

Images of the past and future: the role of photography between memory and projection

Imagens do passado e do futuro: o papel da fotografia entre memória e projeção

ANA TAÍS MARTINS PORTANOVA BARROS ^a

Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Graduate Program in Communication and Information. Porto Alegre – RS, Brazil

ABSTRACT

The theme of this article is the issue of memory related to photography and its possible alterations due to an exponential increase in the production and sharing of images. Starting off from both a philosophy of photography (Barthes, Virilio, Flusser) and a philosophy of images and the imaginary (Belting, Bachelard, Durand, Eliade, Merleau-Ponty), we problematize memory as a carrier of the past in a context of ephemerality of the now and dissolution of the stability of categories such as time and space. We propose the idea of memory as anticipation more than recollection. The conclusion is that the part of photography, despite its dematerialization and detemporization, is intact for the anticipatory memory, which updates the mythical past in order to respond to a desire for what is coming.

Keywords: Photography, memory, imaginary

^a Postdoctoral degree in Philosophy of Image at Université Jean Moulin – Lyon 3. PhD in Communication Sciences from the Universidade de São Paulo. Professor of the Graduate Program in Communication and Information at Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS) – Orcid: <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-5203-7575>. E-mail: anataismartins@icloud.com

RESUMO

Este artigo aborda a questão da memória a partir da fotografia e suas possíveis alterações advindas do aumento exponencial da produção e do compartilhamento de imagens. A partir tanto de uma filosofia da fotografia (Barthes, Virilio, Flusser) quanto de uma filosofia da imagem e do imaginário (Belting, Bachelard, Durand, Eliade, Merleau-Ponty), problematiza-se a memória como portadora de passado num contexto de efemeridade do atual e de dissolução da estabilidade de categorias como o tempo e o espaço. Propõe-se a ideia de memória como antecipação mais do que rememoração. Conclui-se que o papel da fotografia, apesar da desmaterialização e destemporalização desta última, mantém-se intacto para a memória antecipatória, que atualiza o passado mítico para atender o desejo pelo devir.

Palavras-chave: Fotografia, memória, imaginário

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USING PHILOSOPHY'S METHOD (which works on the problem's paradoxes and contradictions, delves into its polysemy, seeks the passage from the phenomenon to the being) and based on postulates by the theories of image and imagination, this paper discusses photography's role in preserving memory and building the future, considering its power to provide an immediate synthesis that enables an interpretative summary of facts and contexts. We are going to investigate the contradictory games loaned to photography by visuality, which is connected to illusion and knowledge at the same time: comprehension and understanding benefit from visual metaphors; however, images, including photographic ones, are branded cheats, deceitful creatures. This uncertainty between illusion and witness-bearing is also seen in photography's relationship with temporalities: Barthes' famed noeme ("that-has-been") indicates that photography is first and foremost past. Nevertheless, its dependence on the present is no less true considering that it is in the here and now that the meaning materializes (the meaning of images changes according to the space-time contexts in which they are and based on which they are observed). Furthermore, photography is not beyond prospecting the future either because as the world is visually represented it takes on the value of a reduced model of the universe when the principle of similarity is applied. Hence, by preserving appearances, the same visual representation operating in photography at the same time preserves memory and gives the world a structure because our constructs, whether material or immaterial, are built in our imagination before they take shape. We ask: would photography's active role in media and interpersonal communications be a safe indicator of the solid recordkeeping of our contemporary times and the vigorous design we are allegedly making of our future? Now, while photography is connected to witness-bearing, it is also connected to interpretations and postulates to the same extent: unlike verbal, analytical discourse, photography cannot operate via arguments and demonstrations. Moreover, its synthetic assumptions are deeply ambiguous, which impacts the memory created through it and fosters flights of fancy. Therefore, photography-based memory drives the elimination of a possibly false boundary between what is real and imaginary and demands our careful attention to the construction media and interpersonal communications have been making of the past and how they project the future. Based on authors such as Hans Belting, Gilbert Durand, Gaston Bachelard, Roland Barthes, Merleau-Ponty, and Ernst Gombrich, this paper discusses some of photography's limits and part of its reach as a holder of historic memory and revealer of our contemporary imagination.

