ALCEU
Revista de Comunicação, Cultura e Política
Departamento de Comunicação Social da PUC-Rio

Communication narratives:

Mitogenic persistence

Narrativas na Comunicação:

A persistência mitogênica

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1. Myth, a superstructure of the imagination

There is certainly no lack of reference to the continuity of a mythical narrative in today's communication and contemporary arts. It is easy to draw an analogy between archaic myths and artistic, cultural and media productions, not to mention social and political manifestations. However, before affirming that Venus has returned in the form of Beyoncé, that Wonder Women is actually Diana or that Achilles and Neptune are rebooted on cinema screens in roles performed by Brad Pitt and Jason Momoa, it is worth questioning these couplings from a *sermo mythicus* point of view. Thus, the question does not concern which myth feeds off of this or the other modern fact, but, instead, pertains to the symbolic effectiveness of this parasitism. A myth is the organized form of symbolic images most closely associated to anthropological unconscious, while at once both awareness and reasoning. As such, by conserving its symbolic *Prägnanz*[1], at the same point that it seems tangible, a myth occupies a specific place in the dynamics of the imagination.

Although Sartre (1986), back in 1940, had already named one of his works "The Imaginary", it was only as from the work of Gilbert Durand, twenty years later –, that a positive comprehension of the imaginary was defined and systematized. By defining the imaginary as the result of a reciprocal genesis[2] between the coercion of the social environment and pulsations, Durand (2016) is highly successful in simultaneously limiting the notion enough for it to eliminate the character of

[1] Cassirer (1998) used the term symbolic *Prägnanz* to indicate that any data received by a subject are already impregnated with meaning, thus implying the nonexistence of pure data. By highlighting the premise that the symbolic has a motivated and consistent meaning, Studies of the Imaginary enjoy expressive support through the expression borrowed from Cassirer.
[2] Durand uses the expression "reciprocal genesis" citing Piaget (apud DURAND, 2016, p. 38), who defined it as "mobile equilibrium" and "reversibility".

the receptacle for everything not fully grasped and amplify it sufficiently to encompass cultural productions that range from the symbolically most rigid, such as stereotypes and even preconceptions, to the most fertile and exclusive, as is the case of art.

It is true the forces that make the imaginary dynamic do not distinguish between what is and is not art, between the stereotype and the preconceptions: as anthropologically shared patrimony, the imaginary holds the potential answers which Sapiens attributes to the strife born down by the world. However, not all images carry symbolic *Prägnanz*, varying according to position on the anthropological trajectory or the trajectory of meaning (DURAN, 2016), which broadly defines the dynamism of the imaginary, the birth of images based on interaction between two poles at once both opposing and self-generative, and also the shift of images along this trajectory. One of these poles, called the pulse, holds that which is birthed with a human being, its body and three dominant reflexes (in the presence of which the other give way or annual themselves), namely, postural (a trend towards standing), nutritional or digestive and rhythmic or copulative reflexes. The other pole, called coercion, encompasses the material and social environment, the injunction imposed on human beings by the world and society. According to Durand (2016), symbolic images are precisely the result of this negotiation between pulses and coercions.

The dominant reflexes at the base of the drive pole extend into *schèmes*, a term used by Durand (2016) and which we prefer not to translate as 'scheme' so as not to be confused with scheme as in *schéma.* In the general theory of the imaginary, the notion of *schème* is hugely important, coming before the archetype, which also participates at a level of the imaginary understood as being anthropological unconscious. The *schèmes* refer to actions that, repeated in analogous situations, transform or become generalized, translating the dominant reflexes into images.

As such, postural reflexes unfold into ascending, diairetic and specular *schèmes* because the standing posture indicates a tendency to rise, freeing the hands and vision in order to distinguish and act, while also adding luminous matter to the experience. The digestive reflex is brought to life in the descending *schème*, in reference to digestive descent, and the copulative reflex in the rhythmic and progressive *schémes.* Durand (2016) recalls the Leroi-Gourhan equation, strength + matter = tool, to affirm that each of these gestures appeals simultaneously to a piece of matter and a technique, creating an imaginary material and a tool or, at least, a utensil:

> This is how the initial gesture, the dominant posture, demands luminous matter, visuals and techniques for separation, purification for which firearms, arrows, swords are regular symbols. The second gesture, linked to the digestive descent, calls on matter from the depths: water or the cavernous earth provoke continental utensils, the glasses and the safes, and lean towards the technical daydreams of food and beverages. Lastly, the rhythmic gestures, of which sexuality is the natural finished model, project across the seasonal rhythms and their astral procession annexing all the technical substitutes of the cycle: the wheel like the road, the pestle like the lighter, and finally over-determining all the technological friction through sexual rhythm (DURAND, 2016, pg. 55 my own translation[3]).

