

The Dialogical Construction of a Historical and Photographic Narrative in Brazil and Latin America between the 1970s and 1980s

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Abstract: *This presentation intends to focus on a key moment in Latin-American photography historiography: the 1980s. In 1984 the National Foundation of Arts – Funarte, governmental institution, created INFoto, the National Institute of Photography. It was created with the intention of mapping and organising Brazilian photographic profession and production, and it is one of the origins of the national photography historical narrative. Such intention is considered here in association with the country's political moment, and cannot be dissociated of a similar movement that was taking place in several other Latin American countries. This movement is related to the Colóquios Latino Americanos de Fotografia, held between 1978 and 1984. A desire to organise the photographer's work considering the realities of the continent is made explicit in the published round tables of the 1981 II Colóquio. The desire to identify a photographic production, and therefore a history of photography, specific to Latin America as opposed to a foreign one was also made explicit. Photographers engaged in public institutions promoted such mapping, which were also a revaluation and a resignification. These people and institutions from several Latin American countries kept contact promoting initiatives with converging aims relating to organisation and professional training, conservation, publishing, exhibitions, etc. The historic narrative, which started to be composed based on the history of photography in Brazil, was built within its borders as well as part of a Latin American transnational movement.*

Keywords: *Brazilian History of Photography; Latin-American Photography; InFoto; Latin-American Photography Colloquium; Latin-American Visual Culture.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Starting in the end of the 1970s onwards there were several initiatives, especially public and national, all over Latin America, fundamental to the consolidation of goals, practices and debates on the field of photography. Public institutions dedicated to photography and active in this period were responsible for a mobilization unknown until then. They not only organized seminars and debates, but also encouraged an editorial market dedicated to the history of photography and to the revelation of contemporary photographers, constituted institutes dedicated to the conservation and preservation of historical collections, promoted training courses, held exhibitions, created galleries and scholarships encouraging photographic review and production, among others. We can therefore say that these public initiatives had a singular importance in the organization of a whole field of professional activity and, also, of intellectual investigation. Actions which were determining to the consolidation of a photographic culture in Latin America, decisively contributing to what is known today as contemporary visual culture.

Before this period, independent initiatives had already been made and minimally constituted a photographic culture, in Latin American countries. In Brazil, such initiatives can be understood through books like 'Antologia Brasil, 1890-1930' [Brazil Anthology, 1890-1930], recently released by researcher Ricardo Mendes¹, and the classic text by Gilberto Ferrez 'A fotografia no Brasil e um de seus mais dedicados servidores: Marc Ferrez (1843-1923)' [Photography in Brazil and one of its most dedicated servers: Marc Ferrez (1843-1923)] published on the *Revista do Instituto do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional (IPHAN)*² [*Institute of Historical and Artistic Heritage Journal*].

¹ MENDES, Ricardo. *Antologia Brasil, 1890-1930: pensamento crítico em fotografia*. São Paulo: Funarte, 2003.

² FERREZ, Gilberto. 'A fotografia no Brasil e um dos seus mais dedicados servidores: Marc Ferrez (1843-1923)'. In: *Revista do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional*. Vol. 10. Rio de Janeiro: Ministério da Educação e Cultura, 1953.

However, different from what had been happening, the actions in the 1970s and 1980s had an eminently public and national character, projecting to all the extent of the nations a wide cultural policy related to photography.

These initiatives had an important role in the practice and understanding of what is known today as Latin American photography. However, the recognition of their importance still needs a more refined reflexion by the history of photography. Regarding the importance of the particular history of each one of the institutions related to photography and created by Latin American nations, but also regarding a common history of institutional organization, these are issues which are still little explored or evaluated by critics related to photography. In this sense, a reading of the public policies related to photography is fundamental to the recognition of this change related to photography, revealing inherent aspects to the integration of nations, in continental level. Finally, the recognition of such characteristics is fundamental for the evaluation of new problems and research lines, which can surely point to themes and issues to be worked on. In this sense, we can highlight at least four initiatives of greater amplitude, which had major developments and significant importance.

