

On/For/Against the Apparatus: the photographic *arché* revisited

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Abstract: We intend to examine here some of the questions concerning the theoretical variants of discussions on photography: we are specially interested in those discursive trends that are still investing in the technical conditions of image's origins and its relationships with the semiotical regimes of these visual icons. We refer to those theories by the title of "arguments on the apparatus", recognizing them as an actual driving force in the general assumptions of about the meanings of visual forms in photographs: we still find them specially influential in the assumed semiotic status of indexicality, as an essential trait of photographic processes. As a corollary of such discourses, we find a commitment to ontological presuppositions about some intrinsic, originary nature of photography, identified with the role played by its technical apparatus. We seek the matrix of such discourses, departing from the reading of two influential essays on the nature of photography, **L'Acte Photographique**, by Phillipe Dubois (1983) and **L'Image Precaire**, by Jean-Marie Schaeffer (1987).

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"L'indice est à la mode" (Dominique Chateau)

1. "Machines of expectation", "mechanical deposits of light", "watches to see", "viewing devices" images of an "automatic genesis", "pencil of nature", "camera lucida", all these are expressions that one can often find linked to an extensive sampling of the speeches that reflected (and are still marking the most recent thinking) about a supposed "nature" of photography: properly established as ways of thinking about the archaic character of photographic images, these discourses attempt to establish a kind of ontology characteristic of certain types of visual representation; in the case of photography, this metaphysics emerges from an assumedly special relationship between the aspect of their final products (the visual imagery of its own and the discourses it generates, or that might be appropriated by photography) and the hypothetical foundation provided by their originating devices of fixation.

Accordingly, it is widely assumed that the photographic phenomenon is somewhat previously justified in the physical dimension of the mechanics of visual world's impregnation in a sensitive surface. Taken from the condition of such a conception about the genesis of

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photographic meaning, this momentary fixation of the visual world (and the instrumental character of its origin) would also take precedence over any of those other features of visual forms that emerged from these processes and devices hereby involved: thus discarded from the question are the ways in which the photographic image enters into the semiotic circuits that are discharged by photographic images, especially when these elements are variables of several communication processes existing in our culture and fully enabled through these visual forms (especially when they involve a productive or poetic dimension of visual discourse in its various manifestations).

Such a speech, which is so frequent in the theories about photography, is sustained on a kind of *phenomenology of instantaneity* in visual representations, especially when they put into question a proper value for the photography, once it is compared to other specific genres of the visual manifestation in our culture (particularly painting and drawing): a photograph is therefore taken into the realm of the kind of manifestations that define *visual discursiveness*, especially when those experiences are necessarily marked by this philogenetic relationship between visual images and mechanical devices of visualization; in fact, it is precisely such a synthetic operation of the ontological foundation of photography - which is manifested by the rise of instantaneity in photographic images (as well as the processes and mechanisms that engender them) - that ultimately raises the apparent efficiency with which this thesis has had a certain constraining power in almost the entire history of reflection on this medium of visual expression, particularly in communication studies.

In this context, we are interested in a critical evaluation of some of the assumptions and argumentative strategies of such a discourse on which such a conception of photography could be sustained so as to prevent us to see the phenomenon, unless we should take into account the condition of its determination by some device of visualization. On the horizon of this particular test, we are interested in bringing an alternative theoretical proposition against this thesis, one by which the question of meaning in the visual picture could be less assimilated with the media environments surrounding photography and more connected with certain semiotic-pragmatic protocols of visual understanding (i.e., the proper communication channels within which we equated the aspectualized dimension of instantaneity, and with which the photograph is often related).

In this regard, some initial caveats are obviously necessary: first of all, we do not assume that critical examination of these theses on the photographic device are manifested, by definition,

as generally uniform in their levels of the proposition, as well as their effects to reflect on the photograph; as we shall see, this prevailing discourse on the nature of photography is motivated by questions of rather variable origins, depending on the authors and traditions with which we work in this examination.

