



THE LOGOTIC IMAGE: BETWEEN DENOTATION AND CONNOTATION¹

A IMAGEM LOGÓTICA: ENTRE A DENOTAÇÃO E A CONOTAÇÃO

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ABSTRACT – This article, situated within the broader framework of iconofotology – a theory that investigates the modes of presence and signification of the image from the classical domains (material and immaterial) to the emerging regimes (epiplastic and holographic) – proposes a theory of meaning in the image based on the distinction between denotation and connotation, not as separate levels, but as constitutive tensions. Departing from the notion that tropes are not figures of speech but elementary operations of

perception and thought, the text develops the Brandão Scale, a dynamic model in which metaphor organizes itself as an ascending movement (analogical condensation) and allegory as a descending movement (narrative unfolding). The scale is exemplified in three domains – verbal, photographic, and cinematic – and articulated with the image's material and immaterial domains. Finally, the article discusses the concept of the margin (where meaning becomes strained) and of the *paramundo* (where the image

¹ This article corresponds to the prolegomena of a broader investigation, developed in the book *Iconofotologia: arqueologia do visível* (vol. 1) [Iconophotology: archaeology of the visible] (forthcoming), from which it takes and deepens the fundamental concepts – notably the distinction between denotation and connotation as constitutive tensions, the Brandão Scale, and the notions of margin, *paramundo*, and enigma. The material and immaterial domains of the image (εἰκών and εἰδωλόν) are privileged here; the emerging regimes (*epiplastic* and *holographic* images) and the neurocognitive foundation of *iconotropism* will be addressed in the original work.



IMAGENS EM FOCO

Revista Científica de Cultura e de Imagem
Nº 6 Ano III março/2026
ISSN 3085-7309

no longer signifies but appears as presence), situating the enigma as the frontier of interpretation.

KEYWORDS: Iconophotology; logotic image; Brandão Scale; metaphor; allegory; denotation; connotation; *paramundo*.

RESUMO – Este artigo, situado no âmbito mais amplo da iconofotologia – teoria que investiga os modos de presença e significação da imagem desde os domínios clássicos (material e imaterial) até os regimes emergentes (epiplástico e holográfico) – propõe uma teoria do sentido na imagem fundada na distinção entre denotação e conotação, não como níveis separados, mas como tensões constitutivas. Partindo da noção de que os tropos não são figuras de linguagem, mas operações elementares da percepção e do

pensamento, o texto desenvolve a Escala Brandão, um modelo dinâmico no qual a metáfora se organiza como um movimento ascendente (condensação analógica) e a alegoria como um movimento descendente (desdobramento narrativo). A escala é exemplificada em três domínios – verbal, fotográfico e cinematográfico – e articulada com os domínios material e imaterial da imagem. Por fim, o artigo discute os conceitos de margem (onde o sentido se tensiona) e de *paramundo* (onde a imagem já não significa, mas se apresenta como presença), situando o enigma como a fronteira da interpretação.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Iconofotologia; imagem logótica; Escala Brandão; metáfora; alegoria; denotação; conotação; *paramundo*.

Before we begin, it is necessary to understand what is meant by the *logotic* image. More than a mere illustration of discourse, it is an image that carries a discursive structure within itself, one that can be that can be translated, analyzed, and interpreted as if it were an utterance. Furthermore, it is necessary to bear in mind that the

operations of the trope – especially metaphor and allegory – traditionally studied by verbal rhetoric, are equally operative in the visual field. That is why this sub-item moves between literary and visual examples: the regime is the same, even if the means differ. The image logoticity, therefore, does not reside in its reduction to a



IMAGENS EM FOCO

Revista Científica de Cultura e de Imagem
Nº 6 Ano III março/2026
ISSN 3085-7309

concept linked to the word, but in its openness to discursive analysis that moves between denotation and connotation.

It is precisely at this point that the image *logoticity* reveals one of its most decisive implications: if it can be read as an utterance, it also participates in the same operations of stabilization and slippage of meaning that characterize language. In other words, the possibility of discursive analysis of the image implies recognizing that regimes of evidence and interpretative suspension are also established within it.

It is within this horizon that the question of denotation arises. Denotation is not merely the limit of meaning; it is the operation by which meaning provisionally stabilizes itself as evidence. What the word or the image says – “this is a pipe” – does not impose itself as truth by itself, but as the result of a perceptual and cultural agreement that momentarily suspends interpretative drift. Denotation does not eliminate deviation; it contains it, not as something that represses, but as something that silently constitutes it. It is less a zero degree of meaning than a point

of rest, a transitory fixation within an essentially mobile field.

In this sense, denotation should not be understood as an immediate given of the real, but as an effect of recognition. Thus, seeing a pipe and saying “this is a pipe” already implies a series of prior operations: identification of forms, inscription in a repertoire, adherence to a code. What presents itself as evidence is, in reality, the result of a sedimentation. Denotation, therefore, is the name we give to what we no longer perceive as problematic – even though it continues to be, in its structure, the result of interpretative operations.

Connotation, in turn, is not merely the open field of meaning; it is the very movement by which meaning unfolds beyond its initial fixation. If denotation stabilizes, connotation sets into circulation. It does not add to a given meaning; it reveals that the meaning was never fully given. Every denotation, when interrogated, opens into connotation.

It is in the domain of connotation that the cultural, the affective, and the ideological manifest themselves not as external layers, but as constitutive dimensions of meaning. A word like “fatherland”



IMAGENS EM FOCO

Revista Científica de Cultura e de Imagem
Nº 6 Ano III março/2026
ISSN 3085-7309

does not start from a neutral core to which values are added; it already emerges saturated with history, memory, and conflict. Likewise, the image of a cross is not limited to representing an object, since it mobilizes a symbolic field that varies with the observer's tradition. Connotation, in this way, is not an excess of meaning; it is its condition for expansion.

The relationship between denotation and connotation is not, therefore, that of two separate levels, but that of two simultaneous tensions: one tends toward fixation; the other, toward dispersion. The first delimits; the second unfolds. Between them, meaning is not resolved but oscillates, and it is in this oscillation that the emergence of figures becomes possible.

Tropes are born precisely from this interval. They do not intervene in an already constituted meaning, but operate within this tension, exploring the possibilities of displacement, approximation, and

substitution that connotation makes visible and that denotation seeks to contain. Before being classified as figures of speech, tropes are indices of this fundamental instability of meaning.

Tropes

In the rhetorical tradition, tropes (*τρόπος* – deviation, direction) are figures that affect a displacement of meaning. This definition, although functional, remains superficial if taken as a final point. That is because the trope is not merely a deviation applied to a previously stable meaning; it is the very condition that makes meaning mobile, relational, and therefore intelligible.

Before being a procedure of language, the trope is an operation of thought, a modality of perception itself, and more profoundly, a fundamental operation of meaning. There is no absolutely literal apprehension of the world, for what presents itself as evidence – the “this is” of denotation – is already the result of selections, cuts, and associations. At this level, the trope does not intervene in meaning: it constitutes it. What rhetoric



IMAGENS EM FOCO

Revista Científica de Cultura e de Imagem
Nº 6 Ano III março/2026
ISSN 3085-7309

describes as a figure is, in truth, the visible manifestation of a more originary dynamic.

The classical tradition, from Aristotle to seventeenth-century manuals, systematized tropes as localized operations: metonymy by contiguity, synecdoche by inclusion, metaphor by analogy, and irony by inversion. This classification, though useful for discourse analysis, tends to obscure the fact that these operations do not belong exclusively to verbal language. They correspond to fundamental modes by which the world is apprehended, organized, and rendered meaningful.

When one says “to drink a chalice,” one is not merely performing a rhetorical substitution, but engaging in a perceptual economy in which the object is apprehended by its function. When one speaks of “a hundred sails,” the whole is grasped by the part that manifests it. These displacements are not external artifices; they indicate that meaning always emerges by approximation, never by full identity. The trope, in this sense, is not ornament; it is a symptom.

Throughout history, tropes have oscillated between two

understandings: as “ornaments of language” (in Quintilian) or as “fundamental cognitive structures” (in Giambattista Vico, Friedrich Nietzsche, and, more recently, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson). The second path allows us to recognize that the trope is not an accident of discourse, but the common way thought operates: by analogies, contiguities, condensations, and displacements.

In Baroque poetry, tropes become visible as technique: they are explored, accumulated, stretched to the limit, producing acuteness. However, this visibility is, in a certain sense, deceptive: it makes the trope seem an exceptional resource, when in reality it is the silent rule that organizes both language and image.

In the technical image, tropes do not disappear; they are transformed. They no longer present themselves as lexical substitutions, but as visual operations: framings that isolate, montages that approximate, cuts that produce meaning through juxtaposition. An advertisement that associates a watch with the idea of value not only uses a metaphor but also reconfigures the



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Revista Científica de Cultura e de Imagem
Nº 6 Ano III março/2026
ISSN 3085-7309

experience of time according to an economic logic. Cinematic montage, by placing images in sequence or in collision, does not add meaning to the given elements; it produces relationships that did not exist in immediate experience.

In this context, the trope ceases to be identifiable only as a nameable figure (metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche) and starts to operate as an organizing principle of the visible. Thus, it is not only what deviates meaning, but what makes it possible for something to be seen as something else. The trope, therefore, is the inflection point at which presence becomes signification.

Tropes, therefore, do not belong only to *logotic* language, since they cross all forms of image – material and immaterial –, as elementary operations of meaning. Before any broader interpretative system, before the structuring metaphor or the narrative allegory, there is the trope as a minimal gesture: the inflection by which the world ceases to be merely what shows itself and becomes what is understood.

