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Natalia Brizuela

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GRETE STERN, HORACIO COPPOLA AND THE QUESTION OF MODERN PHOTOGRAPHY IN ARGENTINA

This article questions the meaning of the category of ‘modern photography’ in Argentina from the 1930s through the 1960s, looking specifically at how it was used to refer to Grete Stern and Horacio Coppola’s work from that period. The article shows that ‘modern’ referred to different and at times contradictory aesthetic and political dimensions of the photographic medium, and not to a single type of practice. By doing this, the article offers a historiographic and theoretical intervention on the question of modern aesthetics in Argentina in particular and in Latin America in general.

Keywords: Argentina; photography; visual culture; modernism; Coppola; Stern

Modernism, the avant-garde and photography

How did photography, aesthetic modernism and avant-garde practice intersect in early twentieth-century Argentina? Did the expanding impact and circulation of art, literature, mass media and mass entertainment engage photography in any way that was different from the use and place that the medium had occupied during the nineteenth century? As one of the privileged nineteenth-century symbols of modernization, photography had been a key medium in the vast production of images of the nation – its territories and its people, the inclusion of some and the exclusion of others, its subjection of both land and bodies – and this iconographic role continued through the celebration of the *Centenario* in 1910, as evidenced by the massive number of photographic albums produced both privately and with government sponsorship. Throughout the nineteenth century, albums had been one of the most common types of circulation and visualization for photographs – when these were not personal family portraits. In their centralizing and consolidating gesture, articulating disparate parts into a single, bound object, albums by the likes of León Pallière, Esteban Gonnet, Benito Panunzi and Cristiano Junior (or the many *Centenario* albums, which did not have any single photographer/artist as their ‘author’) formed part of the long nineteenth-century project of the modernization of the state. We could frame those uses of photography as part of what Jens Andermann (2007) has called the ‘optic of the state’, in the sense of the modes of knowledge that in the late nineteenth century the State used to both control and make visible its territories and its bodies. The question that I want to bring forward in relation to modernist experiments with photography

is what happened to and with photography after the period of the ‘optic of the state’, once critical forms of nationalism had emerged? Once aesthetic experimentations in the arts were under way, in the desire to fight what I will summarize here under the rubric of ‘realism’? Once newspapers could easily reproduce photography and the culture industry began to evolve, and elite culture and forms of mass culture began to rub up against each other? Once new social classes emerged on the scene, first with the rise of a growing working class as the country entered a period of economic growth around 1880, and subsequently with the rise of *peronismo* and its implementations of new progressive labor policies? These questions are of interest to me here not because I want to offer a ‘History of Modernist Photography in Argentina’, but because I want to question a very specific assumption at play in the stories told about Argentine photography: the supposed ‘modernity’ that critics past and present have consistently seen at work in Horacio Coppola’s and Grete Stern’s photographic practices from about 1927 through 1967. Because of the ambiguous and conflictive nature of photography – as both science and art, as both art and information, as part of an elite culture and at the same time as the first ‘every man’s art’, as both a private ‘auratic’ object and a public object in incessant circulation and transformation – it came to stand as an emblem of industrial modernization. Indeed, as Esther Gabara has suggested, photography, more than other mediums, ‘provides a special opportunity to theorize modernism in Latin America, for it bore both the promise of modernity as a technological advancement and the stain of late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century projects of imperial expansion’ (Gabara 2008: 3–4). Here, rather than to address the question of Latin American photographic modernism in general, I shall limit myself to asking what the ‘modern’ is in Coppola and Stern. To understand these two as ‘modern photographers’ we need to visualize, even if in a sketch-like manner, what the contours were – modes of visibilities, types of circulation, types of nationalism (separated roughly between a critical and a culturalist strand) – of a photographic modernism in Argentina in the late 1940s through the mid 1960s.

I want to begin addressing these questions by considering the place of photography as part of an increased network of circulation which has come to characterize those decades as of the 1920s and 1930s, that is to say before the advent of *peronismo* that would transform the use and place of photography in the art scene. If we take a look at two of the writers who have come to most clearly signal those years as of the mid 1920s, Roberto Arlt and Jorge Luis Borges, we can begin to get an idea of photography’s place in the modernist *ciudad letrada* which was in these two experimental uses a non-mimetic, non-illustrative recourse to photography. Once Roberto Arlt left Buenos Aires to write his *Aguafuertes*, he became a photographer. Both the *aguafuertes* he wrote when he traveled to Patagonia in 1934 and the ones he wrote from Spain and Africa the following year were many times printed alongside photographs that he took.¹ His Patagonian *aguafuertes* and photographs reproduce other places, previous travel literature or global tourist tropes, so that in this sense the photographs he took and published worked with the same intention of giving the reader what she expected (Sáitta 2008; Cimadevilla 2012; Juárez 2010). He compares the enchantment of the Patagonian valley of Trafal with the marvels of *Thousand and One Nights*, the Andes seem familiar to him because he has seen them in photographs, certain places remind him of German postcards, the panoramic view of certain places reminds him of a US film, some Patagonian towns could be mistaken

for Brazilian towns (he had visited Brazil in 1930).² This reliance on prior travel narratives to forge his own written descriptions and visual images of the sites visited changed when writing and photographing in Spain and Africa the next year. If in Patagonia he relied on accounts by previous travelers and pre-fabricated ways of seeing, once in Spain and later in Africa he would constantly decenter and undo those inherited ways of seeing. In this undoing, the photographs that appear alongside these *aguafuertes* are also detached from the text, acting as neither illustration nor documentary validation of what appears in the text. The photographs function autonomously, and don't really reveal much to the spectator. The photographs are diversions, *drifts*. In 1930, when Borges wrote his first 'proto-fiction', as Sylvia Molloy has defined *Evaristo Carriego*, it was published alongside a minor (yet very crucial) photographic experiment, for Borges included in it two photographs taken by Horacio Coppola. As Adrián Gorelik has observed, these are surprising photographs for several reasons: first, because, technically speaking, they are flawed as a result of the amateur camera Coppola had used, making the edges of the photograph appear out of focus; second, the captions are 'mistaken', for they do not correspond to the site where they were taken (a sense of confusion which was about to become a signature in Borges's literature); and third, the photographs themselves show only small, one-story houses, standing alone, with nothing remarkable to be seen in them. Furthermore, Borges's text never once references the photographs. As in Arlt's use of the medium in his Spanish and African *aguafuertes*, the strategy is precisely the *error* and *diversion*, against the notion of mimetic correspondence or visual illustration of realist representation.

Even though two of the most important literary figures of the 1930s and 1940s experimented with the inclusion of photography in their written work, mass media in Argentina during those decades barely did. Photographs were included in the main newspapers in the most classically illustrative manner. If we compare the use of photography in the then exploding field of popular print media in Argentina with the way in which it was used in Mexico or Chile during periods similarly marked by intense debates and experimentation with modernist aesthetics, it is surprisingly absent or present only as part of a nineteenth century aesthetic project anchored in the notions of mimesis, indexicality and truth value of the image. The visual medium of choice, even for a publication such as *Claridad*, was the hand-made gravure.³ The *Revista Multicolor* used lithography and engraving, but not photographs.⁴ As a medium of experimentation photography is strangely absent from mass media publications of the period that otherwise are experimenting with collage, simultaneity, and new modernist forms of seriality. It is present, if at all, in a manner still anchored within early twentieth-century image culture. Even when in its first issue on May 14th, 1928, *El Mundo* would describe its project as 'un tipo de diario agil, rápido y sintético que le permita al lector percibir por la imagen directa de las cosas . . . todo lo que ocurre' [a dynamic, fast and synthetic kind of newspaper that allows the reader to perceive through the direct image of things . . . all that is going on], a promise no medium seemed better placed to fulfill than photography, photographic modernity remained largely absent. Despite their radical differences with mass media and popular press publications symbolized by the likes of *El Mundo* and *Claridad*, *Proa* and the later *Martín Fierro*, emblematic avant-garde publications, with a limited run and much more circumscribed circulation, did not use photography either.