THE PHOTOGRAPHIC IS PRESENT

The supremacy of the visual in today's technologically-mediated interpersonal communication processes can be confirmed by the stratospheric amount of photographs shared daily on social networks, even in those that, different from Instagram, don't require the user to post a picture in order to publish a message (Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, QZone, WeChat, Line, Google+, just to name the most popular ones). More than 2 billion photographs are shared on Facebook every day by its users¹. As stated by Van Dijck (2008), photography has become a form of interpersonal communication. The currency of these publications, however, is ephemeral, characterizing an increasingly speedy present, which becomes the past with great ease. Common sense says that past and memory are closely linked; after all, memory is always constituted around something that happened before. But is a memory that is built and preserved by photography made of the past? Can the multiplication of photographs being shared be read as an amplification of collective memories?

Maybe the past has been less present in photography than what has been generally believed. It is true that the instant represented in the photograph is in a chronologically earlier time than the moment when it is observed; but, all in all, no perception brought on by the senses – eyesight, hearing and, in a certain manner, smell – is simultaneous to the fact being perceived, because the space the signal needs to go through demands a certain time. Supposing, however, that this space does not exist, still photography cannot bring the past to memory because any human experience – even memory – always happens in the present. This is indifferent to the analogical or digital environment.

Barthes says (1984: 49): “When William Klein photographed ‘Mayday 1959’ in Moscow, he taught me how the Russians dress [...]”. Well, no one would think that William Klein's teaching was historically given to Barthes, that the Barthes who wrote in 1980 was transported to 1959 so as to learn that information or vice-versa. It is in Barthes's present that the information presented in the photograph previously taken by Klein is transformed into teaching. Another example:

An old house, a shadowed porch, tiles, old Arab ornaments, a man sitting with his back to the wall, a deserted street, a Mediterranean tree (*The Alhambra*, by Charles Clifford): this old picture (1854) touches me: simply because I want to live *there*. (Barthes, 1984: 63)

Again, it is the Barthes that is contemporary to himself who wished to live in the old house shown in the picture, and this is even evidenced by the verb tense used to described what the author feels when seeing these images (the picture “touches” him because he “wants” to live there). The same happens in this other

¹ According to a video of the company presenting a new app, the Automatic Alternative Text (AAT), which would allow blind people to access a description of photographs. ><https://www.facebook.com/accessibility/videos/1082033931840331/>< Accessed on April 6, 2016.



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descriptive paragraph, where the verbs that refer to the scene photographed in the past are used in the present tense:

There is a photograph by Kertész (1921) that represents a blind gypsy violinist being led by a boy; well, what I see, with this ‘eye that thinks’ and makes me add something to the picture, is the dirt road; a grain of this earthy road assured me that I am in Central Europe [...].

And also:

Here, around 1913, is my mother dressed up – hat with a feather, gloves, delicate linen at wrists and throat, her ‘chic’ belied by the sweetness and simplicity of her expression. This is the only time I have seen her like this, caught in a History (of tastes, fashions, fabrics) [...] (Barthes, 1984: 97).

Here is Barthes’s mother: photographed in 1913, she is not in the past, she is here, he sees her, just like we see her *hic et nunc*, just like the year of 1913 is not more than one century away from us and was not seven decades away from Barthes².

² Barthes wrote *Camera Lucida* in 1980.

We insist on the presentification of experience exactly because Barthes’s study on photography is known for having explained the noeme *that-has-been*, that is, its inimitable, unavoidable and founding characteristic would be referentiality, would be the fact that someone made of flesh and bones had been in front of the photographed object. This immediately inscribes the photographic image in history and memory, because not only did the photographed object exist *in the past*, it was also witnessed.

However, the verbs conjugated by the photograph are always in the present tense and the photograph, because it is an imagetic synthesis, oblivious to verbal speech, cannot be referred neither to the past not the future.

