

The View Finder: the Camera as Significant Pedagogue

Jude Chua Soo Men

Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.

Abstract

This paper is intended as an exploratory contribution to the recently retrieved trend in semiotics to relate sign-studies with ethics and values, i.e., ‘semio-ethics’/’significs’, and to suggest how the ‘semio-ethical’ or ‘significant’ consciousness may be educationally enhanced.

In “Designing the camera” I wrote about ways to shape the camera or photography *qua* sign for semio-ethical purposes. Victoria Welby spoke of significs not only as a theory of signs, but also as a kind of (moral) educational theory, since she believed that the understanding of signs-in-relation-to-values raised our critical and ethical consciousness. Here I argue and give phenomenological evidence for the claims that the camera is a pedagogical tool just as it enhances significant formation. But not only that: the camera is a self-automating pedagogical tool; through using it, one is helped to discover the significant point of view. It is almost as if it automatically unpacks significs, or the semio-ethical consciousness.

Keywords: photography, significs, semioethics, natural law, moral education

1. Photography, Ethics and Significal Formation

In “Designing the camera: photo-semio-ethical studies”, (Chua, 2013b) as well as in *The Inquisitor’s Manual* (www.inquisitorsmanual.com), an online blogging project in which I explore the connection between photography and ethics, I wrote about the ways I sought, through writing this *The Inquisitor’s Manual*, to shape the camera or photography *qua* sign for semio-ethical purposes. I explain in “Chapter 11. Transubstantiation: Conceptual Innovations” (Chua, 2012) of the *Manual*:

“Everything is in principle a sign, if it calls to mind something else other than itself. So just as the word, “camera”, is a sign of some object which takes pictures, the physical camera itself, the technology, can also be a sign—perhaps of relaxation—and just as well the experience of taking pictures, and the pictures which are developed, which may recall—and hence sign the realities, or fond memories, etc. And just as [Gunther Kress says] a child may re-shape words to express new meanings, so also we can re-design these other signs to point us to new ideas and concepts, in order to have these lead us to other ideas of interest, besides those commonly, and conventionally signed. We can, as it were, speak of the possibility of a kind of semiotic transubstantiation: the substantive transformation of *this* or *that* sign *as* sign. Although it is still a sign, it is changed from one particular sign to another; as sign it now points in semiosis to something new, and hence is now a new sign. If we collect all these things—words, tools, experiences, etc—under the word “photography”, *including the thinking and writing about “photography” [i.e., for instance, in our writing of the Inquisitor’s Manual]*, then we can begin to see the potential for semiotically transubstantiating

“photography”. We can begin to explore—and hence design and engineer—what all that we have under “photography” can mean *anew*. It need not merely mean snapping an image of something. Perhaps, it could mean—*sign*—something else.

“In part, the *Manual* has been an attempt to re-conceptualize photography, and to consider how it may be re-shaped and re-designed to lead us to new ideas and concepts that photography conventionally may not sign. The question that had driven many of its past chapters has been, “what is the camera?” An answer to this question is not easy; the task is not to discover through analytic thinking an essence or a definition. Rather it is an invitation to re-construct, or to re-engineer this thing we call a camera, with its lens, sensor, body and viewfinder. Such re-construction or re-engineering of this camera may or may not imply the physical re-modeling of the thing. It may merely involve the re-conception of how the thing as it is may be used, and for what end. Though in all appearances nothing much seems to have changed, such re-conceptualization can be very significant insofar as the complete and substantive modification of its nature as sign is concerned: it may now point us to very important ideas.”

Such semio-ethical shaping I called “significal Design” (Chua, 2013a), and is a research method which translates ideas into senses and meanings which are insightful-in-relation-to-what truly matters. Significal Designing presupposes the possession of certain viewpoints and normative judgments. These judgments are to be developed inferentially, but their first principles, which are the first principles of practical reason or the ‘natural law’, are self-evident.

Nonetheless, I have long suspected that the grasping of such self-evident first principles of practical reason could in fact be facilitated, rather paradoxically, by the camera itself, or by photography more generally. In other words, one does not simply Design significantly the camera or photography; one could actually discover that viewpoint needed for Designing the camera significantly when using the camera or doing photography.