2. MAIN INITIATIVES IN THE 1970S AND 1980S

In 1978, photographers, critics and historians founded the ‘Consejo Mexicano de Fotografía A.C.’ - CMF [Mexican Council of Photography]. This Council was part of a bigger initiative organized by the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH) [National Institute of Anthropology and History], which founded in 1976 the Sistema Nacional de Fototecas [National System of Photo Libraries], a clear public encouragement for the renewal of Mexican culture, especially regarding photographic culture. In its first year, this Council held the ‘Primer Coloquio Latinoamericano de Fotografía’ [First Latin American Photography Colloquium], where the exhibition ‘Hecho en Latinoamérica: Primer Muestra de la Fotografía Latinoamericana Contemporánea’ [Made in Latin America: First Exhibition of Contemporary Latin American Photography] was shown, which circulated by several American and European countries and which was also responsible for the organization of a catalog which would become iconic to the representation of Latin American contemporary visuality³. Finally, a big historical exhibition was held called ‘Imagen histórica de la fotografía en México’ [Historical image of photography in Mexico], organizing key references of the Mexican photographic culture⁴. The creation of CMF clearly shows, therefore, that the actions relating to photography, elaborated in that period, embraced different aspects and themes, dealing not only with a contemporary production but also with historical photography.

The organization of an institution related to photography, in Mexico, seems to have been the starting point so that other initiatives took place in Latin America. In this sense, soon after the ‘Primer Coloquio Latinoamericano de Fotografía’ happened, it was created, in Argentina, the ‘Consejo Argentino de Fotografía’ (CAF) [Argentinian Council of Photography], gathering photographers, historians and critics who already worked in the country independently. This initiative opened the theme to the Argentinian State, which, from the 1980s, started to encourage exhibitions of Argentinian photographers as well as exhibitions of foreigners, in their cultural institutions. To Argentina, the 1980s were also fruitful regarding incentives given to the publishing of books dedicated to photography, as well as to meetings dedicated to the debate about photography, like the ‘Encuentro Fotográfico Mar del Plata 85’ [*Mar del Plata 85 Photographic Meeting*], ‘Las jornadas de Fotografía Buenos Aires - La Plata’ [*The Journeys of Photography Buenos Aires*] and the ‘Mes de la fotografía en Salta’⁵ [*Month of the Photography in Salta*].

In Brazil, we can notice several similarities regarding these initiatives. Inside a program of national culture transformation, the Fundação Nacional de Artes – Funarte [*National Foundation of the Arts*], founded in 1975 – created the Núcleo de Fotografia da Funarte [*Funarte Photography Nucleus*], in 1979. This nucleus was responsible for the implementation of the Galeria de Fotografia [*Photography*

³*Hecho en Latinoamérica: primera muestra de la fotografía latinoamericana contemporánea*. Ciudad de México: Museo Nacional de Arte Moderno; Consejo Mexicano de Fotografía, 1978.

⁴MEYER, Eugenia. *Imagen histórica de la fotografía en México*. Museo Nacional de Antropología e Historia /INAH/SEP/FONAPAS, 1978.

⁵FERNÁNDEZ, Silvia Pérez. ‘Apuntes sobre fotografía argentina a fin de siglo: hacia la construcción de un mercado’. In: *Artículos de Investigación sobre Fotografía*. Montevideo: CMDF, 2011.

Gallery], promoting courses and National Meetings, besides exhibitions dedicated to national and international photography. Due to the success and to the development of its activities, the Núcleo de Fotografia seizes to exist, in 1984, to be institutionalized through the Instituto Nacional de Fotografia – INFoto [*National Institute of Photography*], which, more than continuing the actions already taken, would implement other activities like the creation of the Prêmio Marc Ferrez de Fotografia [*Marc Ferrez Award of Photography*] and the incentive to the publishing of books about the history of photography in Brazil. In this sense, it is necessary to highlight the creation of the Centro de Conservação e Preservação Fotográfica (CCPF) [*Center of Photographic Conservation and Preservation*], institution also linked to FUNARTE, which is dedicated to the conservation and preservation of public or private institutions' photographic documents⁶.