As we will see, only in *Sur*, the magazine which envisioned itself as part of a global network of high modernist aesthetics and as the translator of this ‘global modernism’ into Spanish, did photography not only appear, but also have a central place during its first decade. *Sur* published a wide array of photographs in their first years and, while many of these belonged to what we could call a *costumbrista* use of the medium and at times even a tourist-like relationship with places, people and objects, the journal also printed photographs that were, at least from a European or US vision, clearly avant-garde. Examples include dramatic stills from Eisenstein’s unfinished *Que viva México!* to some of Horacio Coppola’s most radical and innovative photographs of his oeuvre in his two-part visual essay on Buenos Aires. European and US modernist kinds of photographs shared space in *Sur* with anonymous, vernacular examples of the medium, well set apart from the pages that offered text, thus keeping both media separated by clearly defined boundaries.

It is, I argue, with the rise of *peronismo* in the second half of the 1940s that photography acquires something I would call a twentieth-century Argentine singularity, as the medium became one of the privileged sites through which a new political body – *el pueblo* – became visible. The use that *peronismo* made of photography pretty much took over the field of printed matter, still within the ‘optic of the state’ framework which had articulated its use in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Yet the distinction between the nineteenth century and the *peronista* ‘optic of the state’ is that, in the latter, bodies that had been until then invisible in the political terrain gained access to visibility. They did this by way of an aesthetics of undoing the hierarchies and categories that had up to then clearly separated spheres, practices, and populations. This new regime of visibility is what Jacques Rancière (2013a,b) has termed the aesthetic regime – the irruption of new bodies into the public sphere through new conditions of visibility. Yet, *peronismo* is not quite Rancière’s ‘aesthetic regime’, because even if the old ‘bourgeois’ divisions and distinctions were pushed aside in ascribing political power to the working class through the figure of their leader, this was still, of course, a highly hierarchical political and aesthetic situation. Furthermore, photography was used *by the State* as the publications were state-run, state-owned and part of a larger project of state-run media and propaganda. As I will sketch out below, photography was one of the key visual regimes through which *peronismo* constituted itself – both its leaders and its people.

From 1946 to 1955, the Subsecretaría de Información [Under-Secretary of Information] under Perón’s governments published an incredible number of pamphlets and photobooks meant for distribution both inside the country and abroad, propaganda of sorts. These books share a number of characteristics which differentiate them both from previous photobooks and from those published from outside the realm of the populist state: the image of Perón and Eva opens all the books; they all show ‘*el pueblo*’, the people on whom and through which the Peronist Project was built; workers; women at work; emphasizing the notion of a movement forward, of a future tense. *Buenos Aires*, *Argentina en marcha*, and *Escuela de enfermeras* are but three examples of this kind of book.⁵ There is no nostalgia in the photographs of these books, no looking back at a time past, but instead plans for a future. The landscapes of Argentina and even the city of Buenos Aires appear in them at the service of the people. For the first time in the twentieth century we perceive a shift in the terms of what was seeable and sayable,

the people and the workers taking center stage, not through revolution but through the figure of their leaders – hence the image of Perón and Eva that appear in the opening pages of every single publication – photobook or not – produced by the Subsecretaría de Información.⁶

This is the urban, Buenos Aires-centered photographic world in which Stern and Coppola produced most of their Argentine work.⁷ Stern was part of the changing use of the medium, which came about as an effect of the ways in which *peronismo* had turned photography into one of their preferred modes of visualization.⁸ Two of her major projects during the years of *peronismo* were indirectly part of this democratization through the photographic, which is, as I am arguing, part of Argentine modernist photography. Between the late 1940s and the early 1950s she worked for the *Estudio Plan de Buenos Aires*, a think tank for urban renewal. She photographed marginal areas of the city of Buenos Aires and crafted collages as part of the studios' printed output in the form of brochures and propaganda. During roughly the same years she worked for the popular women's magazine *Idilio*, making the now famous photomontages for the column titled 'El psicoanálisis te ayudará'. Both of these were first and foremost jobs – professional opportunities where Stern put to work her knowledge of photography and her experience with the medium from the 1920s and 1930s in first Germany and then England. Photography was, for Stern, not an 'art' but a *language*, which was part of the expanding public sphere of urban modernity and embedded in a new regime of representation. As such, it could and should be used – in advertisement, in propaganda, as an ideological tool, in the mass media – with all the force afforded to it by its character of being a mechanically reproducible image. Her understanding and use of photography were as critique. In these two uses she gave photography during the Peronist years, she was also giving visibility to social classes which had remained out of sight and to the female subject who had had no voice – she literally turned their voice into an image. Coppola, on the other hand, did not participate in this reinterpretation of photography. His use of the medium was much more anchored within a desire to make of it an 'art' form, singular and separate from other forms of image making, outside of the circulation of mass media and far removed from any type of use of it as one other language in the expanding democratization of politics and art.

'Photography', 'straight photography' and the complexities of a modern practice in Argentina

Horacio Coppola and Grete Stern have been repeatedly singled out as the creators or forbears of modern photography in Argentina, and this emblem of their vision and work as modern has accompanied almost every exhibition since the first show they held together in Buenos Aires in 1935 up to the most recent exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. I want to complicate this ready-made assumption, almost always attached to their names, as label or password that has allowed them to circulate in Argentine art circles and international markets. Moreover, I wish to unravel the issues embedded in the category of 'modern' as used in the context of Argentina in the 1930s through the 1960s, and to ask if these questions really were the same in Coppola's and in Stern's respective oeuvres. This will, inevitably, yank their work apart, foreshadowing one of the first claims I am making here: there wasn't just one

photographic modernism in Argentina. As much as this might seem – and it actually is – a remarkably simple statement, it is necessary because of the way in which Coppola and Stern, whose conception of photography emerged in radically different settings – Buenos Aires and Germany in the teens and twenties – and whose use and understanding of the medium’s possibilities were radically different throughout their career, have been clustered together. The simplest and partly true reason for this is that they have been grouped because of biographical reasons: they were married and collaborated on a few projects from the early ’30s to the early ’40s. Furthermore, this assumption and clustering of them as a single face of a modernist photography have usually produced a narrative that places Stern as a sort of apprentice to Coppola, particularly in terms of an urban use of the medium, a result of Coppola’s 1936 book as well as his Argentine work leading up to it, and also, importantly, in terms of a male-dominated conception of photography and art at large in Argentina. The unit Coppola-Stern, despite being a unit, has also been clearly delimited as composed of a masculine (and hence leading) side, whose vision focused on the city and public space, and a feminine (and therefore secondary) side that focused on the unconscious and the private sphere. In a nutshell, the perfect gendered photographic aesthetic.

But I believe their having been grouped as this perfect combo of ‘the first modern photographers in Argentina’ within Argentine histories of the medium and of modernism in Argentina is symptomatic of something less evident: in Argentina, photography never actually played a central role in the avant-garde and in modernist projects, and, except for Stern’s photography, this meant that there was no real investigation into the medium’s materiality, nor into the undoing of the complex ontology of the photograph, nor a realization that photography, more than any other medium, was a figuration of the simultaneity, speed, seriality and innovation that was characteristic of the period. Perhaps the truth about photographic modernism in Argentina is another, as I hope to show here, because photography did not participate as vigorously in the new regimes of circulation and in the articulation of a critical nationalism in the search for the ‘new’ (woman, citizen, nation, aesthetic) as it did in Brazil, Mexico, Chile, or Peru, until the arrival of *peronismo*. Photographic modernism in Argentina was out of sync in different ways: because of the *temporal* gap (the mass use of photography in relation to questions of national and popular representation, even critical representation, emerged later as part of a singular populist moment known as *peronismo*), which creates a non-synchronicity between the Argentinian and these other Latin American photographic modernisms; de-coupled also in a more deep, ‘ontological’ way regarding the new nature of the photographic medium, which was now informed by the mass media/art dilemma, a tension that was embodied and developed in different ways by the two ‘exponents’ of Argentinian photographic modernism, Coppola and Stern.