In a sense there is a kind of “theory” (*thea-horao*: goddess looking at us first, and then our looking back) in the Greek sense when one does photography, in the sense which Martin Heidegger has retrieved it: a pious openness to *what is first being unconcealed to us [by the god who looks caringly towards us]*, rather than research that is merely our own aggressive and wilful constructive account of things. (see Rojcewicz, 2006)

If true, then this suggests that the camera is a very interesting technology: it is a tool which designs itself significantly: Pick it up, use it, and it leads you to adopt the evaluative viewpoint for conceptualizing everything you can see through its lenses, thus opening you to the normative prescription of the self-evident practical principles of natural law identifying what is good and ought to be sought and done, i.e., the truly meaningfully important things in life.

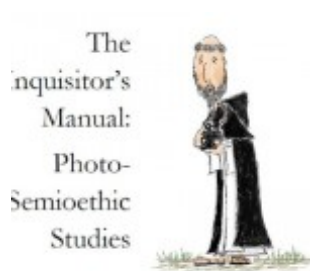
Now, Victoria Welby spoke of significs not only as a theory of signs, but also as a kind of (moral) educational theory, since she believed that the understanding of signs-in-relation-to-values raised our critical and ethical consciousness. (Petrilli, 2009) In which case, the camera is a pedagogical tool just as it enhances significal formation. But not only that, I theorise: the camera is a self-automating pedagogical tool; through using it, one is helped to discover the significant point of view. It is almost as if it automatically unpacks significs, or the semio-ethical consciousness.

Since natural law theory (Finnis, 1980), I have argued (Chua, 2013a), amongst others, is a kind of significal theory, then the camera may well turn out to be the natural law theorist’s

choice pedagogical, educational-technology that prepares one for, or augments one's significant theorizing. Amongst cameras, though, perhaps it is the old film (rather than digital) camera which best affords such significant formation – precisely because it amplifies the cost of each shot, and hence encourages more careful and more serious deliberative evaluation of what is worth capturing.

In my work, *The Inquisitor's Manual*, I have recorded some of my own experiences that corroborate such a thesis. The *Manual* is an open-ended project that is ongoingly in the works. But in the next part of this paper I select, arrange, rework and present the following extracts from some of its chapters that capture and elaborate on the above ideas. In other words, I offer in part 2 of this paper, through these select chapters, something likened to an analytic ethnography (see Anderson, 2006) or auto-biographical narrative inquiry (see Harrison, 2002; Freeman, 2007) into the pedagogical uses of the camera, and in relation to that, the nature of ethical consciousness raising through photography. Specifically, I hope to offer evidence that the use of the camera shapes the photographer's axiological viewpoint, just as much as it is true (and which is more generally assumed) that the photographer's axiological viewpoint determines the way the 'camera' is used and understood.

2. The Camera as Significant Pedagogue: Selections from *The Inquisitor's Manual*



Picture 1

I have walked about casually with a camera, taking pictures of whatever one comes across that seems worth recording, doing what Barbara Harrison (2002) calls “everyday photography” (97), viz, a kind of amateur photography that captures everyday life of generally ordinary people, even if there are occasional anomalies. This may sound like a simple task. In some sense it is. There is no thematic restriction. There is no need to look for a particular object of interest. One is free to roam about and collect whatever one encounters. However, fulfilling even a task like this employs some very complex processes, which may repay some reflection.

I am not thinking about how my eyes work, or how the camera’s technology is very advanced, which it is. I am referring instead to the thinking that occurs when we decide to take this picture, of this object, or of this event, or of this person... In each of these decisions, there is always the judgment that this is worth recording. And, in deciding that this is worth recording, one would have also decided to choose to take a picture of this, rather than that, or its surrounding objects. Even if one directs one’s focus on some other surrounding object, there are still other objects which one omits. In other words, there is always some kind of selection. One discriminates the possibilities for making a picture and realizes some and neglects others.

This kind of discriminating selection presupposes a judgment of what is valuable and what is not. Put in another way, the selection is not random, but evaluative. When one selects this rather than that to direct one’s focus, one employs normative judgments of ‘worth’. This does not necessarily mean that what one omits to make a picture something, one judges it to be unworthy of recording. However, when one does make a picture of some object, then that object is recorded as something worth recording to the photographer. There may be different

reasons why different objects are worth recording, even to the same photographer. There may therefore be different interpretations of what it means to say that something is worth recording. Some one thing may be worth recording because it is ‘significant’, another could be worth recording because it is ‘beautiful’, and yet another can be worth recording because it is ‘shocking’. These various reasons constitute the evaluative guide that helps the photographer select what he considers worth photographing.