Interpretations around Barthes’s *that-has-been*, although numerous, are almost always based on the stability of some element of the image, whether that element is the image’s supposed realism (in the sense that the scene depicted happened before the camera) or – which, in the end, is almost the same – its indicial character, the indelible footprint that the concreteness of the scene impresses on the image, or, yet, if that element is the past character of the image, given the conjugation of the verb that composes the expression. It is in the conjugation of this past time that lies the “absolute Other” to which Rancière (2012) refers, speaking about the *that-has-been*; the past is this entire Other that we have never touched, but with which photography provokes us. Simultaneously, we experience the paradoxically

immediate presence of the past: there is identity in action, that is, the *that-has-been* is the irremediably seductive ingredient that photography carries, as charming as the *coincidentia oppositorum* of a present tense with the intangible past is.

On the same track of an unreachable past, Didi-Huberman (2015: 48, emphasis by the author) points to the possibility of “[...] interpreting the realities of the past with the categories of the past (of the *same* past, see) [...]”. However, we are not condemned to only remember pictures, as regrets Sontag (2003), but it is possible to remember through pictures with the “archeology of images” (Didi-Huberman, 2000), comparing what they show us today with what we know has disappeared, so it becomes an assembly of heterogeneous times. From that, however, the double absence that supports images becomes obvious, according to Didi-Huberman (2010): the belief (one sees beyond of what is actually seen) and the tautology (what is seen is just that). This dilemma is overcome by dialectic images (Didi-Huberman, 2010: 179), “an image that criticizes the ways we see it, insofar as, in looking at us, it forces us to truly look at it “ (Didi-Huberman, 2010: 172).

If time multiplicity can, following Rancière and Didi-Huberman, be configured as such in photography, the constant appeal to the present it carries, together with its difficulty of referring to the past or the future without recurring to a system of references necessarily known to the spectator, can configure the eternal present of non-mythical time. Let us observe this famous image for a moment:

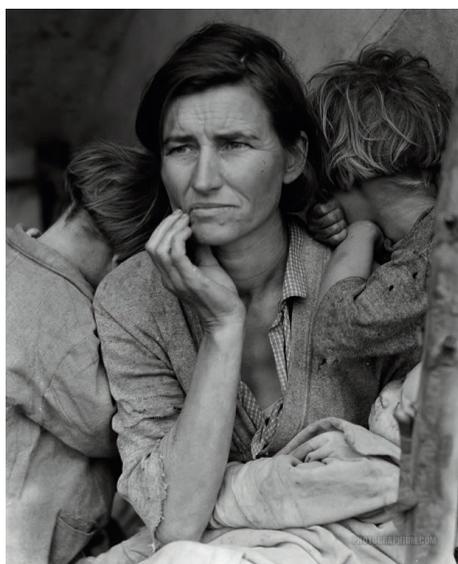


Figure 1 – *Migrant mother*, 1936, de Dorothea Lange

Source: Library of Congress FSA/OWI Collection

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There is no codification of a past time in this image; all we can do is mobilize the information we *already have* in order to imagine the woman pictured with her children as a victim of the North-American Great Depression. Even if the photographed scene had more specific signs of time, we would not be able to consider them as references of a past time. For example, if the clothes of the people portrayed in the picture referred to a given time, there would always be the possibility that this reference was staged. It can be observed, then, that there is a certain incompetency in the language of photography in terms of representing temporality. The indication of the passing of time by blurred movement is practically the only way of speaking of that in photography, but it limits temporality to a movement in space.

However, time does not depend on the language of photography to overflow all over it, because it interfered both on its own origins and its destiny, encompassed by the act of photography as it was fertilized by Dubois (1993): the form and content of photography also implicate its relations with who is photographing and with who sees what was photographed, constituting the act of photography as an image-act.

In this sense, the choice of subject to be portrayed can illustrate how time is carried inside the photograph by the subjectivity of the photographer and the spectator. Belting (2012), when thinking about this issue, compares two photographs taken with short exposure times. On the first one, *Carrera de coches del Grand Prix*, by Jacques-Henri Lartigue, taken in 1912, the short exposure time causes its subject to appear frozen even though it was speeding; on the second one, *Mujer leyendo en el hospital Beaune*, taken by André Kertész in 1928, the subject really is still. Even so, the spectator of each image has a different perception of time: “The extremely long or extremely short duration of time is something we stored as images even before we related a picture with an image we immediately associate in our memory” (Belting, 2012: 278, translated by the author)³.

