

# The eclipse of imaginary: instrumental imaginary and reducing the imaginative power of images<sup>a</sup>

## *O eclipse do imaginário: imaginário instrumental e redução da potência imaginativa das imagens*

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### ABSTRACT

Based on Durand's point of view on the iconoclasm promoted by the conjunction between monotheism and philosophy in the West – which paradoxically produces the proliferation of images in contemporary times –, this article dialogues with Horkheimer's Instrumental Reason notion to propose its equivalent: Instrumental Imaginary, a concept characterized by reducing the imaginative power of images. We use the contrast between Afro-Brazilian religions and the carnival and advertising pieces to apply the concept. The theoretical framework is based on Gilbert Durand, Max Horkheimer, Muniz Sodré and Lilia Moritz Schwarcz.

**Keywords:** Imaginary, Instrumental Reason, images, candomblé, umbanda

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### RESUMO

Partindo do apontamento de Gilbert Durand acerca do iconoclasmo promovido pela conjunção entre monoteísmo e filosofia no ocidente, o qual, paradoxalmente, produz a proliferação das imagens na contemporaneidade, o artigo dialoga com Horkheimer a partir da noção de Razão Instrumental para propor o equivalente Imaginário Instrumental, redução da potência imaginativa das imagens. A operacionalidade do conceito é demonstrada a partir de imagens associadas aos cultos da Umbanda e do Candomblé, contrastados com registros imagéticos do carnaval e da publicidade. O aporte teórico é dado por Gilbert Durand e Max Horkheimer acerca do Imaginário e da Razão e por Muniz Sodré e Lilia Moritz Schwarcz sobre o imaginário afro-brasileiro.

**Palavras-chave:** Imaginário, Razão Instrumental, imagens, candomblé, umbanda

**INTRODUCTION**

**T**HIS ARTICLE PROPOSES the formalization of the concept of *Instrumental Imaginary*, taking the analysis of the clash between rational thought, originated in the association between Greek philosophy and the theology of biblical monotheism against images, as proposed by Gilbert Durand (2004, pp. 9–34) in an essay dedicated to the subject as its starting point. In the text, Durand points out that, after centuries of successive iconoclasm, *Reason* starts producing an enormous volume of images through technoscientific devices, giving rise to a paradox.

Given the accelerated procedurality in the production, consumption, obsolescence, and disposal cycle, such images tend to disfavor imaginative processes related to symbolic aspects inherent to them, which makes them rationalizable, objective, and promote what Durand and other researchers designate as a demotion to these images' power.

When operating simultaneously within the scope of Reason and the Imaginary, the images produced by technoscientific devices tend to effect changes to regimes of thought, both the logical and the imaginative. In view of this situation, and as pointed out by Horkheimer (2002), we observed that Reason suffers from the same kind of downgrade due to the overvaluation of the technique, leading to a kind of *Eclipse of Reason* and establishing a development named "Instrumental Reason" by the author.

Thus, in their instrumental versions, Imaginary and Reason operate under some level of demotion, imposing themselves a crisis as the overvaluation of technical images takes place in contemporary times.

To demonstrate the concept's operability, this work will later return to Durand's analysis of the clash between Reason and Imaginary, establishing a dialogue from contemporary media images present in journalism and advertising that, in their own way, allow us to observe the downgrade of the imaginary from comparisons associated with Afro-Brazilian religions, most notably Umbanda and Candomblé.

**GILBERT DURAND: ENDEMIC ICONOCLASM AND IMAGINARY RESISTANCE**

To deal with the reflexes in the contemporaneity of the insertion of image-producing machines and their relations with the imaginary, Gilbert Durand (2004) made a brief historical digression on the role of images in Western culture from the perspective of the occurrence of *endemic iconoclasm* in the West. This was instituted through a progression of stages originated in the association

between 1) the prohibition of the creation and the use of images according to the “Biblical monotheism” (present in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam<sup>1</sup>), and 2) the “truth method<sup>2</sup>, originated from Socratism and based on a binary logic thinking” (p.9).

For the imaginary thinker, the emergence of a unique, abstract divinity, disconnected from mundane concreteness, and which could not be represented through image as was common in other religions derived from nature, found resonance within Greek philosophy, founded on rational thought and over time established as “the only effective process in the search for truth” (Durand, 2004, p. 9). According to the author, for the Greeks, it is precisely the impossibility of a single and unambiguous interpretation that removes the images from the position of constituting the certainty that ensures access to the Truth, being, therefore, its “uncertain and ambiguous” statement. He stated that the image<sup>3</sup> “can unfold within an infinite description and an inexhaustible contemplation. Unable to remain contained by the clear statement of a syllogism, it proposes a ‘veiled reality’ while Aristotelian logic demands ‘clarity and difference.’” Thus, taking the image as a starting point for a specific form of thought differentiated from Reason<sup>4</sup>, the imagination – a type of thought elaborated from images and fed by the Imaginary – becomes ‘suspected of being’ the ‘lover of error and falsehood’” (Durand, 2004, p. 10).

In a general point of view, we can suggest that a given symbol is never presented in a watertight or isolated way in the theory of imagery proposed by Durand (2002; 2007; n.d.). Conversely, its manifestation always takes place by making room for possible unfolding, interrelating with other symbols who, likewise, participate in a larger set of symbols (*semantic basin*), subject to different regimes (*day* or *night* or, in other words, with apparent or veiled meaning, respectively), and in which a certain degree of entanglement takes place, entailing some level of contamination and/or complementarity.

A symbol, therefore, is not something static, whose meaning is, *a priori*, defined and somewhat limited or contained within itself. In contrast, the power of a symbol is equivalent to the ability of its interpreter to activate other symbols and, from them, keep the process going, interrelating them with others and, successively, other symbols. As a result, the meaning of a symbol is potentially variable, and endless within its limits, given that it depends on the imagination that unveils it<sup>5</sup>.

By image, then, we understand the vehicle in which the manifestation of the symbol occurs as an action, that is, in which the imaginary ceases to be something in potential and is consolidated in an updated form, becoming identifiable. Therefore, the image would be a tangible manifestation of the

<sup>1</sup> Durand expresses this perspective in Judaism from the second commandment of Moses, as present in the Book of Exodus (XX, 4-5), his later influence on Christianity (Atos, XV 29; John, V, 21; I. Corinthians, VIII 1-13), and also in Islam (Quran, III 43; VII 133-134; XX 96).

