

Behind the Photographic Lens of Sergio Larraín

Behind the Photographic Lens of Sergio Larraín:

*Photography, Aesthetics,
and Critical Insights*

By

Jean Paul Brandt

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For Ian and Vic,
through this work, may you glimpse my path,
and always walk your own with courage and wonder.
With infinite love.

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DISCLAIMER

Due to the inability to secure the reproduction rights for Sergio Larraín's photographs, all visual content included in this book has been reinterpreted and sketched by the author for the reader's ease of reference. These reinterpretations are intended solely for illustrative purposes and do not replicate the original works. To ensure a comprehensive understanding, the reader will find additional information about the analyzed images through in-text references or detailed footnotes.

FOREWORD

I begin this foreword with a disclaimer. My academic scholarship is featured in this study. Jean Paul Brandt read early versions of my chapter on photography as translation (as well as other writings I have) and has graciously incorporated ideas from that chapter in my book *The Companion to Latin American Photography* in his present volume (as well as other references my work). Like cousins, the text you are reading and the one I just mentioned were both created under thick Scottish cloud cover by us as researchers on Latin American photography at the University of Glasgow which has a long-standing tradition of text and image studies thanks to the Stirling Maxwell Centre located therein.

Jean Paul Brandt came to know the work of Sergio Larraín working with Gonzalo Leiva in Chile. Leiva's excellent studies on Larraín feature in this work as well, as they should. Leiva was a pioneer on this Chilean photographer, and building upon him and others Brandt's study has done much to cement Larraín as one of the key Latin American photographers of the 20th century.

Such work is no easy feat. Latin American photographers feature little in the world canon, with women photographers featuring even less than men. Though works like the present one are doing their part to change this trend, and this piece of scholarship is one of the fine examples of academic writings on the subject that has appeared in recent times.

The photo agency Magnum now manages the Larraín archive, and Jean Paul Brandt, who has spent quality time within this collection (now in Paris), shows his familiarity with it. I would claim that one of ways in which this study shows its completeness is the well-rounded nature of his study of the archive (as presented in this book). Larraín's photographs of London and Valparaíso are well known. Not unlike Porto, Portugal; the funiculars and the hilly ups and downs of the city near the sea are beautiful, and beauty is a heavy currency in the world of art sales. Perhaps this is why these are the images that are some of Larraín's best known within international circles.

However, Jean Paul Brandt has gone far beyond the regular visions of the Chilean photographer. We see lesser-touched-upon themes such as magic and pain explored as part of his study, as well as the virtually unknown religious photographs that Larraín took. Zen, Satori, or Monastic photography style; along with Haiku photography have been virtually untouched topics in the study of Latin American photography until now. Brandt's coverage of them not only underscores the fascinating nature of such visual production, it amplifies the way in which we understand the Larraín's visual archive and it opens the door to new ways of thinking about his photography as well as offering the reader novel methods to be used when approaching the work of other visual creators.

Indeed, one of the merits of this book is Brandt's methodology. He shows his readers how to approach Larraín's work using techniques that could be replicated with other bodies of work. This is one of the outstanding parts of his study.

As noted by Manuel Alvarez Bravo, photography is one of the most democratic voices of expression. This is indeed true and one of the insights that Larraín offers is other ways of approaching Latin America, for example, through that of a spiritual lens that is outside the dominant religious thought in this region of South America. This of, course is one of the ways in which photography can expose those that engage with it to new visions of the Global South. These are vital ways in which our understanding of the Global South can grow in authentic and advantageous ways. This, of course, is one of the many ways in which this book is essential to the study of Latin American photography.

Another merit of this study is Brandt's clarity. His ideas are explained in a straightforward manner and are easy to understand. Such work is to be appreciated as, as Octavio Paz reminds us, clarity is the philosopher's courtesy. This approach does much to further his study and help those who wish to understand this artist's work and see its place within Latin American cultural studies and visual studies. He presents new ideas while still engaging with the classics. He draws upon well-known authors from the study of photography including Roland Barthes, Susan Sontag, and Walter Benjamin. Yet Brandt also incorporates with great expertise the writings and thoughts of Ariella Azoulay, John Mraz, and Ana Mauad

showing the expansion of photographic thought and the relevance of new ideas to the study of photography in the Global South and beyond.