The abstract images of the *schèmes* have gained body with archetypes. While the *schèmes* each stick with their own logics, the archetypes combine contradictory forces, that is, they hold different logics. Along the lines of Jung (2014), archetypes are intangible, residing in the anthropological unconscious and from there they exercise their pulse strength in the creation of symbolic images. They are grouped according to logics derived from the *schèmes*, though this only occurs at the point they are made conscious and, as such, are no longer archetypes. We managed to detect them, they immediately become conscious, in other words, they already lose their archetypal nature – for this reason, perhaps we can diagnose archetypal images, archetypal partialities, but never the entire archetype. Along with the *schèmes,* archetypes are unvarying elements, major branches of the imaginary and which indicate a central symbolism, revealing the permanence of the archaic in update of human experience.

These updates materialize through myth or the *sermo mythicus,* a construction that manifests in consciousness constituted by constellations of symbolic images leveraged by a *schème*, given form through archetypes, attracted to one another by homologies – and not by analogy, in other words, they are images that have the same origin (the same *schème*), but not necessarily the same function. Despite being possible in the anthropological trajectory, to abstractly distinguish among *schème,* archetype, myth and symbols*,* and even though it is possible to identify isolated symbolic images, the procedure is not very useful because the meaning of the imaginary happens around narratives, experienced contexts – we recall the motivated character of the symbol and the symbolic as an attribute of apprehending an image and not as a property of said image. The meaning that

[3] In the original French: "C'est ainsi que le premier geste, la dominante posturale, exige les matières lumineuses, visuelles et les techniques de séparation, de purification dont les armes, les flèches, les glaives sont les fréquents symboles. Le second geste, lié à la descente digestive, appelle les matières de la profondeur : l'eau ou la terre caverneuse, suscite les ustensiles contenants, les coupes et les coffres, et incline aux rêveries techniques du breuvage ou de l'aliment. Enfin les gestes rythmiques, dont la sexualité est le modèle naturel accompli, se projettent sur les rythmes saisonniers et leur cortège astral en annexant tous les substituts techniques du cycle : la roue comme le route, la baratte comme le briquet, et finalement surdéterminent tout frottement technologique par la rythmique sexuelle".

guides the anthropological is thus rendered through *sermo mythicus* and not isolated images. We may affirm that a myth is a superstructure that guides and substantiates other human productions.

2. The fulcrum of meaning in symbolic constellations

Whether considering the imaginary in general, or the imaginary restricted culturally, the organization of symbolic images in *sermo mythicus* is certainly dynamic, and based precisely on them, to which Durand (2016) referred to as figurative structuralism. As such, the emphasis lies more on the image than the structure, as it is not pre-established, it is not stable, and is determined as symbolism becomes organized. Reflexive gestures and pulses incite the dynamism of the imaginary one the one hand, while on the other end of the anthropological trajectory (DURAND, 2016), exerting coercive force, are the social structures. Despite these also originating from the very depths of anthropological unconscious, upon being institutionally stabilized they conflict with original pulses – and it is here, as can be seen, that the origin of symbolic images that become understandable in the context of a *sermo mythicus*, which already carries rational tendency.

The closer a myth gets, along its trajectory, to the institutionalized end, where lies social coercions, the more the pulse trait is polished, the more “civilized” it becomes, losing, along the way, a major part of its polysemy and, in compensation (although never quite enough) for this loss, its images multiple. Reduced as they are to only a few meanings (the meaning is already becoming distant), they no longer deserve the epithet of symbolic, their experience cannot provoke the fundamental perturbation of the symbol, an experience that was once reassuring, confirming that which was already known – these images are perhaps closer to stereotypes and preconceptions.