<sup>2</sup> The term “truth” (with a lowercase “t”) is used by Durand both in the colloquial sense of something true and in something related to the philosophical thought, which, in many authors’ works, will be capitalized (“Truth”). The same applies to the term “reason”, which in philosophy is also spelled with a capital letter (“Reason”), indicating an abstract process, superior to its applicability within concreteness. In this work, we chose to keep Durand’s spellings in the excerpts presented here, while trying to spell out terms starting with capital letters when related to the philosophical notion of *Truth* and *Reason* in the course of the text.

<sup>3</sup> In this work, the term “image” is used from the perspective presented in the already referred work by Durand (2004), in which it would be a way of presenting – updating – the *imaginary*. In short, the understanding of the term must be taken from its broad sense, that is, in addition to the constitution of materiality in a narrative form capable of presenting and fostering the innumerable possibilities of symbolic entanglements, typical of the imaginary. In a certain sense, the occurrence of equivalence between the terms image and imaginary is noted in the text we refer to insofar as the first term brings with it the updating of the inherent potential of the second. When referring to Durand’s thought,

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we do not change the way the author deals with terms in the present work, to a certain extent, and despite referring to different concepts, making them look apparently equivalent, which may lead to some difficulty in understanding. As we will deal with this issue later, we would like to point out to the reader the understanding that what differentiates image from imaginary is the first term's tangibility, inherent to its existence in a medium (either material or virtual). The image is, in turn, a vehicle of the imaginary insofar as it enables the manifestation of symbols and their consequent interpretation through imagination.

<sup>4</sup>The Reason and Image dichotomy and the latter's relation with the Imaginary, elements inherent to Durand's argument in the essay taken as a basis for the argumentative constitution of this article, to some extent, can induce the reading that the author perceives Reason and Imaginary as opposing and self-excluding fields. The conflicting interaction from antiquity to the present time demonstrated in this approach may impose to the unsuspecting reader the consideration that such opposition constitutes a permanent battle, and that Reason and Imaginary are, in principle, incapable of being associated or reconcile. However, it is noteworthy that, if Durand's work is taken more extensively, one realizes that Reason itself is subject to the action of the symbol, making it, in its own way, an integral part of the Imaginary, understood as a kind of Noosphere, if observed from Edgar Morin's perspective(s/d, pp. 95-114). Although this is not the way in which Durand develops his arguments in this specific work, we understand that the

imaginary per excellence. For this reason, being an expression in a horizon of countless possibilities, the image cannot be confused with the Imaginary itself, as, when constituted, in some way it crystallizes it, making it palpable. Then again, it is precisely the image that, at the same time, establishes a way of accessing it, enabling the return to its complexity through the interpretation of the symbols it comprises. Imagination, therefore, encompasses the two-way path that makes it possible to fix the Imaginary within the tangibility of the image and the other way around; that is, it provides access from the image into the symbolic complexity of the Imaginary.

Starting from the association of the theology of the "one God" with Greek philosophy and its consequent clash against images, Durand (2004) highlighted the historical confluence between Hellenism and Christianity in the work of Paulo de Tarso (defined by him as a "Hellenized Jew"), who spread evangelical texts in their primitive form, starting from the Greek, then through the Byzantine East's iconoclasm in the 8th and 9th centuries, and St. Thomas Aquinas' theology, which sought "to reconcile Aristotelian rationalism and the truths of the faith in a theological 'sum' . . . [which] became the official philosophy of the Roman Church and the axis of reflection of all scholasticism (the doctrine of the school, that is, of the universities controlled by the church) of the 13th and 14th centuries" (p. 12).

Regarding modernity, he pointed out that, when establishing the foundations of modern physics, Galileo and Descartes were generally aligned with Aristotle's propositions (2002). Followed by Thomas Aquinas, perceiving "reason as the only means of legitimation and access to the truth". Established in the 17th century, such foundations imposed an "exclusion from intellectual processes" on the Imaginary, making way for "a single method – *the method* –, 'to unveil the truth in the Sciences'. This is the complete title of the famous *Discourse* (1637) by Descartes", spread through all areas of research. Accordingly, "being the product of a 'madhouse', the image is abandoned in favor of the preachers', poets', and painters' art of persuasion" (Durand, 2004, pp. 12–13).

During the 18th century, David Hume and Isaac Newton's contributions led to the fourth stage of this iconoclasm, which lasts until the present, as stated by Durand (2004). According to him,

The 'fact', combined with the rational argument, arises as another obstacle for an imaginary increasingly confused with delusion, the shadow of the dream, and the irrational. This 'fact' can be of two types; the first, derived from perception, can be both the fruit of observation and experience, and an "event" related to

historical fact. But, if the Enlightenment did not always reach the iconoclastic frenzy of the ‘enraged’ of 1793, it carefully placed – with Emmanuel Kant, for example – an insurmountable limit between what can be explored (the world of the phenomenon) by perception and the understanding, by the resources of pure Reason, and what will remain unknown, as the field of great metaphysical questions about death, the afterlife, and God (the universe of the ‘noumenon’) . . . – which, with their possible and contradictory solutions, constitute the ‘antinomies’ of Reason.

Positivism and History philosophies, to which our pedagogies remain tributary (given that Jules Ferry was one of Auguste Comte’s disciple), will result from the marriage between the empiricists’ factual and the iconoclastic rigor of classical rationalism. The two philosophies that will completely devalue the imaginary, symbolic thinking and reasoning by similarity; that is, metaphor; are scientism – a doctrine that will only recognize the truth proven by scientific methods –, and historicism – a doctrine that only recognizes the causes expressed by a historical event in a concrete way. Any “imagery” that is not simply a modest cliché of a fact is labeled a suspect. According to this same movement, the ramblings of the ‘poets’ (who will come to be deemed the ‘damned’), the hallucinations and delusions of the mentally ill, the visions of the mystics, and the works of art will be expelled from the mainland of science.

