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Place and identity in Italian photography through a study of the town of Lugo

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**UNIVERSITY OF
PLYMOUTH**

**PLACE AND IDENTITY IN ITALIAN PHOTOGRAPHY THROUGH
A STUDY OF THE TOWN OF LUGO**

by

LUCA NOSTRI

A thesis submitted to the University of Plymouth
in partial fulfilment for the degree of

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Author's Declaration

At no time during the registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy has the author been registered for any other University award without prior agreement of the Doctoral College Quality Sub-Committee.

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Fototeca Biblioteca Panizzi - Reggio Emilia | © Eredi Ghirri

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Abstract

This research is framed by the specific context of Italian photography since the late 1970s, which has defined its own aesthetic and cultural identity in relation to the idea of place. The definitive reference point for this context is the group project *Viaggio in Italia* conceived and curated by photographer Luigi Ghirri and presented in 1984, when an exhibition of three hundred photographs was held in Bari and a catalogue for the project was published. *Viaggio in Italia* brought together a generation of photographers who were creating a new cultural atmosphere around photography in Italy: they shared a new and intense focus on the landscape, turning their gaze to the poetics of everyday places and to the poetry and potential of the vernacular landscape. The leading figures in this adventure were Guido Guidi, Mario Cresci, Gabriele Basilico, Vincenzo Castella, Vittore Fossati and Olivo Barbieri.

Within this context, this research attempts to actuate, redefine and further engage with the ideas and issues of place and landscape engendered by *Viaggio in Italia* by focusing on the town of Lugo in the Bassa Romagna (or the lowlands of Emilia-Romagna), in the north-east of Italy. The premise of my research is that Lugo is of particular interest for a series of historical reasons, and through my curatorial and artistic practice I have explored this location in a multi-faceted photographic case study. I have investigated and edited specific bodies of photographic work realised in Lugo from the late nineteenth century up to the present day. This research process has involved the discovery of previously unknown archives, which I have investigated and interpreted for the first time.

Following the current fertile debate around place, which favours an interdisciplinary approach, I have drawn first on a specific history of spatial thinking, developed since the 1970s across various disciplines in the humanities (philosophy, geography and social science), which has reflected on the nature of space and place in a new way. The main innovation in this debate was a new conception of space, not as something preordained but rather as one that is relative, relational, and dependent on social interactions. Within this context, I have then followed an approach to place which combines phenomenology (inspired by Heidegger's philosophical approach that favours a subjective and existential approach) with the postmodern theory of assemblage (an ontological framework developed around 1980 by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari that has proved particularly appropriate for place-based research).

I have employed these theoretical frameworks and my historical research to inform my own reflexive photographic practice, which further explores Lugo from my own personal perspective. In this way my research combines different photographic narratives and ways of investigating a territory into a unique and coherent whole, creating a new and distinct case study within the context of Italian photography and place-based research.

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Fig. 1
© Luca Nostri, *Former Venturi vinegar factory*, Lugo, 2015
From the series *The Hanging Garden*, 2009-2020

Preface

Before starting this thesis I would like to briefly explain my interdisciplinary practice in the field of photography. From the beginning of my photographic practice I have used the medium to explore and investigate my surroundings, and I have often thought of the act of taking pictures as synonymous with inhabiting: the camera is an instrument which allows me to observe what lies beyond my doorstep, and to explore what is seemingly a familiar environment or landscape. Following a certain tradition, taking pictures coincides with biographical data and the camera becomes an instrument that allows me to better understand, decode and collect what surrounds me, where I come from, what I care about.

I started photographing in my early twenties, influenced and inspired particularly by that specific moment in Italian photography that, since the late 1970s, has positioned the relationship between place and identity at the centre of its investigation. The well-known practitioners of this period were Luigi Ghirri, Guido Guidi, Mario Cresci and Olivo Barbieri, but there were many photographers who took part in what can be considered a truly collective movement. Those photographers reflected on the transformations that affected the landscape, and on the changed social and existential conditions that followed. Thanks to its importance, their work impacted on the development of not only Italian photographic culture but more generally the visual culture and, in some respects, the urban and literary culture of the place and time.

The main subject of my investigation over the last ten years has been a territory known as the lowlands of Emilia-Romagna, the area of the Po valley in the province of Ravenna, in the north-east of Italy: it is the region in which I

was born and where I moved back to a decade ago, after years of studying and training in Bologna and Rome.

In addition to my practice as a photographer, in 2004 I initiated a curatorial project in my home town of Lugo (the main town of the Emilia-Romagna lowlands), which I then called *Lugo Land*. Following a strong Italian tradition, with important precedents in the Po valley such as *Linea di Confine* and *Archivio dello Spazio*, *Lugo Land* began as a public commission, which I conceived and curated. One of its main goals has been the construction of a visual archive of the area, for which contemporary artists were invited to respond to the place. Later the project expanded, inspired not only by the Italian context (strongly focused on commissioned projects) but also by other European photographic projects with a different approach, focused more on promoting independent artistic practice and on furthering research with a historical perspective on place (*Photoworks* in the UK and the *Werkstatt für Photographie* in Berlin are two examples of these). Since 2010, *Lugo Land* has also involved educational projects, and today the two main areas of activity are:

- the publication of photo-books in the series *Lugo Land*, published by Edizioni del Bradipo, which I curate.
- the establishment of artists' residencies, in collaboration with a number of universities internationally: the University of Pennsylvania School of Design in Philadelphia; the Architectural Association School of Architecture in London and the Photography program of Bard College in the Hudson Valley, New York State. These collaborations take the form of art residencies and workshops, sponsored by the universities themselves, which I have curated together with colleagues, artists and professors Terry Adkins, Francesco Neri, Sue Barr, Tim Davis and Ken Lum.

These different types of practice within the same area will all be brought into my PhD research. In general terms, the town of Lugo will be the subject of this

research, in the same way in which the city of Luzzara was the subject of research by Paul Strand and Cesare Zavattini in the 1950s. Like Luzzara, Lugo is not a particularly special place; in some respects it just happened to be there. It is the place where I belong, but most importantly Lugo is the subject that allows me to explore the medium of photography, both as photographer and curator: it allows me to investigate my own demons and to create an imaginary geography (an expression borrowed from Luigi Ghirri¹) out of a concrete one, in constant dialogue with the history of the medium. I've always liked and admired photographers and artists who have opened up new conceptual worlds without moving too far away from home, and who have conceptualised themes related to ideas of landscape, place, geography, memory and belonging.

This research aims to explore further an artistic relationship with my native land. Undertaking a PhD at Plymouth University was the ideal way to pursue this goal, for two reasons: first of all, it has allowed me to see things from a certain distance, facilitating a critical approach. Second, and most importantly, for the solid common ground of my research with Plymouth's Photography department and faculty. I first came into contact with the university in 2013, thanks to the professor and photographer Jem Southam, through whom I got to know other faculty members whose work I had always been interested in and studied closely, particularly Professor David Chandler and Professor Liz Wells. Later in the same year, I was invited to speak at the symposium *Everywhere and Nowhere: New Photographic Encounters with Space, Place and Dislocation*. From there, I started a dialogue about the possibility of undertaking a research path within the university. In this new environment of like-minded intellectuals, photographers, art critics and artists, with different histories but with similar approaches and interests, I've found stimulating ground for a new adventure into the world of thinking and looking.

1. Luigi Ghirri, *Geografia immaginaria* (1979-1980).

In recent decades, artists ‘have progressively expanded the boundaries of art as they have sought to engage with an increasingly pluralistic environment’, and ‘curating and understanding art and visual culture are likewise no longer grounded in traditional aesthetics but centred on significant ideas, topics and themes ranging from the everyday to the uncanny, the psychoanalytical to the political.’¹ In line with this tendency, my practice-based research has an interdisciplinary approach, combining critical thinking with curatorial and artistic practice.

This thesis is presented in part through a series of practice case studies. These are presented as a slip-cased, soft bound, series of books. Pdf copies are provided for readers viewing library copies of this research.

The theoretical and cultural framework of the thesis – its methodology, conceptual structure and claims to originality – are discussed in **Book 1** (this document). The practice elements of the thesis are based on four case studies, through which I explore various kinds of research practice in photography. Two of them are curatorial studies of historic photographic archives, and two are photographic studies of specific places. Each of these case studies gave rise to a series of photographs, presented in book form (one individual book for each case study).

1. Statement for the book series *Documents of Contemporary Art*, as the result of an editorial alliance between Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press. See *Work*, ed by. Friederick Siegler (London, Cambridge MA: Whitechapel, MIT Press, 2017), pp. 5.

Book 2: Case study 1: *Cortile*

Photographs by Veronica and Giulia Visani (Curatorial practice)

Book 3: Case study 2: *Vicolo Rocca and Other Places*

Photographs by Paolo Guerra (Curatorial practice)

Book 4: Case study 3: *Anselmo* (Photographic practice)

Book 5: Case study 4: *The Hanging Garden* (Photographic practice)

Books 2, 3, 4, 5 are not meant to be read (or looked at) in any particular order, and they are also meant to be autonomous and independent, yet they intersect and relate to each other. Together they create a unique whole and a conceptual assemblage. What these four case studies have in common is that each presents a consistent body of work which unfolds around a courtyard in and around the town of Lugo: a different one for each project, at different moments of time. I will refer to these four case studies (or four books) as the *Four Courtyards* assemblage.

The argument can therefore be fully understood by cross referencing all the books² in the series.

2. The structure of the thesis will be further deepened in the Introduction, p. 36.



Fig. 2

© Luca Nostri, *Looking west from the top of the Monument to Baracca*, Lugo, 2014
From the series *The Hanging Garden*, 2009-2020

Introduction

In this section I will present the aims and content of the thesis. After outlining the combination of historical research and artistic practice involved in my work I will introduce the cultural context, which is the movement in Italian photography which, since the late 1970s, has built a specific identity in its relationship with the idea of 'place'. I will then address my research questions and introduce my theoretical standpoint, drawn from the field of cultural geography, which favours an interdisciplinary approach. Finally, I will discuss the methodology and present the thesis structure.

1.1 Preliminary notes on historical research and artistic practice

The focus of this research has been on investigating the Italian town of Lugo, in the lowlands of Romagna, through the medium of photography. The research combines a historical investigation with artistic practice in an attempt to create an organic and conceptual whole. A range of photographic notions of the town, realized at different moments in history, have been assembled in order to generate the process of a new consciousness of the place, as well as enhancing the understanding of photographic place-based research. My study presents different interpretations of a place through photography, from multiple perspectives, and it covers a hundred and twenty years of history, from the turn of the twentieth century up to the present day. It both starts and finishes in times of social change and instability, and the period spanned by these events has witnessed fundamental change: it has seen the emergence

of a modern society, but it has also included conflicts and social antagonisms, such as the two World Wars and, in recent times, issues of global migration.

The final outcome of my investigation is a conceptual assemblage made up of four photographic series, two of which are the result of historical research and two of an artistic practice. These diverse types of practice are presented here with equivalent weight, and have influenced each other.

Learning from Walker Evans, among its concerns this research includes photography itself as a subject, a field of investigation. I believe that photography, in an ongoing dialogue with its own history and a broader historical context, can significantly contribute to extending the perception and the knowledge we have of a place, both from a historical point of view, approaching the facts, and from an artistic and metaphorical one, opening up imaginary worlds. With this premise, I am presenting some visual narratives of a place whose first human settlements date back to the fifth millennium BC (even if what we see today of the surface of the town was built from the 16th century) and of which photography, since its invention, has left several traces intertwined. These stories constitute a potential horizon, a sort of new imaginary map of a place, which, although far from being a cartography of the way things are or were, has helped me to become a bit less lost.

The decision to address the subject of history has led me to consider some crucial issues. The history of photography belongs to a wider history, it was influenced by this history and in turn influences how we perceive and understand it. In *History: the Last Things Before the Last*, philosopher and historian Siegfried Kracauer helps us formulate a deeper connection between photography and history by emphasising the role of interpretation, as they both face

‘an opaque mass of facts’.¹ American historian Alan Trachtenberg expands on Kracauer’s argument, analysing photographers’ and historians’ mutual task: ‘how to make the random, fragmentary, and accidental details of everyday existence meaningful without loss of significant details and without sacrifice of concrete particulars on the altar of abstraction’.² Trachtenberg continues by suggesting that ‘both seek a balance between “reproduction and construction”, between passive surrender to the facts and the active reshaping of them into a coherent picture or story’.³ Photographer and essayist David Bate also questions the role of photography in relation to history, and vice versa, wherein through ‘history’ he considers the practice of gathering together documents, artefacts and related materials to provide an account of the past. In *Photography: the Key Concepts*, Bate considers history as a complex system, the reporting of which largely depends on the questions the historian intends to pose. The way a historian defines his goal determines how he will build his report. This consideration opens up a multiplicity of interpretations and the possibility of plural meanings.

History is not merely a matter of pure description. Tackling the contradictory or different connotations systems that various discourses have imposed on photographs is itself a part of historical work. Dealing with history means negotiating these discourses and choosing a path through them.⁴

Like Kracauer, Bate also considers the historian’s task as therefore to interpret documents, including photographs, and not to merely consider them as simple facts to be included in a chronology. In line with the reasoning of Bate, Trachtenberg and Kracauer, the historical documents and artifacts that I have chosen to analyse in depth have been interpreted in the light of the main cul-

1. Sigfried Kracauer, *History: the Last Thing Before the Last* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2014), p. 46.

2. Alan Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989), p. xiv.

3. Ibid..

4. David Bate, *Photography: the Key Concepts* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), p. 244.

tural context of reference, which is that specific approach in Italian photography which since the late 1970s has defined its own aesthetic and cultural identity in relation to the idea of place. This important cultural movement has often been called the 'New Italian Landscape' movement.