Wunenburger (2018) uses a tree as a metaphor to show this trajectory of images, that begins at the roots, in the anthropological archetypal depths, called the imaginal in the words of Corbin (1976), home to the graphic representations of the surreal, which have no models in experience. Next, the trajectory passes through the imaginary, represented by the tree trunk, where “[...] images previously presented as substitutes of an absent real” (WUNENBURGER, 2018, pg. 67) circulate, arriving at imagery, represented by leaves, where the images relate with the outside world, trying to reproduce it, take references from it. Notwithstanding the introduction of the idea of the imaginary as a part of this series and not as “[...] the series of images and relations of images that constitute

the conceived capital of Sapiens" (DURAND, 2016, pg. XVII, highlighted by me, my translation[4]) or as "(...) a dynamic organizer of images that confers depth and links them to on another" (THOMAS, 1998, pg. 16), the metaphor of the tree is useful by making it clear that not all images have the same degree of symbolic *Prägnanz*, though they always reveal their nature in the symbol.

It would not be an overreach to once again underline that the symbolic belongs to the process of experiencing images, and thus one of its attributes. That is because the symbolic, according to the general theory on the imaginary, is motivated and experienced, it has a significance more than just a meaning. As such, from the symbolic it is simultaneously possible to trace the roots (*schèmatique* and archetypal) and project trends, as it is defined by dynamics and not by socially and/or culturally codified crystallizations, even though these codifications act on it in the form of coercions. Neither codified or codable, the symbolic at its highest degree must be experienced before being understood. Understanding it does not mobilize references: it is in fact a revelation. This makes it difficult to access through rationalized consciousness. Guided by that lived, by that experimented, even by that revealed, the symbol is not the property of things, facts, phenomena, and rather a condition of its occurrence. It is precisely this consequence of the figuration preceding the concept, of the connotative meaning being at the service of the denotative; to the contrary the images will merely serve to illustrate previously constructed concepts, not venturing much further that the role of allegories, as affirmed by Wunenburger (2002, pg. 43, my translation): "In first place, the imaginary does not have real access to symbolism if not liberated from the entire allegorical function whereby the concept always preceded production of the image"[5].

As such, the symbolic dimension cannot be discussed by describing images to relate them to symbols or the construction of analogies between contemporary and archaic narratives. It is also trivial to classify an image as a stereotype or preconception. The methodical description of images and their insertion in a universe of references is firstly a work of the cultural being that exists in the subject, it is a diachronic process, while the immediate impact that a piece causes speaks by being mythical, it is a synchronic process detached from explanations. That is why a piece may have a deep impact in spectators who are not familiar with the artist, who do not know the aesthetic movement followed by the artist or whether the representation in question refers to a specific

[4] In the original French: "[…] l'ensemble des images et des relations d'images qui constitue le capital pensé de l'*homo sapiens*".
[5] In the original French: "D'abord l'imaginaire n'accède vraiment à la symbolicité que s'il est libéré de toute fonction allégorisante, dans laquelle le concept précède toujours la production de l'image".

historical fact or to a specific character. The power of symbolic experience lies "[...] in reconnecting data from meanings to the source of the meaning, which far exceeds the particular and contingent data of experience" (Wunenburger, 2002, p. 22, my translation)[6]. By exceeding these particularities, the source of such meaning is transcendental. Thus, even though the imagining subject has their own biographies, their symbolic responses always exceed beyond it, always making part of a collectivity.

The mystery of the *sermo mythicus* lies in this extrapolation of a biographic and historical meaning, without it being a matter of fiction. The difficulties myths represent for studies of the imaginary are significant: they are not gratuitous fabrications, since they have a symbolic motivation and their structural characteristic is based on repetition, nor historical truths, as they are not derived from biographies. By not depending on historical facts, myths must not be confused with legends or folklore tales. As they are not arbitrary creations, they must not be confused with fables. As for the redundant nature of myths, this provides an interesting possibility of study, by mapping the repetitions of minimal mythical themes that are inserted within a larger narrative, that is, mythemes. Repetition is a characteristic of the sermo mythicus as symbolic images are necessarily polysemic. In order to convey and restrict meaning, myths repeat this larger narrative in their details, changing forms.