. . . Although, on the one hand, it was the slow erosion of the role of the imaginary in Western philosophy and epistemology that made the enormous impulse of technical progress possible, on the other hand, the mastery of this material power over other civilizations attributed a remarkable character to the “white, civilized grown-up man”, separating them, as well as their “logical mentality”, from the rest of the cultures of the world labeled “pre-logical”, “primitive”, or “archaic”. (pp. 13-15)

On the other hand, in the same aforementioned stages of iconoclasm, Durand (2004) observed resistance, reactions in which the imaginary and the image open up a positive space, ensuring strength and, consequently, permanence in the operation of social, and, above all, cultural processes. From this perspective, despite the diffusion and legitimacy leading to the dialectical reasoning, he considered that Plato had already recognized “that many truths escaped the logical filtering of the method because they limited Reason to antinomy and revealed themselves, so to speak, through a visionary intuition of the soul that was very familiar to the ancient Greek: the myth” (p. 16).

proper clash occurs within the scope of the Reason and Imagination dichotomy, given both constitute different thought processes. While the first is formed, as Durand points out, from the syllogism elaborated by Greek philosophers and tends to result in objective precision, being able to reach a specific ending; the second occurs through open interpretation, in which a specific starting point does not lead to a precise, determined, and, mainly, unique conclusion. The image, therefore, non-conformed to rational or objective analysis elucidation and, being a tangible form of the Imaginary and, as such, associated with the Imagination, starts to populate the concern of rational thought – according to Durand’s essay –, since the devaluation of the role of the image within society and culture implies an equivalent depreciation of the processes pertaining to the imagination.

<sup>5</sup>This characteristic related to the indeterminacy related to the meaning of the symbol and, therefore, dependent on the imaginative resourcefulness of the one interpreting it, introduces the need to understand that this circumstance does not mean imprecision. On the contrary, the virtual understanding of the countless meanings contained within the symbol makes allows for the understanding that symbolic thinking can encompass the complexity manifested not only in the direct sense proposed through a superficial look, but also encompasses complements, including possible antagonistic aspects inherent to the symbol first interpreted. Thus, considering the context raised by Durand, it appears that, on the one hand, Reason tends to precision

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departing from the syllogism; on the other, the symbol comprised by the image is the starting element of a complex way of thinking and, as such, demands an adequate method of interpretation, different from the rational. To facilitate the reader's understanding, we suggest the reading Contrera and Barros (2018), who deal with interpretation and symbolic imagination, proposing a path – initiatory method – for this undertaking.

He also pointed out that, within the scope of the “quarrel” that took place in the 8th century with an argument based on the purest Platonic tradition, in which the ideal world hovers over concreteness,

St. John Damascene was a herald and winner in the defense of images against a theology of abstraction, of the icon's transfer into “another place” beyond this vile world. An icon whose prototype was the image of God incarnate through the visible person of Jesus, his son. (Durand, 2004, p. 19)

For Durand, in the 13th and 14th centuries this resistance was enhanced within the context of Western Christianity through the work of St. Francis of Assisi and the Franciscan clerics who, while not secluded in a cloister, propagated the images of Jesus' birth from the elaboration of the nativity scene. Additionally, they propagated the *Via Crucis* and St. Bernard of Clairvaux stations with their effusive figurative ornamentation in cathedrals.

The images generated from Franciscan actions resume the cult of nature, especially in the paintings influenced by French, Belgian, Dutch, and other artists, heirs of Celtic traditions whose cult and mythology were founded within the forest, the sea, or the storms.

Thus, the imagery inherent to pagan religions lingered in the painting of religious themes in the form of the cult of nature, resulting in the humanism of the *Quattrocento* founded on Marsílio Ficino's Neoplatonic philosophy and in works by artists such as Michelangelo and Da Vinci, extolling the “natural and its harsh landscape, but also a reach back to paganism and the natural theology of the anthropomorphic forces that govern nature” (Durand, 2004, p. 19).

On the other hand, the severe iconoclasm of Calvin's and Luther's Reformation feeds the exact opposite movement within the scope of Roman Catholicism, in which there was a deepening of Renaissance propositions through the opulence of the Baroque and its deeply carnal visual images in artists such as Bernini, being the subject of religious work, such as *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*, or pagan, like *The Rape of Proserpina*.

Baroque visuality was defined by Durand (2004) as “a banquet of angels’ – a title that unites two antithetical images (or ‘oxymorons’): those of pure-minded beings (angels), and that of the banquet, totally bound to the flesh – . . . this is the depth of the appearance” (p. 24). Therefore, in the face of an iconoclastic exaggeration, the Counter-Reformation “will also exaggerate the role attributed

to images and the cult of saints”, both in Europe and in South America, based on the diffusion carried out by both Franciscans and Jesuits, “the two most powerful religious orders of modern devotion and mystical imagery of the Christian West” (p. 22).

As an answer to the 18th-century neorationalism, which introduces neoclassicism into art in the so-called

[century of] Enlightenment, movements such as pre-romanticism (*Sturm und Drang*, in Germany) and Romanticism were privileged and triumphant ports. The pre-romantic aesthetics and the resulting romantic movements perfectly distinguished the fourth resistance of the imaginary from the massive attacks of rationalism and positivism. Again, this aesthetic recognizes and describes a “sixth sense”, in addition to the five that classically support perception. But this “sixth sense”, which has the power to tap into beauty, creates, *ipso facto*, alongside reason and customary perception, a third way of knowledge, making way for a new order of realities. A path that favors intuition through image rather than proof through syntax. It will be with pure and practical reason that Emmanuel Kant will theorize this procedure of knowledge by the “judgment of taste”. But not only that. At the heart of the rational judgment process of pure Reason, and to allow the merging between the “*a priori* forms” of perception (space and time) and the categories of Reason, Kant rehabilitated the imagination as a “schematization”, in a certain way, preparing the integration of simple perception into the processes of Reason. (Durand, 2004, pp. 27-28)

Concluding the analysis of the iconoclastic clash, Durand (2004, pp. 28-29) pointed out that, within the scope of thought, the valorization of imagination presented in the production of Baudelaire (who identified it as the *Queen of Faculties*), Rimbaud or in artistic movements, such as symbolism and surrealism constituted a territory in which the Imaginary presented itself as autonomous (unrelated to the domain of religion), demanding its place in society and culture in an opposing condition in front of the rationality increasingly presented in daily life. [It happened due to the valorization of scientific thought and its technical-technological developments, whether in the art (the Bauhaus’ productions and functionalism being consistent examples of this operation), or in the progressive and intensive inclusion of systems and devices, transforming the environments of cities, homes, workplaces, and so on.