And even in cases where one can observe certain lineages or schools of thought underlying these reflections, it is equally significant in each of these theses the fluctuation manifested in the relationships between the mechanical genesis of photographic processes and the visual significance of imagery which result from it. Moreover (as we shall see the end of this route), we note in some of the variants of this discourse the suggestion of several problems that seem absolutely essential for the development of a more fruitful approach on the communication systems of the photographic image. Accordingly, we must consider that this “view on the photographic device” could even be ultimately preserved, provided the cleaning up of its compromise with the historical question about an assumed “photographic nature”.

Thus, a first point to be highlighted in our critical examination of theories of photography: the “discourse of the apparatus” is interesting for the bias of our critical intervention, once we find it strictly committed to the ontological questions about some intrinsic specificity of photography. Outside this context, we will see later that it raises issues with which a theory of visual experience of the photograph could not be denied to confront itself with.

Second observation, the choice of these different discourses can raise questions about the fleeting opportunity to recall of its debate, as to suppose that some of its main representatives currently manifest a certain detachment about it. We have to consider stocks with the effective range of such self-rejection of the theories about the photographic device, by part of its main representatives, bearing in mind two key facts: in Brazil, for example, some of these works are still being reprinted (one of the most important of these is in its 11th edition, dating from 2008), which means that, despite their self-declared banning, there is still a rather loyal readership for them, yet fully able to support these same positions from their original authors.

More importantly, however, is what emerges from the ongoing influence that many of these works have in the current mode of thinking about the photographic phenomenon in our academic context, in the training of future researchers and even in a more mature reflection on photography: there is virtually no thesis, article or book, in the context of our thinking

about photography (especially when the theoretical accent of discussions is the most requested), in whose introductions we do not only find a recapitulation of some of these core ideas, but also an almost instantaneous membership to the notion that the nature of photography is derived, in its very essence, from its own mechanical device.

Since we have examined the permanence of the effect of such a conceptualization of photography in an extensive corpus of current researching productions on the subject, at least in the Brazilian academic context, it makes us think about the authority (and, we would say more, even the sincerity) of this self-made challenge to the theses from this speech still so strong among many of us.

This notwithstanding, the fact is that some of these works represent the initial stages of the journeys of each of these authors, which certainly allows us to provide some initial revaluation of these positions, when their authors are taken to resume these in retrospect. On our way of understanding, some representatives of this lineage of the most valuable reflections on the photographic apparatus provide a better service to the debate, just as they preserve aspects of this argument, but guiding them to a more pragmatic dimension associated with the experience of photographic visual forms. We will take care of the details of this variant, a little later.

This kind of theoretical talk about photography has already been called elsewhere by the nickname "argument of the apparatus", however without any addressing on their historical and topical filigree (Picado, 2005): thus, it remains in the offer, at least in its general outline, the substance of this same subject line more or less common in the discourse on photography, as well as the effect they had on the reflection on this phenomenon, more especially as regarding the plastic and representational aspects together with the communicational surroundings and semiotic schemes of the photographic image.

Earlier in this route, we are interested in examining a certain number of problems that marked (and that still mark) the conception that these texts take on the character of the photographic image, its relationship with this particular way of conceiving its *arché*: in the origin of the assumed significance of the visual representation, there would be an irrevocable mark of contiguity between what is left in the forms of visual rendering (the part relative to the photographic image) and what belongs to the order of objects and spatial arrangements that are proper to the nature of the scene or of the objects and entities photographed (the share of

In the history of reflection on the assumed intimacy between visual imagery and photographic rendering of the world (at least in the special case of the photograph), this astonishment was manifested in the form of various concepts, from the most naïve to the most sophisticated ones: borrowing the temporal arc established by one of these well-known theorists of photography, we should stop thinking of the image as a “mirror of nature” - without ignoring those variants that think on the brand image and its intentional “principle of constructiveness” – passing on to reflect on it now as a “dash of reality”.