The defining moment for this context was the group project *Viaggio in Italia*, conceived by photographer Luigi Ghirri and curated by him with Giani Leone and Enzo Velati, which gathered together twenty photographers (seventeen Italians and three non-Italians) and the writer Gianni Celati in a collective and innovative exploration of the Italian landscape. The project is considered a milestone in the history of Italian contemporary photography, and its influence is still evident in the current visual arts context. Photographers such as Ghirri, Guido Guidi, Gabriele Basilico, Mario Cresci and Olivo Barbieri, among others, eschewed the stereotypical images of Italy that crowded the global imagination in favour of a more intimate but equally powerful approach. Their work contributed to the construction of an idea and an image of the area which represented and gave shape to the existential conditions of contemporary society, marking a very important and influential cultural trend. The gaze of these photographers has influenced the writers who have described Italy in the years since, and the architects who have designed it.

It is important to emphasise that within this context the area of the Po valley in the north of Italy has always played a central role. This is not only because many of the leading photographers of the New Italian Landscape movement came from this area and have made important bodies of work about it, but also because, in a process attributable to the strong reaction to *Viaggio in Italia*, many other group projects, and specific place-based research projects, were established in and about this region,⁵ which functioned as vehicles for new

5. . See *Luogo e identità nella fotografia italiana contemporanea*, ed. by Roberta Valtorta (Turin: Einaudi, 2013), in particular the fourth paragraph of Valtorta's essay 'In cerca dei luoghi (non si trattava solo di passaggio)', p. 30.

work and to encourage debate on photography. Inspired by this legacy, in 2004 I established my own photographic research project in Lugo, Romagna, called *Lugo Land*, which I have been curating since. I will examine the genesis of the *Lugo Land* project later. At this point I mention *Lugo Land* in order to indicate the interdisciplinary nature of my research practice over the past fifteen years. Through work that is both curatorial and artistic, I have been attempting, with *Lugo Land*, to actualise the debate around the idea of place in photography, with particular reference to the Italian context but also looking at projects with a similar approach in the broader international context.

1.2 Research questions

This thesis proposes a new and particular approach to place-based research in photography by focusing on a specific place, the town of Lugo, and investigating and comparing photographic archives and bodies of work realised in Lugo from the turn of the twentieth century to the present. The photographic works are as important as the way in which I am exploring them, creating an organic and conceptual whole that aims to clarify and deepen these questions:

- In contemporary society, is the notion of 'place' merely an expression of a nostalgic closure, or can it still be considered an important source for understanding and investigating the world?
- Can the work of various photographers who have critically investigated the same geography, but at different times, and with different intentions, foster some sort of collective consciousness?
- How can the investigation of a specific piece of land, filtered through the photographic medium, and seen from both a historical and an artistic perspective,

generate a process of 'knowledge' and 'consciousness' of the place?

In addressing these questions I have adopted an approach drawn from the theoretical field of human geography. The idea of investigating the same place through different types of research practice (historical, curatorial and artistic) was inspired by some of the place-based research methods developed since the 1970s in human geography, which favours an interdisciplinary approach.⁶ Deepening and studying the contemporary debate around 'place', it is clear nowadays how place-based research is both an interdisciplinary endeavour and a practice that extends beyond the academy, as well as being a key term for research in the arts, humanities and social sciences in the twenty-first century.⁷ Following this debate, my idea is to approach the 'place' of Lugo in the lowlands of Romagna from the 'place' of photography, and bring together different ways of creating research through the photographic medium (taking pictures, curating projects, researching archives) into a unique whole, considering the town of Lugo as an interesting and specific focus of attention, with a story that deserves to be told.

Photography has a privileged relationship to the concept of place: its history has often taken as one of its central objects of investigation (or the consequences of these investigations) the everyday experienced differences between parts of the Earth's surface. Ever since the earliest use of the camera, photography has proved to be an ideal medium through which to convey the unique characteristics of a particular site. The idea of place remains a rich subject for contemporary photographers, who use different and more or less complex ways to explore it. The theme of this research has been to create a conceptual relationship between the photographic history of a place and an artistic response to

6. I address the research methodology in paragraphs 1.3 and 1.4 of this chapter. Interdisciplinary literature on space and place is discussed in Chapter 1.

7. See Tim Cresswell, *Place: an Introduction* (Chichester: Wiley & Sons, 2015), p. 1.

it, in a mutual dialogue. This has been possible using a research methodology drawn from the field of cultural geography. Before elaborating on the research methodology, it is therefore necessary to introduce the theoretical reference context.

1.3 Space and place as a way of understanding

My research explicitly engages with the current philosophical debate around place-based research: while it can be framed in the context of Italian photography mentioned above, it uses research methods and strategies inspired by the contemporary geo-philosophical debate around ideas of space and place. The first chapter of my thesis will briefly outline this fertile debate.

Space and place are slippery concepts, and they are hard to locate and define. They are key terms for the discipline of geography, from the writing of ancient Greek philosopher Strabo⁸ up to the present day, and they are concepts that travel quite freely between disciplines. In the 1970s, at the same time as the first signs of a new photographic movement were appearing in Italy (such as Ghirri's 1973 project *Atlante*⁹), a groundbreaking debate emerged across various disciplines in the humanities (philosophy, geography and social science in particular) which reflected on the nature of space and place in new ways. The main innovation in this debate was a new conception of space as something that is not preordained, but rather is relative and relational, and results from social interactions.

Within this context, a real and specific theory of place was born. American philosopher Edward Casey described this new theory as a remarkable convergence between

8. Strabo is best known for his work *Geographica* ('Geography'), which presented a descriptive history of people and places from different regions of the world known during his lifetime (64 or 63 BC – c. AD 24).

9. The project *Atlante* (Atlas) by Luigi Ghirri is a photographic essay that was published in 1973 as an artist's book. See Chapter 2.3 of this document.

geography and philosophy, which placed emphasis on the experiential features of place and contributed to the development of what is today known as humanistic geography. Thinkers such as Yi-Fu Tuan, Edward Relph, Christian Norberg-Schulz, and later Robert David Sack, Edward Casey and Doreen Massey, developed the idea of place as a central meaningful component in human life – a centre of meaning and a field of attention that formed the basis for human interaction. Place was seen here as a universal and transhistorical part of the human condition: it was not so much places (in the world) that interested the humanists but place as an idea, a concept, and a way of being-in-the-world.¹⁰ Because of the importance for these authors of the subjective, existential or lived aspects of place, it can be said that this approach has been largely inspired by Heidegger’s phenomenological approach.

Starting from the 1980s, the phenomenological tradition in place theory has been challenged by a new groundbreaking approach informed by the post-modern theory of assemblage, an ontological framework developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari¹¹ that has proved particularly appropriate for place-based research. Here, place is intended as a unique whole, whose properties emerge from the interaction between the parts. However, with assemblage, constituent parts can be removed and replaced. The parts can then enter other assemblages and contribute to new ‘unique wholes’. The ways in which parts are combined in an assemblage are not structurally necessary or preordained: their combination is contingent.

More recently (in the last ten years) a new tendency has emerged, at the intersection of phenomenology and assemblage theory. This new approach tends to use the conceptual structures of assemblage theory, but also acknowledges a substantial phe-

10. The approach of the photographers of *Viaggio in Italia* could also be defined as phenomenological. However, neither the photographers nor even the critics had focused on the new debate about place. The influences that are recognised came mostly from the arts in general: literature, poetry, and of course the visual arts, including photography. However, it does not seem that the work of authors like Tuan or Relph, crucial thinkers for the contemporary philosophical debate about place and phenomenology, were well known at that time.

11. Assemblage (from French: *agencement*, “a collection of things which have been gathered together or assembled”) as an ontological framework was originally developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in their book *Mille plateaux* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1980). The book was first translated into English in 1987: *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, translated by Brian Massumi. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), The emergence of assemblage theory in place theory is discussed in Chapter 1.4.

nomenological significance for the research. It aims to engage with places in a new way and to grapple with the specificity of places in all their complexity. Practitioners in different fields –geographers, artists, and writers, for instance – who work according to this approach take a place, usually quite small in scale, and use a number of creative strategies to present the place to the reader as an entanglement of diverse elements and strands, using stories of people and things to recreate what geographer Doreen Massey has called the ‘throwntogetherness’ of place.¹² My research has followed this latest tendency, that combines a phenomenological approach with a conceptual structure informed by assemblage theory.

In his influential book *Becoming Places: Urbanism/Architecture/Identity/Power*, geographer Kim Dovey explains:

Theories are both the beginning and the end of the research; they are the conceptual tools and methods one uses, consciously or not, to analyse and understand the world. Theories are all too often critiqued according to their consistency with other theories. I judge concepts and ideas on the basis of what they enable us to do and see, and how they enable us to analyse and to think; [...]. My interests are in thinking sideways across the gaps between disciplinary paradigms and outside the confines of traditional formalist, spatial and social critique. Poor theory in turn can often be identified by a failure to breach traditional paradigms in their application to interdisciplinary research questions; all places research is interdisciplinary.¹³

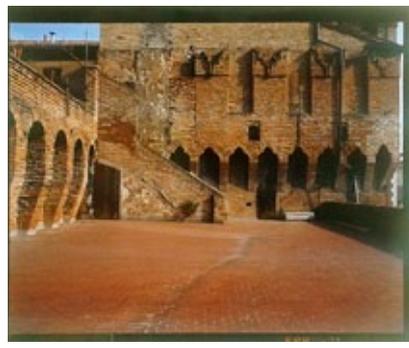
Inspired by Dovey’s approach, I will use a theoretical framework which combines phenomenology with assemblage theory as both a conceptual tool and a method. In my attempt to engage with the town of Lugo, in the lowlands of Romagna, approaching it from the discipline of photography, I present this place as an entanglement of diverse elements through the use of a case-study methodology. In the following paragraph I will explain how the research has developed from a methodological viewpoint.

12. Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: SAGE, 2005), p. 149.

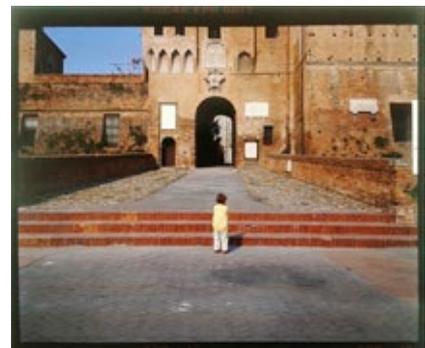
13. Kim Dovey, *Becoming Places: Urbanism/Architecture/Identity/Power* (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 6.



3.a



3.b



3.c



3.f



3.g



3.h



3.m



3.n



3.q



3.r

Fig. 3

3.a, 3.b, 3.c, 3.h, 3.m, 3.r: Luigi Ghirri, *Lugo*, around 1985 (Fototeca della Biblioteca Panizzi - Reggio Emilia | © Eredi Luigi Ghirri); 3.d, 3.g: F.lli Alinari, *Lugo*, late 19th century (© Alinari archive); 3.e, 3.o: © David Farrell, from the series *Neither near nor Faraway. In Lugo*, 2006 (Lugo Land archive); 3.f: *Installation of the ex Baracca Museum*, 1926 (Baracca Museum archive); 3.i: © Marcello Galvani, from the series *Lugoland*, 2008 (Lugo Land archive); 3.l, 3.q: © Paolo Guerra, *Lugo after 1946* (Paolo Guerra archive); 3.n: © Olivo Barbieri, *Lugo*, 1986 (Museo di Fotografia Contemporanea, Milano-Cinisello Balsamo); 3.p: © Emma Ressel, from the series *Olives in the street*, 2016 (Lugo Land archive); 3.s: © Olivo Barbieri, *Lugo*, 1982; 3.t: © Olivo Barbieri, from the series *Lugo e il mare*, 2004 (Lugo Land archive)



3.d



3.e



3.i



3.l



3.o



3.p



3.s



3.t

One of the premises of my research was to open up a historical perspective by investigating historical archives relating to the specific geographical area of Lugo and the broader Romagna lowlands. My interest in a historical approach has grown gradually while working on the *Lugo Land* project. I realised there were some interesting starting points which aroused my curiosity: for example, Olivo Barbieri's 1982 photograph of Piazza del Pavaglione (Fig. 3.s), some photographs from the 1980s by Luigi Ghirri commissioned for an advertising campaign by the Touring Club of Italy (Fig. 3.a, 3.b, 3.c, 3h, 3m, 3r), and the photographs of the medieval fortress made by the Alinari brothers in the late 1800s (Fig. 3.d, 3.g), and I had just become aware of an interesting archive, of the work of a local post-war photographer, Paolo Guerra, that had recently been rediscovered by local historian Giacomo Casadio (Fig. 3.l, 3.q). Furthermore, with the Lugo Land project I was helping to enrich the photographic history of the place through my curatorial practice, inviting both established and younger photographers to work in the area (Fig. 3.e, 3.i, 3.o, 3.p). In the simple dialectic between artistic photography and local (or vernacular) photography, taking a temporal perspective, there was something I was interested in exploring in depth.

Historical research was conducted at a local level by researching thoroughly in libraries in Lugo and other towns in the Romagna lowlands and in local museums. I also visited the private archives of local families, at the suggestion of local historians and cultural workers. In terms of contemporary photographic practice, I had much more focused references. I interviewed some of the relevant photographers (for example, established artists such as Guido Guidi, Olivo Barbieri, Graciela Iturbide and Tim Davis), and I researched in public and private archives, such as the Luigi Ghirri archive held at the Panizzi library in Modena and the Alinari archive in Florence. This part of the research took place over about a year, and gave me a first overview of the material I could work with.