By examining the kinds of objects which the photographer brings into focus, one can infer the evaluative judgments that guided his photographic choices. For example, if he consistently picks out aesthetically pleasing patterns, we could say he had an eye for beautiful things, and that he possibly values beauty as a quality in things. This suggests that a casual photographic task can disclose to others as well as oneself what one’s normative criteria for identifying what is worth recording. Such a normative criterion may constitute aspects of one’s more sophisticated ideas about what else in other endeavors may be choice-worthy. For instance, what guides our picture taking could also feature in our moral deliberations about what is worth doing and pursuing. In short, there can be overlaps between the normative criteria that helps the photographer select objects to put into focus and the normative criteria that shapes the photographer’s ethical judgments in his other morally relevant choices.

However, casual photography is not just an opportunity for disclosing the ethically relevant ideas that guide one’s photography as well as those which may guide one’s moral life. Photography done casually places us in a mode of thinking that shapes some of these normative ideas. In this mode, our ideas about what really matters and what is valuable can change. This suggests to me that leisurely photography can be done to modify our value systems, and not merely to disclose them.

When using the camera in a leisurely manner, one is not collecting evidence to establish the truth of something. One is not for instance, doing scientific imaging, of which the primary purpose it is to discern the truth of something under investigation, using the photographic medium as a tool to achieve the discernment of the truth. In this latter case, one's thinking constantly revolves around the question, 'is this or that truly the case?', or 'what is the truth about which we are observing—what really happened, what could be a true description of that which has occurred?' By comparison, when photographing without such an investigative agenda (even if one is making a record of something to remember, and therefore, collecting a token if the truth about it having occurred) the truth of the object is not really the primary issue. Here we must remember that I am talking about doing photography leisurely, and not for instance, with the clear purpose of documenting a historical event so that there could be little dispute of such an event having ever occurred. The fact that something is before the lens and an image is made of it is made more than sufficient proof of its truth, and that having been established, one's thought about the picture proceeds onwards to its other and greater significances. For example, one takes a picture of a 'graduation', and having quickly collected some evidence of this, one's thoughts no more linger on the reality of the event; instead one then quickly begins to focus on other meanings that judge the graduation as something worth recording: an 'achievement', 'making family proud', a 'better future'... In photography done leisurely, our interest shifts quickly from the fact of something, to the value of, point of, the good of... that something.

Because the leisurely use of the camera facilitates this shift, casual photography becomes at the same time a way to enter into a peculiar mode of thinking we could call, following the tradition, 'practical thinking', which is different from another that we can call 'theoretical

thinking'. The transition of interest marks the corresponding transition from one such mode of thinking to the other. Philosophical psychology has highlighted these two modes of thinking and their distinct interests. Aristotle, for example, talks of reasoning that is 'theoretical' compared to reasoning that is 'practical'. When reasoning theoretically, one's interest is in the truth of things. One aspires, in reasoning theoretically, to offer a factually accurate description of a reality. However, when one begins to enquire what one should do in the light of such a truth, one begins to think in the practical mode, and so reasons practically. When thinking in the theoretical mode, some logics peculiar to this mode of thinking guide one's reasoning: 'something cannot be and not be at the same time and in the same respect', for instance, and hence, one judges contradictions to be unreasonable. Correspondingly, when thinking in the practical mode, some logics peculiar to this mode of thinking begins to guide one's reasoning: "that which is good ought to be done and whatever is evil ought to be avoided; such-and-such is good, and its contrary is evil..."

The logic that guides thinking when we think in the practical mode also identifies to us what is "good", and what is "evil". By "good" and "evil" here, I do not mean what we like or dislike, or what we find useful for something else we value or damaging to something else we value; rather I mean that which is desirable in-itself, or undesirable in-itself. This being the case, casual photography becomes a valuable formative tool for our grasp of some very fundamental ideas about what is intrinsically good and evil just as it facilitates access to thinking in the practical mode. The need to enter into a mode of thinking that is practical rather than merely theoretical in order to grasp good and evil has not always been well understood. Some have attempted to derive a theory of good and evil through the study of certain facts about the human being, or facts about the natural world. However, such attempts turn out, on closer inspection, to be logically indefensible. Logicians point out that the attempt to derive an account of what "ought to be" from an account of what "is the case"

violates the conservation of logic. Labeled the “naturalistic fallacy”, any such derivation concludes more than the premises allow. Rather than to deduce theoretically an account of good and evil, good and evil can be known when we think practically. Our knowledge of good and evil is therefore not deduced from any prior ideas. Rather they are “self-evident”, underived. John Finnis’ *Natural Law and Natural Rights* (1980) is representative of this view.

