Knowledge as Dialectics of Imagination[1]

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Abstract

Under the light of the definition of dialectics proposed by W. Benjamin in the Arcades Project, the present work examines the cognitive inferences produced by the imagination when adhering to the perceivable nature of the empiric object. In order to enable the analysis of the characteristics of such inferences, the close relationship between that concept of dialectics, the epistemological proposals of the philosophy of image of Fusser, and Foucault's concept of event is shown.

Keywords: knowledge, imagination, communication

> "For the beginning and end on the periphery of the circle are common"
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> (Fragment XCIX - Heraclitus, 6th century BC apud Kahn, 2009)

1. The warning of the century

The last decades of the 20th century have forced us to evaluate the century about to end, requiring to ponder, almost like a commercial balance, income and debts, advantages and disadvantages, and maybe, some promise of salvation for the future that seemed nebulous and, at first glance, far from a promising future. In the metaphor of the short story The Library of Babel, Borges harkens to the saga of human communication and Calvino, in the last decade of the 20th century, translated the previous metaphor, remembering the struggle to relate and think of images. They each summed up, in their own way, the debt of the century towards humanity and the challenge proposed to the 21st century. If Borges employed a metaphor to name the lack of communication as a base challenge for modern times, Calvino was more explicit and conditioned such challenge to the possibility of an answer to two imperatives of knowledge: multiplicity and visibility. Supposedly, overcoming the difficulties of communication or those of producing knowledge of

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knowledge going beyond assertive linearity would propose a summation of the 20th century and its possible credit towards the construction of a new century:

> "In its Molisan wisdom and poverty, doctor Ingravallo sustained, among other things, that unexpected catastrophes are never the consequence or the effect, as is usually said, of one lone motive, a single cause: but they are the like a vortex, a point of cyclonic depression in the consciousness of the world, to which conspired a whole range of converging causalities" (Calvino, 1990, p. 119)

> "The mind of the poet, as well as the spirit of the scientist, in certain decisive moments, work according to a process of association of images, which is the fastest system to coordinate and choose among the infinite forms of what is possible and what is impossible. Fantasy is a type of electronic machine that takes into consideration all possible combinations and chooses those that work towards a goal. … what future will be reserved to the individual imagination in what we agreed to refer to as the "civilization of image?" (Calvino, 1990: 107)

Heraclitus' epigraph, Borges' metaphor and Calvino's quotes exemplify the possibilities and difficulties faced by the production of knowledge. The relation between multiplicity and visuality converted in image will orient this text that will seek to study how it is possible to produce knowledge from image or figure of a concept, without duplicating the knowledge established by scientific canon. The apparent coincidence between the century coming to an end and, seeming unique and definitive, demands from men a revision that enables them some salvation, replaces one of the oldest questions of humankind, geared towards the necessity of overcoming its sensible frailty and ascending to a promised essential and ideal Nirvana: on one side there is the link to the image of false perception of the world, and on the other, proposes the need to overcome it with the intent of reaching a promising future. In Plato's dialetics, we have time that goes from the past to the future as progressive and cumulative ascension between partial truths: dialetics like the movement that goes from past to future, overcoming the image as false capacity of seeing and perceiving. However, it deals with an apparent conflict because, between knowledge and image, or between disconnected spaces of time, it is established that knowledge runs through a progressive path to reach the established goal. Borges or Calvino's warning is related to a sensitive but forgotten capacity of man, when Plato, Hegel or Marx reduced dialetics and the knowledge to overcoming between opposites that must be eliminated to enable the synthesis that classifies and guarantees the order of an organized world, capable of identifying man as master of the Cosmos and superior to the image and the sensibilities. We find conflict between knowledge and image. One calls attention to this old crisis of dialetics that

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understood the knowledge and its production dependent on classifications, of hierarchic discriminations, of polarities and oppositions: as a scientific area, communication does not avoid this rule.

2. The celebrity-image

That conflict was subjected to a decisive test when, facing the evidence of barbarism and the Marxist disenchantment that transformed and consumed the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century, Walter Benjamin places a cornerstone by proposing the Dialectal Image, not without thinking about the definitive transformation introduced by technical reproducibility that ensures the fundamental argument of the celebrated 1936 article "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", but above all, realizing that humanity entered into a new form of knowledge that, opposing itself to the determinism of causalities, presented itself inferential, relational, unpredicted.

