

*Landscapes of Care. Public housing across multiple  
geographies: crossing theories and practices*



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## Trans-Formations

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"Each epoch dreams the one to follow. In the dream in which each epoch entertains images of its successor, the latter appears wedded to elements of primal history (Urgeschichte)—that is, to elements of a classless society. And the experiences of such a society—as stored in the unconscious of the collective—engender, through interpenetration with what is new, the utopia that has left its trace in a thousand configurations of life, from enduring edifices to passing fashions."<sup>1</sup>

The contemporary urban landscape is traversed by complex layers of transformation, where architecture and territory overlap in dynamic processes of occupation, memory, and experimentation. In this panel, we bring together contributions that examine emerging forms of inhabiting and contemporary devices that reconfigure the relationship between the built environment and everyday life, particularly in vulnerable and hybrid territories.

This panel addresses the complexities of designing and transforming hybrid and vulnerable territories. The papers and visual essays investigate how architecture responds to cultural, social, and environmental shifts, highlighting the necessity for innovative and context-sensitive approaches. Urban and hybrid landscapes are shaped and represented through photography and other visual media. In this context, the image plays a crucial role in capturing territorial transformations and the intricacies of spaces that defy modernist norms. The works utilise photography as a means to comprehend and convey the subtleties of contemporary urban interventions, offering a profound understanding of the interplay between the built environment and the cultural and social forces that shape it.

As Bruno Latour articulates in 'We Have Never Been Modern', "we have never been modern in the sense that we have never been separated from nature."<sup>2</sup> Latour expands on this by arguing that "the proliferation of hybrids... has made it impossible to maintain the old divisions between nature and culture." Beyond simply acknowledging hybridity, Latour invites us to recognise the active agency of quasi-objects—those entities that are simultaneously natural and social—in shaping contemporary territories. This conceptual shift directly complements the panel's focus on the fluid intersections of urban and territorial dynamics, where architecture participates in complex negotiations between environment, technology, and culture.

<sup>1</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 4

<sup>2</sup> Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

Walter Benjamin, in 'The Arcades Project', reinforces this vision by asserting that "the city is the landscape of dreams of the collective,"<sup>3</sup> highlighting how urban spaces accumulate layers of history and collective memory that shape their contemporary transformations. As he notes, "To dwell means to leave traces. In the interior, these are accentuated... the traces of the inhabitant are imprinted in the interior."<sup>4</sup>

Henri Lefebvre, in *The Production of Space*, similarly asserts that "(social) space is a (social) product" and elaborates that "space is not a thing but rather a set of relations between things."<sup>5</sup> His theoretical framework underscores how vulnerable and hybrid territories are constantly reshaped by lived experiences, situating architecture as a critical tool in negotiating the complexities of urban transformation. Benjamin further contributes to this perspective in 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', where he emphasises how images and visual narratives capture and reinterpret transformations, revealing the interdependencies between material and social dimensions.<sup>6</sup> Together, Lefebvre and Benjamin illuminate the layers of meaning embedded in contemporary urban interventions.

The article "Hybrid Landscapes in the Pearl River Delta: The Case of Macau Modern Housing's Approach" by Niccolò Arnaldo Galliano, Daniela Arnaut, and Ana Tostões investigates modern housing architecture in Macau, highlighting how Western influences intertwine with local construction practices. The research analyses modern housing editions from the 1960s, revealing their interaction with the region's urban morphology and climatic conditions.

"Territory as Threshold: Images of Thought for a Non-Modern Landscape" by Luís Ginja, proposes a reflection on the dissolution of boundaries between city and landscape. The essay reframes the relationship between body and territory through theoretical references such as Benjamin and Frank Lloyd Wright, drawing parallels between the dissolution of modern distinctions and new urban configurations.

In the article "Errante: Contemporary Devices for Heuristic Reflections on Housing, Malagueira, Marseille, and La Borda" by Sérgio Magalhães, the author examines three paradigmatic examples of social housing: Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation, Álvaro Siza's Malagueira, and La Borda in Barcelona. Through a comparative reading, the text discusses the impact of architectural forms and housing practices on the construction of new urban narratives and the challenges of gentrification and community autonomy.

3 Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 406.

4 Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 9.

5 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 83.

6 Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, trans. J.A. Underwood (London: Penguin Books, 2008).

The visual essays in this panel establish a dialogue with theoretical reflections, highlighting the power of photography in understanding social housing spaces and documenting urban changes and reconfigurations. The essay "Public Housing from Within: Childhood Memories as a Landscape of Care" by Chloé Darmon offers a sensitive look at childhood experiences in public housing, revealing layers of belonging and identity embedded in the space.

Together, the works gathered here reaffirm the critical role of architecture and urbanism as fields of inquiry capable of fostering social transformation. By addressing contemporary cartographies of inhabitation and interventions in vulnerable and hybrid territories, this panel advocates for the revision of dominant spatial practices and invites us to reimagine urban space as a site of collective agency and reappropriation.

Rethinking urban space today demands more than technical innovation; it requires recovering the political and social dimensions of inhabitation, and affirming architecture and urbanism as acts of resistance against fragmentation, commodification, and exclusion.