At this point, however, I had no clear direction, and I was researching with an open mind. This methodological approach, open to the unexpected, is notably described by the philosopher and art historian Georges Didi-Huberman: it consists of maintaining discipline and patience without precluding the importance of fortuitous events, unexpected meetings and accidental encounters. According to Didi-Huberman the researchers continue to pursue fixed – and perhaps unexpressed – ideas indulging their predominant passion, in an endless pursuit that they will perhaps define, more formally, as their method. Sometimes, as they run, they stop, dumbfounded: another thing, unexpected, has appeared in front of their eyes. Not the fundamental thing itself emerging from the research, but something fortuitous, explosive or subtle, something unexpected that was encountered on the way.¹⁴ Order, precision and distinctive principles are necessary for this general approach. However, ‘diversions, moments of pure fascination for what we were not looking for’ which come to us ‘with the happy impertinence of casualty, questioning us like an exigent enigma’, can also produce knowledge, and are no less relevant.¹⁵

Didi-Huberman’s methodological approach, which suggests an inverted intentionality, is described in terms of the mimicry of phasmid insects: instead of assimilating the environment to himself, the subject assimilates himself to the environment.

Phasmid thinking is the thought of disparateness, i.e., of dis-paring. This means to un-learn or, as it were, to un-prepare oneself in order to see what we believed we were seeing and which we in fact saw precisely because we knew (or believed we knew).¹⁶

14. Georges Didi-Huberman, *La conoscenza accidentale* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2011), p.11.

15. This method of working is shared and used by both Guido Guidi and Luigi Ghirri. In his book *Lezioni di fotografia*, (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2010, p. 28) Ghirri affirms that even if a research path exists, it is a fluid one, which discards nothing a priori and also considers chance encounters.

16. Emmanuel Alloa, ‘Phasmid Thinking. On Georges Didi-Huberman’s method’, translated by Christopher Woodall, *Angelaki*, 23:4, (2018), 103-112, DOI: 10.1080/0969725X.2018.1497283.

Didi-Huberman's ethics of looking represents a definite shift away from the traditional position of the critic as a dispassionate, objective observer. A Copernican revolution looms, which inverts the Kantian one: no longer are things adapting to their conceptual scheme, no longer is it the state of *adaequatio rei ad intellectum*, but rather its opposite: a methodological consideration very close to that of Kim Dovey's, as discussed above (see p. 35, note 11).

A pivotal encounter for me was indeed the one with the photographic archive of Giulia and Veronica Visani, two sisters who lived in Lugo at the turn of the twentieth century, working as an artistic partnership. These women are fascinating figures, as virtually unknown members of a family of renowned artists (their father and uncle, the painters and sculptors Paolo and Domenico Visani, were well-known artists of the time, at least on a regional level). The encounter with the Visani sisters' archive has been for me a sort of a revelation, on many levels: first of all, I was very surprised to realise that it was (and still is) hosted in their family house in the town centre, literally opposite my grandfather's house. Secondly, the archive hosts four hundred glass plates of different sizes, and a number of prints and documents: a very interesting consistent whole, considering the historical period. And finally, it was something that no one (including the Visani family's descendants) had ever studied before, or considered as a body of work.

The study of the Visani archive strongly redirected the structure of my research and my methodological approach. In many ways, the Visani archive was similar to the photographic archive of Paolo Guerra, mentioned above. Both were consistent and mostly unexplored archives, from a critical and curatorial point of view. They both belonged to local photographers, who had lived in different eras a few streets away from each other in the centre of Lugo. Finally, most of the photographs in both the archives had been taken in the immediate vicinity of the photographers' homes, with an approach that could be defined as documentary.

From this moment on, I chose to engage in detailed discussion of these two specific cases rather than carry out a more wide-ranging but necessarily more cursory survey of the photographic history of Lugo. Moreover, what remains of the Visani sisters' photographs is an eclectic, experimental and rich family album, mostly shot in the little courtyard of their house at the turn of the twentieth century, from 1890 to 1918. This gave me the opportunity to consider the space of the courtyard as a conceptual lens through which to approach the Paolo Guerra archive with an original perspective, which allowed an interesting reading of a specific section of the archive: a series of portraits that Guerra took between 1946 and 1955, mainly in the inner courtyard of the two brothels that existed in Lugo until 1958.

Furthermore, the site of the courtyard has proved an interesting leitmotif for a series of photographs I have been working on for a number of years that focus on the figure of my grandfather (a work in progress that, for a while, I had been struggling to resolve successfully, or to give a final shape to). Finally, the idea of the courtyard inspired my second photographic series, that was developed using the starting point of the inner courtyard of Lugo's Rocca Estense (Este Castle), which today is a hanging garden overlooking the main square.

The practical element of my research is therefore a photographic and interdisciplinary investigation which combines two curatorial studies of historic archives (the archive of the Visani sisters and the archive of Paolo Guerra), with two photographic studies of specific places (my grandfather's courtyard, and the hanging garden of the fortress of Lugo). These four elements represent the four case studies of my research. Each of these case studies resulted in a series of photographs, presented in book form.

The decision to combine two curatorial studies with two photographic studies seemed the right balance for my approach in order to reflect my fifteen years

of interdisciplinary photographic research on the territory of the lowlands of Romagna, as both photographer and curator. The structure of the practice elements of my research have already been mentioned in the Preface (pp. 24-25), and are repeated here for clarity. The practice elements consist of four case studies, presented as four book projects (one book for each study):

Book 2: Case study 1 (curatorial study)

Curatorial investigation of the archive of Giulia and Veronica Visani. The result of the investigation is the series of photographs entitled *Cortile* by Veronica and Giulia Visani

Book 3: Case-study 2 (curatorial study)

Curatorial investigation of the archive of Paolo Guerra. The result of the investigation is the series of photographs entitled *Vicolo Rocca and Other Places* by Paolo Guerra

Book 4: Case-study 3 (photographic study)

Photographic investigation of the courtyard of my grandfather Anselmo. The result of the investigation is the series of photographs entitled *Anselmo*

Book 5: Case-study 4 (photographic study)

Photographic investigation of the courtyard of the Castle of Lugo. The result of the investigation is the series of photographs entitled *The Hanging Garden*

For each of the two curatorial case studies I will provide a cultural context for the historical period in which the work was made, in order to understand how the photographers operated, and how they made their decisions. For each of the two artistic series I will provide an artistic statement. The historical analy-

sis has influenced and inspired my artistic work, although, reciprocally, in the course of the research some of my artistic decisions have influenced my curatorial approach to the archives.

Although they are all interrelated, each book simultaneously stands as a separate book with its own integrity. Together, the four books aim to create a unique whole and a coherent discourse. This whole has the characteristics of a conceptual assemblage with a phenomenological approach.¹⁷ What these four case studies have in common is that each one presents a consistent body of work which unfolds around a courtyard in and around the town of Lugo: a different one for each project, at different moments of time. Moreover, all the case studies present photographic works which, in their making, were guided by the criterion of intentionality: someone has deliberately tried to make sense of society during a specific period of time. Finally, for all the photographers gathered in this assemblage, the specificity of place is fundamental, and the photographic exploration of a topographical subject (the space of the courtyard) devolves into an enquiry into human existence. In the course of the research, I will refer to these four cases (or four books) as the *Four Courtyards* assemblage.

My attempt, then, is to gather and compare a number of projects focusing on Lugo in which photographers (myself included) have employed their medium, seeking to define themselves as well as to create a role for photography as a cultural, intellectual and artistic practice. This assemblage of four case studies aims to expand the meaning of place and foster a better understanding of its essence, with particular reference to the Italian context.

Case study methodology is commonly used in social sciences. However, discussing its use in place-based research, Dovey explains:

¹⁷ I will discuss this approach in Chapter 1, par 6: *New thinking in contemporary debates about place*.

Case-studies are often wrongly understood as producing only local and contingent knowledge that one cannot use to generalize. From the viewpoint of empirical science this is understandable. Yet research on place within the paradigm of empirical science has proven very limited, largely reducing place to its measurable components and stripping it of its “sense”. Most place theory is ungrounded in the particularities of place. Case studies are peculiarly pertinent to theories of place because any general theory must account for the particulars - differences between places are central to definitions of place. What is generally true of the sense of place is that each place is different - places are cases. Case studies are a testing ground for theory, but not in the normal sense that the test proves or refutes a theory. Rather, the theory proves more or less useful in making sense of place.¹⁸

For this research, the methodology of the case study allowed me to investigate the four case studies in depth, providing a detailed description and contextualisation, as well as a conceptual exploration, for each.

One idea that resonates in all of these narratives is the quest to rethink the idea of place and place identity in the context of Italian photography, in the light of the fertile international contemporary debate around place that favours an interdisciplinary approach and suggests the importance of a historical perspective in place-based research.

The theoretical and cultural framework of the thesis, its methodology, conceptual structure and claims of originality are discussed in the current document, which is structured as follows:

- Following this introductory chapter, in Chapter 1 I will present a number of notions and concepts relating to place-based research. I will describe briefly how a ‘theory of place’ has developed within the discipline of human geog-

18. Kim Dovey, *Becoming Places*, p. 8.

raphy, and how, in recent times, it has become a key concept of humanistic, artistic and interdisciplinary research. I will examine examples of place-based research in photography, and I will then discuss the position of my own interdisciplinary research approach within the current debate.

- Chapter 2 examines the specific Italian cultural context which has developed since the late 1970s that was defined by the *Viaggio in Italia* project, organised and curated by Luigi Ghirri in 1984. I will outline the legacy of this project, with particular reference to the geographical area of the Emilia-Romagna region in the Po valley. This will allow me to discuss how the legacy of *Viaggio in Italia* intersects with the place of Lugo, and the impact it had on my photographic practice, leading me to conceive the *Lugo Land* project.

- Chapter 3 reflects critically on the *Lugo Land* project, established in 2004. I will provide a concise history of the project in the light of other significant place-based photographic projects/platforms that have emerged, both in Italy and in Europe. I will then discuss how this doctoral research engages with the *Lugo Land* project: on one hand, this research continues the aims of *Lugo Land*, pursuing the investigation of the territory through photography; on the other the introduction of a historical perspective provides a significant and original point of view. I will discuss my attempt to apply the conceptual lens of the courtyard, drawn from the current cultural debate around place and identity in Italian photography, to a number of historical photographic archives, thus giving them a new and original interpretation. I will then explain how I have combined historical and artistic research in a mutual dialogue. I will argue that this type of interdisciplinary practice can extend and expand meanings of place, and contribute significantly both to the field of photography and to the field of place-based research. Finally, I will introduce the final result of my investigation, which is a conceptual assemblage of four case studies. Each case study presents a photographic series that unfolds around a courtyard, in and

around the town of Lugo, at different moments of time. The assemblage is thus entitled *Four Courtyards*.

- Chapter 4 introduces the practice element of the thesis, which is the *Four Courtyards* assemblage. I discuss the reasons that led to the construction of the assemblage, and I describe the four case studies that it consists of, each of which enabled the research process to deepen. I also touch upon the way the four case studies relate to each other.

- Chapter 5 offers a summary and concluding discussion.

One Appendix is included:

- Appendix 1 presents the research on the archive of the photographer Paolo Guerra which is not conceptually integrated in the *Four Courtyards* assemblage, but which represents a further deepening of the historical and cultural context of this thesis. This is why it is presented in the Appendix and not as a photo-book presented as a separated pdf. As addressed in Chapter 3 (p. 187) and Chapter 4 (pp. 219-223), Paolo Guerra's archive is a very interesting example of a rediscovered collection which has significant value from both a cultural and an artistic point of view.



Fig. 4
Eugène Atget
Entrée pittoresque, Châtillon, 1921-22
© The Museum of Modern Art, New York

1. Space and place: a way of understanding

This chapter provides the theoretical and critical context of my research. I will touch upon a recent history of spatial thinking at the intersection of the disciplines of geography, philosophy and social sciences that emerged in 1970s, involving a more critical and relational understanding of the concepts of space and place. I will first present and discuss the diverse ways in which space and place have been conceptualised and analytically employed to make sense of the world. I will then discuss the theoretical standpoint of my research in relation to this debate. Finally, I will discuss the influence of a 'place-based' approach in photography.

1.1 Space or place?

The concept of 'place' has been a constant theme in the history of Western thought since its origin in Greek philosophy. The notion of place represents both an object (a thing that we can look at, research and write about) and a way of looking. Looking at the world as a set of places that are in one way or another separate from each other is both an act of defining what exists (an ontological view), and a particular way of seeing and knowing the world (an epistemological view). It is thus necessary to consider place as a philosophical, as well as a geographical, object of enquiry. Moreover, in an attempt to grasp its meaning, it is necessary to relate it to the equally important concept of 'space'.

In everyday speech the terms 'space' and 'place' are often used interchange-

ably, and are often regarded as synonymous with other terms such as 'region', 'area' and 'landscape'. Although the theoretical specification of space and place has remained a matter of wide-ranging dispute, which continues to the present day,¹ the common consensus is that these twin terms have provided the building blocks of the discipline of geography and of its intellectual and disciplinary activity that stretches back many centuries.² Moreover, since space and place affect a variety of topics, such as economics, health, climate, plants and animals, architecture and the built environment, geography has developed as highly interdisciplinary since its ancient origins.³ For example, both terms, space and place, have roots in philosophy:⁴ if 'place' was a key term for ancient thinkers such as Herodotus, Strabo and Ptolemy, the concept of 'space' has been analysed in depth by philosophers such as Descartes, Newton and Leibniz.⁵ Descartes, for instance, saw space as intrinsically related to the dimensionality of masses in space (the notion of Cartesian space). For Newton, space was instead an independent, three-dimensional, infinite container for matter. Leibniz, departing from these absolute conceptions of space, stated that space is fundamentally relational: space does not exist in itself, but rather in the relation between bodies.⁶

Geography as a distinct academic discipline emerged only in the eighteenth century. As a field it is commonly divided into physical geography (the study of the natural environment) and human geography (the study of the cultural or

1. See Bert-Jaap Koops & Maša Galič (2017), 'Conceptualising space and place: Lessons from geography for the debate on privacy in public', in: T. Timan, B.C. Newell & B.J. Koops (eds), *Privacy in Public Space: Conceptual and Regulatory Challenges* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar), p. 22.