I want thus to turn the categorization of their work as modern upside down by asking what exactly ‘being modern’ means, and asking what the implications are of that story, of that category, for aesthetics and for politics in the mid-twentieth century. In dialogue with a number of recent interventions on the question of modernity and modernism in Latin America, I want to delve into the specific problematic of modernism in general and photographic modernism in particular in Argentina. I want to read these terms differently and in that sense also re-read them, through an analysis of the photographic archive of these two supposed ‘moderns’ of the medium in

Argentina. I want to suggest that through a close reading of Coppola and Stern's work, it becomes necessary to reinterpret the 'modern'.

Let's begin with the question of modern photography in Argentina in general and of the attribute of 'modern' granted to Grete Stern and Horacio Coppola as password, safe-conduct and, we could even say, refugee status by way of what might seem like a strange excursus on *Camera Work*, Paul Strand and Alfred Stieglitz. By taking this starting point I do not want to imply that the modern in photography was a universal category or aesthetic paradigm – a statement which would of course make a US 'modern' the framework for all modern projects, and thus the site from which to envision and formulate a universal and global modern photography. I do not want to measure Argentine photographic modernism against US and European modernist traditions. Nor do I want to feed into the ongoing stereotype that Argentine intellectuals and artists, more than any of their other Latin American colleagues, felt closer to European and US cultural paradigms because, after all, Buenos Aires was the South American Paris. In this way, I follow the road paved by scholars like Esther Gabara in her reading of Brazilian and Mexican photographic modernisms, decentering, as she claims, 'modernism from those [US and European] centers of economic modernization' by not imposing 'aesthetic expectations from other modernist sites' (4). Instead, *Camera Work's* famous last issue, Paul Strand and Alfred Stieglitz will help me trace a set of initial differences between Grete Stern and Horacio Coppola. I want to separate Stern and Coppola, who have so many times been placed side by side, and have been presented as the point of introduction of modern photography in Argentina. I want to distance them from each other, de-couple them, in order to better undo the very term 'modern' in 'modern Argentine photography'.

Why was that last issue of *Camera Work* such a landmark? Upon reaching the 50th issue, Stieglitz closed the publication of the magazine he had edited since December 1902 and which had quickly become a Bible-like text for those who believed in as well as those who searched for the truth and novelty of photography. Yet, the well rounded feeling of completion or at least of a cycle that the number 50 could afford probably had little to do with why Stieglitz shut down the magazine. Rather, it was the acknowledgement, through a portfolio of photographs by the young Paul Strand and a manifesto-like text authored by him and titled, quite simply, 'Photography', that the medium had found its own language, its own truth. Photography had freed itself from the complicated relationship it had maintained, for many years, with other artistic practices, mainly painting. Both Strand's photographs and his text defined the medium's characteristic as that of 'absolute unqualified objectivity', which was both its contribution and limitation. For Strand, purity through the relinquishing of any mixing with other media was what would allow the medium to achieve its full potential. The photographer should have 'a real respect for the thing in front of him, expressed in terms of chiaroscuro' and a complete negation of all kinds of 'tricks of process or manipulation'. This double respect for the material world placed before the camera and the photographer on the one hand, and for the minimum of intervention on the production of both negative and print on the other, were the only basic elements needed for 'straight photography': Strand's and the last issue of *Camera Work's* profession of faith. 'Straight photography' was the happy encounter of a technology with a subject who organized the world before the camera revealing her or his emotions and intellect, yielding what Strand called 'the photographer's point of view

toward Life' (142). For Strand, America was the place where photography flourished and grew to its fullest potential as a medium, more so than in Europe, where manipulation of both negative and print had become the new fad and asserted that as its modernity. American photographic production was unencumbered by the weight of tradition and by the 'anxiety of influence', partly because it was such a recent development – barely sixty years had passed since its conception by 1917 – and partly because its practitioners were mostly amateurs, not worried with debates about art versus science or technology. This was a way of spatializing history: 'old art', the art of the past symbolized in the medium of painting and in pictorialist and figurative aesthetics, belonged in Europe; 'new art', the art of the present and of the future was photography and belonged in the USA, the land of amateurs, of self-made men and women, of technology and the real, forceful movement of progress. It is through an 'intense interest in the life of which they were really a part of' that, according to Strand's credo, American photographers, since 1840, had become the masters of the medium 'no less for Europe than for America', generating what he called 'a living photographic tradition'. Photography as the art of the present and of the future: an art form that had the strength to generate its own tradition, yet a tradition that was based on living matter – the hustle and bustle of New York or Chicago at the beginning of the 20th Century. Therefore, photography was for Strand the art form of 'what is' and what 'will be' and not of 'what was'. Photography – modern photography – was not for corpses. It was for what was to come. If for Baudelaire, Constantin Guys, who had found a way to capture the speed and time of nineteenth-century Paris, was the painter of modern life, for Stieglitz, Paul Strand was the photographer of modern life, and furthermore, for Paul Strand himself, modern life could only be truly presented through the medium of photography. Stieglitz thus closed the journey of *Camera Work*: modern photography had been born, it had found its 'creator' in Strand, and its home in the USA. The magazine's work was done.

Grete Stern owned a copy of this *Camera Work* famous last double-issue, numbers 49/50, from June 1917: this was the only known copy of that magazine anyone could find in all of Argentina, at least up to the mid-nineties. I want to begin with this detail, which is ultimately anecdotal, for several reasons. On the one hand, because it is rather surprising that Stern would have owned this, mainly in material terms, given that whether she acquired it in Germany or England between the late 1920s and the mid 1930s while she still lived in Europe, or anytime thereafter in Argentina, the 49/50 double issue in particular had become an immediate cult object and was considered a collector's item in the art market – all of which meant that *Camera Work* 49/50 was worth a lot of money, and Stern was, as all accounts of her life and work have stressed, austere, someone fiercely against consumerism and all forms of luxury. Yet, at the same time, amongst the European modernists precisely, *Camera Work* had circulated widely, because of Stieglitz's support of their work. On the other hand, it is also surprising that Stern would have a copy of the magazine because Strand's 'Photography' credo was indirectly a harsh critique of Stern's 'photomontage' trademark in its different manifestations from the late twenties onward. That is, according to Strand's 1917 manifesto, Stern's production from the mid 1920s through the mid 1950s would have been characterized as a contaminated and wrongful understanding and use of the photographic medium. She could not have kept it as a mode of allegiance to Strand's aesthetic credo. Stern's use of collage for her work as a

graphic designer and in advertisements in Germany and England, as well as her later use of the technique (even if in a much modified manner, for her photomontages as well as for architecture and urbanism projects), was something that Strand's credo as published in 1917 dismissed. It is important to remember that Strand's critique of any form of intervention on the photograph marks the clear distinction between the US 'straight photography', which became the country's modern aesthetic, and the European 'new objectivity', which came to summarize the continent's approach to a modern photographic practice. Of course Strand's prime – albeit disguised – attack was on pictorialism, and this is what he was mainly referring to when he criticized the modification of the photographic negative.