One of the uses from contemporary writings on photography featured in this study is a technique encountered in some of Ariella Azolulay's writings on photography. You see, at times when she has not been able to obtain permission to reproduce a photograph, she has employed a very specific workaround of simply creating an artistic interpretation of an image whose permission to reproduce she has not been able to obtain.

Such writing strategies are necessary so that the reader can engage with the visual as they analyse it. Indeed, one of the great challenges faced by scholars of key photographers is the occasional difficulty in obtaining permission to reproduce images. Could you imagine writing a serious study on Cervantes or Shakespeare without being able to quote their work? It is unthinkable. Yet the use of those visual quotes when writing about visual art can become difficult, costly, or simply impossible for scholars in the case of reproducing certain images. For this reason, creative thinking and approaches are essential at times. Brandt needs to be praised for the workaround that he has employed that allows us to engage with both ideas concerning Larraín's images as well as ways of reflecting on his visual productions.

This case also makes a key point that the reader (and indeed others) should consider. There is an irony that surfaces in situations such as this. This is that sometimes, key images can be difficult - if not impossible - to reproduce precisely because of their essential nature. Their renowned status can sometimes shackle them to pedestals which then creates practical difficulties when developing academic work on the subject.

Thankfully, Brandt's solution evidences his talent for the pen both in drawing and writing. Others experiencing similar difficulties would do well to take note of the methods he has used. The reader will enjoy submerging themselves in his dynamic writing style, expanding their knowledge on the photography on the Global South and one of its important creators. We can see the work of an artist who formed a part of one of the best-known photo agencies of our times. Yet Brandt goes beyond the obvious to show us as well the ways the artist was able to retreat from fast-paced modes of production to dedicate himself to the inner self, the abstract,

and the transcendental. The author's approach is a well-rounded study worthy of reading with methods that merit replication in other archives.

Brandt's work, the first of its kind really, cements Larrain's place in the world canon of photography. Yet there is surely (and thankfully) much more to come.

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INTRODUCTION

Born into a milieu brimming with culture and aristocracy, Sergio Larraín's story began in a setting few could rival, making it essential to explore his formative history to fully appreciate his unique socio-cultural background. His trajectory traces back to the 5th of May 1928, the day that two aristocratic Chilean families were united by the marriage of Sergio Larraín García-Moreno and Mercedes Echeñique Correa. Their wealth allowed them, among countless other benefits, a year-long honeymoon in Europe. The couple brought back from their trip memories, presents, and substantial interest in France's artistic movements and Germany's golden era of the Weimar Republic regarding the Bauhaus and the formative social art (Leiva 15-6). As the Chilean aristocratic circle was somewhat hermetic in the early 1900s, Larraín's parents were among the most influential intellectual and political thinkers. This politico-cultural influence was so significant for Larraín's father that he incorporated the contemporary view of the architect Le Corbusier in Chile, a vision he as an architect eventually applied to his designs for urban interventions and buildings.

Sergio Larraín's parents strongly influenced him as both an individual and photographer, for his education took place in one of the most culturally stimulating environments anyone could ever be (Moreno, "El legado de Sergio Larraín, una clase magistral de fotografía"). Here he discovered photography and learned about art, philosophy, politics, and most importantly, he met influential people within artistic and intellectual movements. Concerning the biography of Larraín, Gonzalo Leiva wrote an entire section called "Los referentes del entorno cultural" with the idea of bringing out the tremendous influence Larraín's family had had in terms of cultural heritage. Some of their closest friends were Tristan Tzara, Andre Bretón, Roberto Matta and Pablo Neruda. Original paintings by Roberto Matta, Enrique Zañartu, Nemesio Antúnez, Camilo Mori and even Picasso and Matisse were part of the house gallery. Books by Cartier-Bresson such as *The Decisive Moment* (1952) with original photographs by the author, *Moscú* (1955), *D'une Chine a l'autre* (1954), *Les Dances a Bali* (1954), *The Photographs of Henri Cartier-Bresson* (1947), and Brassai's *Seville en*

Fete (1954) were also in the family library. Larraín's household was commonplace for the artistic avant-garde national movement, a place where the European vanguards and Larraín García-Moreno's pre-Columbian art collection coexisted (20-2).