2. P. Hubbard, R. Kitchin (eds), *Key Thinkers on Space and Place* (London: Sage, 2011), p. 4.

3. See Cresswell, *Place: an introduction*, p. 1.

4. See Bert-Jaap Koops & Maša Galič, 'Conceptualising space and place: Lessons from geography for the debate on privacy in public', p. 21; See also Edward S. Casey, 'Between Geography and Philosophy: What Does It Mean to Be in the Place-World?' *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 91 4 (Dec. 2001), 683-693.

5. See Cresswell, 'Space, Place, and Geographic Thinking in the humanities', video of a talk at an event co-organized by Matt Wilson which took place at Harvard University in 2016. The talk considers long histories of space and place in the humanities as well as the rise of GeoHumanities more recently. Available at:

<https://tjresswell.com/2016/07/27/space-place-and-geographic-thinking-in-the-humanities-video/> (Access July 2020)

See Koops and Galič, ' p. 21.

6. Ibid., referring to R.T. Tally Jr, *Spatiality* (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 27-28.

constructed environment). Human geography includes the economic, political and cultural aspects of geography: by privileging the search for subjective elements, thus transcending purely physical data, it often makes use of disciplines such as social sciences and psychology, or fields of expression and communication such as literature and the arts in general, especially in a regional context. Human geography examines how individuals adapt to a specific environmental framework, how they interpret and live in the places in which they find themselves and how they interact with the territory. It is within this discipline that a debate around space and place, and the interaction between humans and their environment, developed in a specific way.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, debates in human geography were dominated by regional geographers who tried to capture what makes a certain region or area of the world special. Around 1960, a positivist school emerged that engaged with quantitative and statistical procedures. While these traditions were largely influenced by a Newtonian conception of space, for the purpose of this research it has been important to focus on a number of different perspectives that emerged in the 1970s that have involved a more critical and relational understanding of space and place. This includes a behavioural perspective, which looks at how people make places; a humanist perspective, which studies people and their conditions through a phenomenological approach and through the lens of human experience and a structural or radical perspective, using, for example, Marxist or feminist theory.⁷ Although all these different approaches usually 'do not replace each other, but continue to exist within their own traditions, thinking and advances',⁸ and often combine to produce new perspectives, it is possible to distinguish three basic levels at which space and place have been analysed and investigated in recent history, from the twentieth century to the present:

7. Ibid. p. 22.

8. Ibid.

- 1) A descriptive approach: dominant in regional studies, with a Newtonian conception of space, this approach resembles the common-sense idea of the world being a set of places.
- 2) A social-constructionist approach: dominant in radical and post-structural modes, this focuses on how place is constructed within a variety of structural conditions. This approach still focuses on the particularity of places, but only as instances of more general underlying social processes.
- 3) A phenomenological approach: dominant in humanist and behavioural modes, this does not focus specifically on the unique attributes of particular places, nor is it primarily concerned with the kinds of social forces that are involved in the construction of particular places. Rather it seeks to define the essence of human existence, and it is more interested in 'place' than 'places'.⁹

These levels of analysis often overlap and intersect, but the classification is useful in order to understand the variety of insights that human geography can offer. However, before directly exploring this discussion, it is important to outline the basic concepts of 'space' and 'place' for each level of analysis. Until the 1970s, when the debate in human geography was dominated by regional geographers and by the positivist school of thought, most human geographers considered space as empirical, objective and mappable.

Until the 1970s, most human geographers considered space to be a neutral container, a blank canvas which is filled in by human activity. Here, space is defined and understood through Euclidean geometry (with x, y, and z dimensions) and, for analytical purposes, treated as 'an absolute container of static, though movable, objects of behaviour' (Gleeson, 1996: 390). This absolute or 'empirical-physical conception suggested that space can be conceived as outside human existence; rather than playing an active role in shaping social life, it is regarded as a backdrop against which human behaviour is played out.¹⁰

9. Cresswell, *Place: an introduction*, p. 57.

10. P. Hubbard, R. Kitchin (eds), *Key Thinkers on Space and Place*, p. 4.

Hubbard and Kitchin continue by saying that as is the case with space, within regional and quantitative approaches place was also conceived in absolute terms, simply as a large self-contained gathering of people in a boundaried locality or territory.¹¹ In contrast with this vision, in the 1970s a rather different interpretation of spatiality emerged, in what was a new and fertile debate involving other disciplines. Scholars in history, social science, architecture and philosophy started reflecting on the nature of space, primarily by stating that space is not something that is preordained: rather, space is relative and relational, and depends on social interactions. This debate was largely prompted by the integration of French theory to the field, and, for the purposes of my research, it is necessary to examine in particular the work of Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau.

The most important theorist of space was the Marxist philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre, who argued precisely that space is produced, and it never pre-exists the occupation of the subject. In *The Production of Space*,¹² first published in 1974, Lefebvre presented a theory that invested space with an unusual conceptualisation, in which space is viewed as the product of a set of social, political and cultural relations. Lefebvre proposed ‘a trialectics of spatiality which explores the differential entwining of cultural practices, representations and imaginations’.¹³ Moving away from an analysis of things in space, his account considered space as “made up” through a three-way dialectic between perceived, conceived and lived space’.¹⁴

In space, starting from Lefebvre’s discourse, we therefore begin to locate all the meanings produced by this set of different relationships, and we begin to read the space itself on the basis of the institutionalised function of these same

11. Ibid.

12. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Malden - MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 1992)

13. Hubbard and Kitchin (eds), *Key Thinkers on Space and Place*, p. 4.

14. Ibid.

relationships.¹⁵ Place here emerges as a particular form of space, one that is created through acts of investing meaning in a portion of space (naming is one such act), as well as the distinctive activities and imagining associated with particular social spaces (or socially produced spaces).¹⁶ However, Lefebvre was hesitant to use the term 'place', and the word appears in his writing only sporadically.¹⁷ According to urban theorist Andy Merrifield, for Lefebvre space is a social dynamic, an incessant movement. It is a wave or, rather, a whirlpool. Place is not the permanent a priori condition of that flow, but instead its momentary destination – or, rather, its synthesis. Place is to space what solid is to fluid, form to process: an anchor, a grounding. In other words, we can say that space as social dynamic – constantly changing, constantly developing – manifests itself through place.¹⁸ Cresswell points out how, in these terms, places are never established. They only operate through constant reiteration of practice.¹⁹

One of the books that has proved most useful in thinking about the issue of practice in relation to space and place is Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life*,²⁰ originally published in 1980. De Certeau was a French Jesuit priest and scholar whose work combined history, psychoanalysis, philosophy, and the social sciences. In *The Practice of Everyday Life* de Certeau reads the environment as one would a script, or like written speech. He argues that in relation to the alphabet, or grammar, of place, space is like words when they are spoken. In other words, when city planners map out a city:

15. See Maurilio Ginex, 'Il concetto di Spazio secondo Michales Foucault' (translated by me): <https://auralcrave.com/2019/10/24/il-concetto-di-spazio-secondo-michel-foucault/> (accessed July 2020)

16. P. Hubbard, R. Kitchin (ed. by), *Key Thinkers on Space and Place*, p. 6. See also Cresswell, *Place: an introduction*, pp. 16-17.

17. Timotheus Vermeulen, 'Space is the Place', *Frieze* magazine, first published in Issue 171, May 2015. <https://frieze.com/article/space-place> (accessed July 2020)

18. Andrew Merrifield, 'Place and Space: A Lefebvrian Reconciliation', *transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, New Series*, Vol. 18, No. 4. (1993), pp. 516-531. <http://links.jstor.org/sicisici=00202754%281993%292%3A18%3A4%3C516%3APASALR%3E2.0.CO%3B2-X> (accessed July 2020)

19. Cresswell, *Place: an Introduction*, p. 70.

20. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011).

they envisage places, points on the grid. These are locations, nodes, corners and roads. Destinations. The coffee shop on the corner of Fifth and Broadway in Manhattan is a place, as is London's Caledonian Road. If you agree to meet your friends at their house, that house is a place, too. These places, these points on the grid, De Certeau suggests, are like a language's grammar or the letters of the alphabet. What he calls space is what happens when dwellers navigate those places: that is, when we put the individual letters together, when we formulate sentences, when we articulate words. Hence, one of De Certeau's most cited lines: 'Space is a practiced place.'²¹

For de Certeau, place is the empty grid over which practice occurs, while space is what is created by practice. Cresswell points out, however, how, often confusingly for geographers, 'de Certeau uses space and place in a way that stands the normal distinction on its head'.²²

What these differences of interpretation prove, however, is the systematic and increasingly sophisticated theorisation of spatiality in the period since the mid-1970s, which has led to a mature and critical conceptualisation of the roles of space and place in the constitution of social and cultural worlds. Another seminal approach to the concepts of space and place which emerged in the same period is the one informed by phenomenology, which has formed the basis of the discipline of humanistic geography and has led to development of a peculiar and specific theory of place. As philosopher Edward Casey has noted

A remarkable convergence between geography and philosophy has become increasingly manifest in the past decades. It is as if Strabo's celebrated opening claim in his *Geographia* had finally become true two millennia later: "The science of Geography, which I now propose to investigate, is, I think, quite as much as any other science, a concern of the philosopher" (Strabo I, 3). What is new (and not in Strabo) is the growing conviction that philosophy is the concern of the geographer

21. Vermeulen, 'Space is the Place'.

22. Cresswell, *Place: an Introduction*, p. 70.

as well, or more exactly that philosophy and geography now need each other – and profit from this mutual need.²³

Casey explains how a collaboration between geography and the philosophical discipline of phenomenology has been evident ever since a focused attention on place began to emerge in Edward Relph's *Place and Placelessness* (1976) and Yi-Fu Tuan's *Space and Place* (1976). He continues by arguing that:

Because of their emphasis on the experiential features of place - its "subjective" or "lived" aspects - such works were natural allies of phenomenology, a form of philosophy that attempts to give a direct description of first-person experience. Both geography and phenomenology have come to focus on place as experienced by human beings, in contrast to space, whose abstractness discourages experiential explorations. In the case of geography, a primary task has been to do justice to the indispensability of place in geographic theory and practice.²⁴

In this phenomenological vision, space is considered a more abstract concept than place, while place, in its most straightforward and common definition, becomes a meaningful location.²⁵ The idea of place as a central meaningful component in human life – a centre of meaning and a field of attention that forms the basis for human interaction – led to an interesting conceptual shift: place is seen here as a universal and transhistorical part of the human condition: it is not so much specific places (in the world) that interested the humanist geographers, but rather place as an idea, a concept, and way of being-in-the-world.

Within this complex debate, my research embraces the phenomenological approach and some of its recent developments, which can be seen to explore in depth the con-

23. Edward S. Casey, 'Between Geography and Philosophy: What Does It Mean to Be in the Place-World?' *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 91 4 (Dec. 2001), 683-693.

24. Ibid.

25. Cresswell, *Place: an Introduction*, p. 12.

cept of place.²⁶ This is of particular relevance in the light of the fact that the cultural context of Italian photography to which this research refers is the one generally defined as ‘a photography of place’ (within the specific literature, one of the critical texts to which I will refer most often is entitled *Luogo e identità nella fotografia italiana contemporanea* (Place and identity in Italian photography)²⁷; moreover, as I will elaborate later (on page 157), the name of the town I investigated is Lugo, whose etymological origin is related to the word *luogo* (place). However, whatever concept is chosen as the starting point for discussion, the common consensus among scholars is that space and place are not discrete, mutually exclusive concepts; rather, they require each other for definition, and they form a spectrum which is simultaneously a continuum, linking experience to abstraction.²⁸

The humanistic approach to geography has recently been increasingly opened up to interdisciplinary research. If the concept of place remains slippery across academic discourse,²⁹ for philosopher Jeff Malpas place is perhaps the key term for interdisciplinary research in the arts, humanities and social sciences in the twenty-first century.³⁰ Reflecting this assumption, the text on the cover of a recent publication of collected essays and poems about place in Britain, *Towards Re-Enchantment: Place and its Meanings*, reads: ‘At a time when multiple alienations of modern society threaten our sense of belonging, the importance of “place” to creative possibility in life and art cannot be underestimated.’³¹ The contemporary debate is vivid and fertile, and researching and writing about place is at the same time an interdisciplinary endeavour and a practice that extends beyond the academy.

In the past decade, the phenomenological tradition in place theory has been

26. See Kim Dovey, *Becoming Places*; Cresswell, *Place: an Introduction*; Edward Relph, *Place and Placeness* (London: Pion Limited, 1976); Tacita Dean and Jeremy Millar (eds.), *Place* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2005).

27. Roberta Valtorta (ed.) *Luogo e identità nella fotografia italiana contemporanea* (Torino: Einaudi, 2013).

28. Cresswell, *Place: an Introduction*, p. 37; Y fu Tuan, *Space and place* (Minneapolis MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), p. 6.

