From the specular obstacle to the epistemological illusion in theory of photography

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ABSTRACT
Considering the contributions of photographic history and philosophy of science, this article seeks to raise the relations between science and common sense in the Brazilian construction of a theory of photography, claiming that the convergence between the two modes of knowledge (science and common sense) happens through the imagination. The symbolic images of some heuristic assumptions of Brazilian intellectual production about photography in the period 1999-2009 are analyzed. Underlying to the theoretical construction of the area, the mythology of the mirror is found.
Keywords: Photography, Science, common sense, imaginary, mythology of mirror

NARCISSUS, STILL

The comparison between photography and a mirror to which society rushes, "Narcissus to a man", to gaze at "its trivial image on a scrap of metal", as Baudelaire put it (1906 apud Entler, 2007b: 12), has featured prominently in the various approaches to the theory of photography. It is a mythological image that goes beyond the level of metaphors and inserts itself in the deep archetypology of the 173 years during which humankind has been interacting with this form of picture production. In Baudelaire's context, that image illustrated a criticism not to photography per se but instead against its advertising as a technique capable of reproducing the world as faithfully as a mirror, thus offending art: "And now the faithful says to himself: 'Since photography gives us every guarantee of exactitude that we could desire (they really believe that, the mad fools!), then photography and Art are the same thing" (Ibid.).

The trump card of its fidelity to what is real soon turned against photography: it was accused of not being art, as it did not make room for the creative imagination considering the camera did all the work. In a way, photography agreed to that, because

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it was not long before movements emerged which sought to produce photos that looked like paintings. The three pictorial trends of photography that came to light starting in 1850 – according to Costa, the allegorical photomontage, the realist photomontage, and the photography featuring "soft focus and pretentious theme" (1991: 262-263) – would soon flourish through countless techniques for intervening in the photograph in an attempt to come closer to art and rise above the mass-production of photography, which began taking shape with the manufacture of devices that were increasingly more simple to use and affordable.

At that point, the indecisiveness between art and technique tipped the scale in favor of a third: common sense. The photographic process industrialization placed photograph making within reach of people without specific knowledge, which caused Sontag to state that photography is an art of the masses, that is, "it is not done by most people as an art form" (2004: 18), and led Bourdieu to conclude, in a 1960s study commissioned by Kodak, that photography is merely a social practice (2003: 54) and that the photographic devotion is a second-rate cultural practice, a poor man's aestheticism (2003: 93).

It took a long time before the construction of a body of theory on photography that was closer to the *episteme* than to the *doxa* started, regardless of Fontcuberta's assertion (2007: 15) that theories have always existed but were forgotten. To remedy such oblivion, the author dedicated himself to a valuable compilation of texts whose roll suffices to show his intent of presenting the theories on photography since its invention: he begins with Talbot and *The pencil of nature*, 1846, and gets to Otto Steinert – the first organization made by Fontcuberta dates back to the 1970s – and includes Henry Peach Robinson, Salvador Dalí, Eugene Smith, and Henri Cartier-Bresson, among others. However, the dispersion of these papers in time and also their extremely situated character (relative to a given photographic practice, a given time in the history of photography, a given author) ends up confirming how incipient the construction of a body of theory in the field was.

The need to affirm there is indeed a theory of photography is evidence of the problem that marks the fold between classic and contemporary science, that is, its break from common sense. That may be a symptom that its own field of knowledge has yet to be set up. The situation is similar to that of photographic criticism: according to Krauss

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(2002), such criticism does not exist because a specific audience for photography does not exist either. Bachelard's claim (2008; 2010) regarding the epistemological break was driven by the advances in the 20th century Physics which pointed out to situations which were incommensurate with those professed by classic mechanics, although it was also endorsed by less hard sciences, such as Sociology. Well, for the break between science and common sense to actually take place, it will be necessary to contradict the "original ideas" (Bachelard, 2010: 39), those derived from sensualist empiricism. However, exactly because they emerge from man's physical relationship with the world's materiality, such ideas – which are in fact images – hardly ever weaken.

The opportunity to discuss a theory of photography that moves across the philosophy of science and its permeability into the imaginary then presents itself because:

a) democratically, photography is practiced by amateurs and experts, artists and scientists, and is the subject of discussion, reflection and/or opinion by both the "man without qualities" (Müsil, 1989) and the scholar;

b) epistemologically, photography seems to still remain in a growth crisis, in search of that which Bachelard (2008) indicated as the epistemological break required to build scientific knowledge, that is, photography is still looking for a break between *doxa* and *episteme;*[1]

c) despite the search for the aforementioned break, photography as a subject of discussion is resistant to the epistemological break exactly because it is inserted into the everyday experience of every researcher as well, which experience we claim intrudes upon the theoretical discussion not in a clear manner but surreptitiously, which can be unveiled by surveying the symbolic images found in such theoretical discussion.