Notwithstanding, equally important are Larraín's emotional and spiritual conflicts that little by little made him resent his family, their wealth and, at a later stage of his life, even photography, to the extent that he ended up living a life of contradictions and solitude. Media reports depicted him as, for example, one who exchanged the brightness of an international and acclaimed career for dust and loneliness in a lost town in Valle del Limarí (R. Mena), or the "experimental Chilean photographer whose short career resulted in a string of inspirational images" (Hopkinson). The photographer Josef Koudelka mentioned about Larraín that "yo pienso que Sergio tenía un talento enorme, pero se quemó. No ha hecho un trabajo completo. No explotó sus capacidades" (Moreno, *Sergio Larraín: el instante eterno*). Sebastián Moreno's film *Sergio Larraín: El instante eterno* (2021) attempts to address the photographer's familiar tensions and his sudden retreat into mystical practices (Valdivia). However, although his photographic production spanned his entire life and was not only reduced to his active stage as a photojournalist (C. Mena), Larraín's years of contemplation and spiritual practices have never been addressed from a visual approach.

Today, specialised critique acknowledges Sergio Larraín as Chile's most renowned photographer and one of Magnum's most acclaimed artists (Moreno, *Sergio Larraín: el instante eterno*). However, it was not always that way. Even though during the 1960s the Chilean photographer was internationally considered among the "world's finest photographers" (Kinzer 1-3), his name was barely known in the local sphere (Ríos 131). Mainly because of Larraín's "desire to destroy everything" and his "poor opinion of the photography world", he was always reluctant to exhibit publicly, and many of the photographers and media who tried to convince him to do so would wind up "irritated by Larraín's insistent proselytising" (Sire, *Sergio Larraín: Vagabond Photographer* 29).

Nonetheless, this changed radically when, in the late 1980s, Magnum's former director Agnès Sire discovered boxes filled with filed contact sheets from Larraín at the agency. Sire's participation in building up Sergio Larraín's imagery is crucial since she was the first and only person

whom Larraín trusted for such an endeavour. Their relationship as pen pals lasted over 30 years (Recontres-D'Arles, "Sergio Larraín Retrospective").

During that time, Sire managed to put together a consistent visual narrative beginning in the early 1990s through different exhibitions and publications and culminating in 2013, a year after the photographer's demise, with the most outstanding exhibition ever made on his behalf, "Sergio Larraín Retrospective" in Arles, France. The exhibition travelled to South America for the first time in 2014, to Santiago de Chile. It moved to Buenos Aires in 2017 and finally arrived in Brazil in 2019. Hence, for the first time Larraín's name was acknowledged by critics and the regional community as "el hito más importante en la historia de la fotografía" (UAH, "Mesa 2: Callejeo y hallazgo: las ciudades del fotógrafo"), as the specialist José Pablo Concha stated in 2014 apropos Larraín's exhibition.

Nevertheless, although a tremendous effort was made to bring Sergio Larraín back from oblivion and enshrine him as a canonical photographer, his visual narrative divided the specialised critique into supporters and detractors (Valdivia). The Chilean photographer and Larraín's close friend, Luis Poirot, recalls that Larraín's retrospective presented him as a Magnum photographer and that his real work was much more extensive and complex than this compilation (Hartung). Poirot is correct in his affirmation. The photographer's archive remains in Magnum Paris, and because of a matter of legal rights, no further studies have been possible. In this regard, Agnès Sire is paradoxical when she recognises that Larraín's work "is, however, still not very well known" (*Sergio Larraín: Vagabond Photographer* 29) but that his most relevant period was the three or four years he travelled working for Magnum (Moreno, *Sergio Larraín: el instante eterno*). These approaches are partially seconded by the academic Valeria de Los Ríos when she writes that behind the photographer's history, his photographs remain little studied, unknown even (131).

2021 is another remarkable year for the photographer. After a few years of collecting records and material, the documentarist Sebastián Moreno launched his documentary film *Sergio Larraín: El instante eterno*, a production that, under similar premises, presents the figure of the photographer from his most human and personal side. It tells Larraín's story as a compilation of memories and anecdotes of those who were closest to him and invites the viewer to rediscover the person behind the photographer.

For the documentarist, to have had access to Magnum's archive to "declassify" all Larraín's contact sheets meant a finding as significant as to "unlock the treasure chest" (Moreno, "El legado de Sergio Larraín, una clase magistral de fotografía"). However, such findings are not genuinely revealed in the film and only play a shallow role in the pursuit of understanding Larraín's human processes, keeping the photographer's visual corpus at a minor level of importance. In a different interview the same film director recognises that this film is only a small fraction compared to what is left (Moreno, "Conversación con Sebastián Moreno: Sergio Larraín: el instante eterno").