If, in the *logotic* regime, tropes structured the constitutive deviation of meaning, in the

paramundo this deviation is no longer structured as a figure, but as indetermination.

Tropes, as defined here, will not be scaled into degrees, since they operate as the most elementary layer of signification – the minimal gesture by which something comes to be seen as something. Metaphor and allegory, in turn, constitute more complex modes of organization, in which this elementary gesture is articulated into structures of meaning that admit gradation. The trope is, thus, the condition of possibility of metaphor and allegory, but is not to be confused with them.

Metaphor

Metaphor (*μεταφορά* – transfer, transport) is not merely one trope among others; it is the point at which deviation organizes itself as a principle of intelligibility. If the trope indicates that meaning is not fixed, metaphor shows how this mobility can take form, direction, and cognitive power. It does not limit itself to substituting one term for another; it institutes a relationship in which an entire domain of the real comes to be understood in light of another.



IMAGENS EM FOCO

Revista Científica de Cultura e de Imagem
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In Aristotle's classical definition of, metaphor consists of "transferring to one thing a name that belongs to another." This transfer can be from genus to species, from species to genus, from species to species, or by analogy. What matters is not the formal mechanism, but the cognitive effect: metaphor makes us see similarities where only differences were seen before. Western thought has sometimes conceived of metaphor as ornament, sometimes as a mode of knowledge. The ancient rhetoricians included it among the tropes, but Aristotle himself noted that it was a "thing of genius," for only someone who knows how to see similarities can produce it.

In the 17th century, Emanuele Tesauro, in *Il cannocchiale aristotelico*, made metaphor the nucleus of wit (*acutezza*): it unites distant objects by means of "astute apprehensions," revealing the hidden unity of the real. For the Italian, metaphor does not invent relations; it discovers bonds already inscribed in creation. In 21st-century poetry, for example, metaphor reigned supreme. Tears that become pearls, the soul as a ship, life as a flame – each

metaphor is a flash that illuminates the secret correspondence between the sensible and the spiritual. But metaphor did not die with the Baroque.

The Aristotelian formulation, although precise, still describes the phenomenon only at the discursive level; the essential, however, is not in the transfer of the name, but in the reconfiguration of the gaze. Metaphor is not, first and foremost, a linguistic operation; it is a minimal ontological operation: it makes something be seen as something else.

When one says that "tears are pearls," that "the soul is a ship," or that "life is a flame," it is not merely a game of substitutions. What occurs is the establishment of a field of resemblance that simultaneously reorganizes the terms placed in relation.

In the first case, the tear acquires value, density, and shine; the pearl becomes an index of pain, interiority, and the secretion of suffering. In the second, the soul ceases to be thought of as an abstract substance and is understood as a crossing, exposure to risk, wandering between uncertain ports; the ship, in turn,



IMAGENS EM FOCO

Revista Científica de Cultura e de Imagem
Nº 6 Ano III março/2026
ISSN 3085-7309

ceases to be merely a vessel to become a figure of interiority in displacement, subject to the world's storms. In the third, life is not merely what one lives, but what burns, consumes, and illuminates; the flame, in turn, ceases to be a mere physical phenomenon and becomes an index of intensity, finitude, and continuous transformation.

In all these cases, metaphor does not connect previously given terms; it transforms them by placing them in relation; for each term, in mirroring the other, loses its initial stability and begins to participate in a common field, in which its properties mutually reconfigure themselves. Metaphor does not transport meaning from one place to another; it establishes a space in which both cease to be what they

were, in isolation, to become something else.

In this sense, metaphor does not arbitrarily create a relationship; it discovers it as a latent possibility. As Giambattista Vico observed, primitive human thought did not clearly distinguish between the literal and the figurative; it operated directly through images. Metaphor, in this way, far from being a late ornament, is an originary form of thought. In Friedrich Nietzsche², language as a whole is understood as a system of forgotten metaphors – sedimentations of relationships that lost their initial force and came to be taken as self-evident.

In modernity, authors such as George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980)³ have shown that metaphor structures not only language but

² The understanding of language as a system of sedimented metaphors finds its paradigmatic formulation in Friedrich Nietzsche, especially in his essay "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense" (*Über Wahrheit und Lüge im außermoralischen Sinne*, 1873). In this text, the author argues that what we call truth is nothing but a set of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms that, over time, have been forgotten as such and come to operate as self-evidence. The reference is mobilized here to reinforce the understanding of the non-originally literal character of language,

without implying full adherence to the epistemological consequences of his critique.

³ Although the perspective adopted here is not directly based on the works of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980), it is necessary to recognize that their formulation of metaphor as a structure of thought – especially in **Metaphors We Live By** – contributed decisively to displacing metaphor from the strictly rhetorical field to the cognitive domain. The mention of these authors is, therefore, punctual and illustrative, not implying full adherence to the theoretical framework of



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Revista Científica de Cultura e de Imagem
Nº 6 Ano III março/2026
ISSN 3085-7309

conceptual thought itself: we understand time as space, argument as war, life as a journey. Such metaphors are not stylistic choices; they are schemes that organize experience, and inhabit everyday language – “bed of roses,” “heart of stone” – modern poetry – “The moon is the mouth of those who die,” by Jorge de Lima – advertising – “The car that is an airplane” – and even technical language – “computer virus,” “social network.”

Metaphor, therefore, does not operate only at the level of the utterance; it crosses entire systems of meaning, which is why it admits degrees of complexity. At the first degree, it appears as a punctual substitution, perceptible as a figure; at the second, it extends through an utterance or set of utterances, organizing their intelligibility; at the third, it becomes a structuring principle of an entire symbolic system: no longer a figure, but a worldview.

Beyond these verbal examples, the scale of metaphor can be equally observed in the domains of photography and cinema, where

visual analogy operates according to the same logic of gradation.

First-degree metaphor (punctual substitution)

A first-degree metaphor is marked by a localized substitution, in which one term is placed in the place of another by analogy, without the field of meaning being reorganized as a whole. The deviation remains perceptible as a figure, and the utterance – verbal or visual – still allows us to distinguish between proper and figurative meaning.

When one says, for example, “the sea is furious,” fury, as a human predicate, is transferred to the sea, but this transfer does not dissolve the difference between the terms: the listener recognizes the figure as such and does not take it as a literal description.

The same principle can be observed in certain advertising images, where metaphor operates by punctual substitution. A photograph by a health insurance company that depicts a human heart composed of metallic gears does not intend to reorganize the

cognitive linguistics, but only the recognition of a partial convergence

regarding the structuring status of metaphor



IMAGENS EM FOCO

Revista Científica de Cultura e de Imagem
Nº 6 Ano III março/2026
ISSN 3085-7309

visible as a whole, but to introduce a localized inflection: the body is conceived as a machine; and life, as something that requires maintenance. The reading is immediate, supported by widely shared codes, and the viewer identifies the figurative operation without difficulty. Similarly, in Faisal Basudan's conceptual project, *Charge Your Energy | Red Bull* (2013), the can is figured as a battery, establishing a direct equivalence between consumption and energy (fig. 4). In both cases, the metaphor does not establish a system but acts on a precise point, leaving the general structure of the image intact.

This type of operation also appears in cinema. In *The Godfather* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1972), for example, in the scene where Michael Corleone prepares to kill Sollozzo and McCluskey, the growing noise of a train in the background erupts into the sound composition without any direct narrative function. It is a metaphor for the tension that accumulates and precipitates, something that advances irreversibly. Even so, this insertion does not reorganize the scene as a whole: it remains a localized element, recognizable as a

figure, which intensifies the moment without converting it into a symbolic system.

In literature, the same principle can be observed. When Machado de Assis, in *Dom Casmurro*, writes that “words were a way of hiding ideas,” it is not a metaphor that reorganizes the entire novel, but a punctual substitution that illuminates a single passage. The reader recognizes the figure, grasps its meaning, and moves on without altering the narrative's general regime. The metaphor affects a point, rather than the whole.

In lyric poetry, the first-degree metaphor appears as a localized flash. When Castro Alves, in “*Os escravos*” (The Slaves), writes “*E seus lábios derramem como pérolas / Dois nomes – filho e Deus*” [And let their lips pour forth like pearls / Two names – son and God], it is not a metaphor that reorganizes the entire poem, but a punctual substitution: the teeth are figured as pearls, and the mouth as the receptacle that holds them. The reader recognizes the image, grasps its brilliance, and moves on. The metaphor affects a point, even if that point can be dazzling. The same occurs in many haikus, where the sudden comparison between



IMAGENS EM FOCO

Revista Científica de Cultura e de Imagem
Nº 6 Ano III março/2026
ISSN 3085-7309

two distant terms resolves in a
single verse:

the dry leaf
floating in the pond
my heart
(traditional Japanese)

FIGURE 1



Charge Your Energy | Red Bull (conceptual project),
by Faisal Basudan, 2013

The strength lies in compression,
not extension.

Precisely this localization of
deviation defines the first-degree
metaphor: it does not demand an
interpretive journey, nor does it

impose a global reading key; on the
contrary, it offers itself as
immediate evidence, as a
discernible figure that inflects
meaning at a specific point, without
compromising the intelligibility of
the whole.



IMAGENS EM FOCO

Revista Científica de Cultura e de Imagem
Nº 6 Ano III março/2026
ISSN 3085-7309

Second-degree metaphor (organizing extension)

The second-degree metaphor is no longer limited to a punctual substitution; it extends through an utterance or a set of utterances, organizing their intelligibility. In this regime, it is not just one term that is displaced, but an entire field of relations that begins to structure the understanding of another.