**THE PARADOX OF IMAGE HYPERPRODUCTION**

In this context, Durand (2004, p. 31) pointed out that, from the mid-19th to the first half of the 20th century, the clash between Reason and Imaginary created a new and paradoxical situation, establishing new contours. Unlike iconoclasm, which, until then, acted in the sense of destroying images or making them unfeasible as a process capable of conceiving the world and human existence; Reason, whose operational arm consisted of technical and scientific thinking, stepped into the field of art and the universe of imagery production, that is, it started acting within the autonomous space conquered by the imaginary.

Such action was developed by proposing a statute for the image whose objective and precise character distanced itself from the innumerable possibilities of interpretation proposed by imagination, whether constituted foundations for the elaboration of the images. For instance, as perceived in Mondrian's Cartesian orthogonal and colored compositions inspired by the logic of analytical decomposition of light proposed by Newton, or in the registration of the object permeated by movement in cubism, whether in the production of technical apparatuses that produce images such as the camera and cinematograph, rational thought started to produce images characterized by profound objectivity, that is, no longer working at the level of the rational argument, as previously stated, but bringing factual outlines – that is, linked to the *fact*.

Therefore, as proposed by Durand (2004, p. 31), a paradox that is increasingly exacerbated was created as new image production machines in everyday life (first via video, then the digital technologies currently present in *smartphones*, *tablets*, or other *gadgets*, such as goggles prepared for insertion in *immersive reality*, etc.) is the exact Reason, operationalized by technoscientificism, that produces such machines, providing, according to the author, the expansion of the presence of the image, an effect contrary to the iconoclastic claim. As Durand (2004) pointed out,

In our eyes, the overtaking, if not causing the *end* of the *Gutenberg galaxy*, by the omnipresent realm of information and visual image, had consequences whose extensions are only glimpsed at by research. The reason is very simple: this *perverse effect* was never foreseen or even considered. Although the triumphal research resulting from positivism fell in love with the technical means (optical, physical-chemical, electromagnetic, etc.) of production, reproduction, and transmission of images, it continually despised and ignored the product of its discoveries. A common fact in our technical-scientific pedagogies; it took the obliteration of part of the population of Hiroshima for physicists to be horrified by the effects of their innocent discoveries on caused radioactivity...



Something that did not happen with the *explosion* of the imaginary. As the image has always been devalued, it still did not disturb the moral conscience of a West that believed itself to be immunized by its endemic iconoclasm. The enormous obsessive production of images is limited to the *distracting* field. However, image diffusers – say the *media* – are ubiquitous at all levels of representation and the psyche of Western or Westernized man. Media image is present from the cradle to the grave, dictating the intentions of anonymous or hidden producers: in the child's pedagogical awakening, in the teenager's economic and professional choices, in each person's typological choices (the appearance), even in the uses and public or private customs, sometimes as *information*, sometimes veiling the ideology of an *advertisement*, and, at other times, hiding behind seductive *advertising*... The importance of *iconic manipulation* (relative to the image), however, is undisturbed. However, all other valuations depend on it – including *genetic manipulation*. (pp. 32-34)

We observed that, concerning the image production promoted by technoscientific apparatus, significant and important transformations took place within the scope of the image itself, which will be addressed later in this manuscript.

Taken all together, the problem of the image from the Greek root and considering the clash between Neoplatonism (as mentioned, a perspective more suited to dealing with the imaginary) and Aristotelianism, it seems that this new condition of image production leads to the relocation of images into a territory where the understanding of the myth (and, consequently, of the imaginary) proposed by Plato loses meaning due to the operability through which they are now created and to which they are submitted. Such displacement, from the multiple possible meanings presented in an image provided by the imaginary for the procedural and operability of the production of multiple images, redirects the problem back to the Aristotelian terms related to the notions of action and potency.

As is well known, the notion of action and that of potency came from the solution established by Aristotle (2002) for a philosophical problem left by Heraclitus and Parmenides, regarding the eventuality of movement and change. While the first understood that movement (the transformation of things and beings) was constant, as everything flows; the second indicated to the immobility of the being, since he considered that everything, in essence, was immutable and indivisible. Thus, while the notion of action relates to the concept of permanence – the immobility pointed out by Parmenides –, that of potency points to the sense of the transformation of the state of things and beings

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– as indicated by Heraclitus. In this context, the notion of action is sustained by the drive of fixity and permanence, while the notion of potency is sustained by change and inconstancy.

According to this point of view, while action and potency, the image carries the characteristic of latent immutability present in the notion of action in its appearance, figurativeness, and in the register present in the support; and, within the multiple possibilities of meaning provided by the imaginary, the transformation inherent to the notion of potency, that is, once constituted, and even without any apparent alteration, an image allows for countless perspectives, which are precisely the demonstration of the imaginative or imaginary potency that comprises endless forms of interpretation within the same narrative element.

The image would, therefore, be an updated form (that is, current, made action) of the countless narrative possibilities presented within the realm of the imaginary. As the imaginative potency is virtually infinite (that is, the capacity for continuous updating inherent to the image, articulating potentials in new developments via imagination), the imaginary virtually brings the perspective of indefinite duration, given its ability to present itself in constant mutation. It is precisely this characteristic, its weightlessness, that makes it the target of rational thinking based on the binary of logical axioms (the true and false poles), as new potencies always promoting changes that allow the image to move from one extreme to another.

Enabling the acceleration of production and the succession of new images that render the previous obsolete ones, technological-scientific rationalism reconfigures the relations between action and potency by cutting the thread that binds them. That is, making impossible to update the imaginary promoted by the imagination in the same image, making it fundamentally constituted by its own appearance, and without new alternatives for interpretation. In other words, the image becomes objective, or rather, a reference to the object. The technical apparatus operates a subtle but intense inversion, promoting the change from a state in which the duration of the images tended to infinity from a single update to another in which the duration tends to zero from a single potency with numerous updates<sup>6</sup>.

It is a fact that the machines provide the multiplication of images in a progressively smaller time intervals, implying the impossibility of unveiling their multiple meanings, since, by assimilating its apparent shape, this image is already inserted in the obsolescence cycle, successively being replaced by another, which will also be submitted to the same process. Thus, converted into a surface (it is in the depth that the fullness of the imaginary is presented),

<sup>6</sup>This proposition coincides with the concept of stereotypy presented by Edgar Morin (1997, p. 22) when dealing with Hollywood cinema, which tends to constitute an innumerable set of stories based on a typological narrative pattern.

the image<sup>7</sup>, previously an opening to multiple paths, is reified, becoming an object, a technoculture product.