"The starting point is therefore the technical nature of the photographic process, the basic principle of printing devices governed by the laws of physics and chemistry. First of all, the trace, the mark, the tipping (...). In typological terms, this means that the picture is akin to the categories of 'signs', in which we also find in the smoke (evidence of fire), shadow (an indication of presence), scar (a mark of injury), ruins (trace of what was there), the symptom (sign of a disease), the mark of footsteps, etc.. (....). In this aspect, they differ radically from the icons (which are defined only by a similarity) and symbols (which, like the words of the language, define an object by a general convention)." (Dubois, 2001: 50).

For us it is interesting to assess the extent to which the notion of “index” - while identified as the core of the photographic genealogy - might not have turned into a mere alibi in certain theories of the “photographic act” and its determined *arché*, in order to allow them to think the photographic image exclusively under the condition of its mechanical device. More seriously, however, these theories recover an order of contents which are more due to sentient beliefs about the visual realism than a proper critical reflection on the experience of photographic images (at least as regarding the characterization of photographic phenomena as being the object of a belief set by the image): because of that, these theories incur not infrequently in severe shortages, both in its conceptual debt to the very meaning of this “origin” (the definition of what is a photographic *arché*), as on the very idea that constitute the exclusive form of visual content (in which it could be considered independently of the relations of analogy and morphological similarity, with pleas for a visual semiosis, as characteristic features of iconic signs, for example).

Therefore, here lies the second point of our critical investigation: we are interested in assessing how far the notion of “index” - taken as a strictly semiotic category, in its turn

applied to visual imagery derived from the photographic process (and restored to their proper logical sources, in the history of Philosophy) - can finally be justified by the assumption of an *arché* that is, in turn, identified with the mechanical genesis of the image, i.e., with the photographic device, thus defined.

2. There is a curious phenomenon of perplexity that indelibly marks the analysis of the products of photography, once we find these addressed in the condition of a communicational phenomenon: once confronted with the need to consider the discursive functioning of these images, some philosophers insist on overriding the media character of their original apparatus; whence speaking of photography as an auxiliary operator to specific textual schemes (especially those more suitable to the *status* of visual forms of communication in our culture: the reporting, the documentary, the rhetorical, the narrative fiction, the aesthetic), it seems inevitable, at least in many of the theories at stake here, that one has to consider the role of photographic devices, as a datum of the ways in which the images operate discursively . There is thus an ontological implication of something that could be defined as the *photographical*, the way each image, thus rendered by mechanical impregnation of light, offers itself to the gaze, in a necessary dependence of the mechanical devices that are therefore defined as the very origin of the photographic visual form.

First and foremost, it could be noted that all such ways of refunding meaning and philogenetic origin of images to a mechanical device is something that marks, at least in the range of technical pictures, the majority of photographic analysis: as a contrast example, in film theory (where a certain "discourse on the device" has manifested itself with considerable force, even serving as inspiration for many similar reflections with those on the photographs), the notion of the filmic experience as being a correlate or effect of the mechanical order of technical devices or cultural institutions was never proposed as stating a "movie *arché*", or as superimposed on a whole different order of variables related to concrete experience (social, cultural, aesthetic) of visual images (Xavier, 2005).

Anyway, as we have seen, it is quite remarkable that the foundation of all these assumptions about some intrinsic nature of photographs (and the fact that the experience of these images, in its aesthetic apprehension, could not transcend the condition in which the device is defined as a picture's origin) is manifested, in most cases, we have already said, as mere sentence (a belief that is sourced on a certain charm with the technological powers of the photographical arrest or even with the possibilities of reconfiguration of the artistic field and institutions). In

short, this argument about the photographic device, does not seem to provide evidence for a sufficient validation of what is asserted by such theories, namely: the fact that the *apparata* and media institutions provide the visual images with the value that we are finally able to assign to their more extreme manifestations (i.e., their images), regardless of the social discourses and the semiotic regimes of understanding under which the visual representations as well rendered, are required to work.