When one says, for example, “life is a trip,” it is not an isolated equivalence, but the activation of a complete domain: roads, detours, stops, directions, destinations. Each of these elements contributes to organizing the experience of life, which comes to be thought of in light of this journey. The metaphor does not intervene at one point; it provides the principle of coherence for a broader discourse.

In the poetic tradition, the second-degree metaphor organizes the entire poem without, however, becoming an allegorical system. In “*L’Albatros*” (The Albatross), by Charles Baudelaire, the albatross – majestic bird in the sky, grotesque on the deck – is a metaphor for the poet: sublime in his element

(imagination), awkward and ridiculous among men. This metaphor does not remain in one verse; it extends throughout the composition:

*Le Poète est semblable au prince
des nuées
Qui hante la tempête et se rit de
l’archer;
Exilé sur le sol au milieu des
huées,
Ses ailes de géant l’empêchent de
marcher.*
(BAUDELAIRE, 1861)

[The Poet is like the prince of the clouds / Who haunts the tempest and laughs at the archer; / Exiled on the ground amidst the jeers, / His giant wings prevent him from walking.]

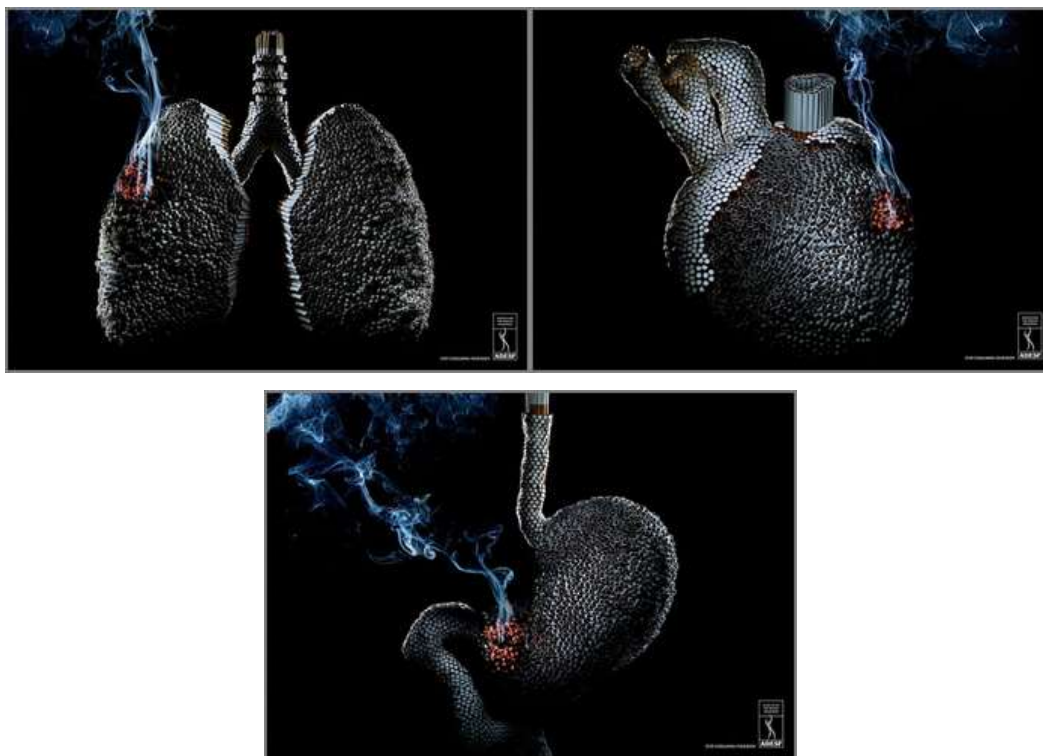
Every detail – the enormous wings dragging on the ground, the sailors’ scornful gestures – is understood in light of the same analogical relation. The poem does not say “the poet is like an albatross” in a single verse and then abandon the image; it unfolds it, without any element coming to signify an autonomous concept (which would be allegory).



IMAGENS EM FOCO

Revista Científica de Cultura e de Imagem
Nº 6 Ano III março/2026
ISSN 3085-7309

FIGURE 2



Anti-tobacco campaign created by the agency NeogamaBBH, 2008

In Castro Alves's "O Navio Negreiro" (The Slave Ship), the metaphor of the vessel as a "cathedral of crime" does not remain isolated: it unfolds throughout the poem, organizing the reader's understanding of the slave trade as a systematic profanation. Each element of the poem – the sails, the helm, the hold, the night at sea – is understood in light of this generative metaphor.

Something similar occurs in João Cabral de Melo Neto's *Morte e Vida Severina* (Severine Death and Life), when the *sertão* (hinterland) is figured as a "desert" and life as a "walk" that repeats from generation to generation. The metaphor is not confined to a single verse; it is the principle that organizes the intelligibility of the entire poem.

In Brazilian modernism, the same principle operates in Carlos



IMAGENS EM FOCO

Revista Científica de Cultura e de Imagem
Nº 6 Ano III março/2026
ISSN 3085-7309

Drummond de Andrade's
"Quadrilha" (country dance):

*João amava Teresa que amava
Raimundo
que amava Maria que amava
Joaquim que amava Lili
que não amava ninguém.
João foi para os Estados Unidos,
Teresa para o convento,
Raimundo morreu de desastre,
Maria ficou para tia,
Joaquim suicidou-se e Lili casou
com J. Pinto Fernandes
que não tinha entrado na
história.*
(DRUMMOND, 1930)

[João loved Teresa who loved Raimundo,/ who loved Maria, who loved Joaquim who loved Lili,/ who loved no one./ João went to the United States, Teresa to the convent,/ Raimundo died in an accident, Maria became an aunt;/ Joaquim committed suicide and Lili married J. Pinto Fernandes/ who hadn't entered the story.]

The metaphor of love as a circular dance (the square dance) organizes the entire poem. It is not a punctual substitution, but a field of relations that extends through all the verses. The reader does not decipher a code; he recognizes a pattern.

Something similar occurs in certain photographic and

advertising practices where the metaphor is not concentrated in a single image but is distributed across a series. Visual campaigns, such as those against smoking, are often organized round to the metaphor of the body as a collapsing machine: lungs are figured as industrial structures, as burnt surfaces, or as damaged devices, and the organism as a system in deterioration (fig. 5). It is not a punctual substitution, but the activation of a coherent field of correspondences, in which each image resumes and reinforces the same logic. The body ceases to be merely an organism and is understood as a functional system subject to failure.

In this type of construction, the metaphor is not confined to a single element but resides in the recurrence that runs through the images. Each variation reaffirms the same organizing principle, so that the viewer does not merely interpret a single figure, but recognizes a way of seeing that imposes itself on the whole. The metaphor appears not as a detail, but as a structure that sustains the intelligibility of the series.



IMAGENS EM FOCO

Revista Científica de Cultura e de Imagem

Nº 6

Ano III

março/2026

ISSN 3085-7309

FIGURE 3



Playing chess with death, scene from **The Seventh Seal**, Ingmar Bergman, 1957

This logic manifests with particular clarity in cinema, when the metaphor ceases to be a localized element and begins to organize the totality of the work. In **The Seventh Seal** (1957), by Ingmar Bergman, the relationship between the knight and Death is not reduced to the famous image of the chess game, but extends as a structuring principle of the entire film (fig. 6). The metaphor – life as a game against death – does not appear as an isolated figure, but as a matrix of intelligibility: the characters' movements are

configured as moves, the narrative time takes the form of a duration tense with confrontation, and the outcome is inscribed within the logic of checkmate.

Each episode – the procession of flagellants, the encounter with the young woman accused of witchcraft, the interaction with the itinerant actors – can be understood as a move on this existential chessboard. It is not a matter of a punctual correspondence but of a field of relationships that runs throughout the work, guiding the reading of its



IMAGENS EM FOCO

Revista Científica de Cultura e de Imagem
Nº 6 Ano III março/2026
ISSN 3085-7309

elements. Here, metaphor not only contributes to meaning; it organizes it, establishing the horizon within which each scene becomes intelligible.

It should be noted, however, that the film does not end under the sign of chess. In the famous final scene, Death leads the already-dead characters in a danse macabre up the hill – an image that directly references the medieval pictorial tradition of the danse macabre. Here, unlike chess, a first-degree allegory operates: Death pulling the king, the bishop, and the peasant in the same procession corresponds to a stable and recognizable code (death equalizes everyone)⁴.

The film, therefore, is not purely metaphorical. It organizes itself predominantly as a second-degree metaphor (chess), but concludes in an allegorical regime (fig. 4). This passage – from the game to the procession, from metaphor to allegory – does not invalidate the

film's classification, but reveals its internal tension: life is a game until the point it ceases to be, and what remains is a choreography that no longer asks for interpretation, but for recognition (fig. 5).

Third-degree metaphor (structuring principle of a symbolic system)

The third-degree metaphor no longer appears as a discernible figure nor as an organizing principle of a delimited utterance, but as the very mode of structuring an entire system of meaning. In this regime, it ceases to be perceived as a metaphor, for there is no longer an exterior from which the figurative can be contrasted with the literal. What once appeared as a deviation becomes the very ground of intelligibility. It is no longer a matter of asking “what does this mean?”, but of recognizing that it is only through this configuration can something mean.

⁴ The image of the danse macabre is not only a narrative closure but an intertextual reference that mobilizes a long tradition of Western visual culture. Bergman does not need to explain its meaning; the informed spectator recognizes the code, and this recognition

operates as a key that stabilizes interpretation. It is precisely this stability that characterizes first-degree allegory, in contrast to the second-degree metaphor of chess, which unfolds throughout the film.