However, the pure and simple inventory of the obsessive images found in a given narrative is not enough to understand its overall meaning or to attest its mythical nature. A myth's overall meaning derives from the constellational fashion of the images that compose it. As these constellations are formed by homology instead of analogy (DURAND, 2016), the attractiveness between symbolic images is not determined by the how similar narratives are with regard to their role, but how similar they are with regard to their creation. Little does it matter if narratives state that Jacob ascended to heaven using a ladder or a tree; in order to determine whether these two symbolic images are part of a constellation or not, we must verify if they originate from the same *schème*, that is, the same logic and not from the same archetype, since - as previously shown - several logics may take part in a single archetype, in its complexity and contradictory nature[7]. The

[6] In the original French: "[...] dans celle de relier les données des sens à une source du sens, qui dépasse de loin des données particulières et contingentes de l'expérience".
[7] Thus, it is at least odd to identify a given narrative as being guided by a given archetype based on *one* major substantive trait, *one* homogeneous and appeased idea. Notwithstanding the intangibleness of archetypes, their presence in various productions being nothing more than general ideas that pervade them, these archetypes are, at least, always two-faced, harboring at the same time two opposing images. There is no benevolent Great Mother without its ruthless counterpart acting alongside it.

only way to understand this is by examining the entire narrative, analyzing the way images relate to one another. And although it is probable that the ladder, for instance, originated from an ascending schème, this is not a given fact, and it is not impossible that the material of the ladder prevails over its form. The wood may originate from a rhythmic *schème* due to its allusion to the tree, which reflects natural cycles, in the same fashion that the tree, despite being used to achieve a higher position in space, thus inducing to the identification of an ascending *schème* in its symbolic origin, may also be associated with a rhythmic schème in the sense that it evokes the passing of time, and with a descending schème, given its potential to attenuate the fall.

Walking the way back from a symbolic image from its manifestation in a *sermo mythicus* until its *schématique* origins calls for more attention to the actions expressing that image than to epithet and/or substantive figurations. This is because the imaginary originates from the awareness of the passing time, that is, the awareness of the perishability of the body. Thus, the body is responsible for expressing the answers built by symbolization; that is, this action unavoidable to symbolism, since it is at the origin of all other expressions, of which *schèmes* are the engrammatic quintessential element. These are conveyed through three major movements which are the foundation of the multiple answers to the anguish caused by the passing of time and which make up the imaginary: distinguishing, (con)fusing, and respective logical principles, exclusion/identity, analogy/similarity and causality. Hence, verbs in oral and verbal discourses, and gestures in visual discourses, are fundamental indicators for understanding the *schème* that is at the foundation of the constellations of the symbolic images that make up mythical narratives, among which communicational ones.

3. The place of the *sermo mythicus* within the social-cultural topos

Myths, as a superstructure of the imaginary, are present even where rational thinking believes there is only room for directness, distinction and clarity, especially when it comes to the hard sciences, but also in philosophy, religion and - of course - in art and communication. If we define myths simply as an organizing narrative, everything that conveys and presents explanations about the world will take part in myths. Therefore, the broadness of this definition results in research difficulties when we establish the founding anteriority of the imaginary and wish to move onto the understandings we have about these image systems in light of their efficiency over reality. Well, if the imaginary is an element of psychosocial balance (DURAND, 2000), myths are its superstructure, and the entire human production may also be understood as mythical, since “[...] the imaginary

constitutes the rules of the game in all levels of our relationship with the world " (THOMAS, 1998, p. 17,my translation)[8], there is nothing left to do but hope that the world will take its course.

Understanding the mythical game means to understand that representations do not entirely originate from us and that the unconscious operates on us as much as our social, political and cultural constructs. In this sense, attempts to demonize and deify the imaginary are thus innocuous. Renouncing any critical view of the imaginary, thus assuming that everything it expresses is necessarily good, is nothing more than falling into a trap of oversimplification and lack of conceptual complexity that deems the entire imaginary as an illusion. In summary, this means to ignore the astounding forces that move the image systems, submitting to them as one submits to fatality. In order to further our understanding of the dynamics of the imaginary, we need to introduce nuances - not exactly distinctions - that allow us, since we are talking about moving, to identify the sense of images, that is, their direction rather than their meaning.

This is not just about realizing how myths distance themselves from fables, legends, folklore tales, etc.; it is also about realizing the variations of one myth when it moves around instances that are defined by the various levels of social-anthropological consciousness named by Durand (1996, p. 141 et seq.) as social-cultural topos. The French author was inspired the nomenclature used in psychology to define three topos levels: an archetypical founding level, called the stable "id", corresponding to the collective unconscious; another level, which may be reached by psychosociology, called "ego", the place of social dramatization and roles; and a level of collective conscious, institutionalizations, legal codification, pedagogical reflection etc. - called "superego". The fundamental point with which Durand was able to make advances and enabled him to reclaim the respectability of the imaginary - and the antipathy of the 1960s *Rive Gauche* - was his statement that these three levels are linked to each other through the *sermo mythicus*. This means defining myths as this great dynamizing element of social forces and take from individuals and structures a significant share of the autonomy over the making of history. Therefore, it is understandable how the general theory of the imaginary was rejected within the French intellectual context of the times, as noted by Cazenave (1980), Hegel, Marx, Freud and Kant's antinomies.

