

ALL THE SITES: FRAGMENTS OF A CLOSE LANDSCAPE

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ABSTRACT

All The Sites (Todos Os Sítios) is an exercise of critical reflection on the contemporary landscape. It brings together a set of photographs, which constitute its body of visual documents, and a written argument that aims to inform the intentions and paradigms of the photographs. This article organizes this reflection through two moments: the first concerns the definition of the term *site*, based on a perception of the landscape as a cultural construction, an expression coined by WJT Mitchell, and the second, through the work of three photographers – Eugène Atget, Walker Evans and Guido Guidi, seeks to situate the visual paradigms of photographs of *All the Sites* and the discourse that is inherent to them.

Keywords: Photography; Landscape; Contemporary; Sites.

1. INTRODUCTION

The work presented in this article started in 2018, on the context of the Master in Photography at the School of Arts, Universidade Católica Portuguesa. It started by building a body of photographs carried out between 2018 and 2019 and completed with a master's thesis, which would be defended at the end of 2021 (Castanho, 2021). The concerns that nourished this exercise were sincere and unpretentious: photographing the city I inhabit, Braga, exploring the possibility of photographs understanding a level of recognition beyond what I saw daily. But would that be possible? How can photographs contribute to the recognition of these places and, subsequently, to the recognition of Braga's landscape?

Inevitably, with these, came a set of broader questions: what do you talk about when you talk about landscape photography? What can photography reveal about the contemporary landscape? Or, finally, what does it mean to speak of landscape photography in contemporary times?

The hypotheses to these questions are not given closed meanings: there are no concrete answers to these questions, as both the term *photography*, the term *landscape* and, consequently, *landscape photography*, are expressions that evoke complex systems of conceptualization, burdened by time and use.

But something can be considered for a common basis of consensus: Landscape, *per se*, is a term that invokes the view of land (*land-scape* or *land-shaft*, or *paysage/pays-visage*) which found a means for its production, development and distribution in a specific genre of painting. It can then be invoked that Landscape, in addition to being everything that the look can reach, is also the complex system of interpretation and codification inherent to that look, ultimately originating in its representation.

Landscape is the entire environment, more or less manipulated by the individual, at the same time which the interpretations, understandings and knowledge of each community overlap with this environment.

This means that there is no *landscape* without its perception and, subsequently, without its representation. It is here, it seems, that a possible meaning for the reflections that frame this work begins: *all the sites* assume their condition of representation of the landscape as a discursive possibility and as a way of seeing catalysed by the very condition of the contemporary landscape.

But the photographs of *all the sites* does not work with those notions without criticizing them. The landscape of *all the sites*, contrary to the main perception on the landscape idea, advocates a sense of *fragmentation* and of *closeness*. The *close landscape*, using the expression coined by the architect Marta Labastida (Juan, 2013), defends, in one hand, an attitude of immersion and circulation in the places, in specific places, as the means for its recognition. On the other hand, the *fragment* predisposes the inevitable hypothesis of the photographic act and a photographic language that often results focuses on detail.



1. Contact sheet. December 16, 2017. View from my room to the north, in São Vicente, Braga. Sequence of photographs taken every 30 minutes during sunset, with a long focal lens.

Both *closeness* and *fragment* are contrary to the most common sense of landscape, which is rooted on the *distant* view that covers the *wideness* of the space or the land. To the notion of the landscape of *all the sites* the view that matters is the one which *approach*, which *harass* and *deepens*. At the same time, the *photographic fragment*, reveal the details that come with such approach – places, objects or individuals.

The look of *all the sites* is, therefore, a look that is inside and informs, contrary to the look that speculates and fantasizes, being outside. The photographs focus on places that, within the web of practices, policies and economic interests that mark the so-called historical centers of cities like Braga, appear destitute and marginal. This does not mean that such places, such *sites*, are less important or pertinent in the contemporary landscape. On the contrary, they are essential to the reality of this landscape.

The *sites* are often places of rapid transitions, associated with construction and its sites or workshops; residential streets with fragile marks of the daily lives of its residents. In brief, a palimpsest of short, recent, ephemeral and anonymous stories. *Sites* are non-precise places that belong to the more routine character of everyday life.

With *all the sites* is proposed a discourse on the contemporary landscape, based on photographs taken in Braga in the last 4/5 years which function as an allegorical map, both for the city of Braga, the contemporary landscape and, ultimately, to photographic practice itself.

The series and sequence of photographs are therefore a key element in the construction of this narrative. Rather than exploring the singular and iconic image, this work is interested in building a mosaic that reflects the heterogeneity, the rhizome and the fragmentation of the contemporary landscape.

The article develops these questions as a complement and information process for the visual work. For reasons implicit in the article submission model, the photographs appear in the end of the document, whereas, in the thesis, they appear in between the written chapters. The intention is to create a continuum where visual discourse and verbal discourse inform each other, as done in the aforementioned master's dissertation.

In the present text, the discussion develops along two lines. Initially, a definition of the term *site* (*sítio*) is sought through the characterization and contextualization of the term *landscape*. The importance of reading WJT Mitchell and his concept of *landscape as a cultural construction* is highlighted here, as a means for the synthesis between the transversal reality between the abstract domains of *space*, the concrete domains of the *place* and the social domains of *memory* and the *collective imaginary*.

These notions are intended to define a conceptual field where the photographs are intended to be placed. They assume being coined as *landscape images* but not without presenting them with a critical antithesis that resides, firstly, in the possibility of these photographs enunciating data and specific information about the territory they reproduce and, secondly, in the possibility of this data being able to constitute a means for social and cultural recognition.