"We therefore assign to images a particular value of veracity: they are true, so to speak, in principle. Which recovers a series of different reasons. Because they report us to on how things were or how things went. Because we are assured that they are true because the communication channels by which they come to us are devoted to information and are therefore 'objective' (...). For us, it's true because it is so with the image because it was photographed or recorded on video. We frequently and often still rely on this particular veracity of the photographic image, connecting it with the mechanic character of its visual take, as to the objectivity of 'objective', mixing the real with the photographic impregnation (Benjamin), with the indexical character of the photographic sign." (Michaud, 2002: 113).

However, even when we consider another rather recurrent aspect in the speech about the communicational traits of the visual images (namely that its meaning implies a reduction of the visual aspects to a proper system of meaning which is "second", offered to the image by the linguistic system), we also sense the presence of a rather constraining view derived from the powers of photographic devices, albeit in a surreptitious manner: it is precisely such a belief in a radical originating indexical quality of photographic images (due, in turn, the alleged nature of his technical apparatus) that induces this theoretical vision of the first *semiologues* (Barthes emblemized) to establish a derived or deflated value of the visual image (Picado, 2003), as a result of a process by which strongly denotational and ostensive meaning of photography (the fact that she works as a "perfect *analogon*" of reality) is like *pierced through* (or alternating with) linguistic features of expository discourse, either reporting or rhetorical (Barthes, 1961, 1964).

3. This stronger thesis about an essentially indexical feature of photographs, defined as a constitutive trait of their visual meaning, is found nowhere as frank and candid as in Phillipe Dubois' work - originally published in Belgium in 1983 and in a later version, in France, added of four additional essays, in 1990 – which is always referred to by so many of us as one of the greatest turnarounds in conceptual thinking about photography, *L'Acte Photographique* (Dubois, 2001): we have already mentioned, at least in its best-known results, all the way by

which this thinker has scaled and valued the historical stages within which the thoughts on the photograph has experienced a certain kind of passion (whether positive or negative), with special regard to the modalities of realism that would seem adventitious photography itself.

Another key reference in this context is the work of Jean-Marie Schaeffer, *L'Image Precaire* (Schaeffer, 1996): born in a context similar to the ideas of Dubois (it was originally published in 1987), its line of argument advanced in the more densely philosophical implications of the identification of photography with the semiotic status of “indexicality”, by introducing variants of the discussion that were traditionally overlooked in this lineage of texts on a supposed photographic nature: firstly, he distinguished between the ontological quest on the nature of photography from the theoretical concerns on the status proper to photographic image, which, at least in principle, greatly facilitates the understanding of how to address the indexical specificity of photography (being on the order of an *arché*, it necessarily invokes consideration about the most proper placement for photographic devices).

In both cases, the central problem is not only the identification of photography with the visual contents (one does not try to think the essence of photography departing exclusively from their products or their images), but also with the original character of the photographic device, as a very foundation of the existential commitment assumed for their visual forms: we are interested in examining these issues, starting from how the category of indexical signs must have been treated (at least in the case of photography) under the strict control of the characterization of devices originating visual forms.

For, in the way we understand it, the impression prevailing in the argument about the device (and the implied recalls of certain categories brought by Semiotics) is that the very notion of “index” does not emerge in these ideas (nor elsewhere in the same orientation) in strict correlation with the semiotic orthodoxy of these concepts: in regards to the indexical qualities of photography, there is little consideration about the history of this idea in the context of logical theories, as well as in its practical implications; they are not, therefore, correlative to an examination of the very nature of the index, once taken as categories of thought or even as an epistemological model of conjecture (an “evidential paradigm”), a feature not only in the logic of science, but also on clinical and detective inquiries, for example (Guinzburg, 1989).

Instead, what prevails is a negative bias of the argument on photographic semiotic features, departing from a certain exclusionary logic of the characterization of certain segments of the

types of meaning (especially one that defines what is proper to the visual universe, whether they are “indexical” or “iconical”): at the bottom of the problem of indexicality, at least in that record of a most defining trait of character in photography, one settles the need to establish the folding difference between specific sectors of the family of visual forms, taken as necessarily and mutually exclusive (most typical case, the limits commonly interposed between pictorial images and technical ones).