The case of Catalina Mena, one of Larraín's nieces, is similar. She published the book *Sergio Larraín: La foto Perdida* in 2021. Despite the title, the book is a biographic narrative that tries to rebuild the figure of Sergio Larraín, not the photographer but the uncle, by retelling family stories.

Overall, even though for the past years there has been an increasing interest and intellectual production regarding Sergio Larraín, so far there is still very little inspected about the visual production itself of the photographer. Most of what has been written revolve around a biographical dimension. Larraín's imagery is built on fragments, traces of what seems to be a coherent piece of history, whereby the more one reads about the photographer, the less one knows about his visual work.

All things considered, the principal goal of this exhaustive inspection is to establish a holistic approach as a robust and multi-layered exploration of critical viewpoints and theories concerning a more extensive portion of Sergio Larraín's photo work, contrasting the published material versus the unprecedented one. Through this particular archive compilation and analysis, this writing looks moreover to decode Larraín's visual imagery and his projection and impact on European and Latin American culture.

As a result, it will evidence the importance of the Chilean photographer's archive in exploring and rescuing local memory and political imageries in Chile, Latin America and Europe. Finally, this book aims to become the first formal visual study on Larraín's photography, a type of analysis based exclusively on image studies never done before.

This book divides its main objectives into five chapters that analyse Larraín's visual production through the relationship between aesthetic-political aspects and photography. It holistically considers Professor Ana Mauad's notions of the "photographer as an agent" to inspect Larraín's general work through concepts of community (people, images), trajectories (collectives and individuals) and projects (field of possibilities). For this, this work establishes the role of the photographer as an individual within a community and as an artist whose work belongs to the historical composition of the collective and contemporary memory (Mauad, "Imágenes Contemporáneas: experiencia fotográfica y memoria en el siglo XX" 43).

In this regard, it becomes necessary to mark and define critical concepts the study operates with, which intertwine in building a holistic approach about Sergio Larraín's work.

Accordingly, the use of the term "holistic" in this book denotes the practice and research that takes into account the "whole person" (Gause and Coholic 2), including physical, geographical, institutional, professional, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of the photographer's life experience. In this particular case, this holistic inspection includes, i.e., Larraín's Magnum phase, influential characters, his figure as a photographer, his spiritual phase and the development of Satori photography as an unprecedented projection of his trajectory.

In equal importance, collective memory is drawn from Maurice Halbwachs' understanding. The concept refers to a social group's shared reservoir of memories, knowledge, and information firmly attached to the group's identity. It can be created, shared, and passed on by large and small social groupings, such as generations and communities. "Collective memory" is not a given but rather a socially constructed notion to the Frenchman. Therefore, it does not lay in one singular event or group but the multiplicity of them, converging and diverging constantly, yet manifesting through individuals that, when located in a specific group context, remember, or recreate the past (Coser). In Larraín's case, this collective memory flows through family, social classes, corporations, public institutions, and so forth. Every instance has distinctive memories that its members have constructed over long periods, and Larraín's photographs help visualise it.

Similarly, the notion of “generation” is understood, in Lewis Coser’s terms when reading Halbwachs, as a community or social group that belongs to a specific context in time and becomes conscious of itself in counterposing its present to its own constructed past. However, past generations may become present when present generations recreate imaginatively (or in Larraín’s case: visually) the past, re-enacting it (24).

The study to continue reads Larraín’s work from a global perspective which considers both European and Latin American approaches to his work and challenges established views when necessary.

For example, among the many perspectives, there is a reductionist tendency to recognise Larraín as the Chilean who portrayed the poverty in Latin America and “la injusticia social” (Esquiaga); who uncovered the Sicilian mafia in 1959 and the “inalcazable capo de la mafia Giuseppe Genco Russo” (Calvo); as “um dos fotógrafos mais importantes da América Latina” (Parizotto); or as an eccentric who ditched everything “while at the top of [his] game to become a mountain yogi on the advice of a Bolivian mystic will do wonders for [the] spirit but not much for your profile” (Usborne).