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[1] Perhaps we may include as evidence of that fact the creation of undergraduate photography programs in Brazil in the past few years. In 2011, we mapped 20 programs. Most of them are offered by private higher education institutions. On the other hand, we found that nearly all of them are technological undergraduate programs, that is, shorter programs lasting only two years and whose degree is not accepted as a requirement to attend Master's and doctoral programs; that seems to indicate that photography is approached essentially from its technical slant, and the theoretical challenges it poses are disregarded.

TEN YEARS, 40 TEXTS, DISPERSED REFERENCES

The research cutout presented herein has two secondary goals: discuss a few heuristic assumptions that steer the Brazilian intellectual production on photography and examine the reference sources used most often. In that body thus laid out, we are going to pursue our main goal, which is to examine the symbolism at the foundation of the theory of photography.

We mapped the Brazilian intellectual production on photography for a period of 10 years, from 1999 to 2009 (the latter, the year our study began). Using the CAPES (Coordination of Improvement of Higher Education Personnel) directory of theses and dissertations and the CNPq (National Council for Scientific and Technological Development) directory of research groups, we looked for papers analyzing photography as *episteme*, thus providing clues to what a Brazilian theory of photography would look like.

In the beginning of our study, in August 2009, by using the word photography as a search term, we found 111 research groups at CNPq; upon looking into the intellectual production by those 111 groups, we had to discard 101 of them because they just used photography in a marginal manner, to look for visual information. After that, we started mapping the intellectual production by the remaining 10 research groups and published over the 10 years of our research, and found 29 papers that actually built something we could call a theory or even philosophy of photography. Of that array, we were unable to access the full text of three papers and realized one of the papers was duplicated, bearing only a different title and published in another outlet; therefore, our research focused on 25 texts.

At CAPES, the overall total was 65 theses and dissertations that emerged from the "photography" search word. After analyzing their abstracts, we found 16 papers suited the criteria to build the empiric body of our research, and obtained the complete text of 15 of them.

Thus, were effectively analyzed 40 papers. The papers originated from various fields: Anthropology, Architecture and Urban Planning, Arts, Information Sciences, Sociology and Education. However, most of them are from the fields of History (15.65%) and mostly Communication (51.1%).

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Field the papers come from:	Percentage
Anthropology	2.5%
Architecture and Urban Planning	2.5%
Arts	12.5%
Information Sciences	2.5%
Communication (17) + Communication and Semiotics (3)	50%
Education	10%
History (4) + History and Semiotics (1)	12.5%
Sociology	7.5%
Total	100.00%

TABLE 1 – Table of the fields originating the texts analyzed

Of the three fields notably contributing papers, two use photography chiefly as a document (Communication and History), whether of immediate (current) facts, or more remote (past) ones.

The bibliometrics performed shows the authors and titles cited the most are widely dispersed, as we can see in figure 1:

Authors and titles cited the most

3,20% 3,20% 1,80% 1,60% 1,60% 88,60%

- BARTHES, R. A câmara clara
- DUBOIS, P. O ato fotográfico
- FLUSSER, V. Filosofia da caixa preta
- SANTAELLA, L. Imagem: cognição, semiótica, mídia
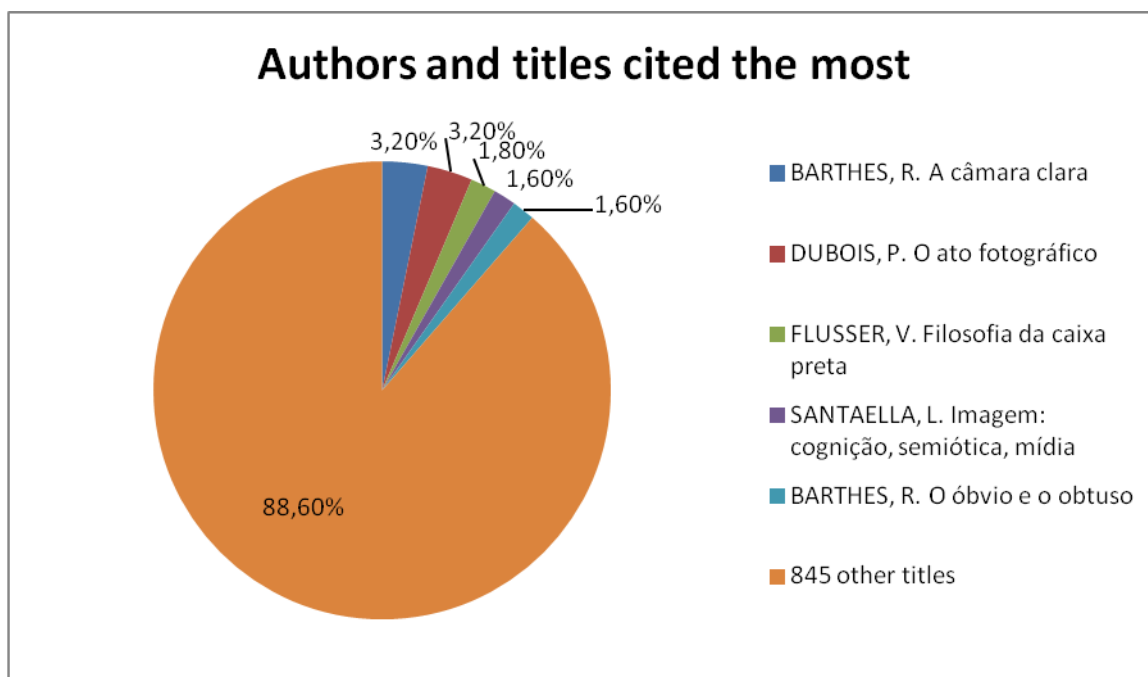- BARTHES, R. O óbvio e o obtuso
- 845 other titles

FIGURE 1: Authors and titles cited the most

We see that the sum of the five titles cited the most adds up to 11.4% of all citations. At the same time we realize some classic texts cannot be circumvented, our attention is drawn to how pulverized the references in the texts analyzed are, despite over half of them sharing the same field of origin. However, we should take into

account the fact that such field of origin – Communication – in turn derives from the convergence of several other fields, which is likely decisive for reference dispersion.

The titled cited the most, *A Câmara Clara* (Camera Lucida) (Barthes, 1984), allows us to speculate that the Brazilian theoretical production on photography is not so much after a method for reading photographs but a license to simply be in their presence, to let us be moved not by the pretentious images of exacerbated iconism but the ineffable images of the *mundus imaginalis*. In the work by French author Roland Barthes, this is a text renowned for its subjectivism, its refusal to define a statute for photography, its entrance into the aporias, into that which is beyond and beneath the sign. Nevertheless, this appeal is going to be weakened by the need to define the ontological contours of the photography object, as we will see later on.

The second title cited the most is a collection of texts as well. Belgian author Philippe Dubois (2004) analyzes photography in its essential condition as a sign, relating it to Peirce's semiotic theory and also to the notions brought forth by Barthes (1984) in *A Câmara Clara.* To Dubois (2004), photography is always an index as it is a consequence of the referent's action. He endorses Barthes' *that was* (1984) and underscores it is not possible to extrapolate it to a *that means*; in photography, we always and only have a finger pointing: *there*.

In *Filosofia da caixa preta* (Philosophy of the Black Box*)*, Vilém Flusser (2002) sees photography as emblematic of the production of technical images, automated images, a situation in which man's participation is restricted to choosing between the options pre-entered in the apparatus. Although deep down it is not a piece specifically about photography, in this short text the study of photography finds unsettling provocations about the photographer's degree of autonomy as they create their work.

In turn, *Imagem, cognição, semiótica e mídia* (Image, cognition, semiotics, and media – free translation), by Lucia Santaella (1999), definitely sees photography as a visual sign and proposes a reflection anchored on Peirce's semiotics.

The book *O óbvio e o obtuso* (The obvious and the obtuse), by Barthes (1982), which ranks 5th among the most cited, includes two important articles about photography: *Retórica da imagem* (Rhetoric of the image) and *A mensagem fotográfica (*The Photographic Message). In the former, Barthes presents the relationship between image and language, and shows it is possible both for the text to lessen the polysemy of

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the photograph and for the photograph and text together to point out to something more far-reaching than themselves. In the latter article, the author seeks to show the connotative construction of the photograph through the use of procedures such as pose, trick effects, the presence of objects making up the scene, resources that make the end-image more photogenic, and the reference to major pieces of the iconography.