The second part of this article seeks to exemplify, through the work of three specific photographers that the visual paradigms carved in themselves can also inform about the visual paradigms of photographs of *all the sites*. The photographers mentioned are: Eugène Atget, Walker Evans and Guido Guidi.

These references are in turn placed within a broader framework of a historical and critical interpretation that is deliberately located in the fields of historical materialism and critical theory. The Marxist nature of this work is assumed as it prescribes, on the one hand, the dialectical process of scrutiny of subjects related to landscape photography and, on the other hand, the interest in the material and productive relationships that nourish both the construction of the contemporary landscape and the photographs that come from it.

Assuming its position within a concrete territory, with no apparent limits, but limited to the municipality of Braga and, in particular to its *historical-center* and its surroundings, the photographs of *all the sites* were taken under the possibility of being able to incorporate various interpretations, without forcing any sense of persuasion on the order of value judgment.

Perhaps the only meaning that can be attributed to it is the sense that, in landscape photography, lies the opportunity for the operability to inform, unveil and inscribe the public and social cause and, thus, culturally

and critically construct Landscape. The hypotheses that this methodology makes possible attribute to photography a mediating and propositional function, which intends to lead to the study of Landscape the purpose of consciously acting in the course of its development.

2. *SITES* IN THE LANDSCAPE

“Site (1) n. m. (Perhaps from Latin *situs* 'position').

1. A specific part of a space, an area. A certain village, locality. 3. A particular region, zone of the country. 4. Space normally visited by many people.

Site (2) n. m. (Of obscure origin). 1. Action or result of besieging.

2. Military Blockade of a contingent, of a location, to take by storm, prevent the escape of troops, people... state of siege.” (AA.VV., 2001. p. 3429)

The term *site* appears as an alternative to the most common denominations in the literature on landscape, such as *space*, *place* or *territory*. The *site* is born from the encounter between the camera and a certain place; relationship that begins by conferring the condition of a geographically established and physically composed place, to give it a mental domain of the imaginary order, revealed as a photograph. The reference to the obscure origin of the term, intends to emphasize, but above all, to metaphorize, an underlying character to the photographed places. These places are perfectly imbued in the daily reality of all individuals and are not, however, recognized as such or, even, as landscape: *sites* are not places. They will, perhaps, be *besieged places*.

2.1 LANDSCAPE AND CONSTRUCTION

Landscape, *per se*, is a term whose use requires a rigorous theoretical and conceptual framework, given the multiplicity of meanings that are added to it. The vast majority of these meanings depend, however, on notions that give *landscape* a universalizing and iconographic character derived from the European pictorial tradition of the 17th and 18th centuries. As a result of this tradition, the study of Landscape remained limited to the fields of Art History, to the detriment of the study of *space* and *places* in their biological and anthropological formations.

This apparent indeterminacy of the term *landscape* is often a reason why several authors do not support the linking of their work to these domains. For example, the works of the photographers studied correspond to in-depth exercises of representation and construction of the landscape, in the perspective of this article. However, that is not why a mere categorization of *landscape photographers* is adjusted to them.

It can also be said that *landscape* has its common conventions, establishing it as an iconographic and almost mythological feeling and mode of perception. *Landscape* is symptomatically linked to the timeless

imaginary of land use or the scenic beauty of Nature, representing, therefore, a kind of universality that overshadows political, ideological and cultural values.

But can't *landscape* be a valid element of analysis of these same political, social and cultural values? How can photography contribute to this study and how can *the sites* help to reveal them? It is from the divergence of this more common and canonical view of *landscape* that the criticisms of WJT Mitchell, in "Imperial Landscape," (Mitchell, 1994) and by Deborah Bright, in "Of Mother Nature and Marlboro Man" (Bright, 1996), arise.

Both Mitchell and Bright locate the roots of this idealistic side of the landscape in the pictorial tradition of the 17th and 18th centuries: a particular trend in painting in which *views of land* became preponderant. These lands, regions or territories belonged to the aristocracy and to the new bourgeois classes, emerged from the new European mercantilism. These classes started the sponsorship of a representative model that would reflect their action, their ownership and their rise as a class. In these molds, the *views of land* begin to be the main subject of images that circulated within very restricted social groups and as a form of celebration of property and power. This resulted on a formal or pictorial tradition, but also formed new systems of use and value of the territory, as well as the new logics of capitalist property production. This applies both to the territory and to the representations of it, since, at one point, landscape paintings began to be as valued as portraits or other types of figurative scenes, also coming to occupy their place in salons, galleries and museums.

To recognize that, in the historiographical basis of landscape images, there are social and cultural motivations, is to attribute to *landscape* a much broader meaning than the mere formal or symbolic interpretation. What authors like Mitchell and Bright propose is an alternative analysis of the uses and meanings of landscape representations, as a means of studying the social system of landscape production. As Bright puts it, it is necessary for the evaluation of these images to go beyond "formal choices of what to include or exclude, whereas the focus in most historical criticism of art, and the historical and social significance of those choices, has rarely been approached." (Bright, 1996. p. 125–26).

Regardless of the realistic content that the landscape image chooses to represent, or the formal expressiveness with which it can be presented, this construction is as much about the choices of the person representing it as it is the result of a combination of interests and influences determined by a social, cultural and economic context. *A text*, says Bright, *selected and constructed*, or, in Mitchell's words, *a means of cultural expression*:

"It is a material medium like language or painting, embedded in a tradition of cultural significance and communication, a body of symbolic forms capable of being invoked and deformed to express meanings and values." (Mitchell, 1994. p. 14).