These numerous tensions, as well as the ones attempting to place Sergio Larraín into only binary categories such as photojournalist/artist, documentary/street photographer, mystic/poet, are considered in terms of human learning areas that “complement rather than oppose each other, and together each can contribute to a holistic view” (Jarvis and Parker xiii) concerning learnings about the photographer.

For this reason, this book divides into five fundamental and explorative chapters that help understand Larraín’s imagery from the reconstruction of his collective memory.

Chapter I, “Understanding Magnum”, is a sort of genesis, serving as a political and cultural anchoring of Larraín’s work by introducing and outlining his professional development and success and contextualising his photography within the framework of Western European visual culture. Covering a significant portion of Larraín’s professional, newsworthy output in Europe, the segment is an expository work that analyses the influence and impact of the Magnum Photos agency on the perception of the Chilean photographer’s figure and his most well-known photo work. Four main analytical approaches cover most of Magnum’s historical early settings and

Larraín's personal life and work: (i) visual translation of tragedy (ii) the *auratical* value of technology, (iii) sense of freedom and visual territory and (iv) media long range and photography truth claim.

Chapter II, "Agnès Sire", explores the relationship between Sergio Larraín and the French curator, her influence in promoting the Chilean's work, and how, for the first time, the figure of the photographer embodies a visual narrative that still endures. It analyses the impact of influential writers and photographers such as Roberto Bolaño and René Buri in collaborating to expand Larraín's international recognition within and beyond the field of photography. Therefore, the chapter is divided into five sections that track the origins and development of Larraín's public figure through the chronological analysis of publications and exhibitions: (i) the figure of Agnès Sire, (ii) the image of Valparaíso, (iii) the argot of Latin America, (iv) the image of London, and (v) the Institut Valencià d'Art Modern (IVAM) and the archetype of Larraín.

Chapter III, "Larraín's photographic imagery", focuses on the photographer's key concepts throughout his career. The first section analyses the importance of Larraín's sense of "magic" in developing and promoting his work and how it is intertwined with personal readings on photography. Secondly, the section explores the historical context in which this phenomenon materialised in the photographer's philosophy and visual production and analyses the global meaning behind photographic magic. It inspects specific case studies on the photographer's most iconic work: "Les petit filles". Finally, it contrasts and analyses how magic is revealed in the context of global photography. The second section explores Larraín's most famous series, "the street children" and analyses how pain and cruelty reflect and materialise in the photographic act and modify visual codes in their interpretation. Additionally, the section explores the relationship between the photographer's work and his self-recognition as a suffering agent as both observer and producer.

Chapter IV, "Satori photography", focuses on the critical analysis and exploration of Larraín's most underrated and belittled photo work: Satori. This terminology responds to a spiritual practice the photographer

has brought into photography as a way of celebrating the quotidian, the normal, utilising photography as a medium for “contemplation”.¹

Somehow the Western European gaze, led by the French agency, has considered this visual exploration as unworthy; while the Latin American gaze never had the chance to make own approaches. While harbouring an anachronic and far-reaching production of images, Larraín’s Satori observations have received only limited coverage in minor reports. Since this photo work was never a tangible photographic category, never published, and never archived under indicatives labels, this book contributes to putting together the photographs from Magnum’s archive to effectively engage in Satori photo work as a real case study and archive. As should every photographic visualisation – documentary, artistic or otherwise – this chapter examines Satori photographic style and its implications for artistic output and sociocultural visibility. Likewise, the connection between texts and images and how they interact in shaping collective memory and individual perspectives is analysed. The concepts of Satori, Zen, enlightenment concerning religion in photography and visual representations constitute a theoretical structure that helps clarify pertinent aspects of Larraín’s photographic experience.

This section delves into key themes to explore. “Satori and Sergio Larraín” contextualises Satori as a photographic practice and its relation to Oriental symbology and examines its relationship with the photographer’s personal experiences. “Satori and subjective photography” section inspects the subjective power in Satori representation at a moment when Larraín’s artistic output was being evaluated not by this particular work but by his old photographs as a photojournalist. Consequently, it reads “subjective photography” in Otto Steinert’s terms, where the nature of the practice lies on the subject’s “power of vision” (Valentin 172), which continues “developing the *avant-garde* photographers’ emphasis on experimentation” (Biro 357). “Zen photography” explores the relationship between Sergio Larraín’s Satori and Thomas Merton’s Zen photography as an intellectual bridge in the definition of conceptual photography practices. Finally, “Haiku, reality, and Satori” section explores artistic and poetic devices in Larraín’s photography. It analyses and contrasts them to similar outputs and

¹ Database extracted from Magnum Paris: Sergio Larraín archive – LAS Captions / Legends 1969 onwards. August 2019.

referents in the field as a way of evidencing the relevance and dimension of his work through newer and more novel approaches.