Yet Stern's 'photographic vision' was not only constituted by the centrality of a collage or montage-like aesthetic.¹⁰ Her life-work also encompassed ascetic, anti-dramatic portraiture, landscapes, city views and forms of non-figurative images through a straight use of the medium. This work of hers is less known and has received less critical attention than her well-known photomontages in *Idilio* and her collages from her *ringl + pit* years.¹¹ In this, her work was close in spirit and ideals to Strand's photography, somewhat bridging the gap between a North American and a European modern practice, by way of Latin American modernity. Furthermore, the later Paul Strand – the one who eventually left the United States for being a socialist and for the accusations brought against him and the *Photo League* where he had worked for years with his mentor Lewis W. Hine and Berenice Abbott by senator McCarthy's witch-hunt; the one who accepted the post-revolutionary Mexican Government's invitation to direct the film and photography department in the National Institute of Fine Arts (part of the mythic *Secretaría de Educación Pública* [Secretary of Public Education] where artists and intellectuals like Diego Rivera and José Vasconcelos had worked or would work); the one who made portraits of people living in rural areas of Europe, after he moved there in 1950 – this Paul Strand was someone whose use of the medium and humanistic turn was very close to Stern's own work in the field of what we could call 'social photography', from her photographs in the 1937 issue of *Anuario Socialista* through the photographic production of the *Gran Chaco* in the mid-1960s, passing through her documentation of marginal areas of the city of Buenos Aires in the late 1940s and early 1950s for the *Estudio Plan de Buenos Aires* architects. When thinking about where many elements of Strand's 'straight photography' ended up in his practice, years later down the road after he asserted his aesthetic principle in *Camera Work*, and where Stern's own Bauhaus and 'new objectivity' early years were present in her more 'social' use of photography, it is not surprising at all that she had a copy of the magazine that had made Strand one of the most important photographers of the twentieth century. There was an undoubtable kinship between them, even if, as I have explained, in the text Strand published in *Camera Work*'s last issue he indirectly dismissed a large part of Stern's techniques, aesthetic practices, and modes of production.

It would not have been surprising at all if Horacio Coppola had been the one to own a copy of that issue of *Camera Work*, even if we actually know for certain that his library had none of the classics on photography from the same period but did have an ample theoretical selection of books on avant-garde film from the 1920s and 1930s. Jean Epstein, Pudovkin, Rotha, Arnheim, Balázs, the magazines *Close-Up*, *L'Art Cinématographique*, *Cinema Quarterly*, *Film Art* were all part of Coppola's personal library, but no Franz Roh book, no Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, no Albert Renger-Patzsch,

no August Sander nor André Kertész – all of whom by the mid thirties at the latest had published their major theoretical texts on photography.¹² All of this helps confirm David Oubiña's and Verónica Tell's arguments on the centrality of film in Coppola's aesthetic development. Despite this, it would not have been surprising if Coppola had owned *Camera Work's* last issue. On the one hand Coppola's own aesthetic project, as outlined in a text he published in 1930 in *Clave de Sol* and then in the text he wrote for his and Stern's 1935 show in Buenos Aires, was very close to Strand's 1917 manifesto. On the other hand, Stieglitz – his aesthetic project and his photographic vision post Strand – had been central to Victoria Ocampo and *Sur* in the early years of the magazine, and *Sur* and Victoria Ocampo (and Borges) had played important mentoring roles for Coppola during the 1920s and 1930s, thus establishing another possible affinity between Coppola and *Camera Work*. It would even be possible to imagine that Victoria Ocampo had owned a copy of the magazine – perhaps given to her by Stieglitz himself when she visited him in 1930, or else bought by her in New York – and had then given it to Coppola, the closest Argentina had to the type of photographs that Ocampo associated with the Stieglitz of *An American Place*. Victoria Ocampo openly admired Stieglitz's work as a promoter of art and literature, and he had been the mastermind and editor of the magazine. Ocampo never mentioned Strand or *Camera Work*, but she did make known her opinions on Stieglitz and on photography through her article 'La aventura del mueble', the piece she wrote for *Sur's* first issue in 1931. There she stated that *An American Place* – Stieglitz's gallery opened in 1929, after he had closed down his mythical *Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession*, also known as 291 – was the first place in New York (and in the USA) where she had felt at home, both because of the sparse use and layout of the space and because she saw in Stieglitz what she wanted for her own project: an American view of the world. For Ocampo, Stieglitz, his photographs and his place where participating in a 'Life' invested in extracting beauty from the reality of modernity, firmly anchored in a modern aesthetics, and that is what she wanted *Sur* and her own house, her own *American Place* in Buenos Aires, to be.¹³ I believe that Coppola was, for Ocampo in the 1930s, the Argentine photographer closest to the kind of practice that she described in her piece on Stieglitz, and this is evident in the selection of his photographs that were published in the 4th and 5th issues of her magazine, and in the organization of an exhibition of his work in her space in 1935. Put otherwise, Coppola was to Ocampo what Strand had been to Stieglitz.

But what exactly was 'modern' photography? Modern, for Ocampo, were those that 'having lost the old gods felt the painful need to find other new ones' ['habiendo perdido los viejos dioses sentían dolorosamente la necesidad de encontrar otros nuevos'], as Ocampo, paraphrasing Waldo Frank, described the first Cézannes, the first Matises, the first Picassos that had been shown in America for the first time by Stieglitz (not in *An American place* but in 291). Modern was having the gift, like Stieglitz's photographs had, of extracting the beauty that lay hidden in opaque things. Modern were his 'miraculous photographs: an electrical power station, a sky, a pier, a hand, a branch . . .' ['sus milagrosas fotografías: una usina, un cielo, un muelle, una mano, una rama . . .']. Yet, of course, this was Victoria Ocampo's version of modernism, and it is not surprising that at least the early Coppola can be situated within this *American* vision of modernity, which read the photographic medium as a *specific* artistic revelator about reality, in distinction with and by opposition to other mediums, was different, as we

have seen from the *European* modernity which had structured Stern's initial encounter with the medium. Modern for Stern was the belief that photography was part of a larger network of renovation, that it was one language among many, a language in a necessary conversation with many others, always in touch with other languages and practices that were sharing the public sphere, increasingly occupied by new bodies and new politics. Modern for Coppola was the search for a photographic practice that made of it an art through its own materiality, its own ontology, its own particular way of being in the world. It meant unveiling the artistic capacities contained in the photographic medium as such, and only in it. For Stern being modern was developing, experimenting with photography in the midst of a wide-ranging modernity, in a new aesthetic regime in which photography was inserted and which had an inherent social, public, political nature. Yet I argue that these two different ways of being modern in Argentina were and are two inherent, complementary and contradictory impulses that can be traced in many other national modernisms.

The show at *Sur*

What was photography like in Argentina prior to Stern and Coppola's 1935 show in the offices of *Sur*? In 1930, a very successful First International Salon of Photography had been held in Argentina, which privileged a showcase of pictorialist-type photographs in the Argentine selection (56 of 358 photographs shown were Argentine, from a couple of dozen photographers). The avant-garde practices already widely prevalent in the medium throughout the Americas and Europe – from Paul Strand, Man Ray, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy and Umbo to Manuel Álvarez Bravo and Tina Modotti – were markedly absent from this first Salon. The Salon's strategy was to stress the divide as well as the co-existence between an incipient amateur photography grounded on a documentary impulse sometimes leading the image towards the emerging field of photo-journalism and 'art' photography, much as had happened with the pictorialists in earlier decades in the USA and Europe. Prior to this, the 1920s had seen a number of 'artistic photography' salons, held mainly, although not exclusively, in Buenos Aires. As in the 1930 First International Salon, in the earlier salons, 'artistic photography' was almost synonymous with the manipulation of the photograph and with intervention on the negative, generating the well-known pictorialist style. For this type of practice, photography was art because it was able to create images as opposed to record them, stressing a particular kind of artist-figure, which I will call classical. Prior and contemporary to the Salons – and to Coppola's and Stern's arrival in Buenos Aires in 1935 – the photographic clubs and societies in Buenos Aires clustered photographers and also dictated styles: the Argentine Photographic Society of *Aficionados/Amateurs*, founded in 1889, was the first fotoclub, and in 1936 the Buenos Aires Fotoclub was founded. Classes were given, teaching its members the basic as well as latest technologies, and artistic parameters were taught, indirectly, through the many competitions the different societies and clubs sponsored. In 1939 the Foto Club Argentino, in association with the Museo Histórico Nacional, helped publish the first 20th-century photobook dedicated to Argentine photography – *Fotografías Argentinas* – with 120 photographs by a couple of dozen photographers – the German-born Annemarie Heinrich, Gustav Torlichen and Hans Mann, the Russian-born Anatole

Saderman, as well as Gar Vic, Manuel Gómez and José Suárez among others. Not a single photograph by Horacio Coppola or Grete Stern can be found amongst the 'fotografías argentinas' in 1939, despite their 1935 exhibition and the success of Coppola's 1936 photo book, which by 1937 was already in its second run.