It is also here that Mitchell determines that *looking at a landscape* is, in fact, “a suggestion to look at nothing – or, more precisely, to look at oneself – to engage in a kind of conscious a-perception of space as it unfolds in the particularities of a place” (Mitchell, 1994, p. VIII). It is a look at oneself because, not looking at anything concrete, reality of the landscape is reduced to the cultural and social codes that the look transmits when it observes.

This is the understanding from which this work is positioned and where it begins by defining itself: the *image of landscape* is a cultural formation that prints a certain context of relations of a community with the territory that, simultaneously, reflects a vision and collective interests such as philosophical, political and economic. In analytical terms, this position allows us to look at landscape and landscape images not only as a specific category of the formal aims of artistic historiography, but as an object of a study where several and distinct disciplines are merged.

By this the images of *all the sites* were constructed and are presented both as discourse and critical representation on a specific landscape as documents meant to recognize specific objects, places and individuals.

2.2 SPACES AND SOCIAL PRACTICES

The concept of *site* comes from the assumption that there is something operative to consider in the study of *landscape as a cultural construction*. The photographs are constructed with the aim of indexing the levels of the built environment, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, imprinting a specific type of view on this environment.

How can the idea of a *site* contribute to clarifying the importance of the study of landscape in contemporary reality? How can *sites* translate the set of relationships between the canonical fields of scientific study that are space, landscape, and place? How are these relationships synthesized in photographic practice?

Mitchell also defines an order for the understanding of landscape from a relationship of mutual involvement between *space*, *place* and *landscape*. This idea comes largely from the thought of Henri Lefebvre, best summarized in *The Production of Space* (Lefebvre, and from his *space of social practice* concept, that is *the spaces occupied by sensory phenomena, including products of the imagination, such as projects or projections, symbols and utopias.* (Lefebvre, 1991)



2. Contact sheet. April 20, 2019. São Vicente, Braga. Sequence at a construction site.

It is from the development of this thought that Mitchell comes up with the theoretical suggestion of *space-place-landscape*, promoting the introduction of the mental dimension of landscape for the characterization of the abstractions of *space* and the physical reality of *place*.

For Mitchell, as for Lefebvre, the transversality between the *physical*, the *mental*, and the *social*, form a syntactic theoretical unit capable of translating the different aspirations and achievements of a given culture or society. The *physical* portrays the material reality of things, biological and anthropological; the *mental* corresponds to the abstract dimension of the individual or the community as spectators who apprehend and simultaneously project their memory; the *social*, in turn, corresponds to the cultural and collective meaning that brings together the realities of the individual and the matters of the institutional, political, ideological and economic processes.

In Lefebvre, this transversality is reflected in three dimensions integrated in the concept of *space*: the *conceived space*, the *lived space* and the *perceived space*. These dimensions reflect Mitchell's same tripartite theoretical unity, *space-place-landscape*, and are essential for

deconstructing the more conventional dichotomies such as *space-place* or *territory-landscape*.

The site emerges from the triangular dimension of these relationships as a transversal option, and a metaphor trying to delimit the processes of conception and perception of places in a concrete way of seeing them by the making of photographs.

To look at *the sites* is to look at something concrete, inversely to looking at Mitchell's *nothingness* or looking at the landscape without any relation to their places or their spatial dimension. The photographs of *all the sites*, promote a reading of space, places and landscape which seek to overcome the *misunderstanding of distance*, myth and universality that is symptomatically defrauded of the experience of the landscape. It is a close look built with layers of fragments and narratives. It is non-iconographic, as it neglects the conventional monumental to pay attention to the banal, the ephemeral and the anonymous. *Sites* are not representations that are intended as concretizing a specific place, but of a place that is concretized through the objects, individuals and marks that constitute that place. They do not have precise or predefined limits, nor do they know the conventional dichotomies of the characterization of the territory: center vs periphery, city vs countryside, urban vs natural, rich vs poor.

2.3 LANDSCAPE AND PHOTOGRAPHY

The idea of landscape arises from a representative relationship with a certain environment: its image begins by being coined by the intentions and aspirations of the bourgeois class that emerged in the 17th and 18th centuries. With the 20th century, and the development of the means of photographic production and dissemination, the landscape ceased to be a restricted means of expression and confined to the desire to exalt possession and power, to become a commodity within the reach of the new middle class.

Between this time, the 19th century, it was responsible both for transporting the visual paradigms of old landscape paintings, and for systematically developing the technical and productive means that involve the entire photographic process. This allowed large populations of industrialized countries, during the 20th century, to obtain their own camera and become, themselves, also photographers. In the 21st century this population is even greater, given the incorporation of cameras in cell phones.

Into popular hands is the expression used by the English critic John Tagg to define the transformations that took place, in the 60s and 70s of the 20th century, in the means of photographic production. Tagg defines this period as a second phase of the process of industrialization of photography within an institutional context and in terms of the new consumerist society. For Tagg, this is a process of apparent democratization, as the divisions between cultural practices were

maintained and these new photographers and their photographs were retained in the field of popular photography:

“Photography only passed into popular hands in the crudest sense of the term. The development of amateur and popular photography was completely dependent on the large-scale production of equipment and materials, mechanized services, and a highly sophisticated marketing structure, which together made possible a second phase of industrialization of photography and the emergence of multinational corporations and monopolists.” (Tagg, 1993, p. 17).