Chapter V, “Photography in the study of religion”, explores Satori photography as a tool in the study of religion and visual exploration of communities. Larraín’s interest in the assimilation of Oriental spiritual practices through photography is framed as an attempt to challenge the traditional canon of visibility and epistemic systems which enable, on the one hand, their comprehension and, on the other, the understanding of the photographer’s self-knowledge. Thus, the chapter expands the practicability of the photographer’s archive and offers critical approaches as a way of recovering Larraín’s unpublished material as something crucial for the examination of his whole imagery.

In conclusion, Larraín’s trajectory and traces respond to the socio-political circulation and impact that both the photographer and his photographs have had over time. Here Larraín, as an agent, takes an upfront stand on the social reality he is shooting (Mauad, “Imágenes Contemporáneas: experiencia fotográfica y memoria en el siglo XX” 48) and his photographs become images and “also a trace, something directly stencilled off the real, like a footprint or a death mask” (Sontag, *On Photography* 154).

CHAPTER I

EXPLORING MAGNUM

1 Critical Foundation

In 1947, in the aftermath of the Second World War, four visionary photographers founded one of the most prestigious photo agencies in the world: Magnum Photos, Inc., with branches today in Paris, New York and Hong Kong. This photo quartet was initially formed by Henri Cartier-Bresson, Robert Capa, George Rodger and David Seymour. Each of them had been a wartime photojournalist and “profoundly affected by what they had seen” (TATE). However, Capa, the principal founder, due to his memories of his time in the Spanish Civil War, “had been envisioning the agency’s creation since the 1930s” (Manchester 418). This particular and traumatic experience is a phenomenon that for Rodger verges on “the unique qualities we ourselves had acquired during several years of contact with all the emotional excesses that go hand in hand with war” (Manchester 118).

This chapter is an expository work that analyses the influence and impact of the Magnum Photos agency in the perception and development of Sergio Larraín’s photo work. It is divided into four analytical approaches that cover most of Magnum’s early historical context and Larraín’s personal life and work: (i) visual translation of tragedy (ii) the Auratical value of technology (iii) sense of freedom and visual territory and (iv) the long range of media and photography truth claim.

The chapter considers the basis on which the agency was created in 1947 to react to the implications of the Second World War and establishes a socio-political criterion to understand Sergio Larraín’s participation in it.

These implications relate to the “commercial venture” focused on what George Rodger recognises in his article “Random Thoughts of a Founder Member” regarding Robert Capa’s work as “the unique qualities we ourselves had acquired during several years of contact with all the

emotional excesses that go hand in hand with war” (Manchester 418). This technological, emotional, political, and moral revolution allowed the photographers to see, record, and recreate the atrocity of war and misery with artistry and determination, constantly feeding media tabloids and collective memory as a result.

Such a revolution allowed the expansion of photography practice and aesthetic experience across the world, enabling the visualisation of new territories and cultures under a witnessing lens. In the following years, the same possibilities led Sergio Larraín to document, for instance, misery on the streets of Santiago, Chile, a form of misery that perfectly fit with the newsworthy condition Magnum craved for. Poverty in forgotten, exotic countries represents an opportunity where other people’s tragedies are awaiting to be denounced and publicised to the rest of the world. As Susan Sontag says, being a spectator of calamities taking place in another country is a quintessential modern experience (*Regarding the Pain of Others* 16).

To set up the basis mentioned, the inspection compares Magnum’s publications that define its role in the contemporary world and exposes them sequentially to give the full scope of the meanings of the agency.