Finally, the Cuban State created in 1986, the 'Fototeca de Cuba' [Cuba's Photo Library], also in the patterns of the institutions which became institutionalized in Latin America. This photo library, one of several public cultural institutions organized by the government in the 1980s, not only contributed to the consolidation of the definition of a national memory, organizing a photographic archive, but also a gallery of photography and scholarships for research and creation in photography. Two years prior, with the 'III Coloquio Latinoamericano de Fotografia' [Third Latin American Colloquium of Photography] in 1984, Fidel Castro had already made clear his position regarding the importance of conferences and federal institutions related to culture, to the unification and the integration of Latin America. According to the 'Havana Domestic SVC', Fidel Castro would have said that: "... meetings like the photography colloquium contribute to the unification and integration of Latin America"⁷. This speech shows not only the relevance of Latin American integration in the 1980s, but also the pre-eminence of photography as a means of propagation and consolidation of a symbolic referential to the nations.

Despite being specifically related photography, the work of mapping, organizing and professionalizing this field, taken from the creation of public institutions linked to this activity, can not be dissociated from a greater political context. In Mexico, as in Argentina, Brazil, Cuba and other countries, we can notice the construction of historical narratives or the organization of histories of photography particular to each one of the countries involved. These narratives were established in parallel to the construction of their own national identities, as well as of a Latin American common identity. These actions happened at the same time when these countries started to look inside their borders, searching to systematize national photographic languages and expressions in terms of aesthetics and professional practice. Specifically in Brazil, we can follow a series of actions which were taken inside the State, showing the pre-eminence of photographic themes, in the context of that period. Founded in 1984, INFoto declared as its central goal the 'establishment of a cultural policy, at national level, specific to photography', as highlighted Pedro Vasquez, in his opening speech as first president of this institute⁸. In this sense, it is worth mentioning a set of actions taken by INFoto, in Brazil, which contribute to the understanding of initiatives taken by the other Latin American countries.

The projection of a policy of national integration, made from the photographic culture of the country, was already clear in the actions developed by the Núcleo de Fotografia da FUNARTE, created in 1979. One of the first actions of this Núcleo was to create a gallery, which was named Galeria de Fotografia. Created in the same pattern as 'The Photographers' Gallery', founded in London in 1971, this Galeria had an important role not only as a place to exhibit photographs, but also as a meeting place for photographers. Similarly, the association of these institutions with exhibition spaces can be noticed, for example, through the Fototeca de Cuba, which, since its creation, keeps exhibition spaces dedicated to photography. Its is perceptible, therefore, that the creation of these Latin American institutions had an important role not only through the policies they instituted, but, specially, as places where photographers, critics and historians could exchange experiences and have dialogs, constituting a field dedicated to photography.

⁶ <http://www.funarte.gov.br/brasilmemoriadasartes/acervo/infoto/as-aco-es-do-infoto/>

⁷ <http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1984/19841122.html>

⁸ <http://www.funarte.gov.br/brasilmemoriadasartes/acervo/infoto/as-aco-es-do-infoto/>

In the same perspective, it is remarkable, however, that the developments propitiated by the Galeria de Fotografia had, at first, been restricted to the city of Rio de Janeiro. In this sense, it seems important to notice that the national scope of the actions of this Núcleo took shape with the publishing of eleven issues of 'Mostra de Fotografia' [*Photography Show*], published between August, 1979 and May, 1982. It was through this publication that the Núcleo searched to '... stimulate, support and disseminate the contemporary production of photography (...) in the five regions of Brazil'⁹. This policy would be enlarged, several years later with the creation of INFoto. It was, therefore, an action which had as goal to strengthen and redesign the national culture by photography, all over the territory, what was achieved specially through the dissemination of information, through books and other printed material.