Symptomatic of this theoretical slope for the alternation between semiotic typologies is the historical background within which Dubois builds (in the first chapter of *L'Acte Photographique*) the successive conceptions of realism manifestly proper to the visual forms of photography: born under the sign of a design firstly "mimetic" (which is still nourished of the family resemblances between visual imageries of photography and painting), it reaches its assumed maturity conceiving the meaning of photography as installed it in the order of an indexical "trace" (Dubois, 2001: 23,56). Therefore, not only indexicality and mimesis are necessarily and mutually in opposition, but also (to a point of view that now is axiological, besides allegedly theoretical), the category of “index” expresses a more advanced degree of reflection on what is constitutive of meaning in the visual pictures.

Accordingly, we have at least two aspects to be taken into consideration before proceeding to evaluate these points: first, in what exact semiotic sense (at least in Peirce's orthodoxy, which seems to provide the matrix within which the texts of Dubois and Schaeffer work more strongly), can one admit this alleged altercation between the iconic resemblance (assimilated here, perhaps wrongly, with visual mimesis) and existential or causal implication, proper to indexes? Secondly, mostly pointed to the photographic phenomenon, how to think this indexical commitment (supposedly exclusive to photography), when their visual forms also demand criteria of perceptual similarity (thus more suitable to the icon)? We will address each of these issues separately, beginning immediately by the first one of them, **namely the extent to which indexes and icons should be taken separately (regarding a question about the semiotical character of visual forms).**

4. In particular, if we consider the appropriation of the Peirce's semiotic categories by Dubois, we shall see that these were considerably abstracted from the logical and philosophical backgrounds from which they originally made some sense. As regarding the notion of indexical meaning, for example, Dubois clearly exacerbates the possible relationship of this category with the semiotic dimension of photographic phenomena:

according to his argument, the picture turns out to exceed the condition of one mere circumstantial example (in which it originally emerged in the writings of Peirce) to take the form of an almost unique and crystal case of the phenomenon of indexicality.

A problem that emerges from the argument of both Dubois and Schaeffer on some essentially indexical character of photography concerns the theoretical address of such a conception of the visual significance: it might seem, as already stated, that in varying degrees of apprehension, both authors anchor the scope of this category to an extent that does not correspond to the orthodoxy of Semiotics (at least in the letter originated from the writings of Peirce). What seems to prevail as a framework for the formulation of the index (most evident in Dubois, more subtle in Schaeffer) is a more appropriate comparison of the doctrines of the mimetic visual realism than by greater attention to how to work closely with the theoretical scope of semiotic categories, in its very origin.

In this aspect, it must be stressed that Peirce's *modus operandi* with these categories (especially his famous second trichotomy of "icon/index/symbol") does not assume the condition of some exclusive typologies for the arrangement of meaning: indeed, in none of Peirce's original semiotic categories, these classifications were assumed as "ontologically pure". It is always necessary to recover each of these notions (unfortunately treated by semiotic pedagogy as forming separate instances) are, in fact, combinatorial arrays, or variables, for the genesis of classes of signs, as we consider the types of relationships proper to the most fundamental triad of Peirce's Semiotics (the very design of sign as a union of "ground/object/interpretant").

In this context, icons and indexes are manifestations of the relationships that could be conceived between a *fundament* and its *object*, as long as they are interpreted, sometimes by their *contiguity* or by their *similarity/analogy*: rather than "types" of signs (which should be conceived as mutually irreducible or incompatible), these categories describe "dimensions" of meaning, which often are combined in the order of the phenomena of semiosis.

Moreover, when resuming a brief passage from a text by Peirce from 1894 (not 1895, as he states), where the indexical character is assumedly identified with instantaneous photography, Dubois misses the important fact that this passage originally evokes this relation of existential commitment of the indexes, including the possibility of thinking about photography (or rather, the visual sign that results from its process) precisely as a case example of an iconic

sign! More seriously, even in the paragraph in question, Peirce argued precisely for the concept of similarity, as a purpose of instant photography, and the issue of indexicality emerged only on condition of an aspectualization of visual meanings, once we consider the question of physical connection between the visual sign and its instantaneous genesis in the photographic process (and not in visual form that emerges or results thereof).