On the one hand, the fact that the image was produced using technological means does not preclude imaginative treatment, given the fact it is always possible for the one who decides to imagine it, to retain the process and pay attention at the disposition of the image. Additionally, the multiplicity of images in our daily lives does not favor it, as the process of industrial image production promoted by machinery implies in the omnipresence of images, but also the loss of their imaginative power once they start being consumed, but no longer imagined.

The sociologist Dietmar Kamper (2016) examined the new condition of the omnipresent image in contemporary society, indicating that its rapid obsolescence and replacement by new images tended to insert them in a phantasmatic stance, that is, of an apparent, non-embodied presence, precisely due to the loss of imaginative power and the ability to reconnect them to the imaginary via imagination processes. To him, such reified images, instead of giving access to, assume the condition of orbiting the imaginary<sup>8</sup>.

The development of technoscientific thinking has inserted the machinery into the transportation of loads and people, in the production of food, clothing, education, health, and in virtually all areas of human activity. It also enabled the dissemination of machines capable of producing imagery in a previously unthinkable volume and, with them, produced a distancing from the traditional forms of life, accelerating the processes of exchange and, especially, consumption.

The omnipresence of machines is, therefore, an indication of the triumph of scientific thought (whose origin dates back to Greek philosophy) transformed into a technique that seeks, through its apparatus, the fulfillment of the purpose of rationalizing everyday processes. In turn, the proliferation of images, the speed with which they become obsolete and are replaced, and the consequent reduction in the time dedicated to their interpretation are indicative of the shrinking of the images' imaginative power, altering the nature of their reflection on daily life and culture.

From this perspective, Contrera (2015) indicated that the nature of the image consumption produced by technique tended to impact the imaginative processes that act in the interpretation of the images. Therefore, it is necessary to split them into two groups; the symbolic images, which trigger endogenous (imagination) processes related to the imaginary; and technical images, which tend to promote the enjoyment of one's own appearance and literal or objective interpretations.

<sup>7</sup> The constitution of two types of image, one traditional, subject to the imagination and able to recompose the original cultural character, and a technical, the result of abstraction processes that end up rendering it null-dimensional, has been presented by Flusser (1985). Our argument dialogues with this perspective, which comprises the connotative/imaginative character (subject to the action of the imaginary) of the first and the denotative/objective (designative, indicative) character of the second. Regardless of this being a fruitful relationship, we perceive this approach as extensive and unnecessary for the subject of this article; therefore, such discussion should be developed in subsequent works.

<sup>8</sup> For Kamper (2016) only imagination could remove the image promoted by technological means from its orbital condition around the imaginary. It is worth considering that the concept of "orbiting" indicates a situation of balance between the forces of attraction and repulsion of one object in relation to another. In the weightless state, which means a paradoxical continuous fall towards the other object without ever touching it, only an external force (in this case, the imagination) would be able to alter the balance and promote its return to the center position.

Naturally, we do not intend to affirm here that the means through which a specific image is produced determines its ability – or not – of constituting imaginative processes. Finally, any image is the product of a technique, from Lascaux records to any series available on a *streaming* platform. It is both possible to imagine and unveil the imaginary from a Kurosawa film accessible online, as well as making an African ritual mask into a mere decorative adornment in any room. Consequently, the imaginative character clearly does not reside within the object but is made possible by the disposition and resourcefulness of the one observing the image.

From a cultural point of view, it is not possible to disregard the effectiveness of the impact of machine time on the life cycle of images produced through technological devices (based on the logic of productivity and consumption, typical of contemporary capitalism), which ends up leading to noticeable differences in the character of the two types of image. Differentiation occurs as we understand that images tend to find their place within the permanence/ephemerality axis. While symbolic images tend to remain, technical images are usually ephemeral.

Having said that, Durand's paradox (2004) related to the strategy of producing images using technique does not necessarily give such products the same status as the so-called symbolic images, and a deeper understanding of the phenomenon is necessary, as he indicated. In his manuscript, he clearly specifies the occurrence of some level of incongruity in this type of operation: "What is extraordinary is that this explosion of the *civilization of imagery* was an effect, and a *perverse effect* (which contradicts or belies the theoretical consequences of the cause) of technical-scientific iconoclasm" (p. 31).

#### **INSTRUMENTALIZATION OF THE REASON. INSTRUMENTALIZATION OF THE IMAGINARY?**

Despite the variations in nomenclature found in each author, which bring substantial differences in specific perspectives when dealing with the problem of two types of image (Contrera, 2015; Flusser, 1985; Kamper, 2016), it seems that these approaches are at the heart of the fact that the images constituted from rationality are different from the others, described by Durand (2004) as the object of reasoning, due to the acceleration of processes related to production, obsolescence, and disposal that impact access to imaginary insofar as they do not favor the temporality necessary for their imaginative action on images.

It seems pertinent to consider that, to understand the nature of technoscientific images, we must no longer observe them under the exclusively symbolic perspective whose character has been described by Durand in several

works (2002; 2007; n.d.), but understand that, being a product of Reason, they are also subject to other processes and developments. Thus, such images could be understood as a kind of interface, frontier (and, why not, a conflict zone), being subject to the two thought processes: imaginative and rationalized.

Deepening the discussion about the paradox pointed out by Durand, there is a need for the understanding of the aspects inherent to the lowering of imaginative power in synergistic association with the performance of technoscientific thinking.

At first glance, given the aforementioned historicity of the clash between image and Reason, it would be natural to consider that such a downgrade would consist of an eventual triumph over the image. However, if we take Horkheimer's (2002) proposition about philosophical reason and its consequences in the modern world, permeated by science and machines into consideration, we may realize that the philosopher similarly identifies an equivalent demotion within the technoscientific processes, implying a certain degree of identity as we observe the relations between technical images and Imaginary.

To Horkheimer, Reason presented itself in two distinct ways: one philosophical, related to a general sense, pertinent to the scope of law, morals, and contracts; and the other, instrumental, related to a specific sense linked to the everyday purpose, a result of the applicability of knowledge and logic in life processes. The first is called *objective Reason* related to the context of the purpose (for which something is accomplished). The second, the *subjective Reason*, related to the scope of the event (the means and ends of the achievement).