From this brief summary, we see that photography challenges authors to enter the realm of objective impossibilities, to surrender, along with Barthes (1984), to the singularity of every photograph, thereby refusing to conceptualize Photography. Nevertheless, there seems to be an attempt, it not a wish, to lay firm methodological bases to address the subject, and to do that they turn to very history of photography, which establishes regular patterns, standards, and to semiology slants that see the photograph as a sign and clear the path for discussions about the photography-reality fold. In this remittance of photography to reality, according to Dubois (2004), the technique plays a crucial role given it is the technique that requires the world to be actually in front of the camera to be portrayed. However, that *to be portrayed* is not definitively set down. Flusser (2002) does not let us forget that a photograph is not a window into the world but instead a pictorial abstraction of concepts about the world. Now, let's see whether the texts analyzed endorse the authors to whom they make reference. To do that, we shall ask them directly.

CODE OF REALITY, SPACE OF THE SUBJECT

At first, we were interested in investigating whether there is general agreement about some photographic ontology or not, about something that is grounding, that characterizes photography in a way that cannot be bypassed. We came to the following results:
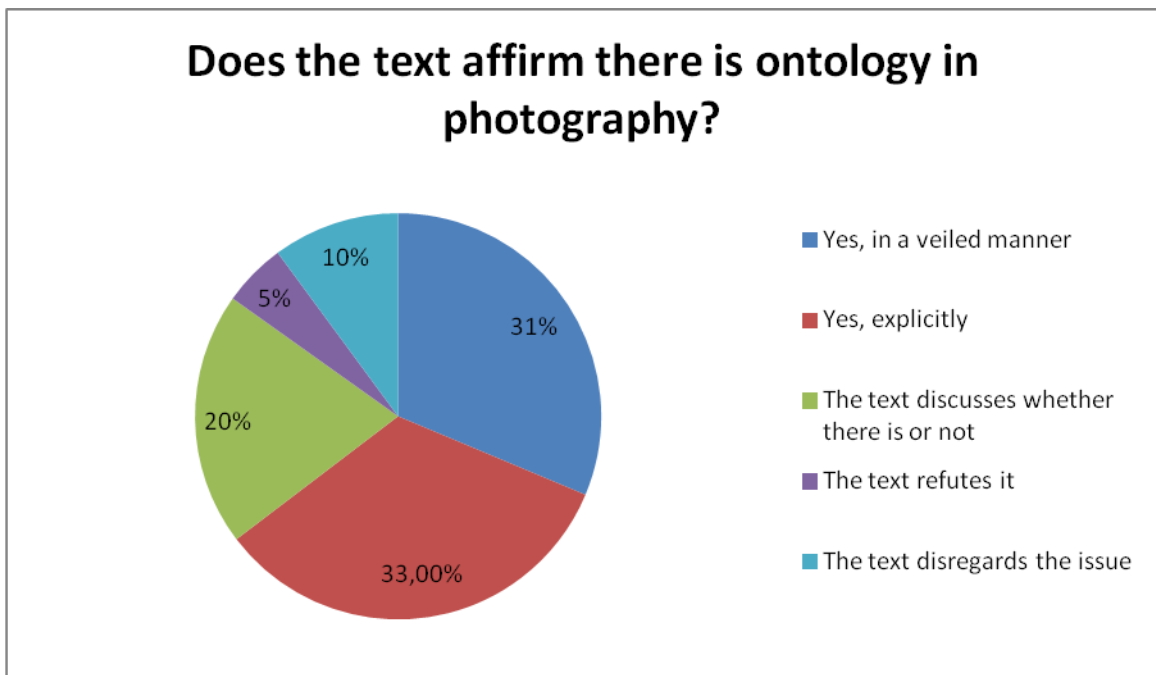
FIGURE 2: Ontology of photography

We see that in one way or another 65% of texts allow one to assume there is a photographic ontology. Many times (31%), the belief in such ontology is somewhat unconscious, but it is indeed there, stating the need for a definition that separates photography from other forms of visual image production. Like Barthes' "that was" (1984) and Dubois' evidence-oriented slant (2004), like Benjamin's aura (1991) and Gombrich's map-reality tension (1982), the texts give photography a different character that makes it unique, so identifiable that we will be able to speak of a post-photography (Santaella, 1998).

Our skimming the text abstracts had already given clues about a major ontological characteristic of photography: its signical nature. Upon examining the texts that affirmed the photographic ontology, a very low percentage (2.9%) indicated the historicity of photography as its founding characteristic; nevertheless, the finding from our skimming was corroborated, as 97.1% of the texts that agree with the existence of ontology stated the signical character would be photography's distinguishing trait. That does not seem to contradict what Fatorelli (2005) says about the matter: that such characteristic should be generic enough to encompass the heterogeneity of images and social productions brought together under the label of *photography* in the course of over

a century of history, and that such generality is found in the reference to the technical nature of the photographic process.

