



Journal

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Guest Editor: Matthew Biro

Reviews

Géo-photographies: une approche renouvelée des territoires, Danièle Méaux. Filigranes Éditions, Trézélan, 2015. 176 pages, with 60 colour and black & white illustrations. Softcover €20.00, ISBN 978-2-350-46358-2.

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Concha broaches the topic of racial and class-based differences in the representation of Chilean history. As a strongly divided society of a white, European ruling class and a coloured mestizo population, Chile's modernity has been an aristocratic one, who thus also adopted photography as a privileged medium of modernity. Accordingly, portraits of the wealthy manifested the 'Western metaphor of light' in well-lit studios with soft, charming illumination, whereas lower classes were, if at all, represented in unflatteringly glaring light or obscuring half-shadows. However, Chilean photographers turned this logic around by using harsh light to glorify the worker and simple man, thus pointing out the fact that in Chile hardly anyone is of purely white descent.

The final and longest chapter, 'Luminous Conscience and Intimacy as Performative Acts in Contemporary Documentary Photography in Chile', traces the development of documentary practices since 1960, the year of the landmark exhibition *Rostro de Chile*. Starting with the oeuvre of its curator Antonio Quintana, Concha describes his social realist agenda and 'aestheticising referentiality' as the then-prevailing ideal of documentary photography. The next phase of documentary photography evolved under the dictatorship and in publications like *Chile from Within* (1990). With contributions by anti-official photographers, such as Héctor López and Paz Errázuriz, the book is emblematic of the turn towards an 'ideological subjectivity' of life under military repression. Subsequently, the transition period of the 1990s with its regained freedom of expression led to an even more self-reflexive use of photography, as manifest in the exhibition *El Artificio del Lente* (2000). Questioning the icono-indexical nature of the photograph, artists like Claudio Pérez and Javier Godoy turned away from grand narratives and instead opened up their photographs to a more personal and metaphorical meaning. Reaching the 2010s, Concha's analysis of contemporary documentary photography of artists like Nicolas Wormull and Cristobal Traslaviña characterises their practices as highly autoreferential, with the photographic act turning into a 'performance of one's own intimacy'. Combining essential background information on the socio-economic conditions throughout the four phases with key figures and works, Concha offers a concise history of the technical and ideological exploration of documentary photography as a genre.

By deciding to revisit slightly dated literature, particularly Barthes, Concha runs the risk of overinterpreting Barthes's writings. Yet through his substantiated philosophical argumentation, he successfully opens up *Camera Lucida* for a contemporary reading of digital photography. Furthermore, he consistently applies his notion on the symbolic nature of photography on specifically Chilean content and thus adds to the understanding of the medium's use throughout different periods in that country.

Alas, due to the book's brevity, many interesting ideas are only cursorily addressed. The quick dismissal of indexicality for digital photography appears rapid if the reader is not familiar with more of Concha's writings. The same accounts for the 'Western Metaphor of Light', which reads like a sketch that instead could be a profound analysis of a nascent Chilean visual culture. Taken as it is – a collection of different ideas – however, the book is a stimulating presentation of utterly topical issues around the world. The 'dermatology of photography' and a 'distributor'-based conception of truth provide fertile ground for further reflection.

In sum, *Delitos Fotográficos* is a notable addition to the reading list of the global philosophy of photography. It is a comparatively short introduction to Concha's work and Chilean photographic history in general. Furthermore, it serves as an introduction to Concha's previous research (*La Desmaterialización Fotográfica*, 2011) and the works of his fellow Chileans Rodrigo Zúñiga (*La Extensión Fotográfica*, 2013) and Nathalie Goffard (*Imagen Criolla. Prácticas Fotográficas en las Artes Visuales de Chile*, 2011), all published by Ediciones Metales Pesados. As a group, the works of these authors mark an important moment in the spatio-intellectual expansion of research in the history and theory of photography.

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