IMAGENS EM FOCO

Revista Científica de Cultura e de Imagem
Nº 6 Ano III março/2026
ISSN 3085-7309

FIGURE 4



Danse Macabre, **The Seventh Seal**, Ingmar Bergman, 1957

This can be seen in certain philosophical formulations in which a conceptual image comes to organize an entire worldview. When one affirms that the world is a living organism, one is not faced with an isolated figure, or a rhetorical extension, but with the establishment of a paradigm in

which everything – stars, elements, human beings, cities – is understood as part of a unitary body. In this horizon, the distinction between the organic and the inorganic loses its force, and metaphor ceases to be perceived as such: it becomes the very condition from which the world is thought.



FIGURE 5



Danse Macabre, 16th century, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Something analogous occurs in certain contemporary configurations of the image, in which metaphor is no longer confined to an isolated photograph but spreads as a cultural logic. The practice of the selfie and the systematic use of filters on social networks not only produce images but also institute a regime in which life itself is lived in the form of its

visualization. Existence is not simply recorded; it is organized according to its exposure. In this context, the filter does not intervene in a pre-existing real; it participates in its very production, and the idea of a natural exterior to the image becomes increasingly unstable. The metaphor – life as an image to be produced – does not appear as a figure, but as a system



IMAGENS EM FOCO

Revista Científica de Cultura e de Imagem
Nº 6 Ano III março/2026
ISSN 3085-7309

in which each singular image is inscribed (fig. 6).

FIGURE 6



Selfie culture with digital filters: life is organized as an image; the filter does not alter the real, but constitutes it as such

In cinema, this regime manifests when metaphor ceases to structure only the narrative and instead establishes a world in which certain fundamental distinctions become inoperative. In **Blade Runner 2049** (2017), by Denis Villeneuve, the question of identity does not present itself as a theme,

but as a condition of the diegetic universe itself (fig. 7). The indistinction between human and replicant, between lived memory and implanted memory, and between original and copy, does not constitute a problem to be solved, but the regime within which everything becomes intelligible.



IMAGENS EM FOCO

Revista Científica de Cultura e de Imagem
Nº 6 Ano III março/2026
ISSN 3085-7309

The discovery that memories can be fabricated does not introduce a metaphor about identity; it dissolves the possibility of an external criterion that would

stabilize it. The film does not contain a metaphor – it operates as the very experience of a world in which the real can no longer be distinguished from simulation.

FIGURE 7



Scene from **Blade Runner 2049**, Denis Villeneuve, 2017

At this level, metaphor ceases to be an identifiable operation and becomes a structure. It does not organize only a discourse or a series of images, but sustains entire symbolic systems, in which the distinction between literal and figurative loses its operational force. There is no longer a point from which one can say that something is “merely” a metaphor, because it is precisely through it that meaning becomes possible.

That is why, in the scale we are about to propose, the third-degree

metaphor marks the upper limit of the *logotic* regime. Starting from connotation, it not only guides meaning but also stabilizes it in broad configurations capable of sustaining worldviews. However, this stabilization is never definitive. The unity that metaphor suggests remains tense, as it always depends on the relationship between terms that do not fully coincide. Metaphor does not eliminate difference; it sustains it in a state of approximation.



IMAGENS EM FOCO

Revista Científica de Cultura e de Imagem
Nº 6 Ano III março/2026
ISSN 3085-7309

It is from this tension that its power derives: seeing something as something else is, at once, recognizing and estranging, approaching and separating. Metaphor illuminates by establishing relationships, but it also disturbs by preventing them from fully settling. In this sense, it constitutes the point at which meaning intensifies to its maximum without yet unfolding into a continuous narrative system. Between the minimal inflection of tropes and the extended articulation of allegory, the third-degree metaphor presents itself as the moment when meaning organizes itself as a world, but a world that still retains, in its own structure, the mark of the instability that made it possible.

In poetry, the third-degree metaphor finds one of its most radical examples in Archibald MacLeish's "Ars Poetica," whose final verses are not a metaphor about poetry; rather, he establishes a regime in which the poem refers to nothing but itself:

A poem should be palpable and
[mute
As a globed fruit,
Dumb
As old medallions to the thumb,

[...]
A poem should not mean
But be.
(MACLEISH, 1926)

The poem does not contain a metaphor about the self-sufficiency of art; it is that self-sufficiency. The reader does not ask “what does this mean?” because the meaning lies on the surface of language, in the materiality of the verse. Metaphor, here, is not a discernible figure; it is the poem’s mode of existence.

In the Brazilian tradition, the third-degree metaphor reaches one of its highest moments in Manoel de Barros, particularly in *Livro sobre Nada* (Book about Nothing, 1996). The poet does not use metaphors to describe the world; he establishes a regime in which the distinctions between subject and object, between word and thing, and between reality and imagination become inoperative:

*Melhor que nomear é aludir.
Verso não precisa dar noção.
O que sustenta a encantação de
um verso (além do ritmo) é o
ilogismo.
[...]
Não gosto de palavra
acostumada.
A minha diferença é sempre
menos.*



IMAGENS EM FOCO

Revista Científica de Cultura e de Imagem
Nº 6 Ano III março/2026
ISSN 3085-7309

*Palavra poética tem que chegar
ao grau de brinquedo para ser
séria.*

*Não preciso do fim para chegar.
Do lugar onde estou já fui
embora.*

(BARROS, 1996)

[Better than naming is alluding. Verse does not need to give a notion./ What sustains the enchantment of a verse (besides rhythm) is/ illogic./...] I don't like accustomed words./ My difference is always less./ Poetic word must reach the degree of a toy to be serious./ I don't need the end to arrive./ From the place where I am I have already left.]

What is at stake here is not a metaphor about poetry, as in "poetry is a toy" (a first-degree metaphor). Rather, it is a regime in which the reader does not ask "what does this mean?" because meaning lies on the surface of language, in the materiality of the verse, in the very operation of disordering language. Here, metaphor is not a discernible figure; it is the poem's mode of existence. When Manoel de Barros states that "from the place where I am I have already left," he does not describe an experience; he

performs it in the very act of reading. In this sense, the third-degree metaphor is poetry at the limit of its own possibility.

The distinction between the third-degree metaphor and the first-degree allegory, however, deserves attention; for in both regimes, meaning organizes itself systematically. The difference lies not in the presence or absence of a system, but in the perceptibility of the operation. In the third-degree metaphor, the viewer does not perceive themselves before a figure: the metaphorical meaning has become the very ground of experience, leaving no literal exterior against which to contrast. In the first-degree allegory, by contrast, the operation is recognizable as such: the viewer knows that the parents who turn into pigs (in *Spirited Away*) mean something beyond the narrative. The third-degree metaphor is, in this sense, an allegory that has forgotten itself; or, more precisely, an allegory whose constructed character has become invisible.



TABLE III
The Scale of Metaphor

Degree of Metaphor	Mode of Operation	Structure of Meaning	Relation to the Visible	Examples
1 st degree (point substitution)	One term replaces another by analogy	Localized	The deviation is visible and identifiable as a figure	Brain represented as a light bulb; heart as a gear
2 nd degree (organizing extension)	A field of relations organizes the statement or series	Expanded	The visible is structured by a recurring metaphorical logic	Life as a journey; campaigns that treat the body as a machine
3 rd degree (structuring principle)	The metaphor becomes the very regime of meaning	Systemic	There is no exterior to the metaphorical; the visible is produced within it	Selfie culture with filters; identity as construction (<i>Blade Runner 2049</i>)

Source: Jack Brandão / 2026

Allegory

The word allegory derives from the Greek *ἀλληγορία* (*allegoría*), composed of *ἄλλος* (*állos* – other) and *ἀγορεύω* (*agoreúo* – to speak in public, to speak before). Thus, in its most literal sense, it is a discourse enunciated in one direction, while its meaning heads in another. However, this etymological definition, taken in isolation, is still insufficient.

What is at stake in allegory is not merely the punctual

substitution of one term for another, but the establishment of a discursive regime in which meaning is organized through unfolding. Unlike metaphor, which operates by transfer – taking one term to another domain – allegory keeps the different levels of meaning in tension, articulating them in an interpretable chain. It does not transport meaning; it distributes it.

In this way, allegory is not reducible to a figure, but



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Revista Científica de Cultura e de Imagem
Nº 6 Ano III março/2026
ISSN 3085-7309

constitutes a mode of saying that demands a journey. This journey is not merely temporal but interpretative: it implies a crossing between levels of meaning that cannot be reduced to one another. What is said is not exhausted in its literalness but continuously refers to another plane, which is constructed during reading. For this reason, it does not offer a flash of immediate recognition, like a metaphor, but a field of relations that unfolds over time. Meaning is not in one point, but in the journey between points; thus, to understand an allegory is to traverse it.

That is why, in the Western tradition, allegory has taken multiple forms. In Antiquity, it was often associated with the interpretation of myths and texts; in the Christian tradition, with the exegesis of Scripture. It presupposes not only a deviation but also the possibility of a system of correspondences, however unstable, that prevents its closure into a single interpretative key. Saying something else, here is not hiding a unique meaning, but establishing a space in which multiple readings become possible, albeit oriented.

In the Middle Ages, it became a mode of reading the world: each element of creation could be understood as a sign of a superior reality. In the 17th century, it reached one of its most intense moments, especially in Baroque culture, where image, word, and concept intertwine in complex devices of signification.