Well, photography's signical character places it in direction relation to the technique used to produce it. Based on the photographic technique, we proceed to the discussion about which type of sign a photograph would be – an index, an icon or a symbol? – or else we do not proceed to the discussion and merely assume one of these three cutouts to be self-evident – usually, the index. That is what the answers to the following question in the questionnaire indicate: 73.5% of the times, that characteristic is taken as evidence, an assumption, and only 26.5% of the times it is put in discussion. There we have scientific production according to what Kuhn called *normal science*, "the activity in which most scientists inevitably spend almost all their time, [...] predicated on the assumption that the scientific community knows what the world is like" (Kuhn, 1996: 24), that is, past scientific achievements that supply the foundation for the current ones, thereby building the paradigms.

From that standpoint, photography would then have, in the affirmation of its character as a link between here and elsewhere, present and past, a paradigm under which to hold its discussions. That leads us to the next question asked of the texts, about the relationship between photography and reality:
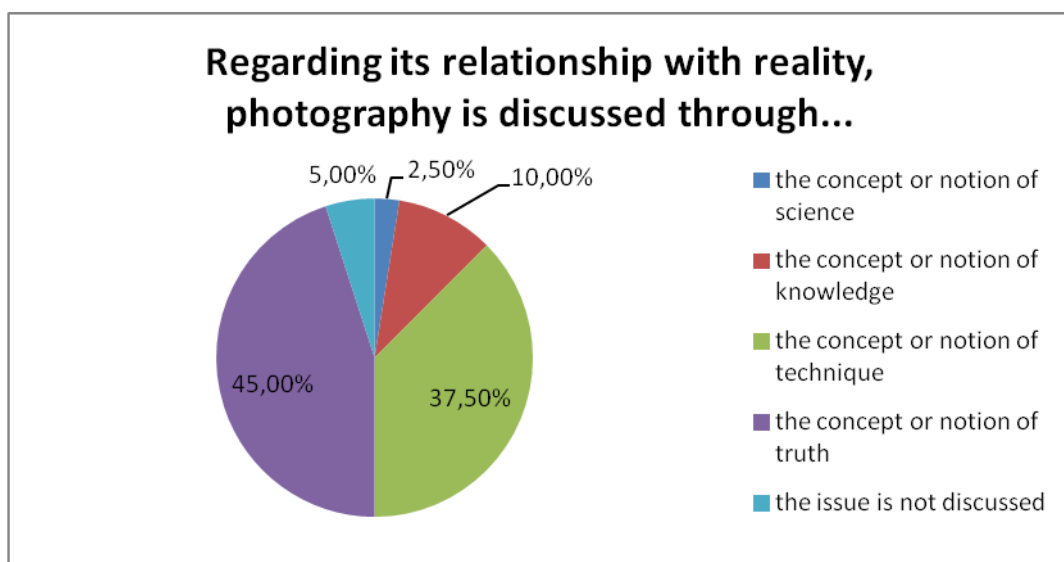

FIGURE 3: Relationship between photography and reality

Regarding that aspect, it is possible to see that the notions of technique and truth do the mediation between photography and reality. The technical character seems to be overwhelming. Would it be so difficult for the photograph analyst to forget about the technique when we know that is what a photographer of unquestionable importance like Cartier-Bresson recommends? "[...] a whole fetishism has grown up around the technique of photography" (Cartier-Bresson, 2004: 26), he says. "Technique should be so conceived and adapted as to induce a way of seeing things; it is important only insofar as you must master it in order to communicate what you see [...]" (Ibid.). He adds: "We should progress beyond that stage at least in conversation" (Ibid.).

However, thinking photography and doing photography are not the same, and if photographers should forget about the technique to be able to focus their energy on creative forces, researchers go back to it constantly to outline their theory of photography:

> Therefore, photography is a route that maintains a function, or permanence: the representation and capture of images through technological processes; in turn capable of being combined with a framework, or broader technological frameworks with which it constantly converses (Silva Junior, 2008: 3).

So technical is that activity that creating through it tends, according to Entler, to be characterized as an exercise in precision (2007a: 39).

That deep rooting in the technique, in a technique that leans over the reality, is perhaps the backdrop motivation causing an equally significant percentage of the texts to place the notion of reality as intermediary between photography and reality. Morelli says: "The truth value attributed to photography is so strong that it seems inherent to this language, albeit of a frail nature, given we know that a single image contains several realities involved and imbricate in it" (2000: 17). Despite the relativization incited by the multiple realities found in a photographic image, the assertion of truth is still possible: "Of all visual documents – even the so-called 'virtual' or 'non-real' – the photograph is the one closest to reality" (Hollanda, 2003: 24).

