leaves tend to outnumber the roots, research about the imaginary's more external levels is the most frequent, and studies focus on the social symptoms of symbolic images. Nevertheless, considering the plethora of visual images in our contemporary times, we believe it is necessary to risk diving into the trunk that carries the sap from roots to leaves. A risk that is greater the lower the stability of the findings we can reach when the symbolic image is what we seek.

Difficulties of studying symbolic images in photography

That search becomes considerably more complex when the empiric body is made up not of visual, dramatic, literary, or even musical works of art – after all, it is agreed that the imaginary reigns over the arts –, but instead of works heavily dominated by technique. When this technical domain is added a visual result, such as in the photograph, it becomes harder to bring the symbolic image into focus because of how easily attention is fixated on perception, preventing the study from looking beyond the secondary, post-perceptive, reproductive imagination – which we elsewhere call post-image (BARROS, 2013b).

The photograph is usually seen as a technical image obtained mostly in an automated manner by means of a camera. Based on that standpoint, studies about the photograph easily and more

vigorously look into the consequences of this technical origin which, seen as primary nature, makes it logical to approach it as a heavily structured sign. It all starts with its material realization, which requires predefined controls (a photograph's entire lighting, perspective, and composition must be allowed by the device or else they will not happen), and culminates in a substantialist interpretation that assumes the thing itself is in front of the camera. Perhaps that is why Santaella (2005, p.198) sees the photograph as a “[...] paradigm for the proposition that the forms of visual representation originate from the indexicality”. Even when its indicial character is put into question, its witness-bearing appeal is revealed in view of the empiric sensuality the photographic gesture implies, given that to be in the photo the thing photographed seems to be or have been in the world. Therefore, the photograph is instinctively seen as deriving from reality itself. Hence, the very reality is an epistemological obstacle for thinking *about* and *reading* photographs, as defined by Bachelard (2010, p.165).

The study of photographs as a Communication phenomenon is definitely marked by its semiotic heritage. Semiotics brings to the field of Communication the general idea that Communication takes place through language. Considering that language and sign (and representation as well) are basically the same according to semiotics, the belief that Communication is only possible through signs ends up permeating the studies, even those that are not clearly affiliated to semiotics, especially because Communication Sciences emerged as extensions of linguistic research in the late 19th century. That is how the occurrence of Communication will be considered when a sender puts a message together, represented by a sign that is going to generate an interpretation in the recipient's mind. Again, even when a study widens to encompass the historic, social, and cultural contexts, its DNA will carry the sign as a heuristic principle.

This legacy also steers the studies into the photograph. Inventory is taken of the visual elements present in the material at hand and leading the sign to be analyzed and then interpreted.

Associations are sought as they will give the message its meaning and communicative intent. Hence, the circuit completes itself as the reference system that created the photograph is established. In this process, the question about the relationships between photograph and image is not actually pertinent, considering the photograph is seen as a technical image in a basically self-evident manner, as advanced by Flusser (2004). Even more rarely, the question about what an image actually is gets raised, because such question has been allegedly answered by semiotics. The photograph would be a sort of iconic plasma of the image. However, we believe the photograph inserts itself in the dynamics of the imaginaries when it operates as a symbolic catalyst. At that point, we must keep in mind that the image is above all a product of the imagination.

Its imaginative provenance gives the image a symbolic character, understood here not as that arbitrary symbol but instead as one that stems from the tradition of the Studies of the Imaginary. It seems the strain between this imaginative provenance and the technical result still needs to be eased and lacks the tools to be considered in photograph reading, as found by a previous study (BARROS, 2011; 2013a).

Again, this scenario is traversed by deeper issues than lexical confusions such as this one about what an image actually is. We should again point out that, given the automated aspect of the photograph, it is considered as a technical *image*. Naturally, its *symbolic* aspect is not excluded from studies because no one expects it to correspond point by point with the referent that allegedly originated it. However, neither is the image limited to something imagined or some representation perceived visually, nor is the symbol restricted to some interpretation of reality. Every image considered essentially visual is deep down derived from sensation – not to say it is its copy –, that is, it is indissolubly connected to perception, and therefore to memory. It is realized as the sensation is transposed into a trans-sensorial reality, which makes it move away from the palpable world and become intellectualized. As the product of something previously perceived,

this image will always be a memory, that is, a reproduction. That is clear in the photograph's case – Barthes' "this-has-been" (1984) demonstrates it sufficiently.

However, as underlined by Dubois (2004, p.85), Barthes' "this-has-been" stops there; it does not proceed toward some "this means". The search for "this means" then becomes the problem to be solved by interpretation. However, the interpretation is not independent from the very process of understanding, and it is then that some heuristic is required even before a method is demanded from the researcher.

Adding nuances to the absolute of the image that reproduces a memory, Bachelard (1997), building on Kant, speaks about the image deriving from the begetting, active imagination. An image that is a mental creation detached from any outside object, even though it is possible to name the sensation that originated it. According to Bachelard, this image is not an evocation but instead it is work and play over the matter organically situated in the relationship between the human flesh and the flesh of the world. Bachelard's material imagination is different from what he calls formal imagination, as the latter depends on sight. Drawing inspiration from Empedocles' cosmology, Bachelard (1997) formulates his law of material imagination and postulates that every imagining being is driven by one of the four elements: water, air, earth, and fire. The material image stems from the relationship between the imagining being and the world that resists him. An image that becomes experience, unlike the spectacle image that is formal and dependent on sight.