As much as symbolic and technical images are deeply involved with the Imaginary, such division does not deny that both forms of Reason are deeply interwoven and have multiple interactions. It is understood that, despite the characters that differentiate them, both are based on logic, a process of thought that, just as proposed by the Greek philosophers and pointed out by Durand, sets an unequivocal way for the Truth to be reached.

Considering this initial framework, it seems that, by being logical, both objective and subjective Reason tend to represent the Truth, and one does not need to precede the other in the validation of the processes to which they are presented. Both, independently of each other, present themselves as a vehicle of Truth, and it is not necessary to resort to objective Reason in advance to validate the subjective Reason argument.

When produced by rationality, the technoscientific apparatus manifests results based on logic and its interactions with society and culture, resulting in their inevitable understanding as "True". According to Horkheimer, the private, subject Reason would not demand the enunciation of previous general principles

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in advance to corroborate the validity of the means and ends to which it is subject, regardless of the purposes associated with it.

As technical images enable the downgrading of imaginative potential, we have identified that the independence between objective and subjective Reason and the applicability of technoscientific thinking in everyday life tends to imply a lowering of intrinsic values to reason and logic. An example can be seen in Adolf Eichmann's conduct, a German officer designated by the Nazis to organize the mass extermination processes during World War II. Responsible for the gathering of Jews within ghettos in large cities, then organizing the logistics for their transportation into the extermination camps, Eichmann built his whole defense against the accusations regarding the crimes he had committed on the fact that he did nothing more than used his technical knowledge of logistics to fulfill superior orders. In practice, when indicating that his performance took place in the application of technical principles to a specific logistical problem, he acted within the scope of subjective Reason, limited to the level of the problem and the use of technical apparatus, would not demand the assessing of the problem in a more comprehensive way, with the ethical character being the responsibility of a higher authority, which would resolve for the problem from the objective Reason perspective. In this case, we can observe both the independence between the forms of Reason presented by Horkheimer and the logical lowering of this condition, as, in face of the civilizing pact, there is no logic in promoting the mass murder that was made possible by Eichmann's actions.

Thus, the independence of subjective Reason in relation to the general purposes proposed by objective Reason, based on the instrumentalization and applicability of knowledge as an end valued as positive, was pointed out by Horkheimer (2002) as a process he named the *Eclipse of Reason*. This was a process related to the devaluation, concealment, or erasure of certain characters of rational thought according to the applicability of knowledge. Such condition implies a process of downgrading Reason as perceived since the time of the Greeks, considering that the notion of Truth is transferred from the sphere of thought to that of the instrument.

With that said, and back to Durand's perspective, we can understand that the paradox of image multiplication in everyday life does not occur due to the design of the same Reason that instituted the iconoclasm process through monotheistic thinking, but as a result of its technoscientific and instrumentalized version<sup>9</sup>, the subjective Reason.

Considering that there is a systemic relationship of mutual implication between Reason and Imaginary, it is observed that the insertion of technoscientific

<sup>9</sup>The perspective of Reason as the preferential means to reach the truth, as pointed out by Durand, is based on the claim that the mastery of rational faculties leads to the so-called *Wisdom*. From Horkheimer's arguments, considering the differentiation between *Reason* and its *instrumental* version, it is pertinent to point out from the classic split between thinking and doing, that knowing (from the Greek *knoetos*, leading to the English *knowing*) is actually different from the applied knowledge (*know-how*).

devices into the cultural environment tends to have an impact not only on the processes related to Reason but also those concerning the Imaginary; logic and imagination have their potential reduced in the face of acceleration, giving rise to automation (the suppression of logical chains, when affecting Reason; and imaginative chain, regarding the Imaginary).

This panorama implies understanding that the appeasement of the conflict between Reason and Imaginary does not occur because of the annihilation of one of the terms (in this case, the Imaginary), but by the demotion – via instrumentalization – of both.

When associating Durand's and Horkheimer's propositions, we have that, while Reason is instrumentalized, becoming operative and, therefore, eclipsed (*irrational*, in a sense), in the face of the production of an infinity of images, the Imaginary, in turn, would be equally *eclipsed*, since there would be a tendency towards a systematic downgrade of the imaginative power in images produced by technique.

Therefore, given the degree of implication between Reason and Imaginary in these images, when dealing with instrumentalized Reason as the one that leads to the eclipse of Reason itself while producing technoscientific devices, we speculate that (in the sense of mirroring), consequently to the Imaginary, images produced by such devices lead to an equivalent degree of demotion.

Thus, the images produced by technoscience and subject to the accelerated media consumption typical of contemporary times, instead of inoculating culture with access to an imaginary loaded with imaginative power, present themselves as a kind of *instrumental Imaginary*, that is, a lowered form of *non-imaginative Imaginary*, in the same way that instrumental Reason presents itself as a low form of *non-rational Reason*.

This way, the instrumental Imaginary would characterize the overvaluation of the apparent nature present in the image, the figurativeness of the objects represented there, its current dimension at the expense of the potentialities inherent to the symbolic realm contained therein.

The perspective of the proliferation of machines and their images, the prevalence of instrumental Reason in the context of processes linked to the idea of the West governed in the contemporary by the interests of capital<sup>10</sup> and the association of this framework with the decline of the Catholic religion – in practice, a field in which images exercised their power until the mid-20th century – points to an already outlined scenario in which Reason and Imaginary somehow lose strength or space to their instrumentalized versions.

Despite this and as according to Durand (2004), processes of resistance regarding the imaginary and related to the inextinguishability of imaginative

<sup>10</sup> From Weber (2009), in practice, it could be said that, given the context of the present work, that capital can be considered a new iconoclastic form originated in Protestant ethics, which, to a certain extent, purges theological thinking so that it is exclusively governed by faith in the abstraction itself.

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power are, in turn, operated as the action of instrumental Reason over image tends to occur within the duration of the object-observer interaction while not disabling it to the imagination (at first).

We emphasize that even in an environment favorable to obsolescence due to increasingly shorter intervals intended for its enjoyment, so to speak, the image in itself does not lose the potential to become a vehicle for the imagination and, therefore, the Imaginary. This implies understanding that the act of imagining, unveiling the senses present in the images, moving them away from the objective and unique sense (associated with the notion of Truth) demands time for fruition, and the suppression of time promoted by the succession of images is the predominant factor for the Imaginary downgrade or instrumentalization.