29. See Cresswell, *Place: an Introduction*, in particular Chapter 2 ‘The Genealogy of Place’.

30. See Jeff Malpas, ‘Place Research network’, *Progressive Geographies*, available at: <https://progressivegeographies.com/2010/11/04/place-research-network/> [accessed January 29th, 2020]

31. Di Robson and Gareth Evans (eds.), *Towards Re-Enchantment: Place and Its Meanings* (London: Artevents, 2010).

challenged by a new theory, largely inspired by the work of philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari: two important books, *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature* (1975) and *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980), led to the creation of a complex discourse that suggested a new epistemology and ontology, usually referred to as 'assemblage theory'. Assemblage theory is positioned between phenomenology and materialism, where Heidegger's 'being' is replaced by the notion of 'becoming'. Assemblage theory, later fully developed by philosopher Manuel DeLanda, is a relevant and useful theory in the current debate.³²

In the following paragraph I will discuss the key points of two approaches in place research which are particularly relevant for my discourse, one informed by phenomenology, the other by assemblage theory, and the main philosophical concepts that they introduced to place theory. In discussing each approach, I will introduce thinking from various disciplines which has attempted to define place with direct reference to a particular philosophy. Then, since the discipline I approach the world from is photography, I will focus in particular on the work of a number of photographers who have reflected these theories in their work.

1.2 Phenomenology in place theory

Deriving from the Greek word *phainomenon*, phenomenology represents a discipline that studies and describes appearances. According to this approach, it is impossible to obtain a presupposition-less understanding of the world. Martin Heidegger gives the most evocative and sustained definition of

32. See Manuel DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity* (London: Continuum, 2006).

place that has come from phenomenology in the last hundred years³³. This definition is derived from the concept of *Dasein*, a German word which means 'being there' or 'presence' (German: *da* 'there'; *sein* 'being') often translated in English by the word 'existence'. *Dasein* does not indicate a mere spatial location, but something more ambiguous and complex: that is, the way in which the being manifests itself in history: for example in the existence of humans. Temporality is essential in the definition of *Dasein*, and so are the concepts of *dwelling*, *nearness* and the event of *appropriation*,³⁴ which sets the stage for the definition of place through being:

The [place] is not already there before the bridge is. Before the bridge stands, there are of course many spots along the stream that can be occupied by something. One of them proves to be a [place], and does so because of the bridge. Thus the bridge does not come first to a [place] to stand in it; rather the [place] comes into existence only by virtue of the bridge.³⁵

Heidegger accomplishes the definition of place, although he rarely addresses place in itself as a topic. This definition links the concept of being and the way people dwell with the processes of building. Throughout the act of building and experiencing, the location becomes place. In its natural state, the location is still not a place. The place is defined as a phenomenon, and can exist only through experiences. For Heidegger, all entities are phenomena.³⁶ This represents the basic notion of phenomenology, as William Large explains:

There is not a subject and object separate from one another, which then, through some kind of unknowable process, have to become linked or attached. Rather, they are already intertwined in our direct experience of the world.³⁷

33. See Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place-A Philosophical History* (Berkeley, CA; University of California Press, 1997).

34. See Milica Muminovic 'Places as Assemblages: Paradigm Shift or Fashionable Nonsense?', *Athens Journal of Architecture*, 1.4, 295-310, p. 298.

35. Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), pp. 151-2.

36. See Muminovic, Milica, 'Places as Assemblages: Paradigm Shift or Fashionable Nonsense?', p. 298.

37. William Large, *Heidegger's Being and Time* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), p.5.

Two key thinkers for a definition of place based on the Heideggerian approach are the Chinese-American geographer Yi-Fu Tuan and Canadian geographer Edward Relph. Tuan's books *Topophilia* (1974) and *Space and Place* (1977) have had an enormous impact on the emergence of the discipline of humanistic geography and the development of the idea of place as a field of care.

According to Tuan, the main purpose of geography is to study the feelings and ideas that have related to space throughout human experience, through feelings, sensations and perceptions relating to spaces and places. He shows how the concept of place, and the differentiation between this and space, is one of the key points of the new perspective of humanistic geography.

Space can be interpreted through an abstract structure of thought, the language of mathematics and quantifiable data. The concept of *place* has rather different meanings depending on the approach used in observing reality. It may be related to the idea of *location*, but in contrast to this, however, a place is a unique entity, and has a history and a meaning: it is a reality that must be understood through the vision of the people who declared, and give it, its value to.

While quantitative geography focused primarily on the study of objective and abstract space, quantified according to the principles of Euclidean geometry, humanistic geography instead focuses attention on places. Places cannot be defined according to geometric categories, because they are important primarily as custodians and communicators of values, meanings, aspirations that humans manifest. A key term in Tuan's *Space and Place* is 'experience':

Experience is compounded of feeling and thought. Human feeling is not a succession of discrete sensations; rather, memory and anticipation are able to wield sensory impacts into a shifting stream of experience so that we may speak of a life of feeling as we do of a life of thought. It is a common tendency to regard feeling and thought as opposed, the one registering subjective states, the other reporting on objective re-

ality. In fact, they lie near the two ends of an experiential continuum, and both are ways of knowing. To see and to think are closely related processes. In English, 'I see' means 'I understand'.³⁸

Like Tuan, Relph, in his book *Place and Placelessness* (1976), compares place with space to make an argument for the significance of place to human life:

Space is amorphous and intangible and not an entity that can be directly described and analysed. Yet, however we feel or explain space, there is nearly always some associated sense or concept of place. In general it seems that space provides the context for places but derives its meaning from particular places.³⁹

In Relph's approach to place he explicitly builds on Heidegger's philosophy, and the notions of *Dasein* and dwelling. A couple of years later, similar concepts were introduced into architecture by Norberg-Schulz. Norberg-Schulz adopts Heidegger's approach in which being is spatial, and further develops this concept as existential space. Schulz reconsidered the notion of *genius loci*, an elusive term whose meaning has changed over the course of two centuries. A modern use of this term has been well described by the influential American landscape writer J.B. Jackson, in his book *A Sense of Place, a Sense of Time*:

"Sense of place" is a much-used expression, chiefly by architects but taken over by urban planners and interior decorators and the promoters of condominiums, so that now it means very little. It is an awkward and ambiguous translation of the Latin term *genius loci*. In classical times it meant not so much the place itself as the guardian divinity of that place. [...] In the eighteenth century the Latin phrase was usually translated as "the genius of a place". We now use the current version to describe the atmosphere to a place, the quality of its environment. Nevertheless, we recognize that certain localities have an attraction which gives us a certain indefinable sense of well-being and which we want to return to, time and again.⁴⁰

38. Yi Fu Tuan, *Space and Place*, p. 10.

39. Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, p. 8.

40. John Brinckerhoff Jackson, *A Sense of Place, a Sense of Time* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 157.

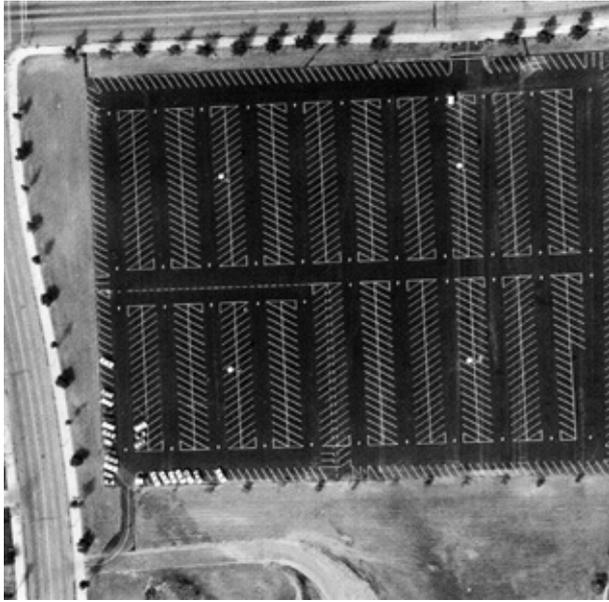


Fig. 5
Ed Ruscha, from *Thirty-four Parking Lots in Los Angeles*, 1967
In J.B. Jackson, *A Sense of Place, a Sense of Time*

Fig. 6
Bill Owens, from *Suburbia*, 1972
In J.B. Jackson, *A Sense of Place, a Sense of Time*

When Jackson writes of 'atmosphere', we can see a similarity with the idea of the 'spirit of a place', the belief of the Ancient Romans that places had a particular spirit that watched over them, a kind of guardian angel for a place, rather than for a person. Going back to Norbert-Schulz, *genius loci* is described as representing the sense people have of a place, understood as the sum of all the physical as well as the symbolic values in nature and the human environment. According to this philosophical approach, place is a phenomenon. Place is not about the built environment, but about how people dwell in that environment. Any location has the potential to become a place, and any place has the potential to become a mere location.

Because of the link between place, dwelling and being, time becomes an important factor in the definition of place. This definition distances place from the physical aspects of the outside world. The experience and meanings of our own existence are intertwined within the process of constant creation of place. People are not simply users of a place but are actively involved in its creation through the act of building and experiencing. The built environment is a mode by which people create places and fulfill their need for a meaningful existence.⁴¹

1.3 Phenomenology in photography

The relationship between a phenomenological approach to places and photography is complex and dates back to the origins of photography. One could say that the reference point for this type of approach is the work of Eugene Atget (Fig. 4), 'who prefigures many photographers for whom the specificity of place is fundamental, and for whom the photographic exploration of a topographical subject devolves into an enquiry into human existence'.⁴² In *Mirrors and Windows*, John Szarkowski defines Atget as the patron of a way of thinking about

41. Muminovic, Milica (2015). 'Places as Assemblages: Paradigm Shift or Fashionable Nonsense?', pp. 298-9.

42. Kate Bush, 'At the Brink', in: *In the Face of History. European Photographers in the 20th Century*, ed. by Kate Bush and Mark Sladen (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2006), p. 16.

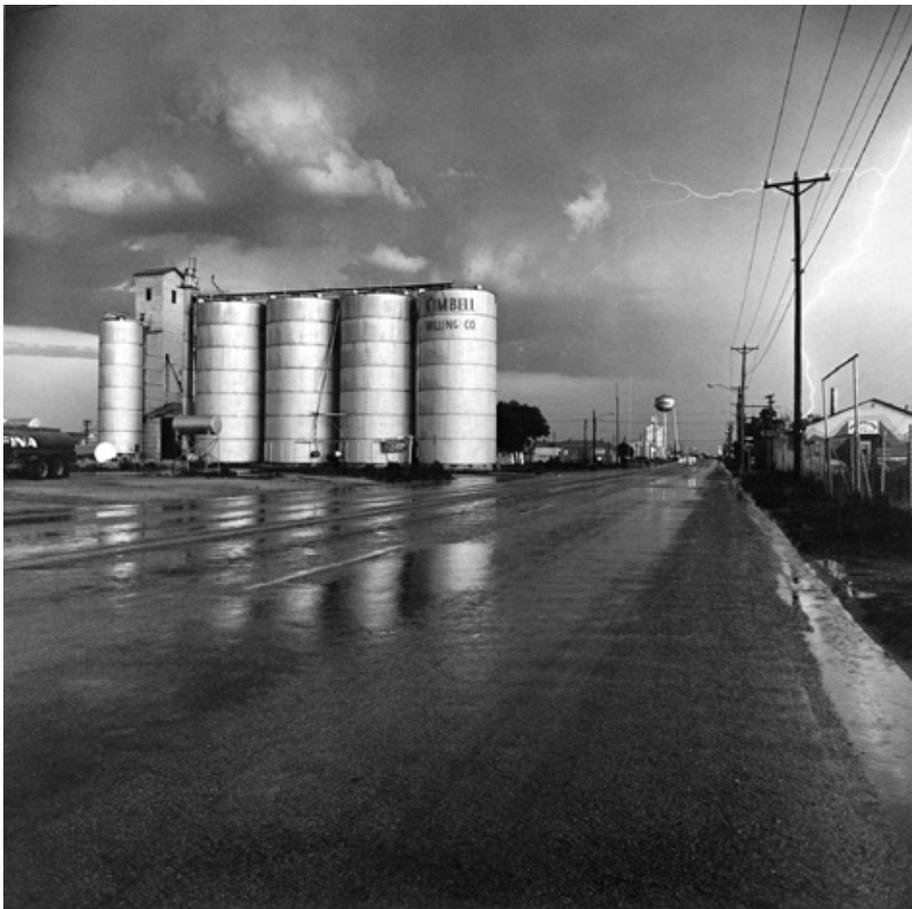
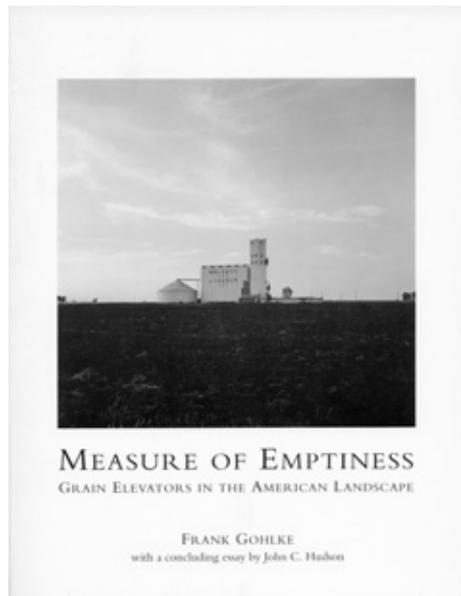


Fig. 7
Frank Gohlke, *Measure of Emptiness*, Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins University Press, 1992

Fig. 8
Frank Gohlke, *Grain elevators and lightning flash*, Lamesa, Texas, 1975

photography as a method of exploration, and of a more realist approach to the world, in contrast with the Romantic approach that was more concerned with self-expression than with a direct relationship with places.⁴³

For the purposes of this research, I will focus on the work of photographers whose approach to places is very similar to that of some of the cultural geographers described above, and in some cases was directly inspired by their work. For example, it is interesting to start from a project undertaken in the 1970s by the American photographer Frank Gohlke, *Measure of Emptiness: Grain Elevators in the American Landscape* (Fig. 7,8,9). The project consists of a photo essay preceded by a reflective essay in which Gohlke acknowledges the influence of what was at the time a new debate on his way of approaching the landscape:

Landscape is an active principle. Its existence is the result of human actions and natural processes in ever-changing combinations, and its understanding requires that the senses, the mind, and the imagination be fully engaged with the facts in front of us. My study of landscape began when I asked “Why do these things look the way they do?” and it was furthered when I discovered, through a chance encounter with a geographer at a dinner party, that a group of people had been posing that question in many forms for years.⁴⁴

Gohlke continues the narrative thus:

I began to read the work of geographers Carl Sauer, David Lowenthal, and Yi-Fu Tuan, and the essays of J.B. Jackson. These writings confirmed my intuitions about the relationships between people and places, about the deep and continuing interchange between the given character of an environment and its inhabitants: what is built reflects both inner needs and external constraints and becomes in turn a part of the landscape that influences subsequent generations.⁴⁵

43. John Szarkowski, *Mirrors and Windows: American Photography since 1960* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1978), pp. 18-19, 25.