In this context, Walter Benjamin's reflection (1984) becomes decisive. For him, the Baroque allegory is not a degraded symbol, but a form of thought that exposes the fracture between the visible and meaning. Unlike the symbol, which aspires to an organic unity between form and content, allegory reveals distance, interval, ruin. It does not reconcile; it makes visible the impossibility of full reconciliation.

In allegory, meaning is not offered as an immediate presence, but as a mediated construction. Each element points to another, which in turn points to another, in a potentially infinite chain: there is no guarantee of closure. The interpreter does not discover a hidden meaning already given, for they must traverse a system constituted in the very act of interpretation.



IMAGENS EM FOCO

Revista Científica de Cultura e de Imagem
Nº 6 Ano III março/2026
ISSN 3085-7309

Allegory is, in this sense, an open hermeneutic machine, and it distinguishes itself from metaphor: not as an inferior or posterior form, but as another regime for organizing of meaning.

Like a metaphor, an allegory also admits degrees of complexity. At a first degree, it establishes relatively stable correspondences between image and concept: figures such as Justice, Death, or Fortune have attributes that guide reading. At a second degree, it unfolds into a narrative, demanding continuous monitoring of symbolic relations. At a third degree, it fragments, loses the transparency of its keys, and approaches the enigma: no longer a system to be deciphered, but a field in which interpretation becomes unstable.

The same gradation can be identified in examples drawn from the verbal tradition, photography, and cinema, where allegory moves from stable correspondence to opaque fragmentation.

First-degree allegory (stable correspondence)

In its first degree, allegory operates through relatively stable correspondences between elements and concepts, relying on a shared

repertoire that guides reading. The allegorical set presents itself as a decipherable system, in which the terms refer to recognizable meanings with little hermeneutic effort. There is, so to speak, an interpretative key available, even if not always explicit, that allows the reader or viewer to move between the planes of meaning with relative security.

This functioning can be observed in traditional forms of verbal narrative, such as fables. In “The Cicada and the Ant,” attributed to Aesop, the figures of the two animals are not exhausted in their narrative dimension but correspond to clearly delineated ways of life: on one side, carelessness and improvidence; on the other, work and anticipation. The moral that follows not only guides interpretation but also stabilizes it, reducing the margin of ambiguity. Allegory, in this case, functions as a consolidated code, whose deciphering is practically immediate.

An analogous functioning can be identified in certain political images, where allegory is structured as a shared visual language. In Soviet propaganda posters from the Stalinist period



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Revista Científica de Cultura e de Imagem
Nº 6 Ano III março/2026
ISSN 3085-7309

(fig. 11), the figure of the worker, associated with the hammer, and the peasant woman, associated with the sickle, directly refer to the alliance between industry and the countryside. The luminous horizon, the aligned bodies, the confident gesture, and frequently, the presence of Joseph Stalin in the background form a system of stable

correspondences: radiant future, collectivity, leadership. Each element finds its conceptual correlate without resistance, and the spectator recognizes, more than interprets, the allegorical structure in operation. The image does not demand deciphering; it offers itself as an already oriented reading.

FIGURE 8



Soviet propaganda poster (USSR), 1950s, first-degree allegory, in which each visual element refers to a clearly codified political meaning⁵

⁵ Top text: "Союз Советских Социалистических Республик есть социалистическое государство рабочих и крестьян" (The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics is a socialist state



IMAGENS EM FOCO

Revista Científica de Cultura e de Imagem
Nº 6 Ano III março/2026
ISSN 3085-7309

This type of organization also appears in cinema. In Hayao Miyazaki's *Spirited Away* (2001), the spirit world functions as an allegory of labor and consumption. The parents' transformation into pigs, overeating establishes a direct correspondence between excess and degradation (fig. 12); the bathhouse, with its hierarchies and rules, figures a labor regime

that entails the loss of name and identity; the character No-Face embodies unlimited consumption that yields not satisfaction, but empty repetition. Although the film has multiple levels of reading, these correspondences remain sufficiently stable to guide the spectator, offering an accessible interpretive key that organizes the whole without exhausting it.

FIGURE 9



Scene from the film **Spirited Away**, Hayao Miyazaki, 2001, first-degree allegory, structured by recognizable correspondences between characters and concepts

of workers and peasants); bottom text: "ПАРТИИ ДЕЛО, ЦЕЛЬ НАШЕЙ ЖИЗНИ – БЛАГО НАРОДА, КРЕПОСТЬ ОТЧИЗНЫ!" (The cause of the Party, the goal of our life – the good of the people, the fortress of the fatherland!).



IMAGENS EM FOCO

Revista Científica de Cultura e de Imagem
Nº 6 Ano III março/2026
ISSN 3085-7309

In Western literature, first-degree allegory finds its most crystallized form in fables and moral tales. La Fontaine's *Fables*, for example, rely on stable correspondences: the cicada is improvidence, the ant is work, the wolf is brute force, the lamb is defenseless innocence. The reader does not need to decipher an enigma; they immediately recognize the code. The moral that concludes each fable does not add an interpretation; it merely makes explicit what the allegorical structure itself had already made evident. That is why these narratives can be read by children and adults alike: the interpretative key is available to all who share the cultural repertoire.

In poetry, first-degree allegory appears in poems that personify concepts in a stable, recognizable way. In Charles Baudelaire's "Correspondences," nature is presented as a temple where sounds, perfumes, and colors correspond – an allegory that organizes the entire work:

*La Nature est un temple où de vivants piliers
Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles;
L'homme y passe à travers des*

*forêts de symboles
Qui l'observent avec des regards
familiers.*
(BAUDELAIRE, 1857)

[Nature is a temple where living pillars / Sometimes let out confused words; / Man passes through forests of symbols / That observe him with familiar glances.]

Each element (the man passing through the forest of symbols, the perfumes that are "fresh as children's bodies," the sounds that "are translated") offers an available interpretive key: the sensible world is a sign of the spiritual world. The reader recognizes, more than deciphers, the allegorical structure at work.

In Brazilian poetry, the same occurs in Olavo Bilac's "*Profissão de Fé*" (Profession of Faith), in which poetry is figured as a goldsmith working with gold and gems:

*Invejo o ourives quando escrevo:
Imito o amor
Com que ele, em ouro, o alto relevo
Faz de uma flor.
Imito-o. E, pois, nem de Carrara
A pedra firo:
O alvo cristal, a pedra rara,
O ônix prefiro.
[...]*



IMAGENS EM FOCO

Revista Científica de Cultura e de Imagem
Nº 6 Ano III março/2026
ISSN 3085-7309

*Corre; desenha, enfeita a
imagem,
A ideia veste:
Cinge-lhe ao corpo a ampla
roupagem
Azul-celeste.
Torce, aprimora, alteia, lima
A frase; e, enfim,
No verso de ouro engasta a rima,
Como um rubim.
(BILAC, 2002)*

[I envy the goldsmith when I write:/ I imitate the love/ With which he, in gold, the high relief/ Makes of a flower./ I imitate him. And so, neither of Carrara/ The stone I strike:/ The white crystal, the rare stone,/ The onyx I prefer./ [...] Run; draw, adorn the image,/ Clothe the idea:/ Wrap around its body the ample robe Sky-blue./ Twist, refine, raise, file/ The phrase; and, finally,/ In the golden verse set the rhyme,/ Like a ruby.]

The correspondence is stable: the artisan is the poet, gold is the word, the workshop is creation. The reader does not need a long interpretive journey; the code is visible, organizing the poem from end to end.

At this level, allegory remains a legible system, in which the relationship between image and concept, although mediated, does not become opaque. Meaning is distributed throughout the elements, but its articulation

remains recognizable, sustained by shared cultural codes. It is an allegory that does not demand extensive deciphering, but recognition: a form in which the interpretive journey is, to a great extent, already traced.

Second-degree allegory (narrative unfolding)

In its second degree, allegory is no longer confined to a set of stable correspondences but unfolds as a narrative structure that demands sustained attention. Meaning is not fixed at a single point but emerges from the relationships among elements throughout the journey. The interpretive key does not present itself immediately; it is constructed progressively, as the reader or viewer traverses the concatenation of parts.

This functioning becomes particularly evident in major allegorical literary works. In Dante Alighieri's **Divine Comedy**, the journey through Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise unfolds on multiple levels: as a travel narrative, a moral journey of purification, and a politico-theological reflection on the order of the world. The figures who accompany the poet, Virgil and Beatrice, cannot be reduced to



IMAGENS EM FOCO

Revista Científica de Cultura e de Imagem
Nº 6 Ano III março/2026
ISSN 3085-7309

univocal correspondences: they are, at the same time, historical figures and conceptual instances. Meaning is not offered as a single key but is constructed along the journey, demanding memory, continuity, and interpretation.

A similar logic appears in certain photographic series in which allegory is constituted by montage and sequence. In Robert Frank's *The Americans* (1958), the aim is not to establish direct equivalences between images and concepts, but to produce a field of meaning that emerges from the articulation of photographs. Flags, roads, faces, interiors, everyday rituals – each image, in isolation, remains open; together, they compose a vision of the United States marked by social tensions, loneliness, and inequality (fig. 13). The meaning is not in a specific photograph, but in the rhythm of the succession, in the juxtapositions and intervals established between them. The allegory is not enunciated; it reveals itself in the course of the gaze.