### A POSSIBLE RESISTANCE SPACE FOR THE IMAGINARY

Continuing with Durand's thinking on the clash between image and philosophy from the historical perspective, the succession of movements and their counterpoints, it is clear that the field of religion served both sides, that is, it supports the criticism of the image and serves as a room for resistance.

In general, Duranian reasoning was based on a Eurocentric point of view, since it acted within the framework delimited by European space/time associated with the influences of the eastern Mediterranean, bringing to light the historical clashes related to the philosophical and religious thought associated with the founding theology of the Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, which served as the basis for the development of the cultural, economic, and political relations that resulted in the framework outlined by the author.

Given this scenario and focusing specifically on the field of image and imagery, Durand's construction obliterates the fact that the resistance associated with Christianity during the Counter-Reformation, especially from St. Francis of Assisi, occurred within the scope of a proselytizing and expansive religion that interacted with the pagan peoples contacted, appropriating its imagery and syncretically associating it with its own images, then refuting it, often by violent means.

At the same time, the European paganism constituted itself as an important source of images and imaginary feeding European Catholicism, is configured within the political spheres as something to be fought against, leading the symbols associated to that semantic basin to take refuge under the design of mythical narrative, that is, associated with the fantastic and/or falsehood label, as previously mentioned.



In Brazil, a country whose original social, political, and cultural constitution is a direct and contemporary result of the expansionist actions undertaken by Christian Europe, the relationship between pagan and Christian imagery did not present in any substantially different way.

Currently associated with the notion of cultural resistance typical of enslaved people, syncretism was, according to Monteiro (1994, p. 47), an initial instrument of conversion in the action of Jesuit groups, associating narratives related to the indigenous. And, later, African divinities to those of Catholic saints. Through their images, they promoted interfaces intended to attract the so-called *gentile* to the Christian faith without necessarily understanding that they paved the way also in the opposite direction, favoring the presence of imagery arising from the pantheism, most notably from Africa, in Brazil.

In this context, Afro-Brazilian cultural practices and their ramifications in media images tend to bring elements, as an analytical *corpus*, to the perspective this manuscript seeks to outline.

Lilia Moritz Schwarcz (2012) pointed out that, in Brazil, we live in a society in which, despite “mulatist” intentions and speeches, there is an ethnocentrism bound to European values, whose socio-political and economic constitution finds its cornerstone within Christianity. The negative concept of the “mulatto” points to the egalitarian ideal of miscegenation in which thesis and antithesis come to constitute a synthesis that no longer allows for the identification of the original terms. On the other hand, it leads to a process of acceptance and rejection, determined by the values founded within the dominant power. In this sense, Brazilian “*mulatice*”, that is, the manifestation of the mulatto culture, would not occur due to the confluence between European, African, and the original peoples of the land, but because of the appropriation of characters present in the subaltern cultures based on the idiosyncrasies of the dominant culture. Therefore, instead of being the result of contributions from three cultural matrices, the Brazilian identity can be perceived as a consequence of the assimilation of indigenous and African characters by the Europeans.

There are several portraits of this process. The association with Africanity manifests at different levels when we look at the role of football, samba/carnival, and capoeira in Brazilian culture. In their own way, each of these manifestations ceased to represent the ethnic group itself, becoming distinctive elements of the “Brazilian” and representative of the whole national collectivity, to themselves, as well as to the world.

Despite the receptivity of such cultural manifestations within the societal context as a whole, we cannot affirm that the same acceptance is reputed when

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related to other expressions of the same origin, which not only are kept limited to their niches, but also tend to be a frequent object of conflict or intolerant actions.

As with European paganism, in Brazil, there is the devaluation associated with religions perceived as relevant to the *African matrix*, whose beliefs, despite feeding the images, imagination, and imagery pertinent to the semantic basin related to Brazil, are also treated as mythologies (i.e., fantasy or imaginary) or refuted from the demonization which is typical of Christianity.

More than a sociocultural conflict between groups in search of hegemony, the clash present in the updating of the imaginary of European and African origin in Brazil has a distinctive character to the understanding of the objectification and imagination roles within societies' representative images and that are presented in the media.

Starting from Sodré's (1988) contributions regarding the visibility and concealment processes of African cultural traits in Brazilian society, especially in the city of Rio de Janeiro, there is a *corpus* whose analysis allows for the understanding of the characters related to the Imaginary, both in the eclipsed and full version of its imaginative character. In his approach, the differences between the objective and the imaginative aspects appear within the urban space.

The crossroads are an example of it, objectively referring to an arrangement of flows, organization of movements in traffic, regularities, and regulations, but which, in a second instance, calls for the imagination of *Exus'* permissions and misbehaving, the respect or disrespect for the sacred of which it is locus, as well as its offerings.

Faced with such a perspective, the imaginative character overcoming the instrumental scope to give access to the imaginary is made clear. The crossroads, in itself, is actually an instance of flows, but it is the imagination that acts on it, the act of unveiling the power present within the field of the imaginary.

The same process can be observed in the context of the production of media images. In this sense, let us use samba and carnival as an example. Their images are often perceived as icons of the Brazilian culture, the first through rhythm and the bodily mobility of the dance; the second, through the suspension of the established order and the inversion of meanings.

In both manifestations, the images representative of the association between the African and European poles are repeated year after year in television broadcasts of the carnival, bringing out the colors, the body movement with the adornments that embellish and color the avenue, but whose interpretation it is presented by duly instrumentalized journalists, familiar with the script and previous and properly formulated interpretations, uniformly disseminated from a *press release*.

As a rule, in the constitution of these images, there is no indication, note, or imagination concerning the origin of that manifestation within the slave quarters, where profane acts and religion took shape, different pieces of knowledge manifested together. Wing after wing, uniform images and texts follow each other, portraying specific moments of the plot, and school after school, images are built for fleeting, instrumentalized, non-imaginative consumption.