[8] In the original French: "[…] cet imaginaire constitue les règles du jeu à tous niveaux de notre relation au monde".

When moving through the levels of the social-cultural topos, the myth is transformed. And this could not have been any other way, since neither of the extremities of the anthropological path - coercions and drives - come before the creation of myths, which are created by the mutual influence of an extremity onto the other. Coming out of the archetypal level with all its transforming power, myths show themselves in this initial moment as a revelation. The symbolic that makes them up is at the height of its *Prägnanz* and, therefore, of its contradictions as well. We are more recipients than authors of this symbolic content, a characteristic that will remain throughout the movement of myths through the levels of the topos, even though it tends to be hidden and disguised so as not to prevent its ascension. What is changed in myths is precisely their symbolic *Prägnanz*, coerced by the institutionalized forces of the social superego. Therefore, it shall not be fair to define as mythical only the narratives that are revealed and carriers of all archetypical plurality, since there is no other way to organize images apart from myths.

For this reason, we have the social-cultural topos (Durand, 1996), which makes a distinction between ascending, descending and directing myths, as seen before. Instead of making a distinction between authentic and inauthentic, or between filled and empty, we shall call full myths the ones who are still in a stage of almost latency, at the height of their symbolic *Prägnanz*, but already performing some social roles, even if seen under a negative light, since myths have not been absorbed by the social ego yet. In order to reach the social superego, myths need that their impregnating images be symbolically degraded into stereotypes which are imposed by the same procedure used by full myths on their most disturbing images, obsessive repetition. In this process, the initial polysemy is reduced and neutralized, whether by distortion or by the simple elimination of the symbolic aspects that are inconsistent with the directing myth of the time, that is, with the myth that governs social consciousness at a given moment in time.

The decrease of the symbolic *Prägnanz* of myths is - although it may be seen as nefarious - the very device through which myths survive through time and cultures, by means of variations, adaptations and conformations. The three levels of social-cultural *Prägnanz* mentioned previously also indicate the mythical changes deemed necessary so that a full myth may become a directing myth. Its fundamental contradictions must be trimmed so that part of its narrative may be accepted; that is why a directing myth will never be a full myth.

At the moment the path of ascension is taken, full myths are degenerated; their wildest and most antagonistic are even maintained within the social ego for a given time, embodied by socially-

devalued roles. At the time these myths are finally settled within the social superego, the trails left by their contradictions will have been undoubtedly eliminated and purged, even from the socially-devalued roles, who shall be filled with the next ascending myth.

4. Devaluation of myths

However, it is unjustified that myths are depreciated because they do not fit the full myth definition. Even though - at first - the studies of the imaginary promote a positive appreciation of symbolism in the sense of recognizing its fundamental importance to societies, quite often these studies, with the best of intentions, lead to the debasement of myth as a result of the methods of their approaches. The devaluation of myths is nearly impossible to be circumvented in the sense that even their oral records already constitute a degeneration of their founding oral and ritualistic forms. Brandão (2004) aptly recalls that poetry, drama and figurative art are profane manifestations of myths, which are subjected to aesthetic and political agents. According to Brandão (2004), this is how heroes from Greek mythology necessarily pass through Athens, the political supremacy of which was of interest to the dominant powers. Aeschylus allegedly recommended that Phaedra's forbidden desire towards her young stepson should be concealed from dramatic representations.

However, the fact that most contributes to the devaluation of myths is their interpretation based on rationalizing elements, which disregard their symbolic nature, transforming them into a simple code that must be deciphered. In this sense, both allegorism and euhemerism take part in the devaluation of the imaginary, according to Eliade (1994). Although these practices date back to the beginning of the Christian era, they are still recurrent, even in studies of the imaginary, despite being disguised as methodologies which are at times rather complex, preceded by theoretical rationales that reclaim the advances of hermeneutics, but which - perhaps due to the pressures imposed by scientific criteria, according to which a research path, when taken by another researcher, must lead to the same results - end up surrendering to more or less disguised codifications, transforming fruitful and dynamic heuristic principles, such as the ones associated with the schemes of the imaginary, into rigid analytical grids.