Popular photography, and the images that came with it, operated in a very limited field, whether from a technical or a conceptual point of view, “a list of codes and modes,” says Tagg, “very restricted and culturally subordinated.”

“Referred to more of a legal status than commercial photography or so-called artistic photography and, by definition, positioned as inferior in the increasingly stratified arena of cultural production, amateur photographic practice was also largely confined to the narrow spaces of families and leisure-comfort, having imposed its restrictions by being tied to consumption and the incorporation of a family division of work, reducing it to the stratified register of legitimized and stereotyped subjects.” (Tagg, 1993. p.18)

The production and dissemination of landscape images, from the mid-twentieth century, face the same circumstances and restrictions. The reach of the new popular and democratized possibilities of photography did not mean a structural alteration to the cultural meanings of the landscape image. On the contrary, its monumental, iconographic and idyllic reading intensified. The landscape image has become a kind of amulet that can attest and prove the experience and witness, in the first person, of nature and its landscapes:

“Nature has been redesigned (...) for middle-class convenience and efficiency. With the active participation of government and private companies, wild scenarios have become good business. In this endeavor, photography quickly overtook other means of graphic illustration to play the central role in the commodification of the landscape for public consumption.” (Bright, 1996. p.128)

The dissemination of photographic media also allowed the dissemination of the landscape image, an image coined by the capitalist system of supply and fetishization of commodities. Deborah Bright also points out that, from the end of the 20th century, the development of the middle class is also linked to the emergence of the mass tourism movement in America – but also in Europe – from which is strengthened the landscape as an object of consumption. A network of commercial interests and social

aspirations gravitated around this object, ranging from the *large-scale nature park to protected*, yet regulated and infrastructured, *landscapes*, to the small-scale souvenir.

The processes that determine the dissemination of means of photographic representation and presentation were so relevant that, currently, the type of activities that mark the contact with the landscape must be validated by an exhibition process, not very complex, but easily aggregating. The unlimited repetition of visual stereotypes has become a fetish practice, among many, of objectifying the landscape.

It is a process of duplicating duplicates, photographs taken from the same places, with the same points of view and under the same light at the same time of day. Their means, which went from mechanical to electronic, are also very similar, which has repercussions on the scarcity of technical possibilities, flattening the definitions of sensitivity, shutter speed and depth of field. Finally, these images are put into circulation on the same platforms, manipulated by the same visual and digital effects, to be validated by peers who have already gone through – or are about to go through – the entire process.

Photographs from *all the sites* seek to act critically on this logic. *Selfies* are not taken in *sites*; in dark alleys, in decaying houses, in claustrophobic urbanizations or in cafes where the main customer is low social status and alcoholism. On the other hand, the photographs of *all the sites*, try to pay some respect to these contexts, removing any kind of irony and avoiding the exoticism with which they are easily portrayed. *The sites*, these *sites*, in this work, are part of the dialectical action of considering the landscape as a whole, where the least appealing and the most anonymous of everyday life is comparable to any other place through its photographic representation.

3. SITES IN THE IMAGES

The most common landscape interpretation is also the most general, simplifying it and making it more suitable for mass consumption. This type of view tends, however, to impose its innate scope as a totalitarian and universal vision. As if there was more landscape as the gaze was able to encompass and the less that gaze was able to distinguish the concrete realities of each place.

As a critique of this way of interpreting the landscape, *all the sites* make use of the fragments and their juxtaposition, stripping away this dominant and comprehensive view of the landscape, by engaging with the places through the collection of images.

3.1 DOCUMENT AND PHOTOGRAPHY

All the sites is based on a materialist historical sense that looks at the landscape, not as an idealized and glorified object, but as a complex process of social and cultural construction of ideology and memory.

The discussion now opens to some specific issues in the work of Eugène Atget (1857–1927). Starting from the relationship between *fragment* and *photographic document*, the intentions of the present argument seek to allude to a latent political agenda that can be revealed in Atget's photographs.

Atget also worked by fragments. Each photograph, from its exposing in large-format negatives (20×25cm) to the albumen prints, constituted in-depth research on specific subjects: particular aspects of architecture, objects and the population of Paris in the transition between the 19th and 20th centuries.

His work is generally based on two different points of view of analysis: if, on the one hand, it is imposed a supposed artistic and universal value to his photographs, on the other, his practice is referred to the type of documentary record and survey quite common in the second half of the 19th century.

Essential to a less restrictive understanding of Atget's work is Molly Nesbit's work on *Atget's Seven Albums* (Nesbit, 1992) In this work, more than looking for the divergences between a purely artistic and formalist analysis of Atget's work, or referring it to a strictly documentary character, Nesbit reflects on the possible factors that allow and allowed multiple readings of the French photographer's work. In her understanding of Atget's operating model, Nesbit explores the discursive capabilities of his photographs, not as something virtuous or arising from an institutional charge, but from its own functional nature as a *document* and *commodity* susceptible to transaction:

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“(…) the document was, in fact, defined by an exchange, that is, through an observer who read certain technical aspects from an image, and by the ability of that image to display that same technical detail.” (Nesbit, 1992. p.17)



3. Eugène Atget. Pl. 51. Rue des Ursins. (April–May) 1923. (Atget et. al., 1982).

This was the functional and, at the same time, commercial aspect of the document, not in a sense of adapting to a market to maximize profits, but of a technical and utilitarian appreciation of photographs for specific audiences/clients: architects, decorators, designers and illustrators, antique dealers or artisans. *Documents pour artistes*, a celebrated phrase that Atget displayed on his business cards, where commerce was a base for the operation from which the photographer asserted, with relative independence, his position as an *author*.