Even though there is no remaining visual record – nor list of works displayed – of the 1935 show which first garnered Stern and Coppola their fame as modern photographers, it seems that they both exhibited most of their existing work to date at that time: Stern's collages, portraits and photomontages from Germany and England including some of her *ringl + pit* work, Coppola's photographs of Buenos Aires that had first appeared in Borges's 1930 *Evaristo Carriego* and then in 1931 and 1932 in *Sur*, some of the photographs he took while he and Stern traveled around Europe in 1933 and 1934, and perhaps some of the photographs of Sumerian sculptures he had made for Christian Zervos's book *L'Art de la Mesopotamie* at the British Museum and the Louvre in 1935.

The few positive reviews of the 1935 exhibit felt the need to emphasize a radical break with the past, stating that 'modern photography' had arrived in Argentina. When Jorge Romero Brest wrote in his review that Stern's and Coppola's was 'acaso la primera manifestación seria de 'arte fotográfico' que nos es dado ver' (*Sur* #13), he qualifies their work as 'realismo moderno' [modern realism]. Romero Brest clearly distinguishes between the pictorialist photographic practices centered on the Salons and a photographic model that privileged 'la más fiel realidad en sus imágenes' [the most accurate reality in its images], because 'modificar este proceso con un tratamiento manual posterior, significa "privar a la técnica fotográfica de sus propiedades específicas"' [modifying this process with a later manual treatment means depriving photographic technique of its specific properties]. It is difficult to know if Romero Brest was really thinking about Stern's compositions and montages when he wrote his review, for her work to that date would have complicated what he so much desired from the photographs: a realist modernity. On the other hand, her portraits – we know her portrait of Brecht was shown – were her contribution to a straight photography, so Romero Brest could have decided to indirectly reference them while ignoring the other Stern photographs. Were collages and compositions ways of altering the 'original photograph', post-exposure, were they realist images? What can a realist modernity mean if we were to place, say, these two types of images side by side, as they very well might have been in the 1935 show?

In what way was Stern's and Coppola's photography different from the spirit of their time and place? We must first remember and underline that their time and place were not the same – Buenos Aires in the 1920s for Horacio Coppola and Germany in the 1920s for Grete Stern. Their 'ethos', to borrow Esther Gabara's term, was therefore not the same. Argentina's most substantial photographic practice, as I have briefly shown, was pictorialism, while Germany's were the avant-garde practices of both photographers and artists using photographic techniques and materials. The two articles that Coppola published in *Clave de Sol*, the short-lived arts magazine he had co-founded in late 1930 – right before his second and right after his first trip to Europe – are revealing of Coppola's aesthetic beliefs at the time. In the first issue he published 'Superación de la polémica', where he strongly positioned himself against avant-garde art for two reasons: on the one hand, the avant-garde was always, according to Coppola, a way of discarding and breaking off with what was 'old' because it was considered

unworthy and judged as 'bad'; on the other hand, the hostility and polemic present in the previous, necessary rupture is 'negative', and modern art, for Coppola, must define itself in 'positive' terms, in terms of what it is, and not in terms of what it is not, which boils down to the formula 'pure contemporary expression with natural tradition'. There is in Coppola a reluctant move to assert Benjamin's 'destruction-mortification' of tradition. For these reasons, Coppola urges the 'modern' artists and 'modern' spectators to 'overcome' what he sees as the drive towards polemic that art of the present had been presenting as necessary. It is clear that Coppola was calling for an art that could be of its time without either a break with its past or a desire to be new. This, which we could understand as a certain adherence to tradition, as a resistance to a looking and moving forward, has been singled out by Adrián Gorelik in his study of Coppola, Borges and Buenos Aires architecture of the 1920s. In reading Coppola's photographs that appeared in the first edition of Borges's 1930 *Evaristo Carriego*, Gorelik shows that they evidence, both in their composition and in their content, a myriad of fundamental signs shared by Borges, Coppola and the Argentine 'avant-garde': tradition as modernist motif in the choice of one-story houses built by immigrant families at the end of the nineteenth century as characteristic of Argentina's modernity; the choice of *las orillas*, the edges the city – as opposed to its downtown – as the symbol of a modernist classicism. What Gorelik observes in placing those photographs next to, for example, the *Martin Fierro* avant-garde magazine and Borges's 1930 masterpiece is clear in Coppola's 1930 text – a fierce rejection of the typical characteristics of Mexican, Brazilian and European avant-garde. This rather classical mode respectful of a traditional conception of art is further developed by Coppola in his second article for *Clave de sol*, where, through a study of American Cinema, he sets forth his aesthetic credo – cinema, much like photography, is evidence, is reflection of a reality.

While we do not have a similar group of texts written by Stern from around the same time period to compare with Coppola's, we do have her work in *ringl + pit* to allow us to establish a valid comparison. If we look at some of Stern's work between 1928 and 1934, particularly the work she did as part of the studio *ringl + pit*, collage is their main aesthetic grammar. These carefully constructed and crafted pieces are orchestrated as still lives, a lesson that Stern learnt from her teacher Walter Peterhans, and as such they denaturalize one of the emblematic genres of the history of art. Up through the early 1950s Stern's photographic practice continued to use the collage techniques she had mastered during her studies in the '20s in Germany, specially in those that combined her knowledge of graphic design and photography, putting them at the service of book covers and layouts, magazines, card design. Even though in this aesthetic practice of Stern's there was no obliteration or modification of the photographic technique, in her work we find a radically different understanding of the image to what can be traced in Coppola's early 1930s texts. Furthermore, if next to those texts we also read the manifesto signed by Coppola and Stern that accompanied the 1935 show (but which, according to Luis Priamo, through conversations he had with Stern, was a text written almost entirely by Coppola, advancing his, and not her or their, ideas on the medium), what emerges is an aesthetic that looks with disdain at the avant-garde photographic practices of the likes of both a Laszlo Moholy Nagy and a Man Ray, anchored instead in a practice we could call 'humanistic', for, as we read at the end of the text, 'the images of things and beings which photography enables us to produce, amount to a fundamentally new possibility for knowledge and expression, given its

specific ability to provide detail of and to insist on the reality of those things and beings' (reprinted in *Grete Stern*, Fondo Nacional de las Artes, 1995). 'The subjective and free preparatory action ends at the moment of exposure [. . .] Obliterating this process or modifying it by means of subsequent manipulation amounts to depriving photographic technique of its specific properties.'