Before the emergence of technical reproducibility in the middle of the 19th century, image loses not only the design of mythical representation of unquestionable efficiency as support of collective values, but also the aura that characterized it as a figure destined to the contemplation in the space that was adequate for it, the temple, and in it, the ritual. In the middle of the 19th century, it is imposed on the world an unmistakable reproducible media form and the image left evident the mythical and anthropologic characteristics that, since then, had oriented its grammar and the knowledge it sought to produce.

Now reproducible, image loses existential and vital values that characterized it as the only aura of a mythical time, and thus should be eternal. Before the uncontrollable expansion and evolution of technique, the value of the myth can find no home, because its collective base was reduced to the occasional meeting in places where the temple is replaced by the factory, and the rite by routine work, silent and solitary, while the mythical figure gives place to Debord's spectacle and Baudrillard's concepts of simulation and dissimulation constitute paradigms of said reproducible image. In this reality, there is no denying that visuality is a central communicative medium for society to expand from the mid-19th century to the 80s in the 20th century. To Debord or Baudrillard, communication is justified by the efficiency of its effects serving the capital, seductively mediated by advertising, transformed

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into a supporting role that replaces the world of production by the effect that the image of the product guarantees, subsidizing trade and surplus value. In both Debord and Baudrillard we find a theory geared towards the study of instrumental efficiency of communication and for the confirmation of a scientific foundation that barely gets sketched, because it limits itself to communication as simple efficient technical medium to reach an effect serving the capital, where visuality of image is dissolved in the fetish of merchandise. As an effect, image is circumscript to the linear logic that sponsors relations of cause and effect and trivializes the communicative process, and while social science under capital conditions visual sensibility to the simple hegemonic effect of an image redundant of consumption itself oriented to the belief in the power of trade.

The spectacular image is reduced to linear simplicity marked by discontinuous time of causes and effects to reach, like a timer, not only of time, but of actions, values and ways of thinking. In this linearity, the spectacular image becomes the celebrity of the 20th century, but it is trivialized as cognitive possibility of imagination which, stimulated by the imaginary, constitutes an untiring agent of production of images that instigates thought and knowledge: thinking through images requires an alliance between imagination and the imaginary. The commercial explosion of spectacular image inhibits the imaginative capacity that sustains the anthropologic grammar of image. As an antidote to this commercial image, it is necessary to produce an anti-image that is introduced as dialetics of imagination, but, in order to understand it, it is necessary to overcome the daydream of seeing that keeps us from thinking image:

> "Every present is determined by those images that are synchronic to it: each now is the now of a determined ability to know. In it, the truth is filled with time to the point of bursting.
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> .... It's not that the past shines light over the present or the present shine light over the past; but the image is that in which the occurrence finds the now in a glimmer, forming a constellation. In other words: the image is the dialetics in immobility. Because while the relation of present with past is purely temporal, that of the occurrence with the now is dialetic – not of a temporal nature, but imagetic." (Benjamin, 2006: 504-505)

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It is seen that this dialetic demands attention to the epistemological nature of the image that, concentrated in visuality, goes beyond representations and presentations and leads us to study the contradictions of image that imply, not to doubt the historic importance that is granted by anthropology, but to go beyond certainties of what is readable, synthesized in the question that sums up Didi-Huberman's (1990: 11) work when pondering the cognitive self-reference of the artistic image "Poser son regard sur une image de l´art devient alors savoir dénommer tou ce qu´on voit – en fait: tout ce qu´on lit dans le visible. Il y a là un modèle implicite de la vérité…."

It is necessary to answer the urgency that takes us to go through the visuality into visibility, of image to imagination and the imaginary, from seeing to looking, from discontinuous time to continuous time, from anthropology to dialetic ontology of image. Another objective of this text is to propose, on one hand, that we overcome the seduction of spectacular image understood as the true obstacle to thinking, and on the other hand, that we reach an ontology that is situated between seeing and looking or between esthesia and the thought of images, to make possible to verify the dialetic that is established between the established knowledge and that which can be produced.