Thus, it is not in the limits of a specifically photographic language that one should seek allusion to the past, because it can only speak of the past through some sign, and it is, therefore, dependent on a decoding that no longer belongs to the photo or the past, but to the present, to the experience of the present. Even the image-act is constituted in the here-now, since, as stated by Merleau-Ponty (1999: 556, emphases by the author), all times are “[...] present, since conscience is contemporary to all times” and “[...] the series of possible relations according to the before and after is not time itself, it is the result of its *passage*, which objective thinking can always presuppose, and never apprehend”. Barthes (1984: 98) translates this when he states that “History is hysterical: it is constituted only if we consider it, only if we look at it—and in order to look at it, we

³ The text we used is a Spanish translation and says: “La duración extremadamente larga o extremadamente breve del tiempo es algo que tenemos almacenado como imagen ya antes de que relacionemos una foto con una imagen que inmediatamente asociamos en nuestra memoria”.

must be excluded from it”. In order to exist, more than a referent in front of the camera, photography demands an observer in front of itself, an observer that can only be living their present moment. Memory is, then, not a transportation of the self to the past, but a construction lived today.

If it is true that photography is always memory because the condition for its existence demands that it presents itself after that which it represents is over, it is also true that the photographic experience can only happen in the present of the self – and so memory is never in the past, because it is always in process. Past and memory are not conserved, they are built. So it is surprising that the responsibility of preserving memory is still put on photography. It should be noted that the temporal ubiquity of photography is not restricted to presentified past (or, why not, a present recognized in ancestry), also extending to the future. Although photography may have an important part in conserving certain information that will end up integrating memory, this memory, maybe, owes as much to the productive imagination, that which creates worlds, as it does to the reproductive imagination, that which represents the data of perception. The productive imagination works for what is coming because desire is only defined by what is not there yet. What one believes to have seen in the world and what one wishes to see in the world are in symbiosis in photography, to the point where it would be possible to talk about a projection of the past as much as about a memory of the future.

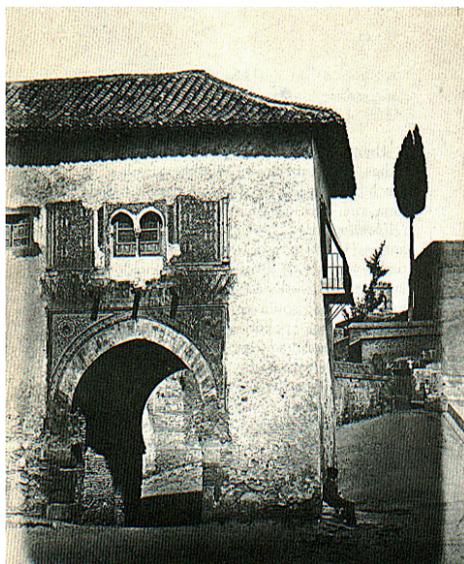


Figure 2 – Granada, Torre del Vino, 1858, de Charles Clifford

Source: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/493707177883054730/>

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“It is there I want to live”, says Barthes when looking at the photograph above. It is as if he recognized on the scene what he had already imagined. After all, the photograph is in our world, not in the world where it was taken.

Malraux (2000: 231) perceives a metamorphosis in the experience of the arts in the museum which “[...] banally and inexorably changes the whole present into the past”. Virilio, 37 years later, in 1988, (2002: 88) points to the same, referring to photography: “[...] how to accept the principle of persistence of vision without at the same time accepting the part of memory in immediate perception?” Well, if the past changes the perception of the present, the contrary also occurs, especially in photography; maybe it is its characteristic to change the past into present/future. The future demanded by a desire of what will be, which can be catalyzed by the experience of photography, benefits of the power photography has of creating micro-universes. This power comes from the visuality of photography, with visuality being privileged in the passage of the abstract to representation, like Bachelard (2008: 25) states:

[...] the complete representation [of the World] finds its first and most profound root in visual representation. [...] It is then we realize in fact the World as a universe, as a reduced model, a miniature, or better yet, as a model that can be reduced by the tacit application of the principle of similitude.