44. Frank Gohlke, *Measure of Emptiness* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), p. 21.

45. *Ibid.*



Fig. 9
Frank Gohlke, *Brick Building in the Shadow of a Grain Elevator*, Cashion, Oklahoma, 1973-74

What Gohlke affirms was sensed by Tuan and Relph in the books *Space and Place* and *Topophilia* (Tuan) and *Place and Placelessness* (Relph). In *Space and Place* Tuan argued that via human perceptions and experience we get to know the world through places. The term ‘topophilia’ was developed by Tuan to refer to the ‘affective bond between people and place’. This bond, this sense of attachment, is fundamental to the idea of place as a field of care. Reflecting on his explorations in the landscape of the Midwestern United States, Gohlke refers explicitly to the impact that the work of J.B. Jackson⁴⁶ had on his thoughts:

[...] and it was Jackson, of all the writers I read, who most explicitly affirmed my belief in the beauty and meaning I was finding there. He strengthened my understanding of the responsibility of the landscape photographer: to make the invisible visible, to see clearly and unsentimentally an obvious truth that struck me with the force of revelation: everything in a landscape has meaning.⁴⁷

Gohlke began to photograph grain elevators in an attempt to connect with a new landscape after moving to the American Midwest. This is how he opens the essay that precedes the photographic sequence:

In the autumn of 1971, after seven years in New England, I moved with my family to the Midwest. The windows of our hilltop apartment gave onto a comprehensive view of the Midway, a mile-long stretch of grain elevators and railroad tracks on the boundary between the cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul. During the months of disorientation following the move, I would often stare idly out the window, content, after my experience of the intimate, crowded landscapes of the eastern seaboard, to be once again in a place where my eyes could find real distances. As I gained my bearings, the grain elevators of the Midway began to draw my attention.⁴⁸

46. We mentioned Jackson before, for his definition of *genius loci*. It is worth offering a few more words on this interesting figure: ‘John Brinckerhoff Jackson was like a kaleidoscope. To each person who knew him, he presented a slightly different image, a different piece of his life story, a different glimpse of how his ideas fit together. Each of the pieces may have been true, but seeing the whole picture has always been a challenge [...]’ (P. Groth, Introduction: J.B. Jackson and Geography, *Geographical Review*, Vol. , 88. 4, J. B. Jackson and Geography (Oct. 1998)).

47. Frank Gohlke, *Measure of Emptiness*, p. 21.

48. *Ibid*, p. 15.

After Gohlke's move he began photographing to adapt to the new landscape: as a way of getting closer to it, to know it better.

At first I just savored the strong emotions the place provoked, which mixed the awe one feels in the presence of monumental architecture with the impatient curiosity of an archaeologist at a new site. The place encouraged fantasies of lost worlds and vanished empires, of abandoned cities whose makers' intentions were utterly inscrutable to me. The grain elevators' resemblance to habitable architecture, however, only serves to dramatize the differences.⁴⁹

Through an empathic approach to a landscape that was still not so familiar to him, Gohlke found in the grain elevators the presence against which the emptiness of the prairies could be measured, not just in a visual sense, but also from a wider social and historical perspective.

I began photographing grain elevators at a time when I was fascinated with blank walls, empty facades, shuttered windows, and all manner of unyielding surfaces, emblems of an interior crisis. It is also true, and just as important, that the grain elevators represented a connection to my childhood home, toward which I was feeling a renewed sense of curiosity and attachment. It is equally true that I sensed in the grain elevators a richer set of relationships with a broader world than was offered by the other subjects with which I was working. I was beginning to understand that my photographs interested me more when they were open to issues beyond aesthetic ones.⁵⁰

Gohlke's new awareness, demonstrated in his photographing of the landscape, and in his new interests in issues beyond aesthetic ones, was inspired by the philosophical (phenomenological) discourse of human geographers around a new idea of place. If it is true that Gohlke is certainly the most explicit in admitting the influence of this specific debate on phenomenological inspiration, it is also true that his work bears comparison with that of photographers such

49. Ibid, p. 15-16.

50. Ibid, p. 16.

as Robert Adams (Fig. 11, 12, 13, 14, 15), Michael Schmidt (Fig. 19, 20, 21, 22), Jem Southam (Fig. 23, 24), Luigi Ghirri (Fig. 3, 40, 45, 46) and Guido Guidi (Fig. 10, 34, 35, 39, 66, 84),⁵¹ which I will discuss. These photographers, in different places, have approached landscape in a manner that is somewhat similar. They all share a way of photographing that is, above all, a kind of human experience: it represents a continuous interaction with the world and with the things in front of them, but also with their personal autobiography and iconography. Their personal observations of phenomena, recorded on photographic film, do not seek truth, but rather a hypothesis of reality that emerges from chaos and multitude. With their practice they seem to question the world and the reality in front of them, without looking for a precise answer. It is an attitude that does not provide the consolation of the unveiling, but indicates the need, the ethics and the aesthetics of a gesture that is 'artistic' in the fullest sense of the term: an attempt to 'catch a glimpse', rather than an aspiration to see things clearly.

As well as the concept of place remaining elusive and difficult to grasp, in the same way it would be impossible to draw up a precise list of photographers who have addressed landscape and place in a manner that can be considered 'phenomenological'. However, there are some key works by the photographers mentioned above which are of particular interest to the nature of my research. This work was realised within a similar period of time, in the space of a decade from the early '80s to the early '90s, during which it developed and defined the Italian context in which Guido Guidi and Luigi Ghirri were its leading figures. This may be evidence of a common feeling that, as it was difficult to generalise about and to force into academic discourse, it was certainly present and particularly intense and innovative among the photography community in Europe and the United States, as well as having (and continuing to have) a great influence on the work of later generations.

51. Italian critic Antonello Frongia acknowledges as particularly significant for Guido Guidi's dedication to the culture of 'spontaneous' landscapes, his studies of 'vernacular' culture, including ones by John Kouwenhoven and J.B. Jackson. See Antonello Frongia, 'At least a Stone. Notes on Guido Guidi's Minimal Geography', in Guido Guidi, *Cinque Paesaggi, 1983-1993* (Rome: Postcart/iccd, 2013), p. 97.



Fig. 10

© Guido Guidi, *Near Cittadella*, 1984, from *Cinque paesaggi*, 1983-1993

A project by the American photographer Robert Adams,⁵² *The New West*, is crucial for this reasoning.

Born in 1937 in Orange, New Jersey, Robert Adams has been living with his wife Kerstin, in Longmont, a small town in Colorado, for over 20 years. Wandering between the prairie and the Rocky Mountains, sometimes going further West, he records and takes pictures of the changing and the lingering of the essential characters of that landscape. He keeps thinking about the meaning (other than the ways) of this operation and, in general, about the possible bond with our geography.⁵³

Ever since its first appearance, *The New West* became a model for the photographers themselves, as if it were proof that the focus of landscape photography had shifted radically (Fig. 11, 12). Unlike his well-known predecessor Ansel Adams, Robert Adams no longer turned his camera on the nominally unspoilt, grand scenic view, but on what became known, in fact, as the ‘man-altered landscape’: in the specific case of *The New West*, what came to fill the open American West: freeways, tract homes, low-rise commercial buildings and signs.

Adams wanted his photography to make evident the contradiction between what was being shown (the suburban landscape that was usually neglected) and the way it was photographed. His austere view, his pictures that were apparently distant, and marked by a sort of stylistic clarity, were intended to carefully illustrate the shape and the beauty that still endured, despite the heavy human intrusion into the natural landscape. His uncompromising gaze led to a new evaluation of the term ‘documentary photography’. In the book’s

52. After a PhD at Southern California University in 1965, Robert Adams taught literature at the Colorado College in Colorado Springs, before focusing completely on photography, which he embarked on in 1963. In 1969 John Szarkowski, Director of the Photography Department at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, purchased the first prints by Adams. In the following year, Adams was included in a group show of artists new to the museum – which in 1971 devoted a solo exhibition to him and published his first monograph *White Churches of the Plains: Examples from Colorado*. The key work *The New West: Landscapes Along the Colorado Front Range*, was made in 1974.

53. Paolo Costantini, ‘Introduction’, in Robert Adams, *La bellezza in fotografia* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 1995), p. ix.

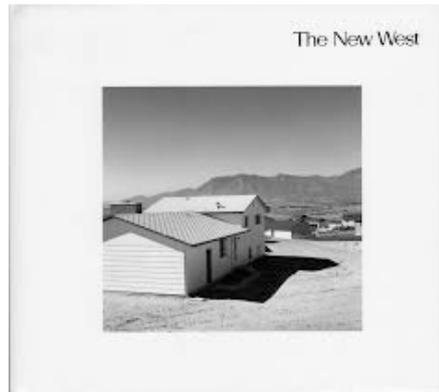


Fig. 11
Robert Adams, *The New West*, New York: Aperture, 1974

Fig. 12
Robert Adams, *Colorado Springs*, from *The New West*, New York: Aperture 1974

foreword, Szarkowski invites the reader to not excise the anxiety transmitted by the pictures, contrasting with the familiar purity of 'the American dream'. Szarkowski sees in the pictures of disorganised urban clusters, so common in a landscape that is no longer legendary, the hint of possible redemption. Just like some sort of ancient relics from a past civilization, these buildings also reveal confused and contradictory human ambitions. Even from this point of view they get a new meaning, an unexpected natural beauty. Szarkowski ends his introductory essay by stating that:

Though Robert Adams's book assumes no moral postures, it does have a moral. Its moral is that the landscape is, for us, the place we live. If we have used it badly, we cannot therefore scorn it, without scorning ourselves. If we have abused it, broken its health, and erected upon it memorials to our ignorance, it is still our place, and before we can proceed we must learn to love it. As Job perhaps began again by learning to love his ash pit.⁵⁴

The biblical metaphor has a great impact, and fits perfectly with Adams' interpretation of photography: for Adams, photography detects, extracts and emphasises the beauty around us, and by doing so it points towards something deeper in the world – an organising power, a coherence supporting the world and our lives. To Adams, photography is a spiritual exercise, making bearable otherwise bleak surroundings.

The complexity in the dialectics between culture and wilderness, a central theme in American culture, returns in Adams' subsequent books, for which he achieved wide recognition. In 1989 the Philadelphia Museum of Art (PMA) dedicated a major retrospective exhibition to him and published a catalogue entitled *To Make it Home: Photographs of the American West*. Robert Adams' relationship with the environment, that was passionate and conflicted (but always filled with hope), by retracing his intellectual and autobiographical jour-

54. John Szarkowski, Foreword, in Robert Adams, *The New West* (New York: Aperture, 1974), p. ix.



Fig. 13
Robert Adams, *St. Vrain Creek. Edge of Longmont, Colorado, 1986*
From *To Make it Home*, Aperture, NY, 1989

ney in the American West through the wilderness. The entire work of the photographer can be understood as a reflection on the possibility of being in the world, of dwelling, feeling part of it; to quote from a novel by Yasunari Kawabata: 'My life, a fragment of a landscape'.⁵⁵

In these examples lies the proximity with phenomenology, also reaffirmed in Adams' writings: during the early '80s, in fact, alongside the photographic books, Adams published a significant collection of writing. As Paolo Costantini explains, Adams' writings 'in defense of traditional values'⁵⁶ represented a unique and exceptional case in the contemporary literature on photography. With charming determination, Adams reflected on issues and concepts that were no longer considered current in intellectual debate, such as beauty, truth, form, composition and originality⁵⁷. He then investigated the sense of the representation of evil and the value of critique, as well as the meaning of a possible reconciliation with geography. For Costantini, the beauty to which Robert Adams aspires in photography, the beauty that is the origin of his own poetry and that he traces between the wrinkles of the history of photography, arises primarily from a truly deep emotion, from the pleasure of walking – and photographing – in the vast spaces of the American West, in which an absolute silence still reigns. Contrasting with the world's noise, the silence mentioned by Adams is an essential, mysterious and meaningful element of the prairie. Adams invites us to think about it (and then think about the act of photographing itself) by wandering through those spaces, and by listening.⁵⁸

In Adams' approach, phenomenology intersects with this attitude of listening,

55. See Robert Adams, *To Make It Home: Photographs of the American West* (New York: Aperture, 1989), p.50.

56. See Robert Adams, *Beauty in Photography: Essays in Defense of Traditional Values* (New York: Aperture, 1981).

57. See Paolo Costantini, Introduction to Robert Adams, *La bellezza in fotografia* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 1995, 2012), p. xii.

58. *Ibid.*, p. xiii.



Fig. 14, 15
Robert Adams, *St. Vrain Creek. Edge of Longmont, Colorado, 1986*
From *To Make it Home*, Aperture, NY, 1989

in the search for a direct comparison with the things, looking for a personal reconciliation with his own geography, with his own biographical landscape.