3. The image as dialetic of knowledge

Calvino's quotes encourage us to produce knowledge of knowledge and overcoming the linearity between cause and consequence and, for that, utilizing the electronic machine of fantasy, that is, they invite us to overcome the use of the esthesia of image that, reduced to contemplation, is always self-sufficient. Conversely, it proposes to transform the image in a suggestive engine for the imagination that, going beyong that esthesia, leads to the production of images that are no longer contemplative, but cognitive and relational. We glimpse an important ontological difference between living from the use of spectacular image and producing knowledge through the image. It demands us to go through an anthropological and phenomenological stage of analysis in order to reach the archeology of visuality in order to operate, comparatively, between images, overcome its esthesic constructions and reach the imaginary suggestions that stimulate cognitive possibilities.

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That is, to think the not knowing while confronting the remains of assimilated knowing and that, because of that, already doesn't incite curiosity: it's necessary to learn to dialetize. This is the challenge of image or knowledge stimulated in dialetic rhythm: to overcome the habit of seeing or knowing, to consider the known as if it were unknown, to produce knowledge as exercise of questioning that leads us to the surprise and the capacity of admiring always, so that the imaginary of discovery is not inhibited: this capacity of admiring, of surprising oneself before unexpected or unpredicted questions is tantamount to knowing where to start the scientific exercise of production of knowledge.

> "Such will be the advantage: to know, but also to think the not known while afflicted with remains of knowing. To dialetize. To beyong knowing itself, to involve oneself in the paradoxical proof of not knowing (which would end up exactly denying it but to think the element of not knowing what dazzles us each time we land our look over an artistic image" (Didi-Huberman, 1990, 15)

Dialetizing makes us notice the possibility of elaborating not a theory of image, but a theory of visuality that finds in Walter Benjamin an epistemology that suggests reading images intending to adhere to the own manner through which it manifests itself and can take us to elaborate the knowledge of the world; it is implied as a new literacy of the seeing in which is revealed the confrontation of two temporalities: on one hand, the time of the image as exposition/contemplation and that of the consequences of the image that Benjamin christened as dialetics without time, timeless, because it unveils the spatiality that takes us to seen in an image, images and knowledge of all the times. Thus, it is violated to the submission of the image to causal linearity, to the organizing division of life in discontinuous times that organize everyday life, actions, desires, body, values, political and historical events. That violence is made indispensable to make the time of image dialetic and to allow thinking from it to construct another form of knowledge of knowing and producing history. The image is transformed in empirical object that mixes imagination, reason, imaginary in an unique complex that stimulates one to produce knowledge:

> "It is import to step back resolutely from the concept of "timeless truth". However, the truth is – as Marxism states – just a temporal functional of knowing, but it is linked to a temporal core that is found simultaneously in what is known and in those who know. This is so true that the eternal, in any way, is much more a drape in a dress than an idea" (Benjamin, 2006,504-505)

To produce knowledge through image is to think in continuous time that, in evolution, turns the present into the great ontological agent of a "now" time, which overcomes the past to dialetize it in the here. To adhere to the expansions of knowledge, cross-referencing them, not with its conceptual foundations, but through inferential image that incite, lead us to revisit, under different lights, the same ideas, to rediscover them in other dialetic that makes it so inferential time of knowledge be always the present, where everything is renewed in making one see in a different way.

4. The continuous time of knowledge

In order to establish a discrimination between the knowledge produced by causality and the other one that, in present time, is relational to recovering, of the past, its instants of present, we are faced with the Benjamin's traditional method of assembly:

> "A central product of dialetic materialism to be ultimately considered: could a Marxist comprehension have to necessarily be acquired through the price of visibility of history? Or: in which way would it be possible to conciliate an increase in visibility with the accomplishment of the Marxist method? The first step of this path will be to apply to history the principle of assembly. That is: to lift the great constructions from tiny elements, clearly and precisely cut. And, even, to find in the analysis of the small individual moment, the crystal of the complete happening. Therefore, to break with vulgar historical naturalism. To comprehend the construction of history as such. In the structure of the commentary. Remains of history." (Benjamin, 2006, p. 503)

To produce knowledge through imagination is, therefore, a method of seeing the world through images mounted in a continuous time worn out of causal simplicity, in order to be capable of revisiting what is known as a form of rediscovery, under other lights or images, the history of the known. To produce another form of knowing and making history through the assembly that require rediscovering knowledge. It demands a recognizance of the empirical object: one goes from causal knowledge into relational knowledge.