Sometimes, allegory and euhemerism are used as synonyms, and at other times as antonyms. They both have in common the devaluation of myths, positioning them in parallel to and distinct from reality, if not in opposition to it. However, we have taken a different path. Allegories are a figure of speech through which the literal sense is preceded by figurative sense, being expressed

through replacements; that is, a given element of a myth represents in fact another element of reality. The name euhemerism refers to its creator, Euhemerus, who allegedly lived in the fourth century BC. This tradition states that the gods found in myths are actually historical characters. Thus, the meaning of a myth is not transcendental, but historical and social. It shall not be difficult to identify, *a contrario sensu*, gods and heroes personified in well-known individuals, from Ayrton Senna to Che Guevara and Zumbi dos Palmares; it's possible to have one for each letter of the alphabet since analogies between myths and history are always possible - this does not mean that this is useful. In a single move, both allegory and euhemerism are implemented, the literal meaning asserting itself over the figurative meaning: these individuals are first seen as historical characters who are later overlaid with a mythical analogy.

Durand (1983) states that myths are degraded until their exhaustion within social consciousness due to excesses or deformations. Maybe he did not intend to point out errors that we may make while researching, but his presentation of the transformations to which full myths are subjected is also revealing about the errors to which researchers of the imaginary are exposed. One the first errors is the excess of connotation. It consists of failing to identify that myths have abandoned their name and attribute. According to Durand (1996), a small example is when Nietzsche makes a mistake by presenting Zarathustra as Dionysus, but conferring upon him attributes linked to Hermes: a rope dancer, between the eagle and the serpent. We may make that same mistake by identifying Hermes as the director of our times, since he is the messenger of the gods, ruling over the communications between several planes. However, the values that guide our communications (or perhaps, to put it better, our exchanges of information) tend to show how pleasant is the life we live, how delicious is the food that we eat, how inebriating is the wine that we drink, and how desirable is the body that we have. The celebration and the enjoyment of life at any cost seem to be more associated with an institutionalized Dionysus, from whose representation the initiatory, wild and disturbing aspects have been removing, there being nothing left but that which is most palatable according to our consumption society: pleasures that can be bought, pleasures that is portrayed as a kind of transgression that is not only allowed, but also expected, thus being characterized as an obligation to transgression - would there not be traces of this when the sexual revolution and birth control not only freed women so they could have sex without reproductive purposes, but also - practically overnight, after centuries of Judeo-Christian morality, obliges them to have orgasms? This leads us to heresy, which is another way through which myths are degraded

and through which researchers can make mistakes: by valuing a single mytheme, disregarding the other and biasing the full meaning of the myth.

One of heresy's correlates is schism, an interpretative procedure that mirrors the deformation undergone by myths through the suppression of several mythemes. This is rather easy to observe in media representations of Greek myths, such as the one found in Walt Disney Studio's animation Hercules, in which the Thebes hero is simply portrayed as a social misfit who wishes to be part of society and have a good reputation, and saves the woman who betrayed him. The two fall in love and live happily ever after. Despite the necessarily alogical simplification of the mythical narrative, which turns it into a narrative that is coherent with the historical conception of that time, what detaches these media adaptations is the suppression of mythemes that indicate the attributes of the full myth. The violence, cruelty and the torment that make up Hercules's existence, which pull him into a tragic destiny, are completely deleted, which suppresses its disturbing force. Even movies categorized by critics as "*films d'auteur*" cannot escape schisms and heresies. In Godard's *Le mépris*, actress Brigitte Bardot plays Camille, a character whose physical attributes are nonchalantly compared to Aphrodite's, as noted by Lage (2013), who quotes Vimenet (1991). Thus, associating beauty and sexuality to Venus/Aphrodite means to reduce a myth to a single attribute, especially glorified from a Renaissance viewpoint and interpretation of the famous episode that precedes the Trojan War, told in the Iliad, when Paris, attending Thetis and Peleus's wedding, is forced to choose which goddess is the most beautiful: Hera, Athena or Aphrodite. They are all beautiful. As everyone knows, Paris choses Aphrodite since the goddess promised him, in exchange, the love of the most beautiful woman in the world. Beyond the negotiation with Aphrodite so that she would be chosen the most beautiful goddess, it is worth highlight that in this example the myth is reduced to a just a couple of aspects, while concealing others, in order to survive within a given cultural system. This system operates through coercion. That is why it is not surprising that - in times of apology to appearances - Aphrodite is reduced to physical attraction. It would be interesting to analyze which aspects of this myth have been marginalized in order to understand to which direction the imaginary is moving; however, the important thing in this case is the independence of symbolism in relation to classifications of high and low culture, art and non-art etc.

