

*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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Photography as an Instrument of Modern Construction

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Henri Cartier-Bresson states that photography stops time. By suspending time, the image becomes a memory of the project's construction process. The use of photographs of the work during construction implies a concern with placing space and technique at the center of the debate on modernity in architecture. Construction establishes the order of space and becomes form. Images of construction aim to reveal constructive innovations and the industrial character of the building process that defines the primacy of the spatial and technological modernity of the new architecture.

In the article *Modularity and Prefabrication: Analysis of the Collective Housing at Ordrupvej No. 70* by Mogens Lassen and Engineer Ishøy, Josep Oriol Ferrer Frau analyzes the relevance of this residential building within Danish Functionalism. The core of this research is the Systemhuset, a sliding steel formwork system patented by engineer Ernst Ishøy. The photographs document the construction process and reveal the boldness of a technique that made it possible to erect one floor every four days. The camera records the slenderness of the reinforced concrete walls—only 15 centimeters thick—which freed the façade from its load-bearing role. Through the analysis of period photographs, Ferrer Frau's research recovers the importance of collaboration between architect and engineer, in which modern aesthetics were not merely an aspiration but the direct consequence of technical innovation.

During his stay in Paris, Mogens Lassen absorbed Le Corbusier's modern ideas, focusing his attention on experimentation with the industrialization of construction. This fascination with technical logic and machine efficiency was not limited to construction details but aspired to a comprehensive understanding of the environment. Under this same premise of technological vanguardism, Le Corbusier published his book *Aircraft* in 1935, where he claimed the aerial view as a new instrument necessary to reveal the structure of the territory and diagnose the problems of the contemporary city.

The work of Domonkos Wettstein, entitled *Aerial Photography as a New Perspective in Planning and Rehabilitation*, immerses us in mid-twentieth-century Hungary to analyze how the bird's-eye view transformed urban planning practice. The protagonist of this account is the architect Tibor Farkas, who from 1957 onward took on the challenge of modernizing the Lake Balaton region.

The genesis of this instrumental use of aerial photography arose from a technical necessity and a political obstacle. After the Danube floods of 1956, the lack of accurate maps—many of them distorted or classified for military security reasons during the Cold War—forced Farkas to take to the air in a small plane. What began as a reconnaissance mission to identify safe land became a design methodology.

Wettstein identifies an evolution in Farkas's gaze. In an initial stage, influenced by Le Corbusier's formal language, aerial photography served to compose the landscape as if it were a "monumental sculpture." The photographs allowed the architect to balance the mass of new modern buildings with the natural topography. However, in the 1970s, the gaze became systemic. Faced with environmental degradation caused by the success of mass tourism, aerial photography no longer sought aesthetic beauty but evidence of impact: erosion and biodiversity loss. This paradigm shift was fundamental to the emergence of contemporary landscape architecture in Hungary, demonstrating that photography can be the first step toward ecological awareness.

In her article entitled *Two Modern Public Housing Projects in Caracas*, María Fernanda Jaua analyzes the transformation of Caracas during the oil boom of the 1950s through the Taller de Arquitectura del Banco Obrero (TABO). Under the direction of Carlos Raúl Villanueva, the language of Le Corbusier's *Unité d'habitation* was adopted, integrating essential elements such as pilots to free public space and *brise-soleil* as a tropical climatic solution.

The study focuses on two residential complexes: the Cerro Grande Housing Unit and the 2 de Diciembre Community (today known as 23 de Enero). Here, photography is analyzed as an instrument of comparison and analysis. On the one hand, the official images from the 1950s, commissioned by the dictatorship of Marcos Pérez Jiménez under the "Nuevo Ideal Nacional," capture the modernity of the superblocks, their free plans, and their geometric purity, projecting an image of progress that sought to erase the reality of informal housing.

However, María Fernanda Jaua contrasts these images with the contemporary photographic record by Julio Mesa for the Interactive Atlas of the Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya. The comparison is revealing. Confronted with the modern concrete utopia, current photographs of these complexes register the "informalization" of the modern project: spontaneous enclosures, lack of maintenance, and a human density that exceeds the original planning. Nevertheless, despite the degradation, the structural logic devised by Villanueva and his team remains the vital support that enables the coexistence of thousands of residents of Caracas. Photography thus serves to measure the distance between political ideal and social resilience.

In Giulia Incicco's research, entitled *Bernd and Hilla Becher: Records of Loss*, photography records industrial decline by systematically documenting obsolete industrial structures. The Bechers' systematic documentation recognizes the aesthetic and historical value of the industrial past through their famous "typologies": series of black-and-white photographs organized in grids that present silos, cooling towers, and blast furnaces. Technically, both Tibor Farkas and the Bechers employ decontextualization: Farkas elevates the gaze to ignore detail and understand the flow of the landscape; the Bechers eliminate background and human figures to understand the logic of the object. In both cases, photography functions as a sensor that enables a systemic understanding beyond what the eye at ground level can perceive.

Incicco highlights the Bechers' participation in the influential exhibition *New Topographics* (1975), which marked a turning point in landscape photography. By portraying silos, water towers, and blast furnaces under diffuse light and without human presence, the Bechers stripped industry of its romantic or heroic charge and presented it as a pure architectural fact.

Beyond aesthetics, their work was crucial in safeguarding industrial heritage, especially in the Ruhr region of Germany. Their photographic records functioned as tools of historical awareness and were decisive in saving sites such as Zeche Zollern in Dortmund. This industrial complex, once threatened with demolition, is now a museum and a symbol of industrial reconversion, demonstrating how photography can act as a catalyst for the preservation of cultural heritage.

Finally, an interview is presented on the *International Carlo Scarpa Prize for Gardens*, organized since 1990 by the Fondazione Benetton Studi Ricerche, which celebrated its 33rd edition in 2024. This recognition focuses on the study and care of places with profound natural, historical, and creative values. Unlike other awards, the Scarpa Prize is granted to specific sites—landscapes shaped by communities or by the interaction between forms of life and territory—rather than focusing on authors or architectural objects.

The methodology of the prize follows a circular cycle of "documenting, researching, and transmitting." A multidisciplinary scientific committee carries out fieldwork and establishes links with local communities to understand landscape transformations, moving beyond a purely conservationist perspective.

A fundamental aspect since 2014 has been the incorporation of documentary film and professional photography not only as means of dissemination but as research tools. These visual narratives make it possible to construct a contemporary language for understanding complex and conflictive landscapes. Ultimately, the Prize functions as a critical platform that links scientific rigor with social sensitivity, promoting responsible and creative management of memory and territory toward the future.

Overall, these contributions demonstrate that visual recording is not an epilogue to the architectural process but a constitutive dimension of its analysis, critique, and heritage preservation. Photography is revealed here as a polyvalent tool: at Ordrupvej 70, it documents technical memory and constructive innovation; at Lake Balaton, it deploys a systemic gaze through aerial photography that evolves toward ecological awareness; in Caracas, it acts as a mediator between design utopia and complex social reality. Meanwhile, the work of the Bechers transmutes industrial obsolescence into cultural heritage, and in the Carlo Scarpa Prize, the image is consolidated as a fundamental research instrument for the interpretation and care of the landscape.