Geoff Dyer, for instance, recognises the agency as an entity in charge of a trove of historical images hidden in the world. He even points out that part of Magnum’s mission is to enable people living history as such, “urging us to look here, at this, to go this way, not that way ... and somehow, incredibly, enabling us to go – and see – everywhere at once” (Hoelscher vii). To the author, Magnum represents an archive that helps reconstruct and teach, supposedly, the meaning of the life and death of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Fred Ritchin, in his publication “What is Magnum”, looks for a vaguer yet more sincere definition. He focuses on Magnum’s founder photographers and defines it as *méfiance*, a French word loosely translated as ‘defiance’. The definition, however, tries to formulate a more profound understanding. It looks to manifest the sense of disobedience and resistance of Magnum photographers “to occupy the periphery, not constrained by the centres of power, the conventional points of concern. It is a sense of *méfiance* that is true not only about their coverage of the world but to their experimentation with the traditions of photography” (Manchester 443).

Additionally, the chapter considers Clément Chéroux's approaches to the compelling new face of humanism. The author explores the implications of geopolitical boundaries' reorganisation, marked by the Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, to depict the pursuit of communal values like "liberty, equality and dignity that were so dear to the photographers" (Chéroux 14).

This way, the chapter seeks to recreate and understand the implications through which Sergio Larraín earned a place among the most renowned photographers in the world of the twentieth century. In so doing, the study deconstructs Magnum's foundational principles on tragedy, technology, freedom and photography truth claim to grasp the importance of the work of the Chilean within this context.

2 The visual translation of tragedy

The term of photographic translation is taken from Nathaniel Gardner's essay "Photography Translation: another way of looking". The author explains it as the technical and humanistic reproduction system that conveys unique knowledge when representing the omissions of other systems. Hence, this exploration considers "visual translation of tragedy" as a visual representation taken from an inimitable source related to tragic and unique historical moments. This type of photographic translation transforms the three-dimensional experience into a two-dimensional one by compressing cultural elements and generating new narratives (Gardner 2). Magnum Photos has been one of the twentieth century's most important institutions to be branded and modelled by this principle of tragedy translation. Even though they have never described their work in this particular sense, the evidence collected has most certainly proved this relationship, in which Sergio Larraín, later on, found his way as a world-class photographer. This section analyses the relationship between the visualisation of tragedy in twentieth-century Europe, Magnum Photos, and Sergio Larraín as the catalyst of the photographer's work under newer aesthetic principles.

The visual translation of tragedy has its roots in the mid-nineteenth century, when photography got onto the battlefield for the first time, entirely changing the perception of the suffering of others. The tragedy was no longer something exclusively to read or hear about, but instead to observe,

enriching the corporeality of war: guns, ammunition, uniforms, landscapes of death moved out of a fictional, unimaginable world into reality. The first warlike conflicts ever documented were the Crimean War in Russia (1853-1856) and the American Civil War in 1861 (Wells 81-2), becoming the starting points of visual assimilation and consumption of war tragedy “through the eyes of a score of photographers” (Carlebach 63).

Later on, in 1914, in the leadup to World War I, the American company Kodak attempted to encourage soldiers to take cameras into battle, feeding the modern desire of (a) consuming realistic, far-distant experiences and (b) recording wars, “even though this was strictly forbidden by the authorities” (Wells 160).

An accurate reflection in response to this relationship between commercial tragedy and photography comes in Susan Sontag’s claim that “wars are now also living room sights and sounds. Information about what is happening elsewhere, called news, features conflict and violence — ‘If it bleeds, it leads’ runs the venerable guideline of tabloids (...) to which the response is compassion, or indignation (...) as each misery heaves into view” (*Regarding the Pain of Others* 16). The author understands that how humanity started to perceive others’ pain had radically changed because of photography. Photographing and visualising suffering had created a social pulse, a sudden interest, in which photographers, institutions and viewers are all intrinsically bonded by a new experience of pain.

Magnum Photos’s foundation is not an exception to this flow of war-related events. Almost a hundred years after the first explorations, the agency was conceived under a similar structure: a sense of tragedy and denunciation of the world’s atrocities. Fred Ritchin, in his essay “What is Magnum”, tells the story of Magnum’s founder George Rodger, who decided to abandon war photography after being sent to cover the liberation of the concentration camp Bergen-Belsen in Germany. The photographer recognised as “obscene” the practice of recording the suffering. However, despite becoming Rodger’s self-motif for abandoning war photography, this sense of obscenity is shown by Ritchin as an incentive to form the agency, along with other founders’ experiences (Manchester 417-8).² The

² In the same article, the author recognises that Magnum would have never existed if André Friedmann, also known as Robert Capa, had not been exiled from his

consciousness of tragedy became a fundamental value in Magnum's foundation, not only in the pursuit of their photographers but also as a newsworthy, institutional criterion. The writer Gerry Badger is even sharper when commenting on the foundation of Magnum and the "concerned photobook" of tragic events:

Magnum was founded in 1947, just after World War II, by war veterans and much of its business since has been closely connected with the reportage of conflict and strife. It has been noted by cynics that the agency needs a war somewhere in the world, or a famine, or inequality and suffering. This implies that it is always in business. In other words, the concerned photographer's concern is largely with human misery and the world's ills (Parr and Badger, *The Photobook: a History* 236).