5. Myths in the media

Communications, whether interpersonal, from alternative or mainstream media, have a significant participation in mythogenesis, justifying themselves by putting out narratives about almost everything in the world. The political and aesthetic directions of these narratives do not deprive them of their mythic character, but constitute signs of the level of social-cultural topos in which a given myth operates more strongly. Conversely, these directions are not elements that constitute a myth, as one would conclude from an affiliation with Barthes (1999), who defines myth as a naturalization of history.

If in ancient societies full myths were verbal in their nature and passed on through religions of mysteries, the written dramatic texts already constituting a reduction of their symbolic nature, what happens to myths in our societies, where our communication practically imposes the disclosure of our entire intimacy and the sharing of every image? Is there still room for secrets and mysteries? Where are the shadows in which transformations are formed?

The myths we can see portrayed on the media have been institutionalized or are close to being so, as they have already been degenerated. The loss of symbolic nature that affects myths on the various levels of the social-cultural topos is merely in terms of degree: the symbolic nature of the images persists, although degraded. The words degeneration and degradation must not be interpreted here with a negative meaning; when it comes to the imaginary, there is no good or evil, but only completeness - which has been reached necessarily by way of compensations, such as when angelic representations are accompanied by violence - that only the coercions imposed by the historical era - of a social, political, cultural nature - may categorize as desirable or nefarious. The empiric material with which we work in Communication is most often the result of the frantic propagation of images without some or several of its aspects. As they are multiplied, they make up for in presence what they lack in polysemy. But this does not absolve researchers of the imaginary from removing the sacred nature from myths. Even a stereotype is an image; to reduce it to a code that makes a connection to a simplistic idea means to ignore its schématique and archetypal origin. This does not mean that the *Prägnanz* of this image will be the same as in symbolic images, which are located close to the driving extremity. This means that addressing it as a simple code prevents an understanding of its symbolic potential. It is necessary to respect the symbolic nature of each and every image without falling into the trap of reduced meaning. On the contrary, what matters is the unveiling of refuted aspects that lead to the highlighting of only a few meanings. Therefore, the

mythological role of communication shall be to diagnose the deteriorations and usuries suffered by the directing myth, unveiling its transformational potential, recovering the suppressed mythemes, pointing out the heresies and false denomination, thus showing that we are losing when we institutionalize this full myth - without falling into the practice of schism, heresy, false denomination, allegorism etc.

Understanding full myths does not involve usual scientific procedures, since they are not represented, but unveiled. Evidently, if their permanence depended on the religions of mysteries that ritualize them, myths would not have been able to endure the test of time: it was their representations that kept them among us, allowing for their survival in the direst stances of positivism, materialism and rationalism. On the other hand, the reduction promoted by representations did not prevent such unveiling from happening; if not, the sermo mythicus would have no efficiency at all. Therefore, in some marginal instance, rites continued to remain faithful to myths. Without rites, the representation of a myth is simply words and illustrations. Myths are transformative when reached within the scope of ritual participation. In rites, myths are unveiled and their meaning take hold of human beings in a comprehensive, instantaneous and untranslatable way. Myths cannot be apprehended by sharing an experience.

The experience of a myth cannot be redisplayed, and that is why full myths belong to the realm of things cannot be said or repeated. For mythologists of communication, the entry into the realm of aporias is something quite disturbing, as this realm chooses us even more than we choose it; we are recipients of the symbolic, not translators. While the coercive components of images can be easily mapped using tools that are already well known in the Communication research field, such as discourse analysis and content analysis, as well as their countless variables, this cannot be done with symbolic components, which requires experience.