"Photographs, particularly those snapshots, are very instructive, since we know they are in certain respects exactly like the objects they represent. But this similarity is due to the fact that the photographs were produced under such circumstances that force them to respond point by point to nature. In this aspect, then, they belong to the second class of signs, by physical connection "(Peirce, 1998: 5.6; 2.281).

In the case of Schaeffer, the faults with respect to orthodoxy are far less severe, because his argumentation is mainly built through an express dialogue with some of the leading commentators in more recent semiotic trends (especially Umberto Eco's work). As regards to the general lines of this conflict, in particular, we would say that Schaeffer's views reflect the nascent state in which the semiotic discussion of these categories (indexical and iconic signs) were kept apart from each other, specially when one considers their relationships with two related areas of visual manifestations, namely: the iconographic manifestation of visual signs (which evokes more patently the role of the cultural conventions of representation and its stylistic variables) and its correlation with perceptual structures (with more logical-cognitive foundations that would evoke, for example, the wealth of conceptual schema of ordinary perceptual experience).

It should also be noted that these aspects will just jump to the forefront of semiotic theories (at least as regarding some greater consideration of aesthetical and perceptual variables in question), whence Eco himself becomes finally available to resume the problem of iconicity, subject of exhaustive debates over the years, in the path of the strictest strains of semiotic's conceptual bias: in a new phase of discussions, the resumption of these issues is done in correlation with certain advanced implications of the notion of similarity, taking it into play with certain strands of an "ecology of perception "; in Eco's case, these variants are at the center of his argument in several chapters of *Kant and the Platypus* (Eco, 1997).

Still, Schaeffer's evaluation on the concept of index implies a return to the origin of these conceptions by Peirce, also entailing some clear violations of the original meaning of this

category (particularly with respect to that same assessment of the need to radically limit the scope of iconicity): given correctly, in the first place, that the Peirce's general notion of sign is vague enough not to compromise us with the arbitrary (which are more proper to the linguistic branch of theories of meaning, a tradition in which much of the francophone reflection on the visual signs hewed their ideas up there), Schaeffer tries to advance to the Peircean conception in the index.

It is at this point, however (the specific concept of the index), that Schaeffer evades the significance with which Peirce had played the necessary merge of semiotic categories that we have talked about: for as long as Schaeffer ascribes Peirce's conception of index with the foundation of a "specific sameness" (not originated from the perception of the sign, but from the connection with the object), the original perspective of Peirce's, in fact, attributes to the indexical commitment the exclusive quality of "factual contiguity" (being such a meaning the most obvious interpretant of indexical signs). To better discern this, however, we must go beyond considerations of purely exegetical orthodoxy of Peirce's semiotics and try to involve them in the context of the very inquiry of the basis for the entailments between technological devices of visualization and the photographic *arché*.

In short, we must examine both Schaeffer's and Dubois' ideas, under the strain of a second issue that we impose on these rather important texts: at first, we ask on why Peirce's categories were taken on this mutual sense of exclusivity and irreducibility. **For now we ask ourselves how to think this supposed separation between picture's factual similarity and contiguity, when it the aspects of "perceptual organization", that evokes the visual similarity of the shapes of their products with an order of ordinary perception, are becoming clear and clearer?**

5. At this point, it is perhaps necessary that we take some advantage of Schaeffer's perspective, so that the point about the necessary indexicality of photography appears in a clearer light. Firstly, in his *L'Image Precaire*, the argument is expressed on the basis of a request which is rather pragmatic (or phenomenological) than historical: therefore it is not put forward to provide an evolutionary thinking about photography (where the latest points of the chronology could represent the most advanced stage of discussion), but rather to think how far (or under what kind of conditions) the discourse on indexicality could make its own input without confounding such a trait of visual images with other most common aspects of our ordinary experience with visual forms; therefore, Schaeffer asks us, it is essential for us when

reflecting on the photograph, to turn from considerations of the photographic *image*, to focus on their *devices* (because, in some sense, the attention to the products of photographic techniques would have confused us about the real character of the photographic *arché*, which would be of an indexical order).