A similar criterion of human cruelty put the name of Sergio Larraín on the world photography map for the first time early in 1959, when Henri Cartier-Bresson called him to become a member of Magnum Photos. This sense of finding beauty in tragedy or the "pain of others", a phrase Susan Sontag coined in her book *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003), was initially applied to Larraín's work by the Swiss photographer René Burri when they first met in 1958. Burri evaluated and considered Larraín's series on the street children of Santiago de Chile not only for the artistry behind Larraín's work but also for his social commitment.

This particular photo work had been printed and used by charitable organisations in the 1950s. However, it was not until Burri's appearance that the photographs acquired artistic value. In this case, the artistry responded to candid moments found and extracted from others' suffering and the social commitment to an emotional involvement with others' misfortune to visualise and denounce social injustice. On the one hand, this artistic-social criterion convinced Burri to introduce Larraín to Bresson as a promising photographer and,³ on the other hand, structured itself as an institutional yardstick for several young photographers.

hometown in Hungary for anti-government activities and forced to give up his career in agriculture to help his family as a journalist.

³ The story began, almost by chance, when in 1958 Larraín ran into the Swiss photographer René Burri on Copacabana beach, Rio de Janeiro, and told him that he was a photographer, that he had decided to meet Bresson at all costs, and that he was

Similar to Larraín's case, the same inclination for exotic misery and otherness added the work of the Brazilian Sebastião Salgado in 1979 and the Swedish Kent Klich in 1998 to Magnum's collection.

In an article in the *British Journal of Photography*, Neil Burgess (founding director of Magnum Photos London and bureau chief of Magnum New York) could not have summarised these institutional criteria better. When remembering Salgado's work, *Gold*, he praises the value of his images "in the midst of violence and danger, and others at sensitive moments of quiet and reflection". He continues by saying, "it was a romantic, narrative work that engaged with its immediacy but had not a drop of sentimentality" ("Sebastião Salgado: Gold"). Here, Burgess refers to the visual translation of post-industrial communities.⁴

This reality was well explored, too, by Klich, who recognised that his ten years of exploring Mexico City had finally paid off. He says, "I guess that the Mexican work was of great importance for my entrance [to Magnum]" (Klich), since not much time had passed after he returned from Mexico before the agency invited him to join. Only one year after his incorporation, Klich published his most famous documentary book with Elena Poniatowska in 1991, *El Niño: Children of the Streets, Mexico City*. This photographic project exploring the symbolic elements of abandoned children's marginality found only rejection in the Mexican capital but found a place outside the Latin region.⁵

taking off for Paris the next day, just to do it. Burri, moved by Larraín's work, gave him his film rolls on Rio and an introductory letter addressed to Bresson. This event became the start of the relationship between Sergio Larraín and Magnum (Leiva 32).

⁴ In the same article, Burgess recognises that they should have paid more attention to the socio-political uncertainties they "glibly" called post-industrial communities. This explained his relationship with and rejection of Salgado's early project *Workers* (42 different stories on manual labour around the world) because it would be "hard to sell". The *Workers* project was not newsworthy back then, or at least it was not until Burgess saw Salgado's photographs about the Serra Pelada mine gold in Brazil. What remains as significant, aside from Salgado's artistry, is what the Pulitzer Prize winner Matthew L. Wald, regarding Salgado's South America photography, calls "a wondrous portrait of that continent's poor and common folk" ("Sebastiao Salgado: The Eye of The Photojournalist"), a photo-work later published in Salgado's *Other Americas* and *Gold*.

⁵ In Gardner's essay, he explains how Klich, even though working intermittently in Mexico for over a decade (1984-1994) for the respectable charity Hogares Providencia, run by the well-known Priest Alejandro García Durán, becoming an