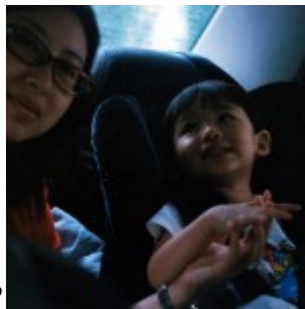
Although these ideas about what is good and evil are “self-evident”, this does not mean that we grasp them without any prior data. They are not ‘intuitions’ we get from sitting contemplatively in an armchair. While we cannot deduce these moral ideas, we can certainly abduce them. When thinking in the practical mode, our experience of certain facts gives rise to those normative judgments about what is good and evil. Let me suggest that this abductive process that gives rise to our knowledge of good and evil is really a *semiosis*. What happens is that our minds are being pointed to these moral ideas by the facts we experience: see, hear, smell, feel, taste. When we sense facts in the world, and when we do so thinking in the practical mode, certain states of affairs appeal to us as good, and others as evil. If we can analyze this process as a triad of the ‘sign-vehicle’, the ‘signified’, and the ‘interpretant’, (see Deely, 1990) then we could possibly identify these three terms respectively as the ‘experienced phenomena’, the ‘moral ideas about good and evil’, and finally, what medieval thinkers call ‘*synderesis*’ (see Aquinas, 1954: 304).

Now, *synderesis*, which is that certain natural habitual capability (*habitus*) of the mind to yield our foundational moral judgments, operates as the interpretant within the semiotic triad of sign-signified-interpretant. As interpretant, it relates the experienced phenomena to the foundational moral ideas, pointing the sign-vehicle to the signified. Yet as interpretant, it needs to be activated by the sign-vehicle; without the sign-vehicle, *synderesis* does not of itself achieve the signification of foundational moral ideas. In this respect casual photography

becomes all the more pedagogically useful for our formative grasp of good and evil. For: in doing photography we are compelled to go out and collect images, and not only are we put in the practical mode of thinking, we are also put in the touch with all that our senses can take in, especially what we can see. This becomes all the likelier when we use fixed focal lenses and have to be physically present to our subject matter, as one might do say, in range-finder photography. We are out in the streets in close encounter with signs—signs that activate *synderesis*, and therefore enable the grasp of good and evil. The casual photographer is, as it were, surrounded by signs of good and evil.



Picture 2



Picture 3

(My) Marriage: A Basic Good. Leica II 5cm Elmar f/3.5 Kodak ISO 400

3. A Peirce-ing Insight

This is something I came across just a few days back reading John Finnis’ “Natural Law and the Ethics of Discourse” published in the *American Journal of Jurisprudence*, Vol 43, 53-73 (1998), which also appears in *Ratio Juris*, Vol 12 (4), 354-373 (2002). There’s an exciting footnote in that paper, which talks about C S Peirce and abductive thinking, and insight.

Now, in several earlier chapters I have been making the case that the logic which allows us to grasp the precepts of natural law is what C S Peirce calls abduction. Photography, particularly rangefinder photography, puts us in touch with phenomena that afford the

abductive grasp of the natural law. I argued that the semiotic structure is as such: phenomena (*representamen*)—>synderesis (*interpretant*)—>principles of natural law (*significate*). You will find all this in *Chapter 3: Signs of Good and Evil*, above.

I did not think Finnis had said this; in fact I only recall him insisting that natural law was self-evident. Now that is not a very informative claim except to say that it is not derived from merely factual claims. One would ask, as Joseph Raz recently has in his “A Menu of Questions”, (2013) what else can be said positively about the grasping of the natural law, if “self-evidence” does not do much work. My own intended contribution is to suggest that the process can be explained as an abduction, and abduction in turn by the triad of semiosis.

Perhaps one could even call it a kind of zoo-semiosis. Anyhow, I have just discovered that Finnis has intimated something of this line of thought, even though he nowhere develops the idea in terms of the triad of semiosis: *representamen-interpretant-significate*.