Bachelard’s work on material imagination (1990; 1998; 2001a; 2001b) has already shown how much reversibility is the condition for the creative imagination, allowing the commutation between pairs of images and metaphors like water and hair, wine and blood. The isomorphy that enables reversibility between images and metaphors, according to Wunenburger (2012), is a semantic principle of Bachelard’s philosophy of imagination, which ignores the limits imposed by logical conversions. This semantic principle makes the small become big because of a simple change in scale. The micro-universe represented in the photograph, which mobilizes a desire, transforms into a macro-universe which, if it is not materialized, will be at least imagined. Thus, the past, in the experience of the photograph, is not restricted to information that builds memories; it mobilizes senses of present and future. In one gesture, the look of the present over the past creates a desire for a certain future and, indiscernible from that, the present desire for the future guides the look over the past.

This is possible because the past that supports/is supported by our desires is not historical, but mythical. This desire for the future is based, then, not on a chronological story, localizable through documents, but on a mythical time. The myth is understood here, very broadly, as an exemplary narrative created by

the desire for another story. One complicating factor is the fact that this desire for another story is not always clear to one's conscience – most times, it is not. Because of that, war pictures are not able to stop wars, as was said by Sontag (2004). The author underlines the rhetoric of these images which “[...] reiterates. Simplifies. Agitates. Creates the illusion of a consensus” (Sontag, 2003, position 35 of 1418). This rhetoric is, yes, a constructed discourse, but its circulatory efficacy does not apply only because of the success of ideologies to format a consensual narrative. What we consider to be photography's ineptitude to promote changes in the direction of a fairer and less violent world results from a complex game between coercions of history and anthropologic pulses; coercions in which the circulating discourses of the public sphere participate. They are effected by reinforcement, entering into consonance with drives, or by reactivity, entering into shock with impulses rooted in an unconscious of the species itself, as is defended by Durand (2011), or in a collective unconscious, as preferred by Jung (2007). In the specific case of wars, maybe we could even evoke Freud (1983) and his ideas about the unrestrainable human drive to destruction, which only becomes controllable by a civilization process, but which is always ready to come forward. Collective choices which, even though they do not blame anyone, as was said by Balzac (1981), they also do not absolve, because they happen in the end of a dispute of mythical powers. The option of not participating in it is as unachievable as the possibility of controlling its results.

In the 1960s Durand (1996) already pointed to the activity of at least two myths, one decadent and another ascendant, which make society dynamic, distribute accepted and marginalized parts, inform rules and regulate deviations. We must reverse the perspective usually adopted by enlightened men and see the myth as parasitized by history to be able to understand how each chronologically localizable context is remittable to the perfect beginning of time. As Eliade says (1994: 122), “The real historiographical *anamnesis* also ends in a primordial Time” because it is in this mythical beginning that are the models of all rites and significant human activities. The knowledge of myths goes beyond the understanding of “[...] how things came into being, but also where to find them and how to make them reappear when they disappear” (Eliade, 1994: 18). Placed between the mythical tools that we have, we understand the transforming power of photography.

ANTICIPATORY MEMORY

Collective memory, to Sontag (2003, position 892), does not exist, because it is not a remembrance, but a convention: “[...] this is important, this is the history

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of how it happened, with the pictures that imprison history in our mind”. This collective memory, even though it controlled by social conventions, is also historic, because it is shared by a collective *conscience*. Regarding the coercive weight of this construction, it is insufficient to prevent that personal memory, constituted by the histories of each person, interfered in this historic memory and transforms the way it is seen. This point in which the collective production of memory through photographs comes into contact with personal memory was underlined by Spence (1976), who indicated it as the rupture that causes us to never see ourselves the same way as before. Time, according to Proust (1998), can change people, but not the image we hold of them. In the case of photography, stability is not due to the immobilization of a past on the captured scene, but to the projection of the image that feels stable in the memory of the photographic image being observed, so that one fits into the other. It makes sense, here, Bachelard’s statement that memory and imagination do not admit dissociations (Bachelard, 1993), and if for some reason the two collide, imagination wins because, as stated by Durand (2011), the imaginary is insensitive to rational rebuttal. By demanding that the material image and the mental image coincide, the imaginary uses photography as a crucible in which, at the present time, memories (past) and desires (future) are alchemically merged; its result, although known as memory, would be more accurately called anticipatory memory.