I have wanted to underline that 'being modern', and engaging in a 'modern' photographic practice, was not only extremely different for Grete Stern and Horacio Coppola, but also meant, it seems, diametrically opposed visions. These differences signal some of the recurrent issues raised every time the terms modernity and modernism are used, specifically in the context of Latin America. Numerous critics have tackled the question of modernity and modernism, of the difficulty of making them fit, because the terms refer to a different history, to a different understanding of History. Latin Americanists have proposed such figures as 'out of place', 'divergent', 'peripheral', 'postcolonial', 'cosmopolitan', 'errant', 'primitive' among other terms as concepts around which to understand, or at least house, the set of aesthetic and political changes that took place between roughly the last decade of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. But these differences between Stern's modernism and Coppola's modernism return to the ambiguity that is at the heart of photography: 'it is exemplarily an art capable of enabling non-art to realize art by dispossessing it', as Rancière (2011) has noted, and it is also a product of a scientific epistemology that was named 'art' from its very conception in the 19th century.

Aleijadinho, *EPBA* and *Idilio*

A woman smiles, as she sits inside a cork-shut glass bottle, resting on the shore (Figure 1). She smiles, yet her bodily posture could hardly be comfortable – at least for the long voyage the image suggests: either a message in a bottle about to be thrown into



FIGURE 1 Grete Stern. Second Version of 'Inhibition Dreams', *Idilio* 80 (May 30, 1950). Grete Stern Archive. Courtesy Galería Jorge Mara-La Ruche.

the water, adrift until it reaches, in some unknown future, another place, or the reverse, a message in a bottle that has just arrived, post time travel, mummified in time. What is the 'there' and 'then' of a photograph such as this one? The complex collage system and use of images belonging to different moments complicates the photograph's status. If any photomontage undoes photography's temporality, cutting and placing side-by-side heterogeneous times and places, undoing the 'then' of the photograph's taking, multiplying and juxtaposing the referents, this photomontage is in itself a meditation of photography's heterogeneous times. It reflects on photography's 'refusal of time', if we understand time in its capitalist configuration of progress, teleology, and history. The indexical traces proliferate, each pointing in different directions, beyond the image itself, yet at the same time, they all inhabit the frame together, underlining the composite temporal structure not only of the photomontage, but of all photographs. The bottle is a time capsule, and whether the bottle and its passenger are arriving or departing, an infinite number of times is contained in it. This bottle, by its upside-down-uterus-shaped-see-through volumetry, quite literally interrupts the horizontal line. The temporal and spatial line is broken, fractured by the roundish volume. In this and other ways the photomontage undoes the supposed temporality of the photograph, which photographic criticism has taught us is complex – a then and there which appears in a here and now – maybe nostalgic and melancholic but ultimately harmonious. Yet everything in this image points not at harmony but rather fracture, and in temporal terms, anachronism.

This 1949 photograph is one of 140 photomontages that Grete Stern made while working for the women's magazine *Idilio* between 1948 and 1951. Stern's job was to put into images the dreams that female readers sent to Gino Germani to be analyzed in his column 'El Psicoanálisis te ayudará'. Working closely with Gino Germani as he wrote his responses, his 'dream analysis', Stern would translate them into a visual form, for which the method of montage worked perfectly to reveal temporal folds of the unconsciousness: dream-sequences as montage. The vast majority of the female figures in the 140 *Sueños* that Stern made over those few years were either Stern's own daughter or her assistant, re-enacting some other woman's dream/phantasy/nightmare/anxiety. The studio where she would shoot the figures was her house in the outskirts of Buenos Aires. She would then cut out the human figure and begin working on her collage.

The same year that Stern began working for *Idilio* she also began working, as photographer and graphic designer, for the *Estudio del Plan de Buenos Aires* (EPBA), a city-government think-tank led by architects Jorge Ferrari Hardoy, Jorge Vivanco and Antonio Bonet, whose task it was to produce a 'spatialization of the social' through a study of the massive growth the city had undergone and the need for a future-looking urban project that could improve the quality of living of the working classes in the metropolis. Juan Kurchan – Ferrari Hardoy and Bonet's collaborator in what had been Le Corbusier's plan for Buenos Aires – was by then also working for the Municipality of the city of the Buenos Aires, and the EPBA's dream was to have the plans for Buenos Aires that the trio had developed with Le Corbusier in France in 1937 finally materialized.¹⁴ The Le-Corbusier-led plans were not adopted, but it remained as the core spirit of the EPBA. It was in that setting that Stern was hired, both to photograph the city – in a similar spirit we might imagine, the Farm Security Administration photographers had done in the USA in the post-depression era – and to help design the visual aid materials for the promotion and presentation of the studies and plans.

Her modernist use of photography is here clearly embedded in association with other practices such as urban planning and architecture, a modernism understood also in social and political terms.

Roughly around the same time that Stern was putting photography to work at the service of urban reforms and psychoanalytic explorations, Coppola traveled to Brazil to photograph the sculptural work of baroque artist Aleijadinho. The photographs of Aleijadinho's work taken by Coppola in Minas Gerais are dramatic: both in the lighting he chose, as well as in the interest he showed in the theatrical display of the religious sculptures. Let's look, for example, at the portrait of the Profeta Jonas (Figure 2): what stands out initially in the image is its brightness; the high contrast, due in part to the intensity of the sun, has not been softened at all, but instead exacerbated. Yet this brightness has also been precisely calculated so as not to blur the other aspect that stands out in the image: the materiality of the figure, its stone-ness. Taken from a low-angle shot – as were most of the photographs from this trip – the photograph is literally gazing upwards at the overexposed face of a man who himself is looking upwards. The close-up has made invisible the figure's context. His is the look of awe and amazement, of bewilderment and piety. Despite the immediate and undeniable knowledge that the photograph makes explicit as to the objectness of the figure – a stone sculpture – the sculpture is almost human, presented, through this exacerbation of the sensorium in the viewer, to instill in the viewer adoration. The viewer is inevitably moved by the photograph: this is its dramatic force. In this sense we could



FIGURE 2 Horacio Coppola. Profeta Jonas, Senhor Bom Jesus de Matosinhos Sanctuary. Congonhas do Campo, MG, 1945. Horacio Coppola Archive. Courtesy of Galería Jorge Mara – La Ruche.

say that Coppola makes this, and other, sculptures become alive. These photographs of Aleijadinho's work differ in this aspect from other work he had done, and would do, on monuments, public sculptures, and later on houses and buildings: the Brazilian sculptures have become alive through Coppola's technical decisions, while never hiding their objectness, their monumentality at the same time exacerbated and brought down to the realm of the living.

Coppola had been interested in *patrimonio* [heritage] since he became a photographer: his first coherent group of photographs, taken between 1933 and 1935 for Zevros, were of ancient Mesopotamian art; then there were the photographs of the city of La Plata, which the government of the city of La Plata published as a photobook; and his photographs in *La Catedral de Buenos Aires*, a book edited in 1943 as part of the State project on Historical Monographs on Argentine Churches; then in 1944 he photographed Rodin's statue of Sarmiento and published the photographs in a limited-edition book. In 1943 Coppola founded his own specialized photography press, Ediciones de La Llanura, which would from then on print most of the books showcasing his photographs. Yet the first two books published by Ediciones de La Llanura, in 1943, were books made in collaboration with Grete Stern, with photographs of the collection of ancient Andean art housed in the Museo de La Plata.¹⁵