Thinking through known image, but assembled in other historical foundations, demands overcoming the knowledge restricted to the linearity that inhibits the capacity of imagining, it is necessary to be capable of overcoming matrixes of opposition, of polarities that freeze the capacity of producing inferences and of producing knowledge. As an area of knowledge, communication is exposed to this difficult because, almost always, it adheres, not to thinking the knowledge through the image of a concept, but to seek canonical senses, qualitative meanings that are made expressive through the quantity or the reiteration and

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insistence with which they are presented: there is great epistemological different between thinking the knowledge or recognizing it through inferential images.

In this theory of image that is takes shape in the perceptive difficulty of a circular spatiality and opposes itself to the ease of immediate and linear perceptions, it is urgent to identify that the inferential image is not unique, but it distinguishes itself, as it can be incited to overcome the achievement of an effect and, thus, signing a flexible communicative dimension with multiple and different constructive roots that, as such, cannot be manipulated by a program that intends to reach effects:

> With every new image the imaginary universe of society is transformed, and the power of imagination makes the rigidity of circumstance, prior to the production of images, be replaced by the fluidity and malleability (Flusser, 2008: 21)

This takes us from a discontinuous and linear time, to continuous, circular or recurring one, which bespeaks of a change in the way of knowing; an epistemological transformation that puts communication in another path, for it challenges the way one can communicate in, without concepts or hopes to achieve a safe effect. This flexible way of communicating goes beyond simple verbal communication:

> "The intellect marches phrase by phrase, and therefore predicate by predicate, in an effort to exhaust the subject and the object, of completely signifying the subject and the object, without ever reaching it goal. It marches partial meaning by partial meaning in search of total meaning that can never be reached; the thought is one unfinished sentence, therefore never meaningful" (Flusser, 1999, p. 57)

The crisis of contiguous time and the discontinuous chronologically codified places itself beside the dialetic space-time that does not boast its differences because they must be groped or intuited by visible synchrony, than figured or deciphered. From the causal linearity to the inference of senses, we have a change in way of knowing; an epistemological transformation that is dialected by the way as it unprograms itself and bring recognition to the change that occurs in the passage of plane and its linearity to the surface that incorporates its space and volume. If there are changes in the object of knowledge that is developed between what is codified and indefinite, it demands that this strange, almost

dissolved, object be faced through other methodological cares. This change leads us to overcome the sufficiency in the theory or the concept, to see the change that the inferential image instigates and makes us react in favorable or unfavorable ways. Overcoming the ambiguity between epistemology and method, this difference is concentrated on the doubt of the concept, or given name in Flusser's formulation, as matrix of inferential production in absence of concept or given name:

> "The doubt of doubt, dazzled by the limitation of intellect that is the given name, it forgets the function of intellect that is the given name. The doubt of doubt is the result of the loss of faith in the doubt, of the loss of critical possibility in the given name. Unbelieving in the possibility of criticism of the given name, it paradoxically abandons the given name. The way out of this situation is, in my opinion, not reconquering faith in doubt, but the transformation of doubt in faith in the given name as source of doubt."
> (Flusser, 1999, p. 73)

The translation of the scientific object in doubt adhering to the sensitive perception, simultaneously continuous and dispersed, transforms production of knowledge in heuristic adventure and free from theoretical or empirical certainties. Doubt appears as proposal of an indecisive and fragile almost-method, because it changes with each formulated doubt. By supposing weaving cognitive inference that meshes epistemological and methodological that don't mean method, an appreciable difference between what is established beforehand and the methodology that adheres to the singularity of each researched object and, more than the certainty of the method, demands the risk of methodological strategy which cannot be understood as another method, equally hallowed.