Atget's photographs are marked by the documentary rhetoric of objectivity and factuality in the face of the representation of a specific subject – a street, a building, a compartment, an individual – but also by the contextualization of this subject, praising the descriptive capabilities of large-format photographs. The small apertures and long exposures stylized a confrontation with the landscape, almost always under the same, homogeneous and controlled light.

Although one can claim a neutral expressiveness, the way in which the subjects revealed themselves in their photographs was a process improved over the years and which proved to be something distant from contemporary documentary and standardized practices. Although transparent, Atget had his style and his way of photographing. Molly Nesbit speaks of an *opening*, which in reality is only apparent, but which had a lot to do with the ability of Atget's photographs to be able to speak in different mediums of circulation. What an architect was looking for in a photograph would not necessarily be the search for a set designer or

a craftsman, but both converged in Atget's way of photographing and of highlighting the most distinct details.

Walter Benjamin had previously proposed a similar idea in relation to Atget. Benjamin highlights the ability of those photographs to act on objects and places as if it were a *crime scene*. For Benjamin, the *opening* of Atget's photographs resides in the quality of the evidence they captured from the spaces, which were *empty*:

“Also, the crime scene is empty, with no people. Your photographic record is intended to capture the clues. Photographic records, with Atget, begin to become evidence of the historical process. Therein lies its hidden political significance.” (Benjamin, 2012. p.73).

Atget's photographs were defined from a more singular description of a given subject, due to the proximity to this subject, capable of revealing almost unintelligible marks, marks that, as Benjamin says, are the “proofs of the historical process,” that is, evidence of the materialist and dialectical process of history where time actively acts on objects.



4. Eugène Atget. Pl. 115. Versailles, vase (detail). 1906. (Atget et. al., 1983).

Another text by Benjamin that can be highlighted is “Paris, Capital of the 19th Century.” (Benjamin, 1997). In this text Benjamin seeks to exalt the city as a global capital, alluding to its industrial and economic preponderance, to its cosmopolitan environment. But, and although Benjamin appreciated Atget's work in many texts and presentations, in this

particular text Atget is not mentioned. Or, one might consider, it is referred to by its absence: it is the same city and in coeval periods, but which contrasts the cosmopolitanism described by Benjamin with Atget's almost *haunted* Paris.

In turn, Atget's photographs reveal the city that Benjamin's text omits. That is, the other face of this industrial and cosmopolitan development; a boiling city and culture that, but Atget's photographs, fades into ghosts and ruins.

“[Atget] spent his life accumulating a series of documents, endless documents that captured a normally absent side of the common bourgeois image.” That is, of the environments, characters and scenarios that marked the vast market of images in Paris: Atget's documents highlighted the popular side of Paris, without high society, without the daydreams of the Ancient Regime, without the bourgeoisie.” (Nesbit, 1992. p.84)

Or, at least, without it making a physical presence in his photographs. For this type of social class, Atget reserved the status, as Benjamin says, of *ghosts*, which populate the salons and mansions he photographed, the esplanades and the cars.

This logic was in stark contrast to the photographs of the countless portraits of workers and passers-by he encountered on the streets: vendors, pavers, sweepers, policemen or prostitutes. It is also not to be overlooked that, contrary to what the volume dedicated to the *Ancient Regime* of MoMA's monograph on Atget might seem, they focus, not on the glorious and heroic aspect of Napoleonic constructions, but in its wear. (Atget et al., 1983) Once again, portraying the historical process of things, as Benjamin had mentioned.

For *all the sites*, Atget's work is essential, not only for the content of his photographs and the way he photographed, but also for the type of material and productive relationships in his work that go beyond mere aesthetic or artistic significance. Many of the photographs of *all the sites* are also born from a deliberate encounter with the city, in its architecture and, in particular, with its construction, rehabilitation and transformation.

These photographs attempt to more literally embody some of the prominent positions in Atget's work. The same attention was given to the objectivity of the subject and its context, the descriptive and informative posture of these subjects and the emphasis, whenever appropriate, of the technical detail.

3.2 FRAGMENT AND SEQUENCE

The explored landscape of the city of Braga has inherent qualities that mark both the physical domains of its organization and the intangible domains of its collective imagination. Domains derived from their specific geographic and historical circumstances. *All the sites* also emphasizes this historical past, however, and although historical heritage is not exactly

an essential theme of the photographs developed, its absence is not involuntary: the absence of elements that validate the remarkable past and the idea of a city with more of 2,000 years of history is, in itself, a critique.

This does not mean that this past does not echo in the most diverse symbols, metaphors and allegories. The photographs and sequences are concerned with responding to the sedimentary, heterogeneous and fragmentary character of the contemporary territory of Braga. By this many photographs have been taken on a construction sites or undergoing excavations. These images seek to express an almost archaeological concern that uses the raw representation of this material that is granite, here unearthed and worked in blocks, to give way to a building. How much history can fit in a block of granite?

The photographs of these blocks, as well as other works related to excavation actions, or even the various photographs taken on the most diverse grounds, have the mediating function between the sequences, seeking to reduce the reality of the photographs to the importance of the ground that is stepped on and revolts.