On the one hand, objects turned into museum collections, on the other hand, religious sculptures located in or around churches. In seemingly different ways, both of these types of objects that Coppola photographed point towards the Nation, towards the constitution of patrimonies which either tell the story of where the Nation came from, of what and who make up that Nation, of what its ideologies and beliefs are, or that, in a similar vein, tell the story of Empire, of possessions beyond the territory of the Nation that belong to the Nation. What I want to claim here is that Coppola's photography was structurally attached – both aesthetically and politically – to the notion of patrimony and heritage. Coppola's first attempt at turning these objects into photographs, at participating in 'the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction' as Benjamin wrote, was unrelated to anything Argentine. If that first exploration in the art of photographing objects that signaled towards the Nation did not reference Argentina, it did garner him the first public recognition of aesthetic value in such a project in the praising comments that British sculptor Henry Moore wrote of Zavros's publication and of Coppola's photographs in particular. This looking back as a gesture of novelty and change was, as we know, a much used strategy amongst the Latin American avant-garde, whether we recall the Argentine Martínfierristas and Borges's own *Evaristo Carriego*, or the Brazilian *modernistas* with Oswald de Andrade's 'tupi or not tupi' and Mário de Andrade's spatial and temporal voyages to the heartland of the Nation in *Macunaima* as well as his ethnomusicology. It was also during the historical avant-garde years that many Latin American countries presented the first systematic work around the construction of National patrimony – in 1937 the Brazilian *Serviço do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional* was founded, with the collaboration of Mário de Andrade amongst other writers, while in Argentina the National Academy of Fine Arts launched its series on *Documentos de arte argentino* in 1939, to give only a couple of examples. Such diverse aesthetic and ideological quests as avant-garde art and the construction of a national patrimony thus met around similar objects and questions. In this sense, we could say of Coppola that he was both a classical avant-gardist from Argentina, and a nationalist.

The *Gran Chaco* and ‘STONEHENGE! PAESTUM!’

The last photographic projects co-authored by Coppola and Stern are the two books of photographs of the collection of *huacos* housed in the Museo de La Plata: *Huacos. Cultura Chamay* and *Huacos. Cultura Chancay*, both from 1943. If we could, as I have suggested, see these as part of Coppola’s line of work focused on patrimony and the Nation, they are also related to a very different project of Stern’s that links her Bauhaus style portraiture with her anti-ethnographic work done in the *Gran Chaco* in the mid-60s. This might seem difficult, given the radical difference in both politics and aesthetics between Coppola’s ‘patrimonial’ gaze and Stern’s high modernist portraiture: the former, looking towards the past to help consolidate the story of the Nation, in a type of gaze I claim is anchored within a certain type of subjectivity; the latter, working on the surface of matter and bodies in a negation of interiority, disentangling objects from any kind of national narrative.

Ignacio Aguilo has convincingly argued that Stern’s photographs taken during her months traveling the *Gran Chaco* in the mid-1960s mark the end-point of an ethnographic (or ethnographic-modality) use of photographs – begun in the late nineteenth century, when the northeastern region was annexed to the new nation-state – and the beginning of a type of visuality anchored within the art market – as opposed to the realm of scientific knowledge – invested in the presenting of a ‘subaltern figure’ who, to recall Spivak’s proposal, could not ‘speak’, or, in photographic terms, self-portray her or himself.

For Luis Priamo (2005), Stern’s photographic production in the Chaco could and should be categorized as either a report or an essay. A report ‘because [she] tried to document indigenous life. She did it in an unbiased manner, with a cordial yet not paternalistic attitude’ and an essay because she ‘built a narrative articulated around three topics: portraits of people and groups; habitat and customs, and craftwork, especially fabric, pottery and basket making’. Priamo speaks at length about Stern’s refusal of dogmatic positions, always having been careful to not corner her own or anyone else’s art practice into a set of norms and belief systems, thus, according to his reading, making it impossible to ‘label’ the Chaco photographs as social commitment for justice. Her project wanted to show to the city folks who the people from this northeastern region were, what they looked like, how they lived and what they did as she herself had seen them.

Around the same time that Stern was making photographs in the *Gran Chaco*, Coppola, with his then-wife Raquel, was on a road-trip through Europe. In his autobiographical text, published in the 1994 *Imagem*, Coppola describes that trip in ways in which are revealing for the argument I have been making:

1967/1968 October 12th, 1967. Cristopher Columbus salutes us from Barcelona’s sky. Our first discovery: the Museum of Catalan Art. Romanesque [architecture] displayed with its own frescos! Catalan Gothic! An incredible collection that prepares us for our European tour. The Marés Museum: the stations of the cross from the XII to the XVIII Centuries.

A Fiat 600 awaits us in Genova. We begin our trip to Paris to document the *Camino de Santiago* and the ‘European landscape’ part which we completed

travelling through Germany, Belgium, Holland, England (STONEHENGE!), Spain and Italy (ROME! PAESTUM!). Twenty-four thousand km in 225 days and nights. (Coppola 1994, p. 16)

Coppola is taken aback by the remains of long gone history of classical and early modern times: Romanesque and gothic architecture, religious icons from early modernity. This is of course not his first trip to Europe, which in the same autobiographical text he described as the place that he belonged to, ‘Hice pie en el mundo al que pertenezco’ [I took foothold in the world to which I belong]. That ‘world to which he belongs’ is the world that he describes as the world of so-called ‘prehistoric’ buildings, of classical antiquity and early modern times, of monuments and icons, of ruins and ancient temples. The three sites bracketed off as stellar and stunning – Stonehenge, Rome and Paestum – are all symbols of the beginning of Western civilization or we might say, following the Hegelian logic of History which governed both Coppola’s time and ours, are symbols of a moment when there was no Time. Coppola searches for a ‘universal’ and atemporal tradition which for him meant both what came before, the past, that is, as well as a that which allows the illusion of a standstill of time. He is attracted to Paris for its ‘presence without time’, or London when it offers itself as an ‘immobile city’.

Coppola and Stern should be understood as negatives of each other, each as the point of critique of the other’s belief of photography as modern: Stern as the impulse of a critique of realism; Coppola as the critique of an avant-garde image. Each, in their form of critique, developed divergent modes of being modern.

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Notes

- 1 Arlt’s *aguafuertes* were *crónicas* that he wrote for and published in *El Mundo* starting in 1928, one of the largest print-run newspapers in Argentina at the time.
- 2 Some examples from his *Aguafuertes patagónicas* will make this clear: ‘Memory and vision are weak in keeping and retaining such a diversity succession of marvels. Now it’s a phallic column ... now a spooky hooded being ... it reminds us of the enchantments of the perverse magicians in a Thousand and one nights ...’ (Arlt 2008: 68); ‘Once my eyes leave the suggestive vision of the incredibly blue water, they notice the landscape’s background. The Andes seem familiar to me ... I have seen it in photographs ... I think I already know them’ (Arlt 2008: 59); ‘These walls remind us of those humorous German postcards’ (Arlt 2008: 101); ‘I would never be able to illustrate through beautiful enough words the fine lines of these wooden bungalows, chalets whose triangular wooden tile roofs rise up gracefully amidst the gardens of raspberries, red cherries, cypresses, pear and apple trees and which, fenced off by those marvelous walls made of perpendicular planks that end in spear-like sharp edges, and that, as I said in a previous article, remind us of those humorous German

postcards' (Arlt 2008: 112); 'If I raise my eyes, I see ... and lower down, smooth, perfect, long, tree-lined and beautiful like one of those streets in the North American film, Bartolomé Mitre Street ...' (Arlt 2008: 102–103); 'Patagones could be a Brazilian coastal town' (Arlt 2008: 35).