Finally, we asked the texts through which notion we could discuss the issue of creativity in photography. "Through the concept of subjectivity", was the resounding answer:[2]
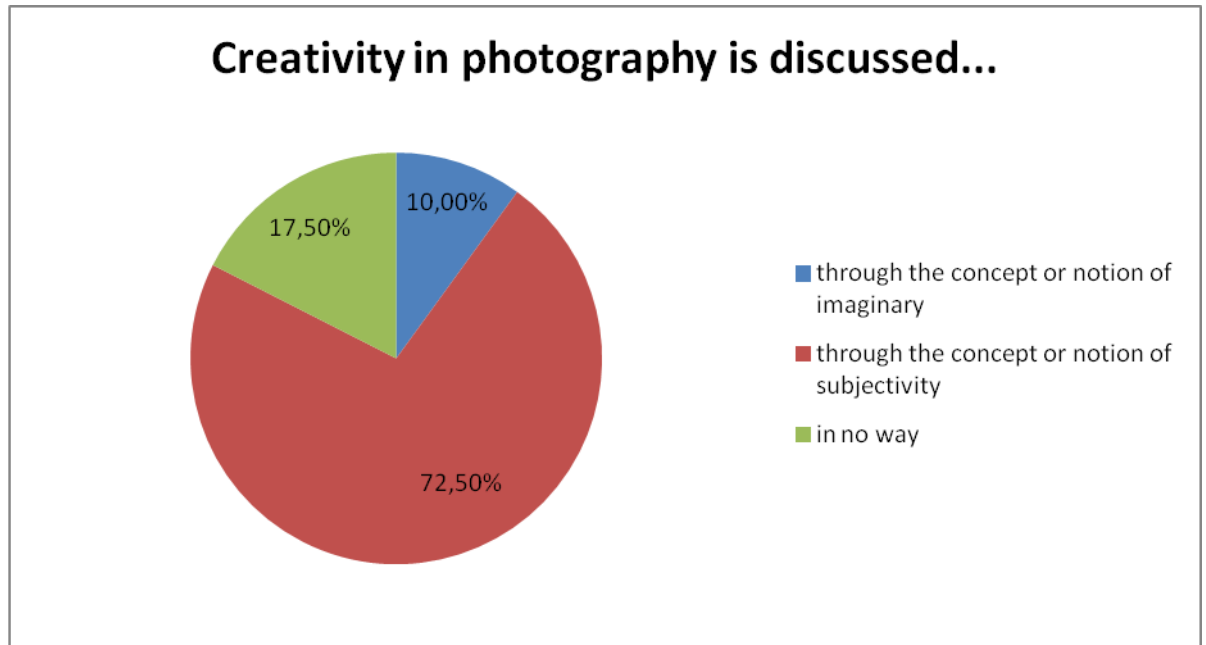

FIGURE 4: Discussion about creativity in photography

The notion of subjectivity seems adequate to counter play the omnipresence of technique in photography, which always hints at the photographer's lack of autonomy over the photographic production:

> The simultaneity aspect seems to account for some of the questions, enabling these comings and goings in time: all apparatuses are possible, less as a result of the technology used and more in terms of the type of thinking and subjectivity involved. Once all means of image production are potentially contemporary to the current time and that, as Agamben well puts it, the answer to our questions lie more in the production of subjectivity than in the devices themselves, everything becomes plausible: even a return to the *camera obscura* (Costa, 2008: 31).

The assertion of subjectivity refutes Flusser's arguments. Yes, although Flusser (2002) accounts for only 1.8% of all citations (nevertheless ranking 3rd among the most

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[2] In all the questions, it was possible to create a new alternative if need be. In this question, we included the option of the imaginary as an alternative to subjectivity because we believe the notion of imaginary is the one that best encompasses the possibilities of collective creations, the products of looking deeper into our anthropologically shared heritage, unlike the creation grounded on the subject. This topic was developed by us elsewhere (Subject and demiurge in the photographic gesture, *E-Compós*, Brasília, v. 14, n. 2, p. 1-13, 2011. Available at: <http://www.compos.org.br/seer/index.php/e-compos/article/view/626>.

cited authors), it seems his realization about the impossibility of creating without entering the black box haunts the philosophy of photography, that his accusation that we only photograph that which can be photographed, i.e. that which is pre-inscribed in the camera, is echoing somewhere in the background of the scene.