"To avoid any misunderstanding: the importance I attach to the analysis of the materiality of photographic device does not come from a reductionist view, but is motivated solely by the fact that the pragmatic status of the image is based on the issuing of materiality as a basis for its specificity. That being, for instance, what provides the criterion for discrimination that allows us to distinguish the photographic image of the pictorial image "(Schaeffer, 1996: 14).

Dubois also identifies (in principle at least) the photographic indexicality with the automatic process of formation of their visual imagery (as we have seen above), what ends up clarifying the source of this kind of talk about the significance of vision, once manifested in the admission that image's regimes are primarily a matter of the technical *apparata* involved in their origin. In Schaeffer's views, the examination of the photographic device will lead us to take the experience of visual forms thereunder as identified with the devices that guide the path of a "photonic flux", focusing on a sensitive matter and designed for the visual understanding: the foundation of these images will depend on how the device might manifest them, either by luminous "reflection" on objects, with its "projection" on display surfaces (for canonical images of printed formats of photojournalism and art photography) or from "direct luminance" and "crossing" of visible bodies (as pictures of the sun and medical images from MRI or X-ray).

We have to think that, by referring to this existential implications of the picture's meanings (under the banner of the semiotic concept of "index"), Dubois and Schaeffer would have considered the extent to which the matter of visual meaning's experience could have put into play the status of this engine of visualization such a role so central and unique.

If the photographic *arché* demands that we put forward the share of photographic devices in the genesis of visual meanings, thus if "the impression - therefore the photonic image - is the *arché* of the photographic image, insofar as this is defined as a record of traces" (Schaeffer, 1996: 26), one might ask whether this is a question specific to the semiotic (or even to aesthetical) experiences of photography: for in the introduction of his book, it is Schaeffer himself who claims for the significance of photography, regarding the relationships between

their images and their reception (we could specify, with the hermeneutic dimension of visual perception). Well, it is hard to imagine how the understanding of photography (we speak here of its most canonical kinds, at least) could put into play the notion of indexicality, in the absolute dependence of the constitutive nature of its technical devices.

That the visual likeness (with an iconic import) is a *datum* that one can logically abstract from this indexical relationships of photographs (which certainly characterizes a possible *arché* of photography) is only a result of the aspect by which we approach the understanding of such images, in rather specific contexts (within which perception can necessarily play a role, but always restricted to one kind of training, proper to scientific or clinical interpretation of visual data, for example): this level of existential connection is exemplified by the cases of visual imagery obtained by direct luminance or transparency, but the same is not true whence we examine visual imagery derived from the processes of luminance "by reflection" because they resemble the patterns of display images that are canonical.

In the first case, we can even say that these are examples of strict visual indexicality (as in the instance of sun spots on the skin surface), as they exempt, at least in theory, of any recourse to a notion of canonical visual figuration (or to a non-specialized, highly cultured, functionally encrypted visual *perceptum*).

However still, once taken in the rigorous accuracy of the semiotic classification, these occurrences are characterized not just as "indexes", but as an entire class of signs that Peirce defined as "rhematic indexical sinsigns": in terms of their grounds (with reference to a quality identified as a vehicle of meanings), they constitute a recognizable shape (a stain), which is taken in case as being caused by another object (direct luminance of the sun, of which the spot is now an index), finally establishing a possible relationship between these two facts (it is the term of a possible proposition, whereby stain and light will involve the interpretation, by means of the logical principle of effect and cause).

More importantly, according to Peirce, these types of signs, although "caused" by its objects, are not manifest in their meaningfulness without the import of an "iconic sinsign" (a sign of figurative ground, thus guided by similarity), which differs from traditional types of icons, for they introduce a kind of likeness arising from some effect of the dynamic object: most dramatic example, the "figurativeness" by which we understand the footprints in a surface, from which we infer aspects of similitude (iconic, therefore), which inferentially supply us

with some aspect or character of the imprinting source.