The operating principle that seems to work best is to go to the landscape that frightens you most and take pictures until you're not scared anymore.⁵⁹

Even though it is firmly located between the prairies and the Rocky Mountains in Colorado, the power of Adams's poetics lies in the universal nature of his reflections and intuitions (in his images as well as his writing). Adams is a master in creating a new imaginary that reaches from the whole American West to his own back garden. The PMA's retrospective catalogue ends precisely there, with some pictures taken a few steps away from his house (fig. 13, 14, 15). Paolo Costantini once again invites us to reflect on them:

They show a little bend in the river; under a unique, almost threatening light; they are accompanied by a sentence from *Specimen Days* (1882) by Walt Whitman that says: "Over me, one of those not unusual but indescribable skies...".

The astonishment and the ability to marvel at the irreducibility of nature are two of the essential conditions, according to Adams, to be able not only to preserve, but also to conceive new attitudes that make possible a new connection with the Earth.⁶⁰

Adams' *The New West* reveals an attitude of the American photographers towards natural space that, a few months later, was to be found in the highly influential exhibition *New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-Altered Landscape*, at the George Eastman House International Museum of Photography and Film in Rochester, New York State, in 1975,⁶¹ which included Adams' work. This ex-

59. Adams, *To Make It Home*, p. 170.

60. Costantini, Introduction, in Robert Adams, *La bellezza in fotografia*, p. xx.

61. For *New Topographics*, curator William Jenkins selected eight young American photographers: Robert Adams, Lewis Baltz, Joe Deal, Frank Gohlke, Nicholas Nixon, John Schott, Stephen Shore, and Henry Wessel, Jr. He also invited the German couple Bernd and Hilla Becher, then teaching at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf in Germany. Each photographer in the *New Topographics* exhibition was represented by ten prints. All but Stephen Shore worked in black and white. In his introduction to the catalogue, Jenkins defined the common denominator of the show as 'a problem of style: 'stylistic anonymity', an alleged absence of style. See *New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-Altered Land-*

NEW TOPOGRAPHICS

Photographs of a Man-altered Landscape

International tour begins at
George Eastman House
June 13-Sept. 27, 2009



John Schott (American, b. 1944)
UNTITLED (from the series Route 66 Motels), 1973
George Eastman House collections. © John Schott



Henry Wessel, Jr. (American, b. 1942)
BUENA VISTA, COLORADO, 1973
© 1973 Henry Wessel

For a large selection of images from this exhibition,
please visit <https://secure.eastmanhouse.org/pressroom>



Bernd and Hilla Becher (German, 1931-2007 and b. 1934)
LOOMIS COAL BREAKER/WILKES BARRE,
PENNSYLVANIA, 1974
© Hilla Becher, 2009



Joe Deal (American, b. 1947)
UNTITLED VIEW (ALBUQUERQUE), 1974, printed 1975.
George Eastman House collections. © Joe Deal



Lewis Baltz (American, b. 1945)
SOUTH CORNER, RICCAR AMERICA COMPANY,
3184 PULLMAN, COSTA MESA, 1974
George Eastman House collections. © Lewis Baltz



Frank Gohlke (American, b. 1942)
IRRIGATION CANAL, ALBUQUERQUE,
NEW MEXICO, 1974
George Eastman House collections. © Frank Gohlke



Nicholas Nixon (American, b. 1947)
VIEW OF THE BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY, 1974
George Eastman House collections. © Nicholas Nixon



Robert Adams (American, b. 1937)
MOBILE HOMES, JEFFERSON COUNTY, COLORADO, 1973
George Eastman House collections. © Robert Adams,
courtesy Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco and
Matthew Marks Gallery, New York



Fig. 16
Press release for the recreation of the 'New Topographics' exhibition
George Eastman House, Rochester, 2009

hibition signalled a radical shift away from traditional depictions of landscape, and marked a very important moment in the history of the medium, revealing and fostering at the same time a different approach to landscape photography, more detached and less magnificent. Up to that time the dominant aesthetic was that of lyrical representation by photographers such as Ansel Adams, Minor White and Paul Caponigro, tending towards the celebration of a nature that was not violated by humans, and able to convey symbolic or metaphysical meanings. The photographers of *New Topographics*, as the curator William Jenkins acknowledged, introduced a conceptual matrix to their work, influenced by artists like Ed Ruscha and Dan Graham. From 1975, *New Topographics* had a deep influence on landscape photography practice, both in the United States and in Europe (Fig. 16).

The first time it was possible to see some of the original photographs in *New Topographics* in Europe was in 1978, when parts of the exhibition were shown at the Werkstatt für Photographie⁶² in Berlin, in 1976. A few years later, in a more official way, but still in a reduced form, the exhibition was presented in 1981 at the Arnolfini Gallery in Bristol, UK, under the auspices of the British photographers Paul Graham and Jem Southam. These were two important events for European photography that highlight the contact points with a specific aspect of American photography: even more so if we think that the first time *New Topographics* was shown in Europe, it was thanks to the individual activity of a small number of photographers, rather than due to the interest of museums or institutions: two of these practitioners, Jem Southam and Michael Schmidt, are important for this discourse on photography and phenomenology. Schmidt was one of the key German post-war photographers. He was born

scape (Rochester, NY: International Museum of Photography, 1974). An expanded version of the original catalogue, with a critical apparatus, was published in 2009. (*New Topographics* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2009). See also *Reframing the New Topographics*, ed. by Greg Foster-Rice, John Rohrbach (Chicago, IL: The Center for American Places at Columbia College, 2013).

62. The Werkstatt für Photographie was an experimental platform for photography established by Michael Schmidt in 1976 (See p. 69).



Fig. 17
Lewis Baltz's workshop, Werkstatt für Photographie, 1980.
Photograph by Friedhelm Denkeler

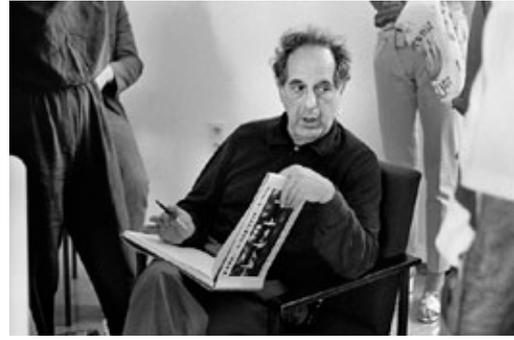


Fig. 18
Robert Frank signing *The Americans*, Werkstatt für Photographie, 1985
Photograph by Friedhelm Denkeler

in East Berlin, but his family moved to West Berlin before the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961. Schmidt, who died in 2014 at the age of 68, was a self-taught photographer, and a loner: he was a member of neither a school nor a student group, and was certainly not part of an artistic group, as critic Janos Frecot has pointed out.⁶³ Somewhat younger than the generation that included Robert Adams, Lee Friedlander and William Eggleston, Larry Clark and Stephen Shore, and a few years older than Axel Hütte and Bernd and Hilla Becher, he trained as a policeman, at his parents' insistence, before taking up the camera in 1965 to document the streets, buildings and people of West Berlin. He built himself a reputation both as a photographer, through a series of ambitious projects over the next five decades, and as a teacher, establishing his Werkstatt für Photographie in Berlin; before discussing some of Schmidt's key projects, I will briefly outline the history of this important institution.

The Werkstatt was founded in 1976 by Michael Schmidt at an adult education centre in Kreuzberg, Berlin, and flourished for exactly ten years. Within this short period, the Werkstatt became one of the best known and most influential photography schools in Germany, reaching a high level of prominence and recognition, particularly in the United States, and it was also influential in Italy. Though Schmidt handed over the direction of the Werkstatt two years later, after its founding he remained connected to it, as a behind-the-scenes *spiritus rector* and driving force. It was a place where photographic techniques and development, the presentation of work and the positioning of photographic images among other media were taught and discussed. It became a transatlantic bridge between America and Europe, enabling young American photographers' work to be shown on the European continent. Schmidt organised the exhibitions, invited the exhibiting photographers to attend them, and facilitated discussion forums about photography in a still relatively sleepy West Berlin. Previously, there had been no forum of this nature: the Werkstatt was a regional, low-budget institution, founded by a private individual, that

63. This characteristic distinguishes him from the photographers associated with the Italian context of reference of this research, which I will introduce in Chapter 2, for whom working 'in a group' was of fundamental importance.



Fig. 19
Michael Schmidt, from *Berlin nach 46*, 1980

was capable of matching the offering of any major museum in the country. Apart from *New Topographics* (shown here for the first time in Europe), its impressive programme of exhibitions, lectures and symposia featured authors such as Robert Frank (Fig. 18), Robert Adams, Diane Arbus, Lewis Baltz (Fig. 17), Larry Clark, John Gossage, William Eggleston, Larry Fink, Frank Gohlke, Ralph Gibson, Stephen Shore and Allan Sekula.⁶⁴

The Werkstatt functioned as a complement to Schmidt's photographic work, and although it would be wrong to search for direct comparisons between Schmidt and the American photographers, the Werkstatt definitely led to reciprocal influence. This cross-fertilisation is acknowledged by both Frecot and Gerry Badger. On one hand, for Frecot, for example, *New Topographics* is a key reference that leads us to the heart of Michael Schmidt's work in the second half of the 1970s:

I presume, after all, that the specific features of his pictures of people and cityscapes have not only been partially inspired by his fellow photographers, but also by a paradigm shift in thinking about the urban and rural areas where people live and which in the end prompted the environmental movement, whose political and social effects will be in motion for a long time to come. That is precisely what the "Man-altered Landscapes" subtitle of the "New Topographics" exhibition implies. It is the documentation of changes that should rarely be seen as improvements, but instead as a downhill process, or even as irreversible destruction. Making such processes visible also became a new subject of fine art.⁶⁵

On the other hand, when Schmidt's work became more impressionistic, towards the end of the 1980s (with his seminal project *Waffenruhe*, 1987, which documents West Berlin in the years just before the Wall came down), it was highly influential for photographers like John Gossage (*Berlin in the Time of the Wall; Stadt des Schwarz*), and Paul Graham (*New Europe*). Historian Gerry

64. See *Werkstatt für Photographie 1976–1986*, ed. by Inka Schube, Florian Ebner, Felix Hoffmann, Thomas Weski (London: Koenig, 2017).

65. Janos Frecot, in: Michael Schmidt, *Berlin nach 45* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2005), p. 16.



20.a



20.b



20.c



20.d

Fig. 20

20.a: Michael Schmidt, *Waffenruhe*, 1987

20.b: John Gossage, *Stadt des Schwarz*, 1987

20.c: Volker Heinze, *Ahnung*, 1989

20.d: Paul Graham, *New Europe*, 1993

Badger explains how Schmidt's book *Waffenruhe* was itself a result of these early 1980s Werkstatt exchanges, as was the project *Ahnung* (1989) by Volker Heinze (Fig. 20).

Formally, both of these intensely felt books demonstrate an international influence, although their immediate subject matter is site-specific, in this case, the city of Berlin. One of the pictures in Heinze's *Ahnung* is of young English photographer Paul Graham, another overseas visitor to the Werkstatt.⁶⁶

Badger also suggests that there were reciprocal influences between European and American photographers:

In 1982 John Gossage was invited to Berlin by the Werkstatt für Photographie in Kreuzberg, a visit that would radically change his work. He began to photograph the Berlin Wall, and returned repeatedly for the next decade to make an extended meditation on the subject. The full project was published in 2004 as *Berlin in the Time of the Wall*, but some of the pictures have been published in groups over the years, of which the most important was his 1987 book *Stadt des Schwarz*.⁶⁷

Four groups of portraits of the city of Berlin by Schmidt are of particular interest for this research: *Stadtbildern* (Cityscapes, 1976-80), *Berlin nach 1945* (Berlin after 1945, 1980), and *Stadtlandschaften* (Urban landscapes, 1981). These followed his first major success, the project *Berlin-Wedding* (1978), and they all deal with Schmidt's immediate surroundings, in particular the Berlin neighbourhoods of Wedding and Kreuzberg.

Berlin-Wedding (Fig. 21, 22) is a photographic project that was produced from 1976 to 1978. When the images appeared in 1978 – initially as a gallery publication for Verlag A. Nagel – their unusual visual language rapidly made them a focus for contemporary discussion on the revival of traditional photography.⁶⁸

66. *The Photobook, a history* (Volume 2), ed. by Martin Parr, Gerry Badger (London: Phaidon, 2006), p. 55.

67. *Ibid*, p. 64.

