

*Landscapes of Repair: the Role of Photography and  
Film in Documenting the Legacy of Modern and  
Contemporary Architecture and Public Spaces*



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## Introduction

# Visual Practices, Architectural Memory and the Transformation of Public Space

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Sophia Journal has, since its start, established itself as an editorial and research platform dedicated to exploring architecture and the city through the lenses of photography, film, and visual culture. The journal published by the R&D Nuno Portas Centre Studies (CENP), at the Faculty of Architecture, University of Porto (FAUP), in collaboration with the Cityscopio Cultural Association (CCA) and their publishing imprint scopio Editions, has consistently fostered an interdisciplinary and international dialogue, bridging architectural research with artistic, documentary, and curatorial practices. Through peer-reviewed publications, thematic volumes and international conferences, Sophia Journal has sought to expand architectural discourse by recognising visual practices not merely as modes of representation, but as critical instruments of inquiry and knowledge production.

This tenth volume, *Landscapes of Repair: The Role of Photography and Film in Documenting the Legacy of Modern and Contemporary Architecture and Public Spaces*, marks the opening of the journal's fourth thematic cycle. It builds upon and extends previous investigations into *Landscapes of Care*, while shifting the focus towards repair as a cultural, political and ecological imperative. Repair is understood here not as a purely technical operation, but as a layered and critical process that engages memory, heritage, social practices and future imaginaries. In this sense, photography and film emerge as privileged tools for observing, questioning, and reconfiguring how modern and contemporary architectures, infrastructures, and public spaces persist, deteriorate, adapt, or are transformed over time.

The notion of *landscape* adopted throughout this volume aligns with contemporary discourses that conceive it as a dynamic construct: at once a material condition, a cultural medium and an imaginative framework. Architecture, city and territory are approached as living and inclusive organisms, shaped by historical trajectories and present-day uses, and deeply embedded in broader socioeconomic, political, technical and ecological systems. Within this framework, modern architecture occupies a particularly critical position. As a heritage of the recent past, it often remains insufficiently recognised by institutions, scholars and the general public, despite its profound impact on contemporary urban life. Addressing this gap requires not only new historiographical perspectives, but also renewed documentary and visual strategies capable of revealing latent values, contested meanings and transformative potential.

Photography and film have long played a central role in mediating architectural experience. However, this volume foregrounds their capacity to operate as research methodologies rather than illustrative supplements. Drawing on expanded documentary practices, the contributions assembled here engage with what Marion Gautreau and Jean Kempf Jean Kempf<sup>1</sup> have described as the multiple dimensions of documentary photography: its scientific or ideological positioning, its artistic engagement with the complexity of the real, and its capacity to affirm identity and retrieve memory. These dimensions are not treated as separate categories, but as overlapping modes that enable critical readings of architecture and public space across different temporalities and geographies.

Several contributions address photography's role in documenting processes of repair, transformation and renewal. These processes are often visible in intermediate states, such as buildings under construction, infrastructures awaiting recognition, or public spaces whose meanings are still in flux<sup>2</sup>. Such conditions challenge dominant narratives that privilege finished forms and iconic images. Instead, they draw attention to temporality, material processes and the everyday negotiations through which architecture is continuously reshaped. In this regard, photography and film do not simply record change; they actively participate in constructing imaginaries that can influence public perception, policy decisions and design strategies.

Theoretical papers in this volume engage with modern and contemporary architecture through diverse yet interconnected lenses. Studies on aerial photography and regional planning reveal how visual technologies have historically shaped both architectural concepts and ecological awareness, reframing landscapes as complex systems rather than purely visual compositions. Analyses of modularity, prefabrication, and collective housing demonstrate how photographic documentation can illuminate the construction processes, technical experimentation, and cultural negotiations embedded within modern architectural projects. Other contributions critically examine photographic archives, typological series and artistic practices that document loss, obsolescence and marginal forms of dwelling, thereby questioning established hierarchies of architectural value.