The profusion and incentive to the production of printed material dedicated to photography, in Brazil and in Latin America, can be noticed through a series of initiatives performed, in special, between the 1970s and the 1980s. Firstly, it is remarkable that a series of individual and collective shows inside public institutions and galleries lead to the publishing of referential works. In the Argentinian case it is remarkable that Sara Facio and María Cristina Orive, two of the creators of the 'Consejo Argentino de Fotografía', had founded, in 1973, the publishing house 'LA AZOTEA Editorial Fotográfica de América Latina' [*La Azotea Photography Publishing House of Latin America*] responsible for disseminating the works of Latin American photographers such as Martín Chambi, Alejandro S. Witcomb and several others¹⁰. In Brazil, besides famous publishing houses engaged with photography, like Massao Ohno or Praxis, Funarte dedicated part of its action to the publishing of books dedicated to photography. In this sense, it is possible to notice a big quantity of books dedicated to works of authors, such as Sebastião Salgado, Aloísio Magalhães and José Oiticica Filho¹¹.

Also regarding the emergence of a publishing field between the 1970s and the 1980s, another action of great importance to this process was the research and collection of historical references of photography, which served as temporal beacons for the contemporary production. It is in the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s that a profusion of publications appear dedicated to the pioneer photographers, who worked in Latin America. In Brazil, Funarte published books such as 'Origens e expansão da fotografia no Brasil: século XIX' [Origins and expansion of photography in Brazil: 19th Century], written by Boris Kossoy in 1980¹²; 'O retrato brasileiro' [The Brazilian Portrait], by Pedro Vasquez published in 1983¹³; and 'Fotografia no Brasil: 1840-1900' [*Photography of Brazil: 1840-1900*], written by Gilberto Ferrez, in 1985¹⁴, organizing the basis for the history of photography in Brazil.

With the collection of these historical references, the intention of preserving photographic archives appear, which made necessary the creation of institutions related to the conservation and preservation of photography. In Brazil, it is remarkable that together with the creation of INFoto the Centro de Conservação e Preservação Fotográfica – CCPF [*Center of Photographic Conservation and Preservation*] is instituted, which had a pioneer role systematizing procedures and conduct for better conservation of photographic document, besides mapping funds and collections belonging to public and private institutions, which could subsidize new studies and references for the history of photography.

This movement of systematization of a history of photography in Brazil did not occur in an isolated way. On the contrary, it is a movement for the organization of iconographic and symbolic basis for the history of Latin American countries, specially regarding photography. In this sense, we can mention a series of initiatives such as the publishing of the book 'América, Latina: o trabalho fotográfico de Geraldo Guimarães' [*Latin America: the photographic work of Geraldo Guimarães*], organized by the Brazilian publishing house Massao Ohno, in 1978¹⁵, or the book by Eugenia Meyer, 'Imagem histórica

⁹ <http://www.funarte.gov.br/brasilmemoriadasartes/acervo/infoto/as-mostras-regionais-de-fotografia-da-funarte/>

¹⁰ <http://laazoteaeditorial.blogspot.com.br/p/historia.html>

¹¹ SALGADO, Sebastião. *Fotografias*. Rio de Janeiro: MEC/Núcleo de Fotografia, 1982; MAGALHÃES, Aloísio. *Cartemas: A fotografia como suporte de Criação*. Rio de Janeiro: Funarte/Núcleo de Fotografia, 1982.

¹² KOSSOY, Boris. *Origens e expansão da fotografia no Brasil; século XIX*. Rio de Janeiro: Funarte, 1980.

¹³ VASQUEZ, Pedro. *O Retrato Brasileiro*. Rio de Janeiro: Funarte/Núcleo de Fotografia, 1983.

¹⁴ FERREZ, Gilberto. *Fotografia no Brasil: 1840-1900*. Rio de Janeiro: Funarte/Pró-Memória, 1985.

¹⁵ *América, Latina*. São Paulo: Massao Ohno, 1978.

de la fotografía en México'¹⁶ [*Historic image of photography in Mexico*]. The emergence of a history for photography in Latin American countries and the profusion of publications related to the theme made other countries interested on the theme, which evoked initiatives such as the publishing of a special issue of the magazine 'South Eastern Latin Americanist', in 1987, called 'Windows on Latin America'¹⁷.