Then again, samba or primordial forms of *batuque* were not out of context with their ritualistic function. When inserted in the urban context, they kept the relationship between the profane and the religious in their specific spaces, as is made clear by the observation that Tia Ciata<sup>11</sup>, one of the Brazilian samba pioneers, hosted dances open to the public in front of her house – where the first samba (“Pelo Telephone”) was composed –, which were attended by musicians such as Donga, João da Baiana, Pixinguinha, Sinhô, Caninha, Heitor dos Prazeres among others. In the background, the “babalaô-mirim” Ciata kept her Candomblé at the terreiro (Sodré, 1988, p. 135).

The spatial organization of Tia Ciata’s house denotes the simultaneity between the multiple layers that allowed the samba presented to the public on the street appeared its close connection with the Candomblé ceremony, performed in the background. In practice, to be inserted in the industrial production elaborated from the processes of instrumental Reason, samba adjusted to the conditions we highlighted as relative to the instrumental imaginary, that is, is performed in the form of sound and movement, music, and dance, without the imaginative power proper to the mythic and ritualistic practice sense. According to the Weberian terminology, it is *disenchanted*.

The loss of potency does not imply breaking the link between image (update) and imaginary, as demonstrated by the figure of a Bahian women in samba schools (Figure 1). Repeated year after year, these images bring the play of colors and movement characterized by the rhythmic circularity, but through the initiated point of view, one can observe them past the appearances (removing them from the cycle of rapid obsolescence), emphasizing the imaginary typical of the cult of the Orixás (Figure 2).

<sup>11</sup> The designation “tia” (aunt) is an indication of a person who practices Candomblé or Macumba in Rio de Janeiro at the beginning of the 20th century. Currently, there is a frequent adoption of the designation “mãe” (mother), as adopted in Bahia.



**Figure 1**

*Bahians – Beija-Flor de Nilópolis  
Samba School, 2008*

Note. Wing of the Bahians by Beija-Flor de Nilópolis Samba School. Author: Jussara Razzé. Source: Wikimedia Commons (<https://bit.ly/32oUOxh>).



**Figure 2**

*Dance in Candomblé – Oxum*

Note. Characterizations of Oxum: Opará (foreground) and Ipondá (background) at Ile Ase Ijino Ilu Orossi. Author: Toluaye. Source: Wikimedia Commons (<https://bit.ly/2VXSdVm>).

Another example concerns the figure of the *Malandro* (Trickster), linked to the Umbanda. Also named *Zé Pelintra*, he configures the archetype of the subject bound to the pleasures of life, but whom, once *disincarnated* (i.e., in spirit), manifest through the mediums at the *terreiro* with the purpose of helping his *children* (people who attend the services).

His image is also very present at the carnival<sup>12</sup>, repeatedly represented as an accomplished dancer dressed in a white suit, with a red tie, and a hat, dancing with contorted gestures intended to hide his face (Figure 3). Taking this image, the analogy present in the advertising pieces of a famous portable telephone company became clear (Figure 4).

The link between the dancer and the *Malandro* is recognizable through the body gestures, the tie, the holding of the hat, or in the darkening of the surroundings.

In both cases, the Bahian carnival dancers contrasting with the dance of Oxum in the *terreiro*, as well as the *Malandro* next to the telephone company dancer, illustrate how the loss of the power of the imaginary operates through technical images: the focus on the plasticity of gestures, colors, movements; objective aspects of the images that seduce the eye distracted by aesthetic aspects.

Annually, the editing of images with quick cuts, alternating from the general plan of the avenue to the reporter's or *passista's* (samba dancer) foreground provided by TV broadcasters allows for this aesthetic enjoyment, but it is the narrator's words that make sense of what is taking place, standardizing these images' meaning, bringing forth the unique truth (the story told by the narrator and commented on by *experts*) in the form of outsourced imagination.

<sup>12</sup>The *Malandro*, for example, was the subject of the G.R.E.S. Acadêmicos do Salgueiro (RJ) samba school's story entitled "A Ópera dos Malandros" (The Opera of the Tricksters) by Renato Lage and Márcia Lage, in 2016.



**Figure 3**

*The Malandro, typical Umbanda figure*

Note. Unknown author. Source: Zé Pelintra Oficial (Facebook page) (<https://bit.ly/3hpokXY>).



**Figure 4**

*TIM BLACK advertisement*

Note. Author: Agência Z+ Comunicação (RJ). Source: Blog do BG (<https://bit.ly/2AGQFpE>).

The image recurrence (after all, the Bahians are present in every school) is not enough to facilitate the imagination, as, year after year, new plots are presented by each school. Thus, the images are not intended to be imagined but serve an illustrative purpose, ultimately defining the loss of potency, as the same props, gestures, or colors take on other shapes when associated with the Imaginary, still present within the *terreiro*.

The same *modus operandi* was applied in the advertising for the telephone company. The visual aspects (the dancer, the dance) are valued at the expense of the possibility of associating the image with other symbols. Associated with rapid obsolescence (as pieces must be quickly replaced in an advertising campaign or, otherwise, they will no longer produce the effect of attracting the public attention), this situation highlights the superficiality, the loss of depth, the imaginative power. In any case, the *Malandro* is present, opening doors for the Imaginary, but the image must be replaced by another, as this path does not tend to lead to the consumption of the product, which, after all, is the object of the image.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Understanding the imaginary production of technoscientific thinking as a splitting space between the logical (related to Reason) and imaginative (proper to the Imaginary) processes and responding simultaneously to both ways of thinking, the concept of instrumental imagery proposed in this manuscript allows us to delineate the effects of the processes in production, consumption, and obsolescence of images in contemporary culture, from the perspective of the Imaginary with greater precision.

Such proposal sheds light on the picture presented by Gilbert Durand about the paradox related to this production, as according to his perspective, a Western society founded on Greek thinking and Middle Eastern monotheistic religions produced several processes of iconoclasm, seeking to give to the images the possibility of being understood as a legitimate phenomenon of thought in some way. In the contemporary world, while the immense production of images by technoscientific devices – understood as by-products of Reason – presents itself as a historical contradiction, it tends to reiterate the clash while altering the temporal configurations related to the exposure of the image, allowing the rapid obsolescence to make it harder to fulfill the symbolic imagination about so-called technical images.

The verification of operability based on images related to the news coverage of the Brazilian carnival compared to that of Candomblé rituals, and the advertising carried out by the telephone company compared to the figure of the *Malandro*, typically associated with the Umbanda, demonstrates that the concept is effective, making it possible to perceive the extent of the decrease in the imaginative power. ■

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