In “A Book Nearly Anonymous,” (Trachtenberg, 1989) Alan Trachtenberg refers to *American Photographs* (Evans as a remarkable book in a period when the photo-book was a thriving trend in American reality. For Trachtenberg, Evans' book differed from most books of this trend not only because of Evans' way of photographing, but also because of the way the narrative was structured, in the book, from these photographs.

American Photographs is a book made almost entirely from photographs taken on a commission by the Historical Section of the *Farm Security Administration (FSA)*, a government institution linked to the *New Deal*, and the economic policies put in place by Franklin Roosevelt to combat the crisis of 1929.

John Tagg says that it is in this economic scenario of crisis and almost nationalist will that documentary photography gains an amplified and reinvigorated diffusion.

“The statute of photography, in this type of economy, constituted a particular he, linking the dreams of transparency, efficiency and accelerated exchange that marked the instrumentalization of the meaning of photography in social administration as well as in commercial communications, in the documentary archive and in the photojournalistic image.” (Tagg, 2000, p. 95)

For her part, Martha Rosler adds:

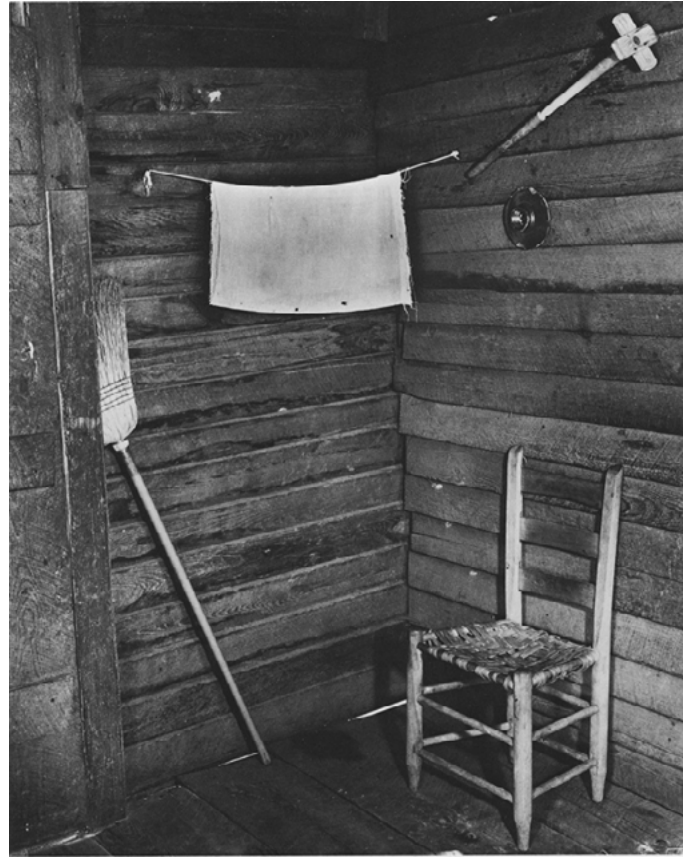
“Documentary photography became the representation of the social conscience of liberal sensibility presented in visual images (...). The documentary, with its original associations of dubious inquiry, preceded the myth of journalistic objectivity and was, in part, strangled by it.” (Rosler, 2004, p. 176)

Rosler concludes by advocating a documentary practice more committed to the social relations it explores and frank with the ideologies that sustain it. The political meaning, which can be more or less visible, or more or less assumed, is unavoidably present in the various decisions that the photographer makes: whether in the choice of subjects to portray, or in their arrangement within the margins of the photograph, up to the commissions and patrons. who can sponsor, use and disclose it.

For authors like Tagg and Trachtenberg, Evans' work centered on capturing the *American city*. *The American city* and not *an American city*. Not specific places and not a specific place, but a *photographic edition of the society* (Trachtenberg, 1989) from which, Evans, tried to avoid any ideological connotation. On the one hand, the liberal-capitalist connotation of the *New Deal* and the *FSA*, in their paternalism towards the dispossessed – simultaneously with the capitalization of large industrialists and landowners – or in their fantasies towards the heroism of rural America. On the other hand, towards the impetus growing Marxist inclined stances in his group of friends and in the groups of intellectuals of his generation and economic condition.

“The value and, if you will, the value of propaganda to the government, lies in the record itself, which, in the long run, will prove to be done intelligently and shrewdly. WITHOUT POLITICS WHATSOEVER.” (Evans, 1982, p.112) That is, over time, photographs can lose meaning but only to gain other meanings: meanings are imposed by factors that are external to them and tend to be cyclically altered. What persists is, in fact, the record and specific record type capable of incorporating all these readings.

This skepticism towards fixed ways of photographing and of inscribing meanings in photographs is clearly marked, says Allan Trachtenberg, in the montage of *American Photographs*. To reverse this type of attitude, Evans used a methodology of sequences of images whose narrative was completely autonomous from the common paternalism of the time, as to constitute an almost literary body, a relationship that Evans had neutered with literature since his youth.



5. Walker Evans. Kitchen Corner, Tenant Farmhouse, Hale County Alabama. (Evans, 2019).

“Any grouping of images within the book can be taken as an example of Evans' adaptation to the montage device [reference to Eisenstein], reaffirmed as a dialectical process of thesis giving rise to antithesis, together producing a feeling and/or idea of imperceptible synthesis. and fickle.” (Trachtenberg, 1989, p. 259)

American Photographs marks a split with the institutional and commercial circles that enjoyed the use of his photographs, through the FSA archive – the archive was public and freely reproduced. The book tells the story Evans wants it to tell. But this is not an attribute that is defined by the intention to pre-conceive an idea: the idea belonged to the photograph itself and Evans only revealed it. This is a *manufactured realism*, intentionally oriented towards the affirmation of photography as such and that the truth lies somewhere outside those four edges worked by the photographer and the book itself. In Evans, photography is a means to look for an image that can emerge from the most diverse forms. Technique only interests him insofar as it allows him to be closer to the image he is looking for.

