Visual Spaces of Change

Photographic documentation of environmental transformations

SOPHIA
scopio EDITIONS

Verticalization: Photographic Explorations Of Complex Urban Phenomena

Luciano Bernardino da Costa and Ricardo Santhiago Costa Pinto

Abstract

How to explore photography as a way of problematizing urban phenomena? Is it possible to use different aesthetic concepts, in photography, to expand the dialogue with cities? These two questions guide the photographic research developed as part of the project, "Highrise Living and the Inclusive City", with a focus in São Paulo / Brazil and Lyon / France. The first question highlights the territory and the production of capitalist urban space by photography realized in fieldwork. The second one involves editing and re-elaborating the images, considering the approximation between the research project, local records and photography aesthetic. The High-Rise Project, on the other hand, discusses the contemporary verticalization process and its spatial and social implications in Sao Paulo city, considering a contextual (São Paulo, Lyon) and multiscale analysis model, while incorporating different reading strategies and territory interpretation. The field study, initially organized as a team, resulted in different materials, including the photographic one, from which discussion and editing meetings were conducted by this researcher, considering possibilities for language experiments in interaction with the territory. The series and photographic montages realized allowed a reflection about the relationship between public spaces and paths capturing a specific ambience to the places; and, also, exploring different comparative strategies that highlight, in the four distinct regions, intense landscape transformation due to verticalization. On the other hand, these photographic setting acquire a relative autonomy in relation to the original project, being placed on the edge of applied use of image and esthetic research with its own characteristics.

Keywords: *Urban landscapes, photography, perception, verticalization, emerging spatialities*

Luciano Bernardino da Costa is Professor–PhD 1 at USP''s Institute of Architecture and Urbanism. COSTA is one of the Coordinators of the Center for Contemporary Spatialities, NEC_USP São Carlos. Full member of the IAU–USP São Carlos Culture and Extension Commission. He works in research and teaching in undergraduate and graduate courses in areas of: arts, shape and space; visual languages, photography, metropolis and perception. Currently, he develops researches problematizing the relationship between landscape, visual representation and urbanity. He is an expert on the following scientific journals: RISCO (IAU–USP), VIRUS (IAU–USP), ARA (USP), DISSON NCIA (Unicamp). He has selected work and got included in the collection of the BIENAL of Architecture and Urbanism, 2016. He has articles published in the ARA, RISCO and STUDIUM magazines, in the Proceedings of the ENANPARQ, CORPOCIDADE, ENEIMAGEM and photographic series in ASTRÁGALO (ESP). He held a photo exhibition at IMS Poços de Caldas, entitled ''States of the Landscape'', 2014. He served as a teacher and curator of photographic exhibitions at IMS Poços de Caldas from 2010 to 2017. PhD from FAU–USP, 2010, in the Project area, Space and Culture COM A TESE ''DIALÉTICA IMAGE AND CRITIC IMAGE: PHOTOGRAPHY AND PERCEPTION THE COMTEMPORANY AND MODER METROPOLIS''. Master in Education at UNICAMP, 2001, with the dissertation; SMALL TRIP TO THE BIG OUTBACK. Graduation in Social Sciences, UNICAMP.

Ricardo Santhiago Costa Pinto is a graduate student in the Architecture and Urbanism course at the University of São Paulo, São Carlos (IAU–USP). He develops research for scientific initiation linked to the project ''Highrise Living and the Inclusive City'', with support from the Unified Scholarship Program (PUB–USP). He is a member of the Laboratory for Urban Studies of the Contemporary Urban Environment (LEAUC_IAU–USP). He has been improving his studies on visual language, urban narratives and contemporary cities.

Studying verticalization and its influence in socio-spatial relationships: "Highrise Living and the Inclusive city" project

The images here presented are distributed in four areas, four neighborhoods; four visual organization strategies that complement one another. Among the strategies, two distances are set: the situated sight, within the territory, and the one that sees the faraway, in other words, the verticalization process that keeps transforming existing urban dynamics. Other than that, there is one more issue: photography as a mean of urban investigation and the re-elaboration possibilities which it brings us regarding territory approximation, and also as an autonomous aesthetic conception.

All of the images have the "Highrise Living and the Inclusive city" project as a common guide. The Highrise project, developed by the University of São Paulo partnered with the University of Lyon, proposes itself to think about the contemporary verticalization processes and their spatial and social implications in São Paulo city, from a contextual and multiscale analysis model, incorporating different reading strategies and territory interpretation.