Overcoming the necessity of explaining the sense or meaning of the empirical object means awakening from the reason to reach the imagination and imaginary. One goes from one form of knowing to another: through imagination, they dialetized, in dazzle, both image and continuous time, and the doors are open to the differences in doubt as reinvention of the empirical object, as it forces us to see it under lights that do not affirm or acknowledge it, but interrogate it and allow for the happening of knowledge:

> "What interests me, in the issue of discourse, is that fact that someone said something on a given moment. It's not the meaning that I seek to show, but the function that can be attributed once this thing was said at that moment, that is what I call happening" (Foucault, 2010, p. 255)

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Benjamin, Flusser and Foucault are brought together, however, to allow the understanding the complementarity that is established between the authors, it seems necessary to study that methodological strategy, with the intent to noticing how and why it's not about a simple descriptive-phenomenological process, but an approach that seeks to find, in knowledge, not the roots of emergencies, but the foundations of its constructive and cognitive differences. In knowledge, one does not read or discover a meaning, because nothing is covered, but one produces a meaning that can be, but nothing demands that it is. The risk of this company appears in a scary way, because it goes against the established practice for a production of traditional knowledge in the western world that is geared to a referential adequacy between the known object and the logic or identity that distinguishes it: a perceptive challenge that is not based on a certain linear path, but wanders between dispersed inferences:

> "The lines, therefore, represent the world by projecting it on a series of successions. In this way, the world is represented by lines, in the form of a process. Currently, this isn't the case anymore. Written lines, despite being more frequent than before, have been becoming less important to the masses than the surfaces. What do these surfaces mean? This is the current question… It is not only about the problems of the adequacy of the thought to the thing only, but the expressed thought in surfaces to the thing, on one hand, and the expressed thoughts in lines, on the other." (Flusser, 2007,103-104)

A knowledge made of remains of what is known to be possible to know more and in a different way. In this unbalance between what is known and what is not known, traditional knowledge suffers from decentralization, a estrangement that challenges the ruthless traditional logic because, by referring to the hallowed cognitive possibilities, that mismatch demands confirmation of its dissimilarity with the knowledge that establishes the predictability of the world.

Despite of the insistence of disciplinary specialization of science in the impervious characterization of the parts of its architecture, it is possible to find converging points between interpretations that, originated in points historically and geographically distant, allow us to notice that knowledge involves the interactive contagion that is processed in complementary circles. In its efficient immobility, the dialetic of knowledge is responsible for this complementarity, which is the same as saying that we think and produce knowledge

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by achieving what is established. In this exercise, it is observed that the exhausted interdisciplinarity or the sterile multiculturalism demand to be overcome: to think the knowledge as dialetic production in the manner of a sensitive image, it appears as another epistemological proposal that can configure itself as political and ethical commitment of the 21st century, with the intent of overcoming the debt from the 20th century.

In the uncommitted track between sparse and dispersed bibliographies, it is possible to find traces of that dialetic and notice that the weaving of knowledge through imagination constitutes the interest of several areas of knowledge. In this track, we find curious approximations that made knowledge a necessary circularity to cause the *acontecimentalizar* of the world. Science has been groping its cosmic traces by producing itself as exercise of imagination and the knowledge is expanded by finding, in different áreas and historical circumstances, the fragments of this unmovable dialetic mobility. It is worth to mention some examples to notice that knowledge is multiplied through imagination that allows it to overcome itself:

> "Everything moves degree by degree imaginarily... (because) the world is irregularly seeded with regular dispositions. (Valéry, 1894: p. 149)

> "One can conclude that defining estrangement as cultural phenomenon is the starting point of a process that leads inexorably to the "revelation" that the ambivalence cannot the eliminated from existence…" (Bauman, 1999: p.83)

> "Our situation, therefore, is diametrically opposed to the classic difficulty from the 20th century in which the left knew what had to do..., but had to patiently wait until the opportunity arose. Nowadays we don't know what to do, but have to act now, because the consequences of inaction can be catastrophic. We have to venture into the abyss what is new in completely inadequate conditions; we must reinvent aspects of the new, only to maintain what was good in the old…" (Zizek, 2012: p.362)

> "It is not about thinking of a perimeter, a seal... but it's about experimenting with an constitutive and central opening: there where the evidence, crumbling, evaporates and is obscured." (Didi-Huberman, 1990, p. 15)

And finally:

> "I thus see the task of the philosophy of photography: to point the path of liberty. Urgent philosophy

because it might be the only revolution that is still possible" (Flusser, 1998: p. 96)

Or

"Men forget where the path goes... and find it strange that with they are most associated with. And that which they find every day seems strange… we should not act and speak like men sleeping." (Heraclitus, Fragment V, 6th century BC apud Kahn, 2009)

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