- 3 *Claridad* and *Los pensadores* were two popular magazines published by Claridad Publishing Cooperative [Cooperativa Popular Claridad], which had been founded by the Spanish immigrant Antonio Zamora in 1922. The magazines and the books that the cooperative also published were part of Zamora's belief a press should not be a commercial enterprise, but rather serve as a popular university. Needless to say, Zamora was close initially to the anarchist organizations in Buenos Aires in the early twenties, and later on became member of the Argentine Socialist Party [Partido Socialista]. See Florencia Ferreira de Cassone, *Índice de Claridad: una contribución bibliográfica* (Buenos Aires: Dunken, 2005) for an excellent introduction to *Claridad* magazine and press.
- 4 I thank Alejandra Uslenghi for pointing this out. The *Revista Multicolor* was the literary and cultural section of the sensationalist newspaper *Crítica*. The supplement was published between August 1933 and October 1934, with Borges and Ulyses Petit de Murat as its editors. The newspaper *Crítica* had been founded in 1913 by Natalio Botana, and showcased a visually stunning graphic display, meant to attract a large, popular public.
- 5 See *Argentina en marcha* (Buenos Aires: Subsecretaría de Informaciones de la Presidencia de la Nación, 1950); *Fundación Eva Perón. Escuela de enfermeras* (Buenos Aires: Presidencia de la Nación Subsecretaría de Informaciones, 1951); *Buenos Aires* (Buenos Aires: Presidencia de la Nación Argentina Subsecretaría de Informaciones, n/d).
- 6 *Peronismo* definitely did not produce the first photobooks of the twentieth century after the *Centenario* albums. Photobooks began appearing in the mid 1930s in Buenos Aires. Just one year before Coppola's 1936 book, one of the first photobooks, *Maravillas de nuestras plantas indígenas*, was published, showcasing austere photographs by Russian-born Anatole Saderman, where close-ups of plants were set against black background, magnifying a dramatic setting. Hans Mann's photographs of the statue by 17th-century Spanish sculptor Alonso Cano were published in the photobook *Una obra de Alonso Cano en Buenos Aires. La imagen de San Pedro de Alcántara* in 1939 [it is almost impossible not to think that Coppola was aware of this book when he made his photographs of Alejaidinho's sculptures in Brazil in 1945]. In 1941 Victoria Ocampo published *San Isidro*, with photographs by Gustav Thorlichen on the right side of the layout, and the verses of a poem by Silvina Ocampo, her sister, on the left page. The book exudes nostalgia, and this is a very different 'arrabal' from the one shown, for example, by Borges. The almost square format with the spiral binding – an idea most probably taken from the second edition of Coppola's *Buenos Aires*, for which Stern re-designed both the layout, the cover and the binding, making it spiral-bound – announce a modern aesthetic, which both the images and poem very quickly undo. There's Hans Mann's *Buenos Aires Recopilacion fotográfica* from 1946, published by the popular press Peuser, who in 1956 published an updated version of the album (their words) this time with photographs by Stern, and another *Buenos Aires* photobook from 1949 published by Ediciones Robeduard. Stern's *Buenos Aires* book is clearly aimed at an international readership, with lengthy narrative captions in three languages. The book is divided into three parts – Buenos Aires retrospectivo, Buenos Aires moderno, and Buenos Aires íntimo. The most interesting part of this book is clearly the last section,

where Stern's photographs are clustered together, many to a page, not only complicating the very notion of 'intimate' under which they are presented, but also making visible the 'quotidian' that the very monumentality of these types of albums tended to overshadow. Not quite the masses, the people or *pueblo* which will appear consistently in the photobooks published by Peron's government during the same period, but close.

- 7 The exception would be Coppola's photographs of Aleijadinho's sculptures in Minas Gerais, Brazil, in 1946 and Grete Stern's work in region of the *Gran Chaco*, in Argentina's northeast, in the mid 1960s.
- 8 Although not part of my argument here, it is possible that Stern arrived in Argentina having already experienced this use of the medium as part of a larger changing use of mass media and political propaganda during the Weimar years. I thank Alejandra Uslenghi for this observation.
- 9 See Luis Priamo's essay on Grete Stern for the exhibition catalogue he prepared in 1995 for this information. In his research, Priamo spent two months at work in Stern's archive, funded by a grant from the *Fondo Nacional de las Artes*. In the essay's third footnote, Priamo states that 'El único número de *Camera Work* (la revista de vanguardia editada por Alfred Stieglitz en Nueva York) que se ha encontrado en el país hasta el momento (esto lo hemos chequeado con otros investigadores), estaba en el archivo de Stern: es el número 49–50, de 1917, dedicado a Paul Strand, donde se encuentra su breve y revolucionario texto sobre la nueva fotografía, que había publicado previamente en *Seven Arts*' [The only issue of *Camera Work* – the avant garde magazine edited by Alfred Stieglitz in New York – that could be found until now in the country – we have checked this with other researchers – was in Stern's archive: it the 49–50 issue of 1917, dedicated to Paul Strand, where there is a short but revolutionary text on the new photography that he had previously published in *Seven Arts*] (36).
- 10 On numerous occasions Grete Stern spoke of the 'photographic vision' – the conviction that the image was visualized even before looking through the camera's rectangular or square viewfinder. This was the lesson she learnt from Walter Peterhans, her teacher in Germany, first in the apprentice-like classes he gave her (as well as Ellen Auerbach) in his studio, and later on at the Bauhaus where he was the first and only teacher of photography in the last years of the School's life. See in particular Petra Olschewski's interview with Stern published in *Photographie* (June 1992, included in this dossier).
- 11 In her 'Notes on Photomontage', while describing European avant-garde projects of the early twentieth century, Stern describes the German 'New Objectivity' in a way that links it to Strand's call for a straight photography: '*Die neue Sachlichkeit* that sought the presentation of an objective image, against any form of sentimentality. Indeed, photography can offer the objective representation of a thing, especially if it is shown without context.' See Grete Stern, 'Notes on Photomontage', trans Alejandra Uslenghi and Natalia Brizuela, in this dossier.
- 12 I visited Horacio Coppola's house on Esmeralda Street in June and July of 2009 several times, while preparing an essay for an exhibition catalogue on Coppola's travels. It was then that, while surveying his library and archives, I was able to take note of this. Critics, such as Verónica Tell in this issue, have pointed out that Franz Roh's ideas resonate with some of the ideas expressed in the text that accompanied the *Sur* exhibition signed by Stern and Coppola.

- 13 The photographs Stieglitz gave Ocampo were from his later period – abstractions and experimentations with landscape. These photographs are now part of the collection of the National Museum of Fine Arts in Buenos Aires [Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes].
- 14 In the Summer of 1929 Le Corbusier took his first of three trips to South America. He visited Montevideo, Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo during that first trip, and delivered ten lectures in Buenos Aires at the Asociación Amigos del Arte, who had partially financed his trip. During his return to Europe aboard the ocean liner *Lutetia*, Le Corbusier organized his South American lectures, and eventually published them. Coppola attended the lectures, and in 1995 in an interview with Adrián Gorelik (published in this dossier) Coppola pointed out that those conferences had been fundamental in shaping his photographic work. See Le Corbusier, *Precisiones. Respecto a un estado actual de la arquitectura y el urbanismo*, trans Johanna Givanel (Barcelona: Apóstrofe, 1999) and Adrián Gorelik, ‘Horacio Coppola: Testimonies’ in this dossier.
- 15 The emergence of *peronismo* in 1945, only a few years after the photographing of the ancient Andean Art at the La Plata Museum, and right before Coppola travels to Brazil to photograph Aleijadinho’s work as his photographic practice becomes increasingly organized around the imaging of *patrimonio*, will make a number of intellectuals like Victoria Ocampo, Adolfo Bioy Casares and Borges become highly preoccupied with the threat to the national heritage by the now visible masses of the populist movement.

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Natalia Brizuela is Associate Professor of Latin American Literature & Culture at the University of California, Berkeley, where she is also a member of the Critical Theory Program and the Arts Research Center. She is the author of *Fotografia e Imperio. Paisagens para um Brasil moderno, Depois da fotografia. Uma literatura fora de si*, co-editor of *Y todo el resto es literatura. Ensayos sobre Osvaldo Lamborghini*, as well as of numerous essays on Latin American photography, film and literature.