In this respect, one of its steps was São Paulo city's area division in quadrants of 400mt x 400mt, with distinct socioeconomic and spatial compositions. Four areas from this grid were selected to the fieldwork – República, Penha, Morumbi e Vila Prudente – in which, we sought to identify processes of socio-spatial inclusion or segregation, social practices "produced or reconfigured" and real estate expansion dynamics, all of them while considering the surroundings of the Highrise referential enterprise (more than 10 floors) and specific areas along the paths.

As part of territory approximation strategy, photography initially participated as a record and description of paths and urban processes in their microscale. On the selected quadrants, the focus was driven to public spaces, inhabitants' scale and their interactions with the space around them, identified from the conjunction of notions like; "seeing", "living" and "verticalization" itself as a dynamic that is capable of redefining social practices and setting up new spatiality. Thus, on the fieldwork, the act of seeing and photographing was transformed in every step taken, being constantly affected by ways of living, building, inhabiting, pointing different layers of usage and temporalities that connect when living vertical in the contemporary city. It's observed, in all of the region, a kind of spatial unity made of greater or lesser heterogeneity given to the intensity of occupation processes they have been going through, the verticalization being, particularly in two areas, a borderline that keeps going towards established traditional zones.

So, the photographic material, mostly produced by this researcher, was realized along pre–defined paths collaboratively and taken by small groups, but they were always open to deviations, invitations, unusual perceptions, that the act of walking can encourage. As its initial purpose, a solid visual reference of the selected areas was sought to be constituted with the photographs, so that there could be a spatial analysis deepening linked to other data, previously collected, besides identification of questions not considered before. We can, then, say the photographs play its traditional role in architectural and urbanistic studies, it means, as a tool of analysis and reflection about the areas researched, as concepts illustration and as a part of critical argumentation of the urban, as Higgott and Wright explain.

> Photography did not simply document built works: it was employed in the processes of surveying, conceptualizing, passing judgement on and planning the city; in state propaganda, advertising and architectural manifestos; in architectural and planning education; and as a creative tool within design processes.[1]

Yet, the amplitude of uses and speeches, brings us the question about the accessory or instrumental condition of documentary photography in architectural and urban projects and studies, even in photographs known to be authorial and autonomous, for example, Walker Evans photographs to Farm Security Administration. On the other hand, contemporarily, photography reassures, more and more, the perspective of photographic language exploration and its historical and conceptual references, as a way of approximation of urban phenomena associated to a critic and purposeful view from the photographer, interacting with the referent and, exhibition and interlocution contexts.

This horizon was constantly considered on the work that follows this text. If descriptive, documental, narrative value was an orientation and necessity on the High Rise project, on the other hand, we would continually consider the possibility of expanding this verisimilar base through image reedition and intervention.

From this photographic document perspective, I bring four images that refer to each one of the areas. On the images, it's possible to recognize the urban walker's scale while an observer of the city's different usages and dynamics. On two of them, Penha (Fig.1) and Vila Prudente (Fig.2), it's possible to see the buildings which get higher and closer, from far away. In Penha, the view of the person that walks on the residential street on foot, is surrounded by a set of towers with new residences nearby highways. In Prudente, the subway's concrete structure frames the city that seduces and haunts the inert walker. Both show distinct aspects in which, urban mobility and welcoming places have a central role attracting new businesses. The act of seeing, then, meets with the act of walking, and faces urban processes in course, going back to a common landscape photographer act in the 19th century: to the conquest of the view, but within the

---

1 Andrew Higgott and Timothy Wray, *Camera constructs: photography, architecture and modern city* (Farnham: Aschgate Publishing Limited, 2012), 35.

[Fig. 1]
Penha.
© *Luciano B. Costa.*

[Fig. 2]
Prudente.
© *Luciano B. Costa.*

metropolis, the spatial unity notion itself, is shattered. On Morumbi's and República's images, we establish another approximation, the view transverses itself to the depth of field. Verticalization seems non–existent on both, however, the green wall that imprisons the trees, supports the base of more than one high standard building. While the precarious market, on one highway, is one of many forms of financial income or even, of urbanistic reformulation wait in dispute, which can enormously, increase the profit of urban soil as a product.

PUBLIC LIFE PENHA

[Fig. 3]
Public Life – Penha.
© Luciano B. Costa.

