

Conversation
between Pietro D'Agostino and Angela Madesani
Milan, 2014 may

For many years, Pietro D'Agostino has been a photographer. At a certain point in his professional life, he decided to reroute, to investigate the meaning of photographic language, to use photography with another declination. Nothing to do with the desire to feel an artist at all, somehow a firm wish of investigation. Through time, his research gets an experiential matrix, dealing with the trace left on photographic paper, in the release, but also with the recording of the procedure. The author has a fundamental role, as well as the person who looks, the spectator, who develops an active role, sharing to act. D'Agostino has interested in that complex territory placed between those who looks and the object of the vision, in which the protagonist is always and however the light.

Can we say that the starter *Kit* (2009), which gave birth to the book *A light (Carta da viaggio)* was thought as a pocket for the new millennium able to stop, to fix what is around us?

As well as thinking that an object of this kind could bring upheavals if there won't be an action and a direct involvement of the user. In this operation, what comes to miss is the image in the canonical sense, replaced by other; what it is missing are the tools of decoding. The *Kit* is a device to create testimonies, evidences.

Of existence?

Of course, but if we thought about it or used it in a conventional way, it becomes the opposite.

In the text accompanying the *Kit*, you wrote «It is not a photographic device; its use is stimulating for report on the territory and not on the maps». What do you mean with 'not on the maps'?

Because we move on predetermined maps, on logical adaptations. I would reach, instead, a zero degree. To one point which can be likened to the silence of John Cage in music. Just to delineate this different way of using sensitive material, I removed *graphic* to the expression *photographic* and joint *carta* (paper) and *foto* (from the greek *photòs*, light), to underline leaving from a practical and a photographic thought. In fact, from this moment onwards I will be talking about *cartafoto* and no longer about photographic paper.

In the box of the kit, besides the paper, there are the salts for fixing and a pack of crystals of sodium hyposulphite.

Actually, it is not mandatory to develop *cartafoto* and even fix it. We can interpret the option of fixing as taking notes on development of process while we advance in a certain direction. If we fix it, what deposited above it stabilizes. I note that we can make several deposits on the same sheet. As well as a common paper sheet fills, with the writing, of cultural deposits, the *cartafoto* sheet fills with deposits of only light. Are we able to translate, to structure them in language and turn them into as many cultural deposits?

In this sense, I thought it was clever for the curators of Benway Series, insert your volume *A light* in their literature series. Such as writing, this is also a memory, a legacy, a deposit of course, in this case of only light. The survey is not only about the matrix, of a linguistic nature, but also about who does the experience of leaving a trace. Then the role of the reader

is also fundamental. I like to see it in this way, the lesson of one of the fathers of photography, William Henry Fox Talbot, the inventor of calotype from which modern photography descends.

Niépce and Daguerre had already seen the picture of what would later be called negative, but they didn't accept it because it did not represent the reality as appeared, while Fox Talbot has accepted and interpreted it as a manifestation of nature. In my opinion, with this reflection, he had come full circle. He had a sensitivity and a very open mind.

Can we reflect on the general sense of your work?

I consider my production a physical documentation of experience in the becoming. Mine are not images in the strict sense of the term, or photographs, objects, video nor works of art, but rather objects of experience, crossings. I try to experiment, through light and various devices including photography, not for creative forms but to go through experiences, investigating what generates them and the relations between things. Therefore, this attention to the more elusive areas of investigation, less describable, such as those of the experience of a transformation in act, produces a unitary moment of consciousness between subject and object. It is a possibility of primary knowledge in that brief moment when the language is absent and we experience the reality in advance of thought.

Even if not in a univocal sense, can we say that a determinant area of your reflection starts from the language itself?

For me everything begins from the light, which, along with the natural elements related to our primary senses, has meant that the man has structured languages. While we have begun to catalogue, select languages of reference have formed. Both writing and photography have for me a certain kind of structural reference in common. For example the attempts of objectification.

Philologically photography is writing with light.

I do not recognize this definition; there is something in it that does not convince me. Writing has its own semiotic structure. Call it writing of light is like trying to put a pen in the hands of the light. A key point for me is the reflection proposed by Mario Costa in *Photography without subject*. One of the issues to deal with is to not confuse the picture with the object photographed.

So is it the process that matters?

I think I have removed a series of layers to reach the essence, as I previously said. If in the functionality of the device, I put my hand in front of the lens nothing happens, meaning that the light does not come on sensitive materials. Just as if I remove the sensitive material inside the camera or if I delete the battery in the digital camera disabling the sensor. I consider the other elements of the system as accessories, relatively to my interest for the two fundamental factors: light and sensitive material.

Is the idea of index, of trace in the semiotic sense, the basis of everything?

Actually, what I have worked on is neither a photograph nor an index or a *ready made*. It is none of these things. But I cannot find a working definition, I don't know what it can be. Perhaps, from a certain point of view, it is better this way. Alternatively, other users will try to find it, maybe using the *cartafoto* in some way. In *A light* movement and deposition of light on *cartafoto* cannot situate within the concept of photography. There is a continuous transformation.

The unpredictability generates error, doubt, a keystone of the time we live in. Perhaps the most consistent attitude in art, or at least I think, is not to provide answers but to pose questions. Returning to the text, which accompanies the project, we can read that the *Kit* is not a photographic device and this seems decisive to me.

We are in a borderline area, at the limit. We can think up to a certain point, but then we simply must take note of what happens: something generates, but it is not a photographic image, or what we mean with it. Considering the various researches, which I have been concerned with in recent years, another important factor is that light and sound are not only bearers of energy, but also essential vehicles of information. A lot of information we perceive with our senses and that we coded, structured in a certain anthropologically manner, allow us to move with a good dose of safety in what surrounds us. Naturally, with this information others will understand what we do not perceive, nor record. With cartafoto all the information that the light brings within, even in relation to what it has crossed deposits on the sensitive material.

Therefore, we are in front of an experiential vehicle, bearer of memory in the broad sense.

As already said, we are not even able to decrypt most of the amount of information. Maybe we cannot even call it information. What are they? The objects resulting from this research, such as *A light*, runs the risk to be out-of-date, out of time, not accepted for their potentiality to make our deeper certainties unstable.

Could we call *A light* an artist's book?

No, we couldn't, not really. I want to escape from this category. As I said, this exercise does not fall, at least for me, in a precise typology. Moreover, the choice is indicative, along with the curators of Benway Series, to publish it in the editorial series with a possible no limits print run.

1 Pietro D'Agostino, *A light* (Carta da viaggio), Benway Series n. 7, 2014

2 Mario Costa, *Photography without subject*, Costa & Nolan, 1997