The anticipatory property of memory seems to become more acute with digital photography and its use as a form of communication and expression.

Thus, the frequent sharing of photos, personal or otherwise, is indicative of a permanent reconstruction of the self and the world. By stating that taking pictures can be more an individual tool of communication and formation of identity than a way to conserve the photographic family heritage, Dijck (2008) refers more precisely to photographic manipulations that seek to modify the picture so that it reflects the mental image of the self that the person has or wants to convey. But it is possible to say that even when there is no manipulation, a review of desires is present, since the impulse of sharing only occurs if something in the image causes some disruption – positive or negative. If these images – manipulated or not – will faithfully translate the reality of today to posterity is a minor issue: just like the mirror, photography does not duplicate the world, but reverses it and deforms it. On that point, perhaps we should invest in a concept of memory that is more often aware of the fact that memory is, after all, *our* history and not the history of those who are supposedly objects of this memory. The collective imaginary guides the construction of memory in the direction of its desires; so the notion of anticipatory memory becomes operational to think of the photograph from the perspective of a theory of the imaginary.

Retaining certain traits, expanding them, and forgetting others, deleting them, is a common procedure of memory which, when it is intermediated by photographs, is strengthened. The first requirement of the photographic gesture is to eliminate the contexts of the photographed scene. Well, when you do that, the details that remain are intensified, which works for their conservation, but especially for the sake of the subject's desires of expression, who will choose this photograph as representative of something they want to communicate. Belting says (2011: 9):

Images are used as windows to the reality. But, since our concept of reality is constantly altered, our claim for images is also altered. A similar demand implicates that we wish to believe in the images, although we have to justify our faith.

In another way, common sense makes the same accusation against posts on social networks, which are supposedly manipulated to match not only idealized and unattainable images of people, but also the facts that compose our history; accusations that, when looking at photography as anticipatory memories, are unfair: in them, past and future are inseparable, constituting one eternal present in which the world that is and the world with which one dreams are mixed.

Challenging idealized images is pertinent, yes, but no more than the contested pictures, that is, it also indicates the collective effort of anticipatory memory to deny the validity of certain aspects and the affirm others, leading to a "fight of truths" (Santos, 1989: 95) that ultimately builds up the future, because "The truth is not [...] a fixed characteristic inherent to a given idea. The truth happens to a given idea when it contributes to the events anticipated by it" (Santos, 1989: 49). Thus, the validity of the idealization that led to the modification of someone's body or appearance or that decontextualized a political scene is also part of an imaginary, only it is committed to another idealization. So Belting's (2011) statement is not fair when he says that, rather than measuring images based on the similarity they have with the world, we now measure the world based on the similarity it has with images. If the world was never matrix for images, why would they now be matrices for the world? There are more variables at play than the copy and the original. What we loosely call reality cannot be assimilated to neither one nor the other of these poles, and so it becomes a dynamic between the different possible versions are between them, these, in fact, rather idealized and unattainable, extremes.

The manipulation of photographic images answers to collective needs born out of the alteration of the experience of time itself facing the speed of new experiences, including photographic ones: a time that is more and more felt as *making itself*, constituting itself, a time in which the act of photography allows



the transmutation of the present into future, like what happens in the passage of viewing into seeing, pointed in traveling experience in the 1980s by Vilém Flusser (1985) when he pondered that photographing the places visited is more imperative than contemplating them, absorbing their climate, feeling present in them. Knowing the places happens after tourists have returned home, when looking at their photos. There, Virilio (2002) denounces more than the neglect of experience: he points to the standardization the look suffers from the imposition of the point of view of the camera. The cyclops, a mythological figure that could be the badge of photography, does not haunt us anymore, maybe because he is losing his attributes. His one eye – which, mythologically, translates into a lightning – still operates deeply in photography, this illuminator of scenes, details, focusing on what one wants to emphasize. However, it seems that the intensity of its light has been degraded due to the increase of its speed, which increasingly determines the photographic experience.