A hermeneutics of the image will define its heuristic bases according to how the researcher approaches the image, whether as an experience or spectacle, whether as a product of the active or passive imagination. The "vice of ocularity" (PESSANHA; SIMÕES, 1999) denounced by Bachelard (1997) is succeeded by the spectacle. Incidentally, Bachelard's criticism against the supremacy of sight is the hinge that connects his epistemological work to his poetic work, so many times seen as completely opposite. In science, excessive ocularity brings the epistemological

obstacle that comprises reality itself (BACHELARD, 1996), so much so that researchers tend to take that which they see as data from reality. It is the point when what they believe they know conceals what they were supposed to know. In the poetics of images, the same excessive ocularity leads us away from the palpable towards the intellectualization of the image, i.e. passive contemplation.

On the other hand, the image considered organically, as a product from the work of man's hand on the world, is an experience-based image without the anchor of memory about an outside object, although we can partly identify the original sensation. We could say this image has no meaning because it is not a bridge between two third-party elements. Nevertheless, it does indeed have a meaning. This image is a hermeneutic symbol instead of the symptom of something else. In other words, whatever it conceals, i.e. the reality behind it, is not of much interest as the reality it represents, given its strong shape-content conjunction.

Durand agrees with his master Bachelard with respect to the symbolic image's dynamism. However, he disagrees about its origin based on a Eurocentric cosmogony, and proceeds to search the human body's gestures towards the world for the birth of the image. Drawing inspiration from Betcherev's reflexology, Durand (1997) builds a system to classify symbolic images according to dominant sensory-motor schemes which, when present, inhibit the other reflexes and engender the symbolism: postural reflexes, which control the vertical position that characterizes hominization and organize the images of confrontation, disjunction; digestive reflexes, which bring conducts of assimilation but also of rejection and ejection; rhythmic or mating reflexes, which are founded on sexuality and organize the symbolic images connected to the passage of time, whether it is cyclic or linear. On those grounds, Durand (1997) develops his theory of the imaginary and classifies images into systems according to the basic dominant reflex, respectively, the heroic, mystical, and dramatic systems. This classification will guide subsequent developments of the theory

of the imaginary, especially with respect to what Durand calls mythodology (1996), a myth-critical, myth-analytical method capable of detecting symbolic images and how they are organized in societies and culture products.

Although it conveniently offers a hermeneutics for the symbolic image, mythodology must be carried out along a discursive thread, which complicates the work done by researchers whose empiric object comprises photographs. Naturally, we can always describe the photograph at issue and apply myth criticism to such description. However, that requires using verbal language as a mediator whose nature is entirely foreign to the visual image.

Debray (1993) lists the deficits of a visual image such as a photograph compared to verbal language: 1) it disregards negative utterances: “[...] absences can be talked about but not shown” (DEBRAY, 1993, p.319); 2) it disregards the universal: “[...] it can only show particular individuals in particular settings” (DEBRAY, 1993, p.319); 3) it only has meaning through “[...] juxtaposition and addition” (DEBRAY, 1993, p.319); 4) “[...] it disregards time markers” (DEBRAY, 1993, p.319). We may suspect that every negative balance has its counterpart in some exaggeration on the other side of the scale. Hence, the same way the photograph is unable to talk about the absence, the universal, and time markers, restricting itself to adding and juxtaposing visual information, discourse’s linearity carry an insurmountable limitation. The photograph presents itself whole, all at once, synchronically. Discourse requires us to follow a diachronic path so it may be understood. Therefore, although the photograph’s deficits do not represent a problem for it to be turned into discourse, its synchronicity is a considerable obstacle. Applying mythodology to discourse that describes a photograph is not the same as applying mythodology to some discourse of culture. Not only because we will be then studying a material that has been finally generated by the very researcher but also because such study will inevitably disregard one of the photograph’s constituting aspects, that is, the synchronicity of its presentation.

Therefore, the mythological path is not supplied ready to be used. Although a visual image may be somewhat converted into discourse by way of some symbolic hermeneutics, we will also have to be present to the image at the time of the image, as Bachelard always wanted, in a sort of gnosis. While that seems to fully lack a system and is impossible to be repeated by third parties as required by the scientific method, we must keep in mind that the fantastic also has its rules, as seen above, so that it would indeed be possible to build a method. However, this method will have to take into account that the symbolic in the photograph is not an image at the palpable representation's level. Way before the meaning of the photograph, we will be dealing with the meaning of the image. As we look for the symbolic image in the photograph, we will not be seeking information but instead a subjective experience of appropriating the symbol. The theoretical consequences of that are many, and the hardships, immense: we may even have a dictionary of signs, but a dictionary of symbols is a contradiction in its very terms when it comes to the imaginary. Deciphering a photograph is a procedure that stops short at the code level, and it is due to the excessive intentionality the latter always carries that the symbolic image does not happen there. The symbolic is not a predicate of a class of images but instead a condition for the image to happen. The symbolic leads to something. It is *not* something. Stop seeing the photograph as the reflection of something invisible means opening ourselves up to the immediate symbolic image, although doing that is useless as a methodology. We have the lock, but we lack the key.

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