If we however consider these same phenomena, now in view of the kinds of perception by which we attribute its reality as a fact of significance, it is clear that without the assumption of a fundamental analogy between operations and results (the type of instrument and the shape of the mark in the case of the scar) and a similarity of shape and morphology (shaded boundaries and contours of the object perceived, in the case of the shadow), no assumption about the factual causality between these signs and their origin would make sense, at least in the logical perspective of the justification of our visual understanding.

The lesson remaining from all this concerns the character with which we treat the semiotic categories from Peirce, especially on how to deal with the regimes under which we find meaning in communicational phenomena attached to photography: concurrency aspects of indexical and iconic visual forms (regardless of its original devices) is not only conceivable (and the same would be even true for the pictorial, which would have its corresponding share of indexicality), as it is also the only way to access the phenomenon of visual significance of its own, under the aspect by which it stands out for analysis, i.e. from the "proper request of its own phenomenology" (Lopes, 1998).

Once we properly follow the precepts of logical classifications of Peirce's semiotics, we would recognize that indexicality is constitutive of the factual origin of certain types of signs (in his manifestation as a phylogeny of meaning), but insufficient by itself to establish a logically valid sense, from the point of view of its understanding at the visual stance of its reception: to assume the contrary would incur in that known fallacious implication of a "*post hoc, ergo propter hoc*", i.e. to take the progressiveness of the photographic process as a causal element of justification on how effectively one can assign its referential meaning.

Without proper introduction of iconicity (specific to the configuration of visual schemes and sensory perception), one can impose no matter of facts, even for the genuinely indexical signs. This also applies to the understanding of photography, while assumed as supposedly indexical: in particular, Dubois should have granted to his consideration on the nature of photography as existentially committed, the point about this aspect of its meaning (so proper to the schemes under which it works as a criteria of truth and factuality, as is the case of photojournalism) as not independent of the pragmatic conditions under which it previously operated as iconic sign (at least from the perspective of its canonical reception).

Also in the letter of Peirce, for example, the canonical photographs are exemplary of the “dicent sinsigns”, i.e. a class of signs that manifests as its ground (again, in reference to quality that is its semiotic motor drive) a visually recognizable form (the figures of objects as they are rendered on the device) and establishing a principle of understanding associated with the order of propositions about facts (the ones pictured are meant by their manifest presence or by the significant character of the their instantaneous surrender). However, the requirements of this causal connection are not understood, once again, as purely indexical because the manifestation of the objects accords itself with a kind of configuration of the visual qualities which is respective to a perceptual structure (thus manifested as an “iconic Sinsign”).

“A Dicent Sinsign (...) is any object of a direct experience in the measure of being a sign, and as such, it provides information about its object, so being only in virtue of being really affected by its object, in such a way that it is necessarily an index (...). One sign of this kind must involve an iconic sinsign to embody the information and an indexical sinsign to indicate the object to which the information relates. But the combination mode, or syntax, of these two should also be significant”. (Peirce, 1990: 55; 2257).

Thus, by assuming that the category of index is necessarily an appropriate one for the explanation of the modes of signification that we might find associated to photography, this should imply acceptance (at least in the level of what we intend to establish as a photographic nature) of a relative independence of visual meaning in photography in regards to the very nature of its technical devices. Let us formulate this point in a better fashion: to consider the issue of a photographic *arché* will certainly claim the semiotic category of the index as one of its most salient features, but this can not be confused at all with the assumption of a decisive character of visual meanings, derived from the powers of the photographic devices (and this applies both for the pair implicated photographs/indexicality, as for his supposed antipode paintings/iconicity).

If we refer to the indexical nature of photography, we will find the idea of such an origin of its meaning being much more identified with the pragmatic grounds of the regimes of experiential understanding of visual forms (and therefore, with the systems of belief that entail the ways to fix this aspect of ontological commitment of the image), than by supposing such an existential connection as purely evoked by products of a particular sideshow.

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