Light and speed are usually associated cooperatively, but we venture to say that this cooperation is transmuted into contradiction in the superabundant and speedy photography, be it in the production or consumption of photographs - processes, which are imbricated in digital communication. The light associated with speed decomposes, in a manner that is at least interesting, the idea of abduction that expresses the experience of understanding through photography: its synthetic nature provides a synchronous reading, in which the sense is delivered at once. However, the speed that was also given to the access to photographs – which literally roll on our screens, pushed by our eager fingers –, prevents that this abduction be completed, that the lightning of meaning occur. The speed imposed to the experience of seeing transmutes it into simple looking, insufficient even for a synthetic medium like the image. One may regret the lack of focused attention from this experience, but one should not forget that looking without seeing is a survival strategy our over-stimulating environment.

The contemporary experience of the photographic is inserted at a pace that was suddenly accelerated with the massification of digital communication. The one eyes of the cyclops which is the camera was multiplied and its focus was scattered; we do not have a point of view on which to let our focus rest anymore, but many points of view that, to be appropriate, require a look that wanders everywhere without stopping anywhere. There is then a de-spatialization of the photographic experience in two ways: the permanent mobility of the look, which is more visualization than vision, and the very dematerialization of photography, which although it does not need large and dense supports (canvas) yet, has no physical matter and, therefore, neither mass nor volume⁴.

⁴ Like other types of digital data, photographs have dimensions, but not matter, and, therefore, have no mass or volume. Digital information is presented as the presence or absence of electric charge by the binary code, the bit (binary digit). The bit can take only two values (zero or 1), indicating cut or passage of energy. Physically, the value of a bit is stored as an electric charge, but it can be represented by other means, for example, by light (as in optical fibers) or electromagnetic waves (as in wireless) (><https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bit>< Accessed on April 15, 2016). Photography is a kind of image that has a bit to bit correspondence between the tracked image points and the points in the image reproduced on the user's screen; this image, then, is a finite set of points defined by numerical values, forming a mesh of points, where each point is a pixel, considered to be the smallest component of the digital image. A pixel is composed of three colors: green, red and blue (><https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pixel>< Accessed on April 14, 2016) The relative proportion of these colors is represented numerically, so that the more bits of information per pixel, the more colors will be available and more accurate will be the color representation.

Dematerialized and despatialized, what seems to remain in photography is the experience of time. This experience, at the speed of passage, is characterized by the eagerness for what will come, calling the picture to show solidarity with the projection of individual and collective desires. This is how the photographic experience, made almost unbearably fast, has in image manipulation an ally for the construction of the future: the period of time between seeing, rejecting what was seen and rebuilding until it reaches the idealized projection (and, maybe, forgetting it right after) is increasingly shorter. It may be appropriate to ask, with Virilio, if after the disabsolutization of space (because of its dematerialization) photography will not need light as well, the absolute translation of speed. In other words, will photography be capable of annihilating time and all we attribute to it like memory? If we understand memory as something remembered from the past, the answer is yes. Flusser (2008) shows how, in movements of back-and-forth, in a progression that regresses a little in order to advance better to the next stage, man abstracted from space, firstly, time (use of the hands), then depth (use of vision, creating traditional images), then width (use of the fingers, creation of writing), and, finally, length (use of the fingertip, generalized digitalization), so that there is no longer any dimension⁵. Images are now made of nothing more than points, sending us “[...] from one-dimensionality to the abyss of zero-dimensionality”, implying a post-history, “[...] that succeeds history and writing” (Flusser, 2008: 15). The difficulty of returning to the concrete to which the absurdity of abstraction led us would declare the definitive end of memory. However, not only does the material space still live in our flesh, its experience also happens, if not in time, in a time: the mythical time.