This form of organization also manifests itself in cinema when the narrative structures itself as a progressive investigation. In Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* (1941), the

search for the meaning of “Rosebud” does not lead to a definitive key, but to a multiplicity of fragmentary perspectives. Each testimony adds a layer, without ever totalizing the figure of Charles Foster Kane. Although the film offers a literal answer at the end – the childhood sled – this revelation does not resolve the enigma but highlights its insufficiency. Life cannot be reduced to a single sign, for meaning is constituted in the journey through fragments. Allegory, here, is not in an isolated symbol, but in the very narrative structure that demands from the spectator a continuous work of reconstruction.

Modern literature, however, complicates this regime. In João Guimarães Rosa's *Grande sertão: veredas* (The Devil to Pay in the Backlands), allegory is not reduced to stable correspondences. The *sertão* (backlands) is not merely the world, nor is Riobaldo merely the human soul. The *jagunço's* journey does not refer to a single concept, but to multiple overlapping planes: existential, theological, linguistic, and political. The reader does not receive a key at the beginning of the novel; they construct it along the way through the text, as



IMAGENS EM FOCO

Revista Científica de Cultura e de Imagem
Nº 6 Ano III março/2026
ISSN 3085-7309

Riobaldo narrates, hesitates, contradicts himself, and begins again. Allegory, here, is not a code to be deciphered, but a journey to

be undertaken. Meaning emerges from the narrative unfolding, not from a punctual correspondence.

FIGURE 10



Funeral, St Helena, South Carolina*. Robert Frank, 1958, an image from **The Americans**, in which allegorical meaning emerges from the sequence and montage, not from an isolated correspondence

In poetry, second-degree allegory demands a journey. In William Butler Yeats's "The Second Coming," the image of the "falcon that cannot hear the falconer" does not refer to a single concept but unfolds throughout the poem into a vision of the collapse of Western civilization:

Turning and turning in the
widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the
falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre
cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the
world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed,
and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is



IMAGENS EM FOCO

Revista Científica de Cultura e de Imagem
Nº 6 Ano III março/2026
ISSN 3085-7309

drowned;
The best lack all conviction,
while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.
(YEATS, 1920)

The falcon's gyre, anarchy loosed upon the world, the "beast that slouches towards Bethlehem" – each element is not an isolated key but part of a system of relations that reveals itself only through the journey through the text. The reader does not receive a fixed correspondence; they build it as they advance. Allegory, here, is not a code, but a temporal experience of accumulation and discovery.

João Cabral de Melo Neto's poem "*O Cão sem Plumás*" (The Dog without Feathers) operates in a similar regime:

*Ali o mar é uma lagoa
ali o mar é uma lagoa
que não encontra o céu
porque o céu é muito baixo
e o mar é muito baixo
e o mar não se atreve a subir...*
(MELO NETO, 1956)

[There the sea is a lagoon/ there the sea is a lagoon/ that does not meet the sky/ because the sky is very low/ and the sea is very low/ and the sea dares not rise...]

The Capibaribe River is not just a river, nor merely the miserable life of the Northeast; it is an allegory that unfolds in multiple layers – geographical, social, existential – without ever settling on a single key. The reader traverses the poem as one traverses the river itself: on a journey.

At this level, allegory ceases to be an immediate reading code and becomes a device that organizes meaning over time. It demands a journey, memory, and articulation, displacing interpretation from a punctual gesture to a continuous experience. What is understood is not a fixed meaning, but a network of relations that constructs itself in the very act of traversing.

Third-degree allegory (fragmentation, opacity, proximity to the enigma)

In its third degree, allegory no longer offers a stable key nor a system of correspondences capable of closure. Relations become multiple, sometimes conflicting, and the allegorical device itself begins to expose the limits of interpretation. Meaning does not fix itself, nor does it allow itself to be totalized; it shifts, fragments, and sometimes retracts. This is the



IMAGENS EM FOCO

Revista Científica de Cultura e de Imagem
Nº 6 Ano III março/2026
ISSN 3085-7309

point at which allegory touches the margins of meaning and begins to give way to the enigma.

This condition manifests with particular intensity in certain literary works where the allegorical structure remains active yet refuses to stabilize. In Franz Kafka's texts, such as **The Trial** or **The Judgment**, everything seems to refer to something else – the court, the law, guilt, condemnation – yet none of these instances can be fixed by a single interpretive key. Possible readings multiply (critique of bureaucracy, negative theology, existential parable), but none imposes itself as definitive. Allegory does not point to a hidden meaning to be discovered but establishes a field in which meaning itself remains suspended. The interpretive journey does not lead to a solution but to an intensification of indeterminacy.

Third-degree allegory in literature reaches its limit in works that refuse any hermeneutic stabilization. In Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, the labyrinthine library, the poisoned manuscripts, and the dispute over Aristotle's laughter form an allegorical system that offers itself

to interpretation but, at each attempt at closure, unfolds into new layers. The novel is at once a detective novel, a reflection on interpretation, a critique of truth, and an allegory of reading. None of these keys exhausts the work. Eco, one of the greatest theorists of interpretation, constructed a mechanism that produces meaning precisely by exposing the limits of any definitive interpretation. Allegory, here, does not lead to a hidden truth; it establishes a field in which the very act of interpreting becomes the theme.

In modern poetry, third-degree allegory reaches its limit in works that refuse any hermeneutic stabilization. In T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land":

April is the cruellest month,
breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land,
mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.
Winter kept us warm, covering
Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
A little life with dried tubers.
[...]
What are the roots that clutch,
what branches grow
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of
man,
You cannot say, or guess, for
you know only



IMAGENS EM FOCO

Revista Científica de Cultura e de Imagem
Nº 6 Ano III março/2026
ISSN 3085-7309

A heap of broken images, where
the sun beats,
And the dead tree gives no
shelter, the cricket no relief,
And the dry stone no sound of
water.
(ELIOT, 1922)

The quotations, the voices, the fragments of myth and literature form an allegorical system that invites interpretation, yet at each attempt at closure, it unfolds into new layers. The poem is at once an elegy for post-war Europe, a meditation on spiritual sterility, a palimpsest of quotations, and an allegory of reading itself. None of these keys exhausts the work. Eliot constructed a mechanism that produces meaning precisely by exposing the limits of any definitive interpretation. Allegory, here, does not lead to a hidden truth but establishes a field in which the very act of interpreting becomes the theme.

In Brazilian poetry, something analogous occurs in Carlos Drummond de Andrade's "A máquina do mundo" (The World Machine):

*E eu me preparei para entrar na
[máquina
que se abria diante de mim,
[como um sonho
de pura pedra e puro espaço, e
[nela
penetrei sem espanto,
[caminhando
sobre estranhos fulgores que
[desciam
do teto ao chão, e do chão ao
teto, em ondas...
(ANDRADE, 1951)*

[And I prepared myself to enter the machine/ that opened before me,/ like a dream/ of pure stone and pure space, and into it/I penetrated without astonishment,/ walking/over strange gleams that descended/from ceiling to floor, and from floor to ceiling, in waves...]

The "object" that offers itself to the traveler's gaze is so dense and multifaceted that any allegorical reading is frustrated, not because the poem is hermetic, but because its openness is structural. The reader does not decipher; they traverse, without ever reaching a final term.



IMAGENS EM FOCO

Revista Científica de Cultura e de Imagem
Nº 6 Ano III março/2026
ISSN 3085-7309

FIGURE 11



A Sudden Gust of Wind (after Hokusai), Jeff Wall, 1993

A similar logic appears in certain contemporary images that operate at the boundary between construction and opacity. In Jeff Wall's *A Sudden Gust of Wind (after Hokusai)* (1993), the meticulously staged scene oscillates between documenting everyday life and explicitly citing of the pictorial tradition. Flying papers, interrupted gestures, invisible forces crossing space: everything suggests a possible field of relations between photography and painting, between instant and duration, and between banality and composition (fig. 11). However, none of these readings stabilizes as

a key. The image remains a dense surface, that welcomes interpretive projections without being exhausted by them. Allegory does not disappear; it becomes undecidable.

In cinema, this instability becomes radical when the narrative structure itself no longer sustains verifiable coherence. In Alain Resnais's *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961), the repetition of scenes, the variation of details, and the inconsistency of time and space prevent any conclusive interpretation. The relationship between the characters – encounter, memory, invention –



IMAGENS EM FOCO

Revista Científica de Cultura e de Imagem
Nº 6 Ano III março/2026
ISSN 3085-7309

does not resolve but reconfigures itself with each return. The film admits multiple possible readings but validates none as definitive. Allegory no longer organizes an

interpretable system; it functions as a machine that produces interpretations without ever fixing on any one of them. At its limit, it approaches the enigma (fig. 15).

FIGURE 12



Last Year at Marienbad, Alain Resnais, 1961

“Endless corridors succeed endless corridors”: the interminable passage through the hotel, before reaching the theater – the threshold between what was, what might have been, and what never happened

It should be noted that third-degree allegory does not operate identically across different media. In cinema, its instability can rely on temporal repetition and mnemonic variation (as in Resnais); in photography, by contrast, it concentrates on a single frame, which must alone sustain the tension between possible meaning and refused meaning (fig. 14). Jeff Wall’s work exemplifies of

this second type: the fixed image must carry, on its surface, all the power of the undecidable, without the aid of narrative unfolding. This difference in temporal regime does not invalidate the common classification as third-degree allegory but qualifies its conditions of emergence.

At this level, allegory ceases to operate as a code or structured narrative and becomes a field of



IMAGENS EM FOCO

Revista Científica de Cultura e de Imagem
Nº 6 Ano III março/2026
ISSN 3085-7309

tensions in which meaning does not present itself as given but as a problem. It is no longer a matter of deciphering, but of sustaining the relation with that which resists deciphering. Interpretation no longer guarantees meaning; it merely accompanies it in its movement. Allegory, here, does not lead to a key but exposes the impossibility of its closure.