Such incursion into Brazilian texts about photography shows that the old issues are our issues. Photography, announced in 1839, kept the same technical bases for over a century. Since 1878, when Charles Bennett develops a process to increase the sensitivity of the gelatin that holds the silver salts on the photographic film plate, the advances in photography were developments from techniques already in existence. The photographic process would only really change in 1990, when Kodak placed in the market, albeit at a very high price (approximately USD 30,000), the first digital camera. The chronological cutout of the text sample analyzed herein encompasses exactly the first 10 years over which digital photography starting climbing towards achieving a widespread reach. In 1999, digital cameras began being made as such, instead of adaptations from analog cameras.

We see that technological innovation does not depreciate the importance of aspects like the relationship between photography and reality or photography's technical/signical (that is, coded) ontology. Although image processing software is available to ordinary consumers, and especially owing to that very fact, discussions about and the affirmation of photography's ability to reproduce the reality are heated. Perhaps we should consider that the texts studied come mostly from the field of Communication, and secondly, from the field of History. These two fields are characterized by dedicating especially to the current reality, in the former case, and past, in the latter. Both look into photography as a documental tool. On the other hand, the issue of photography's technical origin is used at times to assert its ability to mirror the reality and at others to affirm the subjective possibilities of the process – after all, there are countless techniques but the combinations between their choices would not be so, thereby quickly solving the contradiction between technique and subject.

SPECULAR OBSTACLE

In the words of Barthes (1984), from *A câmera clara*, a photograph is divided between the *punctum* and the *studium*: the ineffable, imponderable on the one hand, and that

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which can be located, described on the other. Dualisms such as this in the reflections about photography mark its entire history. It would be unexpected to have happened otherwise. The perceptive habit existing then (and today) is that of the Renaissance perspective, and so the perspective illusion of photography does not appear as an illusion but instead as a reproduction of what is natural. Pairing that with the specular semblance of the photograph, it would hardly be possible to advertize the process through any characteristic other than that of its fidelity to the real.

Such "specular illusion" (Machado, 1984) ends up becoming an epistemological obstacle for photography according to Bachelard:

> And it is not a matter of considering external obstacles, like the complexity and the elusiveness of phenomena, nor of incriminating the weakness of the senses and of the human mind: it is in the very act of knowing, intimately, that slowness and unrest appear through a sort of functional necessity (Bachelard, 2010: 165).

In the case of photography, out of the multiple epistemological obstacles listed by the French philosopher, we can point out that of reality and common sense. Reality poses an obstacle when one believes the information and theories on which one is working derive directly from it. Therein we find Bachelard's criticism against empiricism and the failure to consider that the very conceptualization is part of the experience. The common sense obstacle is related to how difficult it is for scholars to separate their preconceived ideas, their early experiences from theoretical knowledge. "When it presents itself to scientific culture, the mind is never young. It is even very old, as old as its prejudices", Bachelard says (2010: 166).

The appeal of photography's reality, the photograph as a "mark of the real" (Dubois, 2004) is the obstacle preventing thought from escaping some dualism that has made itself over many times in the course of these 173 years. We speak of map/mirror (Gombrich, 1982), second/third realities (Kossoy, 2000) or document/art (Rouillé, 2009). We are always talking about the classic opposition between technique/art, reproduction/creation. We are always pondering whether photography captures images from the world or casts images upon the world.

Hence, we may legitimately conclude, along with Bontems & Ronde (2011), that also in photography Bachelard's epistemological obstacle is the very notion of entity devised by Aristotle to explain the changes by applying to it the three principles of

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logic, namely existence, non-contradiction, and identity. The notion of entity shapes the thought that the world is made of things, which Bachelard denounced as substantialism (Bachelard, 1932 *apud* Bontems & Ronde, 2011).

If on the one hand the texts studied assume the self-evidence of photography's signical character, which could legitimize some dehistorization of the image, that is, thinking about the photograph outside its production context, outside the issue of the subject, on the other there is an emphasis on the photographic creation through its authorship, the subject's unique eye. While in one case we have an attempt at isolating the photograph object and, who knows, think about it conceptually, draw up universal laws for it, in the other case there is an appreciation for the situated experience. From the conceptual abstraction to the personification of the photographic gesture, entities persist about which the photograph speaks, which it analyzes, among which it is the bridge and in which it transforms when we admit that photography, too, creates worlds. The substantialism is clearly visible.

> To understand the irresistible appeal of the idea of substance, we must not be afraid to look for its principle in the unconscious itself, where indestructible preferences are formed. The idea of substance is such a clear idea, so simple, so little discussed that it must rest upon an experience more intimate than any other (Bachelard, 2010: 173).

Incidentally, what experience is that? According to Bachelard (2010: 174), the experience of *having*, whose joys are that much greater the more concentrated the wealth in the thing possessed. If the substantialist *thingness* is accused to be an epistemological obstacle in Bachelard's daytime work, the human connection with the four elements of matter is indicated as the basis of the imagination in his nighttime work[3].