A recurrent theme across the volume is the capacity of visual practices to activate architectural memory. Archives are revisited not as static repositories, but as dynamic materials open to

1 Marion Gautreau e Jean Kempf, «La photographie documentaire contemporaine dans les Amériques», *IdeAs* [Online], 13 | 2019, posto online no dia 01 março 2019, consultado o 17 dezembro 2023. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/ideas/5099>; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/ideas.5099>

2 See Pedro Neto. (2024). "An Editorial Project As a Catalyst for Discussion and Construction of Architectural Ideas: Scopia Editions and Sophia Journal". *Sophia Journal* 9 (1): 3-7. [https://doi.org/10.24840/2183-8976\\_2024-0009\\_0001\\_1](https://doi.org/10.24840/2183-8976_2024-0009_0001_1)

reinterpretation and recontextualisation. Diachronic studies of urban environments reveal how photographs acquire new meanings over time, particularly when viewed through contemporary lenses shaped by digital technologies, environmental concerns and social change. In this sense, the act of repair extends beyond the physical realm, encompassing the symbolic and cultural dimensions of architecture and landscape<sup>3</sup>.

The volume is structured around three editorial sections — *Modernity 50s–60s*, *Intermediate States* and *Other Realities* — each offering a distinct yet complementary perspective on the overarching theme. Together, they articulate a critical trajectory that moves from the documentation of modern architectural legacies, through transitional and provisional conditions, to alternative and often marginal realities that challenge dominant architectural narratives. Interviews and visual essays further enrich this framework by foregrounding practices situated at the intersection of research, design and visual experimentation.

The editorial readings by Cristina Gastón, Judit Taberna, and Jaime J. Ferrer Forés analyse this issue through a layered exploration of photography as a methodological instrument and a critical lens for understanding landscape and urban transformation. From the visual essays curated by Gastón and Taberna, which approach territory through performative engagement, memory, and atmospheres of repair, to their reflections on the aesthetics of construction processes and photography, photography is presented as a means of revealing transient conditions that often escape architectural intention. In parallel, Ferrer Forés situates photographic practice within the broader discourse of modernity, demonstrating how images—whether documenting construction, capturing aerial perspectives, or recording the afterlife of modern projects—operate as tools for analysis, comparison, and historical consciousness. The contributions gathered in this volume—from Josefsson, Alvarado, and Barranco to Ferrer Frau, Wettstein, Jaua, Incicco, and others—collectively underscore the capacity of visual media to mediate between design intention and lived reality, between technological progress and social complexity, and between memory and transformation.

The *Perusal* section of this volume further deepens this critical enquiry through the contribution of its Guest editor Félix Solaguren–Beascoa, *Who Do Cities Belong To?*, a reflective and incisive text that interrogates the city as a contested space of representation, memory, and social struggle. Moving across temporal and geographical contexts—from the upheavals of May 1968

3 See the discussion of key conceptions of landscape circulating as part of the recent discourse i.e. landscape as a fundamental building block, a communicative medium, and a realm of imaginative constructs." Vera Vicenzotti. "The Landscape of Landscape Urbanism." *Landscape Journal* 36, no. 1 (2018): 75–86. <https://doi.org/10.3368/lj.36.1.75>.<https://lj.uwpress.org/content/wpj/36/1/75.full.pdf>

to contemporary urban protests—Solaguren–Beascoa situates visual practices, particularly photography, as both witness and agent in the construction of civic consciousness. Through the works of Carrie Mae Weems and Ryūji Miyamoto, the text reveals how ephemeral materials—plywood panels or cardboard shelters—become charged surfaces upon which claims, exclusions, and forms of resistance are inscribed. In doing so, the city emerges not as a fixed entity, but as a layered and unstable condition shaped by conflict, erasure, and re-appropriation, compelling us to reconsider, once again, the enduring question of who the city is truly for.

The visual essays included in this volume exemplify the journal's commitment to recognising visual research as a legitimate and rigorous mode of scholarly inquiry. Through carefully constructed photographic sequences and reflective texts, these contributions explore public spaces as sites of action, memory and poetic engagement. They demonstrate how visual narratives can articulate forms of knowledge that resist purely textual articulation, engaging affect, perception and embodied experience.

Ultimately, *Landscapes of Repair* proposes a humanist approach to architectural and urban transformation. It calls for renewed attention to the cultural, social and ecological dimensions of the built environment at a moment when cities and territories worldwide are facing profound crises. By foregrounding photography and film as critical research tools, this volume aims to draw attention to practices that do not merely document what exists but actively contribute to envisioning more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable futures.

Through the diversity of its contributions, *Sophia Journal* Vol. 10 No. 1 reaffirms the journal's role as a platform for interdisciplinary and visually driven research. It invites readers to reconsider modern and contemporary architecture not as fixed objects of the past or present, but as evolving landscapes whose repair depends as much on how they are seen, narrated and remembered as on how they are materially transformed.