Thus, within our scale, allegory moves from stable correspondence to narrative unfolding, and finally to structural opacity. The more it complexifies, the closer it approaches its own limit: a point at which meaning can no longer be stabilized, but yet does not disappear. It persists as tension.

Between the trope, as minimal inflection, and metaphor, as analogical organization, allegory appears, therefore, as the regime in

which meaning constructs itself over time. It does not offer itself to the gaze all at once; it demands a journey, memory, and interpretation. More than saying something else, it makes meaning produce itself as a journey; and, at its limit, as instability.

The degrees described here refer to the structural potential of the work – the operations it makes possible and the modes of reading it summons – not to the empirical reception of each spectator. A third-degree allegory can be read as a first-degree allegory by an inattentive spectator; conversely, a first-degree metaphor can be overinterpreted as an allegory. What is at stake in the scale is the architecture of meaning that the work makes available, not the use that is made of it.

TABLE IV
The Scale of Allegory

Degree of Allegory	Mode of Operation	Structure of Meaning	Relation to the Visible / Narrative	Examples
1 st degree (stable correspondence)	Elements refer to concepts in a	Stable and codified	Meaning is recognizable;	<i>Aesop's Fables</i> ; Soviet



IMAGENS EM FOCO

Revista Científica de Cultura e de Imagem
Nº 6 Ano III março/2026
ISSN 3085-7309

Degree of Allegory	Mode of Operation	Structure of Meaning	Relation to the Visible / Narrative	Examples
	relatively fixed manner		there is a shared interpretive key	propaganda; <i>Spirited Away</i>
2 nd degree (narrative unfolding)	Meaning is constructed a sequence or trajectory	Expanded and progressive	Meaning emerges from the relation between parts; requires memory and continuity	<i>The Divine Comedy; The Americans</i> (Robert Frank); <i>Citizen Kane</i>
3 rd degree (fragmentation / opacity)	Correspondences become unstable or undecidable	Unstable and open	There is no definitive key; interpretation remains in tension	Franz Kafka; Jeff Wall; <i>Last Year at Marienbad</i>

Source: Jack Brandão / 2026

Articulation with the First Two Domains of the Quadripartite Model

The quadripartite model we propose distinguishes four domains of the image: the material (*εἰκόν*), the immaterial (*εἰδωλον*), the *epiplastic* (generated by AI), and the holographic. The first two – material and immaterial – remain within the regime of representation. In them, the question of meaning is not only present but structuring. It is in this field that denotation, connotation, tropes, metaphor, and allegory are inscribed.

The material image (painting, photography, sculpture) constitutes the domain of visible denotation: it shows what there is; but, in showing, it also connotes. The figure presents itself as evidence – “this is” – and, at the same time, opens itself to interpretation. Tropes operate in this space as inflections of the visible: not only as identifiable figures, but as modes of perceptual organization. The sculpted tear does not merely represent pain; it condenses it. The gesture of the body does not merely indicate a state; it makes it visible through



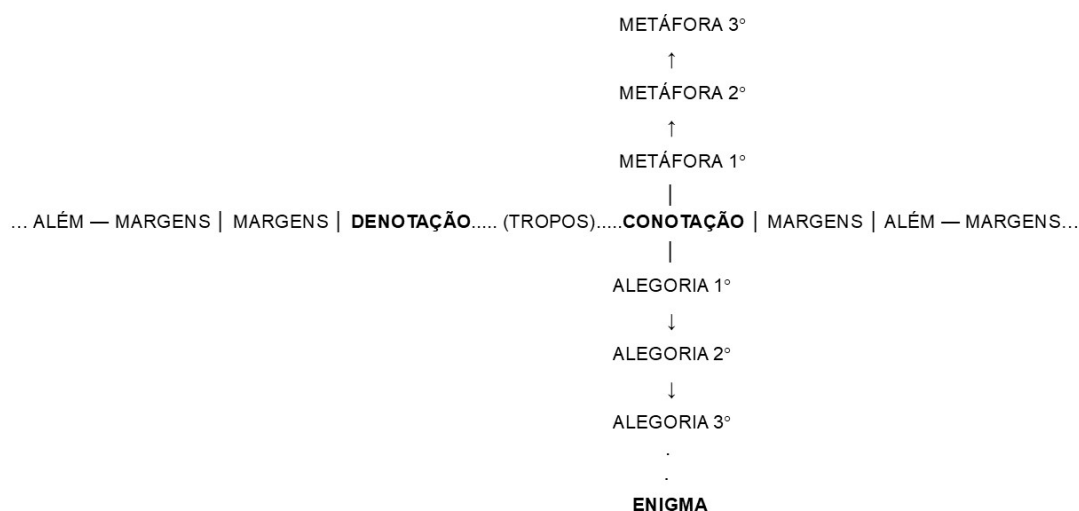
IMAGENS EM FOCO

Revista Científica de Cultura e de Imagem
Nº 6 Ano III março/2026
ISSN 3085-7309

displacement. What is seen, therefore, is never merely what is

given, but rather what is organized as visible through these operations.

ESCALA DE BRANDÃO



The immaterial image (dream, fantasy, thought) is, in turn, the domain where connotation predominates. In it, denotative fixation unravels: there is no support, no “this is” that stabilizes meaning. Oneiric images do not represent; they associate, condense, and displace. In this regime, tropes can no longer be isolated as figures, for they become the very mode of the image’s functioning. Metaphor emerges as an immediate fusion; allegory, as a fluid chain; meaning does not fix itself but transforms continuously. If, in the material image, the trope

operates on the visible, here it coincides with the very process of image formation.

It is in these two domains – material and immaterial – that meaning organizes itself according to what we call the Brandão Scale⁶, that is, a dynamic model that describes not levels, but directions of the operation of meaning.

Why does metaphor ascend while allegory descends?

The directionality of the scale is not arbitrary. It stems from the very nature of the operations that



IMAGENS EM FOCO

Revista Científica de Cultura e de Imagem
Nº 6 Ano III março/2026
ISSN 3085-7309

each figure performs on the field of connotation.

Metaphor is **ascending** because it tends toward **unification**. Starting from connotative dispersion – where multiple meanings coexist without hierarchy – metaphor selects, approximates, and condenses. It makes two distinct domains (for example, “life” and “journey”) appear as one. The more extensive and structured the metaphor, the closer it approaches a unified worldview, in which the distinction between literal and figurative language fades. This movement toward unity is perceived as an ascent, from connotative plurality to a synthesizing analogy – from the multiple to the one.

Allegory is **descending** because it tends toward **articulation**. Starting from the same connotative field, allegory does not condense; it unfolds. It keeps the domains separate (the literal and the figurative) and builds a system of correspondences between them that demands a journey. The more complex the allegory, the more layers are added and the more meaning is distributed across a narrative or a set of elements. This movement toward differentiation is

perceived as a **descent**, from the potential unity of connotation to the organized multiplicity of the system – from the one to the multiple.

In summary: metaphor **ascends** toward analogy (condensation, unification, overcoming difference); allegory **descends** toward narrative (distribution, articulation, exposition of difference). Both start from connotation – the common source of meaning in movement – but follow opposite directions because they respond to two equally fundamental needs of human intelligibility: the need **to gather** (metaphor) and the need **to traverse** (allegory).

The term trope is used here in a sense distinct from that of classical rhetoric: it does not designate a set of figures, but the fundamental operation by which meaning becomes possible. In this sense, metaphor and allegory – traditionally classified as tropes – are not treated here as parts of that set, but as modes of organizing of the tropological field.

Denotation and connotation do not constitute separate levels, but poles of the same field. The vertical bars indicate that this field is not



IMAGENS EM FOCO

Revista Científica de Cultura e de Imagem
Nº 6 Ano III março/2026
ISSN 3085-7309

continuous and homogeneous, but crossed by zones of tension and transition. The ellipses indicate that, at its extremes, the model reaches its own limits, opening itself to what can no longer be fully inscribed within the regime of signification.

Starting from connotation – and not from an intermediate point – meaning organizes itself in two opposite directions. In the ascending movement, metaphor structures the field by analogy, condensing dispersed relations into forms of intelligibility. In the descending movement, allegory unfolds these relations into interpretable systems, distributing meaning in sequence and duration. Both start from the same field of possibility, but operate according to distinct logics: one tends toward unification; the other, toward articulation.

The Brandão Scale should therefore not be understood as a universal model of the image, but as a description of how meaning functions within the representational regime. It applies to domains where the image still refers to something, that is, to the material and immaterial domains.

In the emerging domains – the *epiplastic* image and the holographic image – this logic begins to transform. The AI-generated image derives its meaning not from direct perceptual experience, but from probabilistic operations. The holographic image, in turn, does not represent an absent object but makes a visual and luminous presence appear in space. In both cases, the denotation-connotation axis ceases to fully structure experience.

At this point, the Scale reaches its margins. Beyond them, it is no longer a matter of interpreting, but of facing another regime: one in which the image is no longer primarily organized as language, but as presence. At this point, the logotic-regime reaches its limit – and the image begins to escape the regime of signification, opening itself to what we will call the margins and the *paramundo*.

Margins and Beyond-Margins: The Limit of Understanding and the *Paramundo*

All the movement described so far – from denotation to connotation, from tropes to metaphor and allegory, from punctual figure to totalizing



IMAGENS EM FOCO

Revista Científica de Cultura e de Imagem
Nº 6 Ano III março/2026
ISSN 3085-7309

structure – remains inscribed within the same regime: the regime of meaning. It is a field in which the image, however multiple and unstable, continues to operate as language, that is, as that which refers to something else. However, there is an internal limit to this field: the margins.