In this selection that I will lift from his paper, he is adamant that the abductive grasp of natural law needs to be checked against the results of dialectical examination. The example he has in mind is the one which checks and confirms that the knowledge of truth is a good, when the serious and reasoned denial of the good of knowledge involves one in a kind of retorsive, performative self-contradiction. But the point nevertheless is that he has thought about Peirce’s ideas and the grasp of the natural law. Any way here it is, from his “Natural Law and the Ethics of Discourse”, *AJJ* :

“...[p. 57]...Considered as a benefit to be gained or missed in a discussion (or in a course of reflection), truth is a property of the judgments to be made by those (or the one) engaged in the common (or solitary) inquiry. Its intelligible goodness, its character as not merely a possibility but also an *opportunity*, is grasped, in practice, by anyone capable of grasping that the connectedness of answers with questions, and with further questions and further answers,

is that general and inexhaustible possibility we call knowledge. **This grasp of a field of possibility is a field of *opportunity* originates in an act of that undeduced (though not datafree!) understanding which C S Peirce, in common with the tradition originated by Plato, calls *insight*.**”

That para ends with a footnote 20, also on p. 57:

“See e.g. Justus Buchler, *The Philosophy of C S Peirce* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1940), 304, a passage in which Peirce, italicizing the word “insight,” **speaks of “the abductive suggestion [which] comes to us like a flash” as “an act of *insight*.”...**

Well, there you go. A Peirce-ing “insight”, with abduction and all...

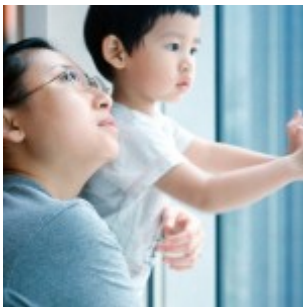
4. Vain Studies in Studium

I have been struggling with 35mm film photography for weeks now, with my 1934 Leica II, paired with an 5cm collapsible Elmar. Between shooting film, which is rarely – and I will get to that in a while – I’ve also been shooting and enjoying shooting my Leica Digilux, and the digital workflow is smooth and fantastic, and a couple of my shots uploaded into *Leica Fotographie International* (LFI) gallery have even been selected for the Master Shots section. It’s easy to shoot and not worry about the cost: it’s free. I take many shots, and even though I remain selective and evaluative, I am less hesitant, and more generous with myself when confronted with any of these picture opportunities.

But not so with my Leica II. I’ve just sent in my first roll of film to develop – after a month, and I nearly decided to not do that. I’ve been extremely selective, and very careful. Indeed scrupulous. Is this really worth a shot? What does this mean? Is it just another pretty image,

or nice colors? Leave it to the Digilux. For film, this has to matter a little more. It has become very evaluative. Talk about practical reasoning: what I'm getting is that there are lots of things that, whilst visually attractive – what merely delights my senses – really don't matter, and don't deserve my roll of film. Many things pass by, and I pass many things by. I walk around and end up thinking I should go home and save my shots for the people I love, and whom I care about.

In some sense my reflections mirror the insights derived from thinking through Robert Nozick's experience machine thought experiment, discussed by John Finnis (1980: 95-97). For all the pleasure and delight if I plug in for life, I would rather not: what about the other important things in life?



Picture 4

Mother and Child. Leica II with 5cm Elmar f/3.5 on Kodak ISO 400.

I have already said much about how the viewfinder and peering through it, i.e., the photographic process, invites such practical and evaluative reflections. But I wish to dwell on this with respect my experience shooting film a little. For there is a difference shooting film and digital in this regard.

Roland Barthes (1982) writes in *Camera Lucida* that there are two kinds of photographs, one with *studium* and others with *punctum*. I find that distinction helpful. *Studium* shots are those which we appreciate but do not *prick* or *puncture* us. They are nice, but don't *especially* appeal. Barthes (ibid.) writes:

“The studium is that very wide field of unconcerned desire, of various interests, of inconsequential taste: I like / I don't like. The studium is of the order of liking, not loving; it mobilizes a half desire, a demi-volition; it is the same sort of vague, slippery, irresponsible interest one takes in people, the entertainments, the books, the clothes one finds ‘all right’” (27)

The *punctum* on the other hand is different – it grabs us, involves us, and engages us *especially*. But it is not *shock* either. Hence Barthes notes that news photographs often shock, even traumatise, but “no *punctum*...no disturbance; the photograph can “shout”, not wound...I glance through [these journalistic photographs], I don't recall them...I am interested in them (as I am interested in the world), I do not love them.” (41) Barthes unfortunately is less clear about what it is exactly:

“certain details may ‘prick’ me...A detail overwhelms the entirety of my reading: it is an intense mutation of my interest, a fulguration. By the mark of something, the photography is no longer “anything whatever” This something has triggered me.” (47)

Whatever it is, it is what is not merely the *studium*. It is that which arrests us, and however it pricks, perhaps it is what matters, and is for us what stands out, and is significant. In any case, I will borrow and use Barthes' *studium* and *punctum* in this way. I would say that when shooting digital, I am after both *studium* and *punctum*, but when shooting film, I am keen to capture merely the image with *punctum*, and filter out the unworthy *studium*. I want to record

and develop only what could puncture – and wounds, leaving an impression, a scar if lost and missed – and not merely what is likeable.

Film teaches me to abstract the *punctum*, and to leave behind the *studium*, much better than does digital, which is quite indifferent to this distinction. Indeed, when shooting digital, after a while I take so much delight when capturing successfully the pretty *studium* that I am addicted to it, and seek no more than the likeable, but which I would disregard in film. I lose the subject, the meaning, and think of no more than the phenomenon: the colors, the shapes, the lines, mostly attractive, but meaningless.

This is not a condemnation of digital. I take great delight in it. Look at this, a wall, taken with my Digilux 2, and stitched together in Photoshop: it's my masterpiece – so far. I could print it out, frame it, and stare at it the whole day. It's Nature's Mural. It is on my desktop now. I am very proud of it.



Picture 5

Wall. Leica Digilux 2, Panorama stitched in Photoshop

Or consider this one below, titled, “Orange, Red on Green”. This one made it into *Leica Mastershots* in the Leica Gallery, after rigorous selection by an expert panel, I am told on the website. This is a part of the same wall. I like it very much myself.



Picture 6

Orang, Red on Green. Selected for *Leica Mastershots*. Leica Digilux 2

But what do these mean? For my rolls of film, I hope to capture something of far *greater* import. For my digital studies in *studium*, I am keenly aware of their vanity.

5. Infallible Propositions

Here's a random thought, that I've been nursing this couple of days.

Recall that Descartes suggested that one's doubting is indubitably true, since, by doubting one's doubt, one is still doubting. So as long as I doubt, *that I am doubting*, is infallibly true – for even when one doubts that, one proves it is true performatively.

Here's a more thomistic example, from John Finnis: suppose someone says that knowledge is a good, but is confronted with the skeptical challenge that it is not – well, the skeptical challenge, when not whimsical but careful and considered, even rigorous, ironically demonstrates or proves that 'knowledge is a good' to be true, or contradicts the very skepticism, since one is here keen, when skeptical, to grasp the good of the truth of knowledge, namely the knowledge of whether knowledge is true or false, or to promote as a good, the knowledge that 'knowledge is not a good'. (Finnis, 1980: 74-75)

Suppose I say that, **Photography affords, semiosically, ethical** or religious (to the extent that religiously based moral ideas can be classified as ‘ethical’) **consciousness raising**. By this I mean that photography, which includes everything I do here – the taking of pictures, the captioning, the blogging or writing about it, etc. – has the capacity to lead, as a sign-post, to ethical or religious ideas, either by reminding us of these, or by pressing us to think about the latter, or by holding up the latter to our consciousness when otherwise we would not bother with them. So:

“Photography (Ph) affords Ethical (E) consciousness raising, by way of semiosis”

This seems to me infallibly correct, using infallibility in loose way, to suggest that the very posing of this proposition *as a question*, i.e., “Does: photography afford ethical consciousness raising by way of semiosis?” itself adds to its truth.

Proof:

Let P be (Ph affords E semiosically)

Interrogate, question, problematize P .

Hence, {Is it true that P ?}

Let $?P$ be the problematization, the skeptical questioning, or the research question in relation to P .

I.e., Let $?P$ be {Is it true that P ?}

How are $?P$ and P related?

$?P$ asks if P is True.

Now, because through the posing of the question, *Ph* and *E* are held up semiosically, hence *Ph* does afford *E*.

Comment: when the question is posed, and put out as a research question, the study that interrogates the connection between Ph and E actually puts before our minds E, just when we explore how E is related, effected, caused by, afforded by, or correlated with Ph. Hence, Ph understood to include the reflective study of how E is afforded, actually affords, by way of this study, E. Whatever the real relationship between Ph and E are (and there may be some or none at all), the very study of Ph in relation with E generates, even if merely nominally, and not metaphysically, a true relationship between Ph and E where Ph leads, as a sign, to E.