DEMATERIALIZATION AND REMATERIALIZATION OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Photography, just like everything else that can be object of the look, is only seen because something in us accepts it, as was well emphasized by Merleau-Ponty in his work: “I would be hard pressed to say *where* the picture I look at is. Because I do not look at it as one would look at a thing, not fixed in its place, my gaze wanders around it as on the nimbus of Being, I see according to it or with it more than I see it” (Merleau-Ponty, 2004: 18). What makes it possible to see *according to* the object or *with* the object more than seeing *the* object is a phenomenon characterized by Merleau-Ponty as *precession*, explained by Carbone (2011: 121, our translation) as describing “[...] a very particular temporality, which is characterized by the movement of advance of the implied terms”. From this comes an infinite game in which what *is* comes before what *is seen*; but what *causes one to see* comes before what *is* and, then, before what *is seen* as

⁵ The process of increasing abstraction denounced by Flusser (2008, p. 15) begins with the manipulation of volumes, causing man to abstract the time from the concrete, transforming the world in circumstance. The second degree of abstraction would be occupied by vision, which would abstract the depth from circumstance. The third abstracting gesture is conceptualization, which is capable of removing width from surface. Finally, the fourth abstracting gesture is the computerized calculation, which abstracts length from the line: then we do not have more than points; dimension, here, is null.



Images of the past and future

well; that is, we will never reach a historic past. As Carbone points out (2011, p. 124, emphasis added, our translation), “[...] it [precession] can only send us to a *past that was never present*, that is, to a past that belongs to a mythical time.”⁶ The vision, thus, collaborates with the imaginary and, reciprocally, the imaginary fits the vision.

⁶ From the French: “Bien plutôt, elle ne peut nous reporter qu’à un passé qui n’a jamais été présent, à savoir un passé qui appartient à un temps mythique”.

It is known that for Merleau-Ponty all the knowledge of the world goes through perception, a perception which lies less in our sensory devices than in our whole being; less in the body than in the *flesh*. By *flesh*, Merleau-Ponty means an inseparability between sensible and intelligible, real and imaginary; this inseparability is what requires reciprocal precession, it is what removes the visible image of the *second* place, “[...] a weakened double [...] of *something else*” (Merleau-Ponty, 2004: 18, emphasis added). Analogous to what the French author says about painting, what is looked at is not *in* the photograph, there is solidarity and even indiscernibility between the body that sees and the image that is seen, and it is still possible to agree on this subjectivity:

Quality, light, color, depth are at a certain distance before us; they are only there because they awaken an echo in our body, because it welcomes them. This internal equivalent, this carnal formula of their presence that things arouse in me, why would they not raise in turn a trace, visible still, where any other look would find again the reasons that support their inspection of the world? (Merleau-Ponty, 2004: 18).

The agreement is possible because we inhabit the same space as other imagining beings, with a body that, in the end, is the base of material imagination. It does not matter, then, if photography is now despatialized and if the imposition of the speed of light will annihilate it in its temporality; the matter that counts is not the one supporting the photograph, the time that makes a difference escapes from pure historicity. Memory persists *through* and *with* photography.

The logic of anticipatory memory, governed by the symbolic imagination, does not follow the logic of physics. Sure, science disassembled the absolutism of matter, exchanging it for the absolutism of light, and it might be more rational to choose the time - stable and ubiquitous - to house what if one does not want to forget; but human nature, stuck in desiring flesh, elects space to rest its memories:

[...] Space is everything because time no longer incites the memory. Memory – strange! – does not record the actual duration, duration in the Bergsonian sense.

We cannot revive abolished durations. [...] It is through space, in space, that we find the beautiful fossils of duration achieved with long stays. [...] The memories are immobile, the more solid, the more well spatialized. (Bachelard, 1993: 28-29).

Memory only makes sense if it carries the future, if it enables us to dream about what is not yet given. Transcending the issue of photography as another reality, it is in the flesh of the dreamer that the photographic image is inscribed. The absence of reliable photographic documents is lamented by common sense, but this will only continue happening by those who will come after us if we continue to feed the dualisms whose overtaking has been requested by proof of experience - including technological experience: subject/object, real/imaginary, reason/sensibility etc. No matter how much technology annihilates space and time, it will still be produced as a human dream. It is here that anticipatory memory, produced by the imagination, sustained in onirism, will be realized by photography. Memory, therefore, will not be extinguished, but will coexist with dreams, for it is not possible to dream without remembering. It is a memory at its maximum power, not simply evocative of a story, but also capable of moving the future. Thus, photography becomes a memory of what happened immemorially, shortly and beyond time: memory of the myth. ■

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