



FEATURED TEXTS OR PROJECTS

**Photography as a cognitive instrument
for (re)discovering architectural and
social realities**

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Photography as a cognitive instrument for (re)discovering architectural and social realities

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Abstract

This essay presents the pedagogical approach to photography at FAUP, where teaching is closely aligned with research, fostering students' critical, independent thought and ability to articulate it through photographic narratives. The projects address architectural and social realities, engaging with political, economic, and cultural contexts while balancing realism and abstraction. Parque Residencial da Boavista reinterprets Porto's 1970s housing through Italo Calvino's fictional city of Valdrada, blending influences from Hanzlová and Gursky. Identity explores the São João de Deus neighbourhood through walking as a method of inquiry, evoking influences from the Düsseldorf school and Wim Wenders. Decoupage examines Bom Sucesso's human presence, echoing Aalto's humanism and Ribeiro's focus on lived space. Transições reflects on Siza's Bouça neighbourhood, integrating architecture, light, and everyday life. Collectively, these projects reveal photography as a cognitive tool for (re)discovering urban and social realities.

Keywords: Photography, Cognitive instrument, (re)discovering architectural and social realities, Atmospheric, Architecture.

Biography

Pedro Leão Neto holds a degree in Architecture (FAUP, 1992), a Master's in Urban Environment Planning and Design (FAUP-FEUP, 1992), and a PhD in Planning and Landscape from the University of Manchester (2002), with postdoctoral work at FAUP (2018). He is Professor and Researcher at FAUP, where he teaches courses on photography and architectural design and coordinates the research group Architecture, Art and Image (AAI). He is Editor-in-Chief of Sophia Journal and scopio Magazine and Principal Investigator of the projects Visual Spaces of Change (FCT) and Contrast (DGArtes). His research explores the intersections of architecture, art, and photography, with a focus on artistic documentary practice. He has published around 40 books, over 100 scientific articles, and curated exhibitions, conferences, and the Sophia Journal international conference series.

Essay

The work carried out so far in the curricular units linked to the teaching of photography at FAUP has aimed to bring the world of teaching closer to that of research. Moreover, it is pertinent to highlight that the pedagogical methodology employed aspires to cultivate in students a comprehensive capacity for informed and independent thought, enabling them to articulate this thought through a compendium of photographic visual narratives. This pedagogy necessitates, among other components, an openness to critique—both commendatory and detrimental—concerning the political, economic, social, and artistic contexts of urban space and its architecture. Consequently, the resultant works exhibit diverse realism and abstraction, varying in their interpretative approaches to reality and the issues they elect to convey.

Notably, the students' projects exhibit significant conceptual and technical influences from various authors. For instance, the Parque Residencial da Boavista project, executed by Ana Amélia Ferreira, Ana Carolina Varejão, João Diogo Afonso, and Maria Inês Silva, invokes Italo Calvino, imaginatively and critically linking the author's narrative regarding the fantastical city of Valdrada with a paradigmatic residential district from the 1970s in Porto. Through the fictional framework of Valdrada, the photographic series investigates the concepts of symmetry, transformation, and identity of the Boavista Residential Park, thus (re)discovering the atmospheric qualities of its architecture and public space. The influence of authors such as Jitka Hanzlová is also evident in the series' direct engagement with the neighbourhood's nature and architecture, underscoring their relational and often latent tensions with the greenery and urban environment. Additionally, elements inspired by Andreas Gursky are manifest in certain images, particularly those of larger scale, characterized by meticulous attention to detail, patterns, and the intricate landscapes of the neighbourhood's architecture.

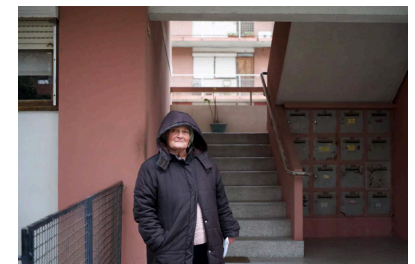
Identity by Isadora Fontana, José Rodrigues, Maria Luíza da Silva, Nadja Araújo, and Vinícius Pauli centres on the São João de Deus neighbourhood, revitalized by architect Nuno Brandão Costa. This photographic series, aligning with the philosophy of Francesco Careri, implements a visual methodology of walking as an investigative tool for perceiving space, facilitating an examination of architecture and space as dynamic entities. The construction of the visual narrative, including the cropping and frontal composition of the images, functions as apertures through which the world may be perceived and understood, reflecting cross-influences from photographers such as Sebastião Raimundo and movements including the flat, dispassionate documentary style characteristic of the Düsseldorf school of photography, as well as contributions from philosophical, cinematic, and architectural realms—specifically referencing figures such as Wim Wenders and Aldo Rossi.

Decoupage by Rodrigo Encarnação, Simão Alves, and António Gonçalves scrutinizes the Bom Sucesso neighbourhood, established in the 1950s to address the issue of unsanitary living conditions in Porto's islands. The series meticulously explores the connection between the individual and their surroundings, reflecting the intricate realities of this community, thereby aligning with Alvar Aalto's advocacy for human-centric architecture as articulated in "The Humanizing of Architecture." This emphasis on human presence¹ further denotes the influence of Eduardo Sousa Ribeiro, particularly in capturing the human imprint and activities within spatial contexts. Furthermore, the influence of Andreas Gursky is apparent, particularly within the abstract and geometric interpretations of the neighbourhood's architecture, underscoring keen attention to detail and architectural patterns.

Transições by Carolina Cunha, Duarte Amaral, Guilherme Ferreira, Mariana Afonso, Matilde Oliveira, and Pedro Martins examines the Bouça Neighborhood, a design by architect Álvaro Siza. This photographic series endeavours to depict the essential moments and attributes of the neighbourhood, avoiding a depiction of mere architectural shells, instead integrating nuanced facets of daily life alongside inhabitants and their routines within the milieu. This collection illustrates influences from Hélène Binet regarding the capture of light and form within the neighbourhood's architecture and Paolo Rosselli in incorporating individuals within select images.

Subsequently, students are tasked with producing a final project consisting of a series of critical visual narratives, emerging from examining diverse works by the author, predicated on individual reflection and the effective application of photographic techniques and visual grammar.

¹ Quoting the students, 'Not just photographing them, but talking, getting to know them, asking and listening... stories of now and before, how they ended up there if they like it there, the family they have and the life they lead, asking if we can come in.'



Ana Amélia Ferreira
Ana Carolina Varejão
João Diogo Afonso
Maria Inês Silva



Parque Residencial da Boavista