In which case, then *P* is true, even when one questions *P*.

I.e., *?P* implies *P*.

Hence *P* is infallably true, since even if questioned, *P* is proven, performatively, by *?P*, to be true.

In sum:

***?P* implies *P*; ergo, *P*.**

Hence, infallibly *P*

What does this all mean?

Well it means that, even before the question, “Does photography lead to ethical consciousness raising” needs to be answered through extended study, the answer to that is already that it does. And this is because the suggestion that it does is infallibly true when posed as a research question and studied. *The very researching or study of this question makes it true.*

Hence the study of whether photography leads semiosically to ethical consciousness raising

(or shortened, photo-semio-ethic studies) is very worthwhile, precisely because it *does* lead to ethical consciousness raising.

Simply put: *skepticism regarding the semiosis of ethical ideas in photography is indefensible*. Because: the serious, thoughtful, skeptical challenge, which is willing to test the possibility of photography for signing ethical ideas – that very challenge proves the semiosis of one with the other. We are speaking of such fair minded skepticism which is scholarly, and which is willing to give it a go, to think through and to see if it works, to give it a chance to corroborate itself or to surface a counter-example, rather than the arbitrary, whimsical skepticism which is not to be taken seriously.

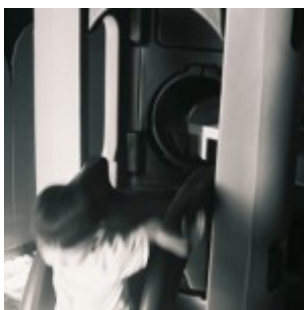
The way photography leads to ethical *semiosis* is precisely through the study of the affordance of one with the other, and in a sense, or at least one can go so far as to say, that the affordances of photography for ethical consciousness raising in the real is not entirely relevant. It is not photography *per se* which needs to afford such consciousness raising. Rather it is the *study of photography in relation to ethics*, which leads to such consciousness raising. This is not to say that there are no metaphysically robust claims to be made in relation to the way photography could afford ethical semiosis. But it does mean that, whatever may be said of these, *the very ongoing study to unveil these affordances*, is what truly matters, and is what needs to be done.

Hence photo-semio-ethical studies *need to be done*, not for the results of these studies, but for the very performance of such studying, which effects ethical consciousness raising.

6. The Habit of Black and White

I have found, speaking at the least for myself, that it is good to have a habit of shooting, on occasion, in just black and white. I say this without prejudice towards digital. Black and white photography, whether in digital or in 35mm film, achieves the same thing with respect a certain way of seeing, which color, whether digital or film, eschews.

Color is a good thing, but it can be a distracting thing, and could lend itself towards the quest for mere aesthetic *studium*, rather than for meaningful *punctum*. Color is beautiful, whether one speaks of certain shades or of certain combinations. But black and white is more thoughtful. One puts the quest for saturated spectrums aside: in black and white such aspirations for nice colors is from the very start frustrated. Hence one has to look for *something else*: the subject, the story, the action, rather than the mere appearance, or phenomena. The intelligible subject matter is sought after, and abstracted, and the trivialities of the merely colorful left behind. Here there is more likelihood of capturing the meaningfully puncturing, the important subject, because: of being encouraged to see the punctum.



Picture 7

A Happy Child. Leica II with 5cm Elmar f/3.5 on B/W Kodak film ISO400

It may be possible that shooting 35mm black and white film does a *slightly* better job at supporting such a way of seeing, since once again, film costs, and so presses for more

deliberated evaluation. After all, even in black and white, there can be the temptation to capture merely nice lines or shapes, such as trees or branches or the panels of building walls. So one is denied not merely the attractively colorful; one has reservations even of the merely structurally beautiful, which when wasted on expensive film, is venial sin. I did have, recently, a rather expensive Kodak CN400 c-41 processing 36 exposure film loaded, which give me great results. But when shooting that roll, I was well aware of the self-imposed discipline to *not* shoot the merely “visually interesting”. With respect digital, the beautifully monochromatic can still be a temptation.

Although at the end of the day, when the digital camera is set to shoot in monochrome, my own experience is that one’s attention can still be *quite* discernibly deflected from the merely aesthetic, in the search for subjects that truly matter. The digital camera I’ve been using is the Fuji X100, which simulates the rangefinder photographic experience. So: for someone shooting in color for quite a while, the transition to black and white effects such a way of seeing powerfully, even if one still has the license to snap away. Hence even if not shooting in film, digital photographers who shoot in black and white would, I think, find the experience recognizably beneficial.