The reality made up of entities is seen through the photograph permeated by the notion of technique or the notion of truth, in most cases (figure 3). The two are connected, as the technique implements the juncture of the photograph with the reality and the truth is a moral value that guides such implementation.

Pressured into crafting itself according to the scientific model, the study of photography resorts to modern axioms, within the limitations given by the substantialist

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[3] Bachelard (1993) categorizes his own work into daytime, that which is dedicated to the concepts, the science, and nighttime, that which is dedicated to the imagination.

realism, which cannot but see a (reflected, twisted, built, representative) image of the world in the photograph. The complexification of academic language indicates a desire to break with common sense, but the archaeology of the ideas supported shows how difficult it is to turn one's mind off from the initial intuitions that the photograph arises.

THINKING WITH ONE'S GUT

Dubois keenly realized the origin of photography's irresistible appeal:

> All these compulsive practices of photography retrieve their essential power not in any way from the meaning of their representation or their own qualities (plastic or mimetic), but instead from their original relationship with their reference situation (Dubois, 2004: 82).

That original relationship with the very thing appeals deeply to the gut – instead of reason. As we know, it is from the gut, from man's material insertion in the world, where the strongest convictions stem. We may say the myth inhabits rational thinking from its birth. Even though, contrary to what Barthes says (1984), there is no equivalence between a star's belated rays and the image that comes to us from the past in a photograph, even though that reference situation is not logical, as Machado affirms:

> That which the photographic film records is not exactly an action of the object upon it (there is no physical or "dynamic" contact between the object and the film), but the particular form of absorbing the reflecting the light by a body placed in a lighted area, just like a sensitive emulsion interprets it based solely on that portion of rays reflected by the object and which could be captured by the lens and filtered by the camera's inner devices. It is an extraordinarily complex process that is a few light years away from the Franciscan simplicity of the classic visual indexes, such as the paw print left on the ground by an animal or a fingerprint" (Machado, 2001: 125).

If the photograph is an index for recording the traces of light, everything in the universe is a photograph, given everything suffers the action of light, it does not matter, because the myth is resistant to the rational disproval, as shown by Durand (1997).

Dubois (2004: 83) warns that we should not take the affirmation of the object's existence made by the photograph for an explanation of meaning. Again, it does not matter; the ontology established by the reference-based situation casts the photograph forever onto the logical corral. Its haecceity establishes not only the referent as an entity, but itself as well. The affirmation of existence is the acceptance of the very

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principle of identity. By understanding the photograph as a sign, we are unfaithful to the secret image it produces within each viewer. The true symbolic image – motivated (Durand: 1997), which is not to be taken for the arbitrary symbol (Peirce: 1984) – which at once combines the imagining being's experience with a deep, universal anthropological meaning, is betrayed by the viewer's charge as he quarters the product of his imagination into defined entities with separate roles: the represented thing, the representing thing, the meaning of the representation, which is in itself a reinterpretation of the thing, and therefore already means something other than the represented thing!

That unfaithfulness to the symbolic image, wishing to introduce clarity and distinction, reveals its deep roots in the imaginary, more specifically in the so-called heroic regime of the imaginary, whose logical basis is grounded on the principles of identity, contradiction and exclusion (Durand, 1997: 443). Here,

> Then reason would no longer be thought of as an autonomous faculty, which would find its own laws in itself, but it would be a form of representation that abstractly translates what the imagination combines according to affective-symbolic representations (Wunenburger, 2011: 15)[4].

The very separation between the photograph object, the *representamen*, the represented, the meaning, and so many other entities we may wish to include is no more than a play of reflections resulting from the countless *re-foldings* and *unfoldings* of the mythical image that parasites the photograph's primeval perception: that of the mirror. From Japanese tradition to *Snow White*, the mirror reflects the superior truth, but accommodates a certain aspect of illusion "it gives an inversed image of reality" (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 2003: 394).

The man of yore used to see his own life depicted in the sky. External – social, historical, cultural, technological etc. – contexts forced him to turn his eyes away from the sky, but the need to get to know himself is an anthropological constant and man always finds new ways to read the map the stars provide. The great myth of the earth reflecting the sky is repeated in contemporary mythemes that technologically update it, and photography seems to be one of them. If the myth cannot be bypassed, the epistemological break is an illusion.

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[4] Original text in French: "La raison ne saurait donc plus être pensée comme une faculté autonome, qui trouverait en elle-même des lois propres, mais serait un mode de représentation, qui traduit abstraitement ce que l'imagination conjuge selon des représentations affectivo-symboliques".

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