The publications dedicated to the history, to the theory and to the photographers made the interest on Latin American photography spread throughout the continent. From this dynamics it is remarkable the emergence of collections and archives dedicated to these photographers, which appears in detail on the example collected by the historian Fernando Cury Tacca, relating the Brazilian presence in the Fundo Fotográfico do Conselho Mexicano de Fotografia¹⁸ [*Photographic Fund of the Mexican Council of Photography*]. Again, the traffic of ideas, references and actions is emphasized, constituting a real web of dialogs among Latin American photographers and researchers.

It certainly was through the Colóquios Latino-Americanos de Fotografia [*Latin American Colloquiums of Photography*] that this movement gained momentum, integrating several Latin American countries. Always accompanied by photographic exhibitions, these events promoted the consolidation and renewal of photography, fostering debates on photographic practice and theory, among professionals from several countries, and had important developments for the specific context of each Latin American country involved. Therefore, it seems clear that there is a link between the systematization of the professional field of photography and the organization of a history of photography, which was decisive for the organization of this field in Latin America.

It is possible to notice a political orientation of Latin American aggregation permeating most of the speeches of the II Colóquio, held in México in 1981, which were published in the book *Feito na América Latina* [*Made in Latin America*]. This Colloquium had discussion tables such as "The possibility of action of a committed photography in the current structures in Latin America" coordinated by Mario García Joya from Cuba, or "The research about photography and cultural colonialism in Latin America", coordinated by Sara Facio from Argentina. In the "Introductory Words" that open this book, the text by Pedro Meyer also goes in this direction, declaring the wish of organizing the work of photographers in view of a determined common vision of a political and professional reality:

[...] the photographer is not only inscribed in his most immediate context; his works penetrate spaces further and further away by the natural transit of cultural exchange among the peoples. It immediately poses one of the most interesting problems that Latin American photographers have to face: Whom and where are they photographing to? Which are the parameters to evaluate these works? To whom and in which contexts is it interesting to show the work? Which are the most qualified mechanisms to disseminate the photographic work? Are they interested in and willing to create 'artistic objects' subject to free trade?¹⁹

Meyer continued his presentation stating the wish to identify a photographic production, and thus a history of photography, specific to Latin America, opposed to the foreign one. According to him:

Until recent years, we were forced, by the lack of alternatives, to turn our eyes looking for orientation and even support to the centers of cultural power of the metropolis, in the centers where photography was apparently more developed. Finally, despite everything, we are not looking at the metropolis any more to receive their orientation and their favor. [...] Stimuli are coming from our own lands, from our brother countries, from our cultural political and social realities.²⁰

¹⁶ MEYER, Eugenia. Op. Cit.

¹⁷ LEVINE, Robert M. *Windows on Latin America: understanding society through photographs*. Miami: North-South Center, University of Miami, 1987.

¹⁸ TACCA, Fernando Cury. *La presencia brasileña en el fondo fotográfico del Consejo Mexicano de Fotografía*. Luna Cornea, v. II, p. 147, 2013.

¹⁹ MEYER, Pedro. *Palavras de apresentação*. In *Feito na América Latina. II Colóquio Latino-Americano de Fotografia*. Rio de Janeiro: Funarte, 1987, p. 11.

²⁰ *Idem, ibidem*.

3. CONCLUSION

This process of mapping the photographic practices and works promoted by committed photographers at public institutions, in parallel to a reevaluation and re-signification of these practices and works, is therefore fundamental for a history of photography which started to be constructed between the end of the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s in Latin America. These people and institutions were in contact, promoting initiatives with convergent goals regarding to organization and professional training, of conservation, of publication, of exhibitions, etc. In this sense, debating a particular history of photography for each of these countries involves debating also this Latin American bigger movement. They are actions that are part of a common and shared movement. There is a public sense of training, education and dissemination of a memory, which is key to understanding the current state of photography in Latin America and, specially, in Brazil.

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