7. Death and Resurrection

[Having revisited] Martin Heidegger lately... I’ve come away with some ideas that I think are rather interesting to me [insofar as they inform my thoughts on photography and ethics].

As I’ve written in [earlier] chapters, photography inclines one in a variety of ways to enter into a kind of evaluative, and hence practical mode of thought, and that in turn emerges the focal viewpoint, just as our grasp of what truly matters becomes more keen. Now it’s occurred

to me that, basically, when one is confronted with a limitation, with the closing down of infinite possibilities, then one enters the focal viewpoint—precisely because one can no more squander opportunities, but must choose.

Now the horizon of death, which we all face, imposes precisely that kind of limitation to our lives; when we are existing with the knowledge that we will die one day, we begin to take more seriously the time we have, and begin to decide what to put into the time we still have, and to discard what deserves less of our time and attention. We begin also to think through what is important and what is not, what is choice-worthy and what is not, what is good and evil.

Thus the peering through the viewfinder in photography is analogous to one's being-toward-death. In this recognition that we are dying, we begin really to live: to exist with a consciousness of what matters, and what does not. We become, or are readied to become ethical. In dying, we are resurrected: we are now more fully alive than when previously we were dead in our careless squandering.

In a sense also, there is here, in photography, just as there is in the being-towards-death, a kind of theory, or *theoria* as the Greeks meant it. That is to say, *thea+horao*, the looking of the god[dess] at us to disclose to us+our pious looking back. (Rojcewicz, 2006) It is not by our sheer will power that this ethical comportment is achieved; rather the dynamism is the other way around. It is experienced as given to us, disclosed to us, un-hidden to us. We did not develop it, or deduce it. We did not work it out. Rather, we looked (through the viewfinder) and that ethical comportment was given, and hence “looked back”. Just as someone looks towards the horizon of death, and then it was given back, saying: “you need to spend your existence meaningfully, on the important things, and therefore, live.”

Heidegger (1976) said that only a god could save us, and that is true. In the *theoria* of photography, we the dead may begin to live.

Acknowledgements

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the *World Congress of Semiotics on Global Semiotics*, in October 2012 in Nanjing China. I am thankful to members of the audience for helpful comments and their support. I also am also thankful to my panel members, Susan Petrilli and Augusto Ponzio, for their encouragement.

References:

Anderson, L (2006), "Analytic Autoethnography", *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* Vol. 35 no. 4, 373-395

Aquinas, T (1954), *On Truth (Vol II, Qns X-XX)*, McGlynn, J. (trans.), Indianapolis: Hackett.

Barthes, R., (1982), *Camera Lucida*, London: Vintage.

Chua, J (2012), *The Inquisitor's Manual: Photo-Semioethical Studies*, Retrieved November 26, 2012, from <http://www.inquisitorsmanula.com>

Chua, J (2013a), "Significal Designs: Translating for Meanings that Truly Matter" in *Semiotica*, Vol 196, 353-364

Chua, J (2013b), "Designing the "camera": photo-semio-ethical studies" in *Writing, Voice, Undertaking*, Petrilli, S (ed.), Toronto: Legas, 199-202.

Deely, J (1990), *Basics of Semiotics*, Indiana: Indiana University Press.

Finnis, J (1980), *Natural Law and Natural Rights*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Finnis, J (1998) “Natural Law and the Ethics of Discourse” *American Journal of Jurisprudence*, Vol 43, 53-73

Freeman, M. (2006). Autobiographical understanding and narrative inquiry. In J. Clandinin (Ed.), *Handbook of Narrative Inquiry: Mapping a Methodology*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage. 120-145

Harrison, B (2002), “Photographic Visions and Narrative Inquiry” *Narrative Inquiry*, 12 (1), 87-111

Heidegger, M (1976), “Only a God Can Save Us”, available at:
<http://www.ditext.com/heidegger/interview.html>

Petrilli, S (2009), *Signifying and Understanding: Reading the Works of Victoria Welby and the Signific Movement*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyer.

Raz, J (2013), “A Menu of Questions” in Keown J & George RP (ed.), *Reason, Morality and Law*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 13-23

Rojcewicz, R (2006), *The Gods and Technology: A Reading of Heidegger*, New York: SUNY