This attitude towards the content of the photographs explored through the sequence is of the utmost importance for *all the sites*. The sequences presented result from the combination of *sites* scattered throughout the northeast of the city of Braga. The photographs are arranged in three chapters that bring together different types of *sites*. These typologies are neither fixed nor official, they are intended above

all to indicate the general qualities of *sites* that can be found in the most different cities.

Most of the time, the sequences follow a logic that is inherent to the sequence of frames of the film itself, thus revealing the path of the gaze taken by the photographer. In this sense, the edges of the photographs play a leading role as they often present fragments of objects that, in other frames, are the central subject.

Another attitude is also inherent to these sequences and the content of the images, although one can refer to a more symbolic order and a vocabulary that has been sedimented in the photographs and over time. These are shapes, types or configurations of objects, composition options, or even written words, which are repeated in the photographs regardless of the typology of the *site*. These elements often help to build the rhizome between *sites* in the contemporary landscape, allowing the narrative to jump, for example, from the photograph of a door in the historic center, to the photograph of a fence in an abandoned plot.

3.3 PERSPECTIVE AND PERIPHERY

The events that involve the transformation of the landscape, whether on the physical plane of changes in the territory or places, or on the allegorical plane of representations or management systems, are largely influenced by social and cultural relations, where the economic domain urges the public domain, to the development of these transformations according to their own expectations, intentions and investments.

The photographs of *all the sites* seek a space between these ambivalences: on the one hand, they are material objects resulting from the testimony and presence, on the other hand, they are inherent to a perspective and a discourse on the territory they record and the landscape that, later on, inscribe.

If through Evans we saw how institutional power can influence a whole stylistic trend in photography, but also inspire extraordinary reactions, as in the case of *American Photographs*, in this part, and through the example of Guido Guidi, we seek to demonstrate how this same institutional power it serves as an instrument to a specific way of photographing the transformations those powers exert on the landscape itself.

Per Strada (Guidi, 2018) shows a work with photographs taken between 1980 and 1994. More than 200 photographs, divided into three volumes, some of them around 40 years old. The book portrays the region of Emilia-Romagna and Lower Veneto, the region where Guidi was born and where he lives and lived practically all his life, in the village of Ronta de Cesena. The motto, and which the title refers to, is *Via Emilia*, an ancient Roman way, which connects Milan to Rimini and which today has the official name of *SS9*.

The reference to this road announces the absence of a center. The photographs are taken through the rhizomatic branch that gravitates around this main axis. Therefore, there is also no strategy to

photographically centralize this territory. In *Per Strada's* photographs, the viewer can witness the insistence of searching for a look, more than a predefined or institutionalized look, a characteristic that has also been mentioned about Atget.

In Guido's case, however, this is a search for *new eyes* to represent a landscape that was also new and undergoing recurrent transformations. With this resource, Guidi reveals a particular position of his work, but also of his position as an author: a detriment of the *ideal city – Renaissance, as idealized by Rossellino* (Frongia et al., 2018) – still materialized today in many historic centers of Italian cities, Guidi explores a free zone of territory and photography: the periphery and the accidental perspective.

“My photography is a photography of incidents, limits, borders and insertions. I have always focused on the margins and the peripheries, on the fragments and on the sentences, and I have never looked for the central thing.” (Frongia et al., 2018. p. 207)

In an interview with the English newspaper *The Guardian*, regarding the launch of *Per Strada*, Guidi positions his idea of the periphery: “(...) the periphery of one person is the center of another (...) the center is where you you are.” (Higgins, 2018) Commenting on the historical evolution of the city and, to a certain extent, depending on the territory it inhabits, Guidi uses the evolution of urban form as a means to understand its reality and paradigms in contemporary times:

“The history of the city is like an egg. The ancient city was a boiled egg, with very clear boundaries, defined by walls. Then there was a fried egg, with its edges deformed. Today it's like a m-scrambled egg, shapeless.” (Higgins, 2018)

Without a form or, in short, without a cohesive and apparent formal structure, the contemporary city is formed by the countless poles spread throughout the territory, in a rhizome of complex heterogeneous relationships where the dichotomy between center and periphery becomes obsolete: each pole is, simultaneously, the one's center and the other's periphery.

In order to record spontaneous architectures of the periphery, Guidi uses a perspective that he comes to call *accidental*, making that landscape also an accident and detaching himself from the classical central perspective inherent to the optical system of photography. Photography that Guidi exercises, to a certain extent, in a classic way, with 20×25cm large format cameras in a production and reproduction system with methods very similar to those of Atget and Evans.

In *Per Strada's* photographs the center is the camera. It is almost invariably positioned on a path or road, pointing to the events on its banks. In the same way, the edges of the photograph itself are composed of objects that participate in the narrative of the photograph itself, while enunciating a reality outside it.

Guidi's photographs build an ambivalence between the subject and the camera, as the *marginality*, *banality* and *spontaneity* that can emanate from these figures and architectures are transversal to the way of photographing. By penetrating the different domains and appropriations that make up the space, these photographs manage to be transversal to all of them, breaking the common barriers of private property, from the collective to the domestic or the city and the countryside.