Is it possible to separate the code from the symbolic? Despite the fact that the coercive component becomes progressively larger as the myth is degraded, we must ask ourselves if there are any gains in separating the code from the symbolic, mapping whatever we can with traditional tools while leaving the symbolic interpretation for a later time. Understanding myths, either full myths or myths already subject to usurpation and/or degradation, is something necessarily personal, which does not mean either subjective or objective, since myths, as said previously, lies within an arational sphere, which is neither historical nor fictional. Coercions and drives are strictly interwoven with the

sermo mythicus; trying to separate them will only increase the chances of schism, heresy and false denomination when interpreting the symbolic.

Even if it is possible to reach an understanding regarding the symbolic through unveiling, researchers are immediately faced with the problem of its expression, as this meaning cannot be represented. The symbolic unveiling, should it occur, can only be vaguely described by poetics, which can only be vaguely understood by initiates that have already experienced the same. Maybe the symbolic unveiling's incompatibility with research can only surpassed by how unlikely it is for scientific thinking to admit that not all truths have something to gain when they are exposed to the light of reason.

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Received on: May 16, 2020.

Approved on: June 18, 2020

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Abstract

This article questions mythogenic persistence in contemporary communication narratives and the ways to investigate it. In order to achieve so, it presents *sermo mythicus* as the fundamental narrative that guides the human experience in all times and cultures. It questions the symbolic efficacy of myth transpositions in the media, situating it in the context of the imaginary, relating it to *schèmes*, archetypes and symbolic images. Subsequently, it describes the mutations necessary for a given *sermo mythicus* to survive in instances of social consciousness. It postulates that the same process of usury and degradation suffered by the myth gives rise to mistakes that lead the studies of the imaginary to devalue the *sermo mythicus*. It concludes that the symbolic remains alive even in the impoverished images of mythical narratives stiffened in social consciousness and that the role of the so-called Communications mythologist is to uncover the repressed meanings of myth. This work is affiliated to the General Theory of the Imaginary, mainly through G. Durand and J.-J. Wunenburger.

Key words: Communication. Narrative. Imaginary. Myth. Symbol.

Resumo

Este artigo questiona a persistência mitogênica nas narrativas comunicacionais contemporâneas e os modos de investigá-la. Para tanto, apresenta o *sermo mythicus* como a narrativa fundamental que orienta a experiência humana em todas as épocas e culturas. Pergunta-se sobre a eficácia simbólica das transposições do mito na mídia, situando o mito no contexto do imaginário, relacionando-o a *schèmes*, arquétipos e imagens simbólicas. Em seguida, descreve as mutações necessárias a um dado *sermo mythicus* para que seja possível sua sobrevivência nas instâncias da consciência social. Aventa-se que o mesmo processo de usura e degradação sofrido pelo mito dá origem a enganos que levam os estudos do imaginário a desvalorizarem o *sermo mythicus*. Conclui que o simbólico permanece vivo mesmo nas imagens empobrecidas das narrativas míticas enrijecidas na consciência social e que o papel do assim chamado mitólogo das Comunicações é desocultar os sentidos reprimidos do mito. Esse trabalho afilia-se à Teoria Geral do Imaginário, principalmente através de G. Durand e J.-J. Wunenburger.

Palavras-chave: Comunicação. Narrativa. Imaginário. Mito. Símbolo.

Resumen

Este artículo cuestiona la persistencia mitogénica en las narrativas comunicacionales contemporáneas y las formas de investigarla. Con este fin, presenta el *sermo mythicus* como la narrativa fundamental que guía la experiencia humana en todas las edades y culturas. Pregunta sobre la efectividad simbólica de las transposiciones del mito en los medios de comunicación, colocando el mito en el contexto de lo imaginario, relacionándolo con esquemas, arquetipos e imágenes simbólicas. Luego, describe las mutaciones necesarias para un *sermo mythicus* dado para que sea posible sobrevivir en los casos de conciencia social. Se sugiere que el mismo proceso de usura y degradación que sufre el mito da lugar a errores que llevan a los estudios de lo imaginario a devaluar el *sermo mythicus*. Concluye que lo simbólico permanece vivo incluso en las imágenes empobrecidas de narraciones míticas endurecidas en la conciencia social y que el papel del llamado mitólogo de las comunicaciones es revelar los significados reprimidos del mito. Este trabajo está afiliado a la Teoría general de lo imaginario, principalmente a través de G. Durand y J.-J. Wunenburger.

Palabras clave: Comunicación. Narrativa. Imaginario. Mito. Símbolo.