Getting closer, where the act of seeing and the "whole body" are more present, we see, on the boards of each quadrant (Fig.3 and 4), photographs of public life taking different shapes: narrow streets of public occupation, graffitied alleys (Penha), gardened streets and sidewalks (Morumbi), shacks on avenue borders, mass transport stations, meeting and living islands (Vila Prudente), plazas and their homeless, siding and handcraft fairs (República). Places of resistance,

PUBLIC LIFE VILA PRUDENTE

[Fig. 4]
Public Life – Vila Prudente.
© Luciano B. Costa.

[Fig. 5]
Topos – Penha.
© *Luciano B. Costa*.

[Fig. 6]
Topos – Vila Prudente.
© *Luciano B. Costa*.

[Fig. 5]

[Fig. 6]

[Fig. 7]

[Fig. 8]

[Fig. 7]
Topos – Morumbi.
© Luciano B. Costa.

[Fig. 8]
Topos – República.
© Luciano B. Costa.

[Fig. 9]
Red Series 01.
© Luciano B. Costa.

speculation, oblivion or living. Interconnection or passage zones. Overall, they compose dynamics of heterogenic occupation, in which common and convivence places present themselves at times as borderlines or areas reserved to specific social groups. The paths taken by the group overlay the locals, and they're where points of interest and data collection are highlighted. In those places, narratives are told, analysis perspectives are reviewed and defined, images are produced, snipping places and sociability, while seeking what might be singular to a specific view.

On the second set of works, we get away from unique images or boards related to the paths and public life, to talk about, by means of edition and reorganization, other comparative and aesthetics possibilities, taking as reference, conceptions from architectural territorial reading, but also present on photographic aesthetic.

Accordingly, more thickened current metropolises, trigger of continuous transformation processes, invite us to a distant view that allows us to feel that we own them, even if it costs a complete downgrade of their inequalities. Finding a sight, then becomes a challenge, but it can also be an encounter of the territory topographic memory and the overlapping urban processes, of which the whole body participates. On the panoramic photographs (Fig. 5, 6, 7 and 8), practiced by a distant view, a cut line is to be recognized, a territory elevation that organizes the urban design consolidated in time. The double line markings in red indicate the cut reference point often coinciding with a highway. This way, it''s possible to see the impact and progression that verticalization has in areas with different elevations. At the same time, the image gets another aesthetic purpose that is not reduced to a specific function or project, bringing up other reading possibilities depending on the exhibition context.

Similarly, the black and white panoramic, again, refer to the four areas, having the amplitude of Edward Ruscha''s composition as a reference, but they''re seen from a single shot and from a distance. At first (Fig.9), the red markings seek to establish a parallel between the built frontiers, having the researched referential buildings as common axis. This comparative relationship is retaken with the red dot markings, that date back to the ways of selecting images from the old tests in contact. The different sizes suggest the recognition of different heights between the buildings and the distances in relation to the photographer position.

As a whole, the works seek to identify a reflection about verticalization and its influence in socio-spatial relationships in the areas selected, and beyond them. Therefore, it's proposed that different strategies of image documentation, edition and arrangement can be associated, using both their own mean of the architect's act or representation, and as references found in photographic aesthetic. This way, the images (photographs, inventories and compositions) can be understood as autonomous aesthetic conceptions or be the argument and tool of analysis associated to urban processes in course.

Bibliography

Besse, Jean Marc. *O gosto do mundo. Exercicios de paisagem.* Rio de Janeiro: EdUERJ, 2014.

Camargo, Camila Moreno de, Manoel Rodrigues Alves, e Luiana Cardozo. 2020. ''Questões Da Verticalização Urbana Na França E No Brasil: Projeto Highrise''. *Risco Revista De Pesquisa Em Arquitetura E Urbanismo* (Online) 18 (2):138–66. https://doi.org/10.11606/issn.1984–4506.v18i2p138–166.

Careri, Francesco. *Walkscapes. O caminhar como prática estética.* São Paulo: Gustavo Gilli, 2013.

Flusser, Vilém. *Filosofia da Caixa Preta. Ensaios para uma futura filosofia da fotografia.* Rio de Janeiro: Relume Dumará, 2002.

Higgott, Andrew; Wray, Timothy. *Camera constructs: photography, architecture and modern city.* Farnham: Aschgate Publishing Limited, 2012.

Lima, Solange F. de. ''O Circuito Social da Fotografia: Estudo de caso II''. In *Fotografia: usos e funções no séc. XIX*, edited by Annateresa Fabris. São Paulo: Edusp, 1991.

Rouillé, Andre. *A fotografia: entre documento e arte contemporânea.* São Paulo: Senac São Paulo, 2009.