6. Guido Guidi. Cesena, 1985. (Guidi, 2018).

In the same way that Guidi's peripheries are also a center, the center where the photographs of *all the sites* were taken, which is even assumed in many frontal and centralized views, are composed by *peripheral scenarios*. Everywhere there is an attempt to look at the aspects associated with the consolidation and perpetuity of the centers, through the description and deconstruction of their processes of transformation and appropriation. The photographs seek to encourage an in-depth reading of these processes made subjects. The camera's optical device explores a density of details that are impossible to reach with the naked eye, giving the photographs a degree of complexity and ambiguity because, when the subject is something concrete, visible and familiar, it can become strange.

Operating from the descriptive capabilities of this specific way of photographing, images from *all the sites* can oscillate between two representative models: (1) photographs with great proximity to the subject, generally obtained through a telephoto lens, with great simplicity of objects but highlighting the material properties of this subject; (2) photographs of broader scenarios, more composed in terms of objects, also with a lot of material detail, but mainly concerned with the relationships between

objects, while to reveal a story through photographic composition. Transversal to these two models is the exploration of the relationships between objects with vertical photographs. It is also about reflecting on the different scales that are formed from the shots of the photograph, from the closest to the most distant.

The language of photographs also seeks a reflection of the rhizome and the constellation of events that make up the spaces and the various centers of everyday life. The sequences also try to act in this sense, confronting apparently disparate scenarios, but with relationships that are visible and transversal; relationship that arise from photography itself as an object and as a printed surface.

4. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Let us now move on to what could be some considerations about the political relevance of the photographs of all the sites and about the ideological rise that may be inscribed in his speech.

In “Art, Common Sense and Photography,” (Burgin, 2021) from 1975, Victor Burgin metaphorically describes the a-political being as a total hermit, that is, a human being completely alienated from other humans and from life in society – *alienated from his landscape*. This being naturally does not exist or, as Burgin puts it, it exists through a process of *habitualization* – Viktor Shklovsky’s term – or of *false consciousness* – Marx’s term – that lulls him into a kind of apathy and uncritical acceptance of everyday life. “Through habitualization, says Burgin, working men and women accept lives of boredom or even misery as a natural and inevitable condition of their lives.” (Burgin, 2021. p.20)

They also accept the precarious conditions of their housing, the insufficiency of their salary for more dignified homes, the state of degradation of the streets and squares where they circulate or, they even accept that essential goods such as water distribution be privatized and annexed to the accumulative dynamics of large corporations. This process, which has its repercussions on the landscape, was called, by WJT Mitchell, an *a-perception* of space and which is, in fact, a condition of that apathy mentioned by Burgin.

By the framing given to the term landscape and by its funneling through the term *site*, this article tried to assume that there is, in photography, an operative instrument to confront, initially, this condition of *a-perception* and then, hypothetically, to recognize in the *sites*, in their banality and anonymity, the result of this apathy, habituation; “the false mirror of rejected dreams” (Smithson, 1996), using Robert Smithson’s expression, as a condition for its exclusion from the very notion of landscape.

Through this common notion of a landscape *beyond the ordinary* and the *animic daily life*, landscape photography is disputed between the popular domain of the experience of the exotic or natural place, normally associated with tourism, and the domain of the art photography, that photography carried out in the fullness of technique and of aesthetic

codes, by photographers who are also artists, dedicated to circulation in galleries, museums and books with uncontrollable prices.

Both realities, more or less innocently, hide their political significance so that the landscape is both easily consumed and quickly digested. This is almost a precondition for photographs that want to constitute themselves as art. In the case of landscape photographs, it was mentioned that this position is shaped by a vision that, historiographically, depends on old pictorial traditions: focusing only on the formal, technical and aesthetic issues of these landscape photographs, the possibilities of reading this landscape are severely restricted.

The photographs from *all the sites* try to overcome these restrictions. If some artistic value is attributed to them, this is something that goes beyond them, however, their hypothesis as documents or, as Burgin puts it, of constituting themselves as an *ideological instrument*, is intentional. They assume the manipulative nature of photography on the real world and its belonging to the world of representation, also assuming the quality of object of visual contemplation. However, they do this not without seeking to implement a type of discourse that alerts to the continuous forces that transform everyday life, to the fact that the social order is not the natural order of things and that our relationship with the spaces we inhabit and, necessarily, with the landscape, is a perception imposed on a precarious life condition and from models out of the common reach, belonging to an exclusive and powerful social class.

This is the case in the relationship between the old bourgeois painting of the 17th and 18th centuries, and the amulet-landscapes of mass tourism in the 20th century, or even among those who, today, make the landscape an object of repeated stereotypes.

This article sought to reveal some examples of how to assume the inevitable ideology behind landscape photographs, also serving the purpose of informing about the positions of the photographs of *all the sites*.

The metaphorical meaning of the term served to characterize the contemporary landscape, but also to situate the development of a photographic model based on *fragment* and *proximity* as the antithesis to the generalized understanding of the expanded image of a landscape.

In the same way, an attempt was made in the production of documents to justify this type of practice, indexing the characteristics of the places but imprinting a discourse and a narrative on them, not to restrict but to value its possible meanings. Finally, a specific way of seeing was tested for the *sites* and for the contemporary landscape, a way of photographing and producing images that treat the territory through its current condition: fragmented, diffuse and heterogeneous.

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