The margin is not an exterior to meaning, but the point at which meaning is stretched to the point of fraying. It is the place where signification does not disappear but becomes precarious; where interpretation does not cease, but no longer guarantees itself, and meaning vacillates between saturation and silence.

At the margin, the image still signifies, but no longer assures what it signifies. The bond between the visible and the intelligible becomes unstable, and the interpreter realizes that their keys are no longer sufficient. It is the domain of third-degree allegories, of resistant emblems, of forms that can no longer be reduced to a stable system of correspondences. The margin is, thus, the point at which the logotic regime reveals its own finitude.

It is also at this threshold that what remained hidden within the

system becomes visible: the fact that meaning was never fully guaranteed, but only sustained by interpretative operations. At the margin, this sustenance wavers; meaning does not disappear, but retracts.

Beyond the margin – not as its continuation, but as its rupture – the *paramundo* begins. It is neither an illusory world, nor a simple extension of the previous regime, but a transformation of its own logic. What changes is not the content of the image, but its mode of appearing.

In the *paramundo*, the image is no longer primarily organized as representation; it no longer refers but imposes itself as presence. The question ceases to be “what does this mean?” and becomes “how does this present itself to the gaze?” Denotation and connotation, tropes, metaphor, and allegory – all the operations that structured the field of meaning – become insufficient to account for the experience.

It is not that meaning disappears, but that it ceases to be the organizing principle of the image. What imposes itself now is presence as such: the image does



IMAGENS EM FOCO

Revista Científica de Cultura e de Imagem
Nº 6 Ano III março/2026
ISSN 3085-7309

not speak; it presents itself; it does not signify; it appears.

It is in this beyond of the margins that the two emerging domains of the quadripartite model are situated: the *epiplastic* image and the holographic image. The former operates as a calculated presence: it does not result from the direct incidence of the real on a support, but from algorithmic operations that produce visibility from probabilities. The latter operates as a luminous presence: it does not refer to an absent object, but makes a visible volume appear in space, even if irreducible to touch.

In both cases, the image is no longer fully inscribed in the regime of signification. One does not ask, before an AI-generated image, “what did it mean to say?”, because there is no *a priori* original intention to be recovered. One does not ask, before a holographic image, “what does it represent?” – because it does not represent; it projects. The *paramundo* is not the place of interpretation, but of presence.

The passage from world to *paramundo* does not eliminate meaning; it displaces it. What was once organized as language begins

to operate as an environment. The image ceases to be a means and becomes, itself, a mode of presence.

The Enigma

There is a point, in the movement of meaning, where interpretation does not advance, not because of the interpreter’s insufficiency, but because the image itself retracts. This point is the enigma, which should not be confused with the obscure, which can still be clarified.

The enigma is that which resists the very logic of clarification. It does not hide a meaning awaiting deciphering, but institutes a regime in which concealment is constitutive. Unlike allegory, which, even when complex, still presupposes the possibility of an interpretive key, the enigma suspends this possibility, for there is no guarantee of resolution. If there is a key, it is unstable; or, if there is meaning, it does not fix itself. The enigma, in this way, is not a stage of understanding; it is its limit.

In the Western tradition, the enigma has always occupied a liminal place. In oracles, its ambiguity was not a flaw, but a strategy: the god did not give



IMAGENS EM FOCO

Revista Científica de Cultura e de Imagem
Nº 6 Ano III março/2026
ISSN 3085-7309

himself entirely. In the Sphinx, the enigma was not only a question, but a test, and failure implied death. Thus, the enigma does not inform; it selects.

In the 17th century, it was cultivated as a form of wit: emblems, word games, and visual compositions challenged the reader, but still presupposed a solution. The modern enigma, however, radicalizes this condition. When the image no longer guarantees a key, the enigma ceases to be a problem to be solved and becomes a structure.

In contemporary images, for example, this condition reaches a new degree. A photograph showing a body without identity is not merely a record; it becomes a question without an answer. An AI-generated image – simulating a non-existent face – is not merely a representation; it is an ontological undecidability: did what we see exist? Could it have existed? And this is decisive: we do not know.

The enigma inhabits the margins, because it is there that meaning becomes unstable, but beyond the margins – in the *paramundo* – it ceases to be a problem of interpretation and

becomes a condition of the image itself.

The *epiplastic* image is enigmatic because its origin is not perceptual, but statistical. The holographic image, in turn, is enigmatic because its presence does not imply substance. In both cases, the enigma is not an obstacle to be overcome, but the mode in which the image offers itself.

What is revealed, then, is that the enigma is not a defect of meaning but its frontier; hence, the Scale indicates this through ellipses. And, in the *paramundo*, this frontier ceases to separate the two regimes and becomes the very mode of the image's appearing.

If, at the beginning, the image presented itself as a sign – that is, as that which refers to something else – at the end of the journey it reveals itself as presence, as that which appears without a guarantee of translation. Between one point and another, meaning does not disappear but transforms itself: it stabilizes in denotation, expands in connotation, organizes itself in metaphor, unfolds in allegory, becomes tense at the margins, and finally gives way to a regime in which it no longer structures experience. What iconophotology



IMAGENS EM FOCO

Revista Científica de Cultura e de Imagem
Nº 6 Ano III março/2026
ISSN 3085-7309

allows us to glimpse is precisely this passage: not from the image to meaning, but from the image to its own mode of appearing.

Final Considerations

Throughout this article, we have traced an arc that begins with the founding distinction between denotation and connotation – not as separate levels, but as constitutive tensions within the field of meaning – and reaches the threshold at which the image is no longer primarily organized as language but as presence. This journey is neither linear nor teleological. It describes a dynamic: the oscillation between fixation and dispersion, between provisional stabilization and interpretative expansion, between the minimal gesture of the trope and the systematic organization of metaphor and allegory.

The Brandão Scale, presented and exemplified throughout the previous sections, does not intend to replace existing semiotic or rhetorical theories. Its purpose is more modest and, at the same time, more radical: to offer a dynamic model that describes directions of the operation of meaning – ascending (metaphor) and

descending (allegory) – starting from the same field of possibility, connotation. Metaphor condenses, unifies, and makes us see similarities where only differences were seen before. Allegory unfolds, articulates, and constructs paths in which meaning emerges from the relationship between parts, not from an arrival point. Both are legitimate. Both are necessary. Both respond to two equally fundamental needs of human intelligibility: to gather and to traverse.

The examples – from Aesop's fables to Resnais's cinema, from advertising photography to the poetry of Manoel de Barros, from Soviet propaganda to selfie culture – are not mere illustrations. They demonstrate that the scale is not an empty abstraction, but an operational tool. The reader who understands the difference between a first-degree metaphor (punctual substitution) and a third-degree metaphor (structuring principle of a symbolic system) not only classifies images: they learn to see in them different regimes of the organization of meaning. Likewise, the one who distinguishes a first-degree allegory (stable correspondence) from a third-



IMAGENS EM FOCO

Revista Científica de Cultura e de Imagem
Nº 6 Ano III março/2026
ISSN 3085-7309

degree allegory (fragmentation, opacity, proximity to the enigma) not only deciphers codes: they recognize the point at which interpretation itself becomes unstable and, at times, suspends itself.

It was precisely this point that led us to the margins – the place where meaning does not disappear but retracts; where interpretation does not cease, but no longer guarantees itself. And, beyond the margins, to the *paramundo*: the regime in which the image no longer refers to something else but appears as presence. One does not ask, before an image generated by artificial intelligence, “what did it mean to say?”, because there is no original intention to recover. One does not ask, before a holographic image, “what does it represent?”, because it does not represent: it projects. The *paramundo* is not the place of interpretation, but of presence.

The enigma, in this context, is not an epistemological obstacle to be overcome. It is the very form the image takes as it approaches its limit. The *epiplastic* image is enigmatic because its origin is not perceptual, but statistical. The holographic image is enigmatic

because its presence does not imply substance. In both cases, the enigma is not a defect of meaning, but its frontier – and, in the *paramundo*, this frontier ceases to separate two regimes and becomes the very mode of the image’s appearing.

What this article has allowed us to glimpse, albeit in a programmatic way, is that the image is not reducible to its signification. Before signifying, it appears. Before being a sign, it is presence. And it is precisely because the image can be presence that it can also be meaning. The passage is not from the image to meaning, but from the image to its own mode of appearing.

The Brandão Scale, the notions of margin, *paramundo*, and enigma – none of this closes the question. On the contrary, it opens it. The developments only sketched here – the articulation with the *epiplastic* and holographic domains, the deepening of the concept of *paramundo*, the relationship between iconotropism and the emerging regimes of the image – demand a more extensive treatment, which is beyond the scope of this article. They will be developed in a future publication,



IMAGENS EM FOCO

Revista Científica de Cultura e de Imagem

Nº 6

Ano III

março/2026

ISSN 3085-7309

in which the present reflection will find its place as part of a broader investigation into the nature of the image in the contemporary context.

For now, the proposal remains: the image is not a surface to be deciphered, but a field to be traversed. And to traverse it requires not only interpretative keys, but also the willingness to suspend the very certainty that all meaning can – or should – be fixed.

There are images that do not ask to be understood. There are images that only ask to be inhabited. Iconophotology, of which this article is a first movement, is born precisely from this bet: that the image is, above all, a mode of presence – and that it is only from this presence that meaning, when and where it becomes possible, can emerge as a journey.



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Nº 6 Ano III março/2026
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