68. As a consequence of this work Michael Schmidt became co-founder of a new trend in which a number of young



Fig. 21
Michael Schmidt, *Lortzingstraße* (Hof). From *Berlin-Wedding*, 1978

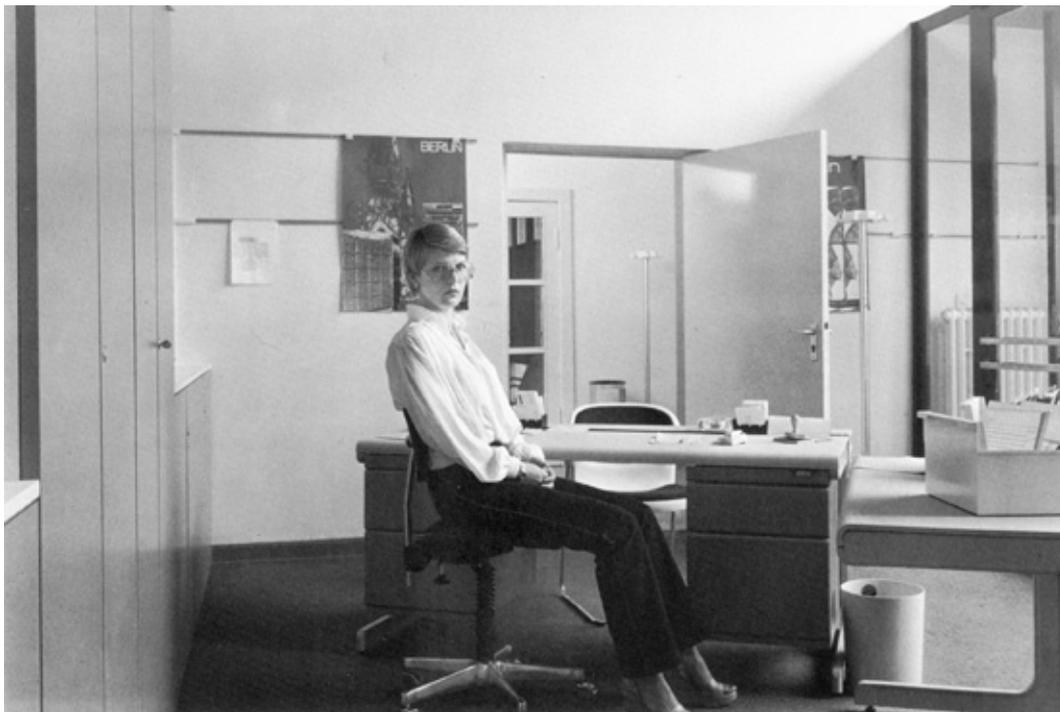


Fig. 22
Michael Schmidt, *Inspector at the district office in Wedding* (citizens' advice bureau),
From *Berlin-Wedding*, 1978

While *Berlin-Wedding* combines urban scenes of Berlin with portraits of people shot in interiors, *Stadtbilder*, *Berlin nach 1945* and *Stadtlandschaften* are entirely focused on urban landscapes of Berlin: although Schmidt employed every technical and creative possibility to achieve the greatest conceivable objectivity in his representation, the choice of motifs already indicates a subjective approach. In these cityscapes, topographic depiction is not the decisive factor; instead, existing social values are revealed against the background of urban areas and their conditions. These cityscapes mark the beginning of a working process of 'getting in touch with oneself' that would later lead Schmidt to the cathartic *Waffenruhe* project.

In *Berlin, Stadtbilder* (Berlin, Cityscapes), Schmidt discovered the central theme of his later works. His works since then have had a decisively historical approach. Yet this approach should never be confused with the pathos of a documentary-appellative form of photography, which draws its energy primarily from the possibility of collective memory of a concrete, historical event because it is otherwise incapable of artistically generating this energy itself. What results are latently atmospheric pictures of places everyone seems familiar with, but the historical significance of which actually prevents depicting merely what is visible. Schmidt's reputation – momentarily – can be described as being composed of a close link between historical memory and the search for a pure, visual form of evidence. His photographs do not speak of history; instead, history has become a visual form within them, and the pictures seem to be completely saturated with its weight.⁶⁹

Frecot suggests that an exhibition of the three groups of Schmidt's landscape photographs discussed above should be organised in order to understand the various ways of addressing the city as a subject that goes beyond mere narrative photography. He suggests that what would result is a range of densi-

photographers attempted to implement their individual ways of seeing in large-scale projects without the constraints of a commission – later, this came to be known as *'Autorenfotografie'*.

69. Heinz Liesbrock, in Michael Schmidt, *Landschaft, Waffenruhe, Selbst, Menschenbilder (Ausschnitte)* (Michael Schmidt. Landscape, Ceasefire, Self, Pictures of People – Selections), (Münster: Westfälischer Kunstverein, 1998), p. 132.

ties of space, the materialisation of light, and the development of an emotional bond with the space. The relationship between phenomenology and Michael Schmidt's work lies in the dialectic between this subjective approach, hidden behind a strongly documentary-oriented style, reinforced by a masterful use of black-and-white pictures. 'For me, black and white are always the darkest grey and the lightest grey', Schmidt once said: eschewing colour was a way, for him, to make what he called 'neutral' photographs that would not be 'emotionally distracting' to the viewer, even if they were emotionally significant for their creator. This interest in issues of place, the city and the neighbourhood where he was born and raised can be traced to some of the traumatic events that took place in the photographer's childhood:

Schmidt has lived in the Kreuzberg area of Berlin his entire life. However, between 1949 and 1953, he moved twice to "east" Germany. The second move ended in an escape back to West Berlin at the last minute. These traumatic childhood events put a strain on Schmidt's relationship to "over there" (as the people of West Berlin once called East Berlin) for a long time.⁷⁰

I have acknowledged the Werkstatt as an important centre of exchange and mutual influence for the American and European photographers, in which important exhibitions of works that had never before been seen in Europe were displayed. One of these was an edited version of *New Topographics*, in 1978 (probably the first time it was shown in Europe). In 1981, six years after the original exhibition in Rochester, another smaller version of *New Topographics* was shown at the Arnolfini Gallery in Bristol, in the UK, organised by photographers Paul Graham (a frequent visitor to the Werkstatt) and Jem Southam. The work of the latter is important for the purposes of this discussion.

In 1981 Jem Southam was a teacher at Exeter College of Art and Design⁷¹

70. Frecot, in Michael Schmidt, *Berlin nach 45*, p. 15.

71. The Exeter College of Art and Design was at that time part of Plymouth Polytechnic (now the University of Plym-

(where Paul Graham was a regular visiting lecturer) and was building himself a reputation as one of the most interesting of the emerging British photographers of the time. The website of two major UK art institutions, the V&A Museum and Tate, confirm that Jem Southam, born in Bristol in 1950, is one of the UK's leading photographers, and one of the key landscape photographers of the last twenty years. Renowned for his series of colour landscape photographs, beginning in the 1970s and continuing up to the present, his singular approach involves the patient observation of changes at a single location over many months or years.

Southam was starting to work on his seminal project *The Red River*. Made over a six-year period (1982-1987 – Fig. 23), it comprises a sequence of fifty photographs that follow a small stream in west Cornwall from its source to the sea.

It travels from moorland, through areas of small-scale farming, tin mining and urban communities to the tourist beaches on the coast. The whole river valley and been extensively mined for tin and copper ore over hundreds of years and it is the extractions of water from the mine and its use to crush ore that stains the river red. The work started as a result of stumbling on a tiny red stream while Jem Southam was walking his dog in the area which is not far from his home, and continued over a period of six years. It began as a series of 'topographic' views but increasing dissatisfaction with the sense of detachment of this strategy lead to a more intimate and varied approach. The Red River is broken into seven sections, an introductory topographic view depicts the configuration of the valley. Other photographs describe the surface of the land, the homes and gardens of its inhabitants and the cultures of animal husbandry, plant horticulture, mining and tourism that have historically shaped the landscape. The work is also intended as an allegorical journey through a series of myths that have historically influenced our perception of the land.⁷²

outh).

72. Brett Rogers, *Documentary Dilemmas: Aspects of British Documentary Photography 1983-1993* (London: The British Council 1994). The quote is taken from the online magazine *Landscape Stories*, named after one of Southam's books: <http://magazine.landscapestories.net/en/archive/2013/river/projects/jem-southam-the-red-river>; see also Jem Southam, *Landscape Stories* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Architectural Press, 2005).



Fig. 23
© Jem Southam, *Bolenowe*, 1982, from *The Red River*, 1982-1987

Like most of the subjects of his work, the place that Southam is investigating here is in the south-west of England, where he lives and works. Combining topographical observations with other more personal references (cultural, political, scientific, literary and psychological), his approach and methodology could be defined as phenomenological.

His next project, *The Raft of Carrots* (1987-1992 – Fig. 24), broadens and develops the themes of *The Red River*. The series was published on the occasion of the exhibition curated by David Chandler at the Photographers' Gallery in London. In an essay for the book, Chandler explains how this new project departs from the documentary aspect of *The Red River*, while its use of symbol and metaphor is extended.

Although they were all made in the South West, Southam's new photographs are not concerned with the nature of a particular place. Their location is unspecific: indeed it is intentionally denied. Rather, their subject is the more general and complex relationships between people, animals, the land and its produce that now determine the character of the landscape and our experience of it.⁷³

Both *The Red River* and *The Raft of Carrots* suggest a profound affection for the land. If, conceptually, the later project suggests a more elusive and undetermined sense of place, and represents a genuinely new approach to the depiction of landscape, a peculiar sense of attention and closeness is still vivid in the pictures:

The Raft of Carrots is an extraordinary little book, detailing an extraordinarily material approach to the landscape. It has echoes of the jagged, prickly, mordant twentieth-century landscape paintings of Paul Nash or Graham Sutherland, and its primary antecedents are possibly the physical matter dealt with by John Constable in his oil sketches of woodland and fields. There is one evanescent sky study here, but for

73. David Chandler, in: Jem Southam, *The Raft of Carrots* (London: The Photographers' Gallery, 1992), p.6.



Fig. 24
© Jem Southam, from *The Raft of Carrots*, 1987-1992

the most part Southam anchors us in the heavy earth – dark, fetid and extremely affecting.⁷⁴

As seen in Michael Schmidt's work, Jem's Southam's photography demonstrates the influence of *New Topographics* (in fact Schmidt and Southam both played a crucial role in bringing this show in Europe). It is important to acknowledge how the *New Topographics* approach created an important link between American and European photography, between art photography and vernacular photography, and between documentary photography and conceptual art in general. In the next chapter I will discuss the impact of *New Topographics* on the Italian context, and in particular on the specific group of Italian photographers who were starting important conceptual investigations around the idea of place at the same time as Schmidt and Southam's work was produced in the early 1980s. At the end of the 1970s, in fact, even in Italy, a new research approach to photography was being established, rooted in the urban aspect of the land. As the Italian critic Antonello Frongia explains:

If in the suburbs of Denver or in the industrial areas of Irvine *New Topographics* had found itself measuring the dissolution of the myth of uninhabited wilderness in the light of Pop Art and Land Art, photographers of *Viaggio in Italia* referred to a complex set of spaces that were strongly anthropized, structured by an alternation of projects, transformations, images, representations.⁷⁵

With regard to the plethora of photographic texts that from the 1960s onwards began to address the themes of the city and the land, Frongia identifies a particular type of approach that favours constructivist forms of research. According to Frongia, these types of projects are not preordained by the physical or socio-

74. *The Photobook: a History - Volume 2*, p. 70.

75. Antonello Frongia, 'La città come testo fotografico', in: *Luogo e identità nella fotografia italiana contemporanea*, ed. by Roberta Valtorta (Torino: Einaudi, 2013), p. 110.

political structures of the city: in these the subject of investigation is a work in progress defined through a substantially phenomenological relationship of the photographer with the urban environment.⁷⁶ In the next chapter I will focus on Italian photographers who have used this approach, with particular reference to the work of Guido Guidi and Luigi Ghirri.

The early 1980s were a crucial turning point for the development of the discourse around place, in photography in particular. Whereas the influence of *New Topographics* insinuated itself gradually in the European context in terms of the photographic debate, another crucial tendency, developed at the same time in the United States, would have a profound influence on the European context, not only with regard to photography: postmodernism.

Postmodernism marks an intellectual watershed in the late twentieth century. It describes both an era and a broad movement that developed in the late twentieth century across philosophy, the arts, architecture, and criticism, which marked a departure from modernism. While encompassing a broad range of ideas and projects, postmodernism is typically defined by an attitude of scepticism or mistrust toward grand narratives, ideologies, and various tenets of Enlightenment rationality, including the existence of objective reality and absolute truth, as well as notions of rationality, human nature, and progress. Instead, it asserts that knowledge and truth are the product of unique systems of social, historical, and political interpretations, and are therefore contextual and constructed. Postmodernism was hardly a single, unified movement. It could be described more readily as a tendency, or a series of tendencies, and it is often associated with schools of thought such as deconstructionism and post-structuralism. Influenced by this debate, a new theory about place developed, informed particularly by a conceptual 'toolkit' outlined in the 1980s by

76. Ibid., p. 112.

philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari: assemblage theory.

Assemblage is one of those bridging concepts that connect various disciplines while retaining their specificity. Commonly used in geology, paleontology, archaeology and art, it has recently gained traction in other fields (political sciences, science, cultural studies and the arts generally). The process of the reappearance of this concept has been accompanied by serious attempts to theorise an *assemblage*, mainly by reference to Deleuze and Guattari's understanding of the term. In the next paragraph I will introduce the key philosophical basis of this theory, and how it has been applied to the debate about photography and place.

1.4 Assemblage theory in place theory

As mentioned above, assemblage theory finds its roots in the work of Deleuze and Guattari. It was first developed in the book *A Thousand Plateaus*,⁷⁷ published in 1980, as a new way of thinking about the social world. Here, Deleuze and Guattari introduce the notion of *a whole as an assemblage*, in contrast to the most popular organismic metaphor that considers *a whole as an organism*. What are the main differences between the two notions?

The organismic metaphor has been influential in general social theories that analyse the relation between the part and the whole, and consider a whole as a seamless totality, or an organic unity.⁷⁸ In an organic structure, each part

⁷⁷ See note 9. *A Thousand Plateaus* is the second of the two-volume theoretical work *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, by the French authors Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, respectively a philosopher and a psychoanalyst. The first volume, *Anti-Oedipus*, was published in 1972 and translated in 1977. Though the book has been critiqued on many grounds, it has been highly influential across disciplines and is considered a major statement of post-structuralism and post-modernism.

⁷⁸ The conception of society as an organism is a longstanding one; from at least the time of Plato, the 'organic theory of society' has served time and again as the theoretical foundation for advocating paternalistic and authoritarian government. Herbert Spencer, for example, used a 'biological analogy' and was convinced that society is an organism – subject to universal laws applicable to all organisms, and therefore susceptible to analysis by scientific methods; in short, that there is such a thing as 'social science' or 'sociology', that responds to the rules of a social Darwinism. (cfr

depends on the others in order to exist: if you take away a constituent part, the structure ceases to exist in a recognisable way. In other words, if a part is detached from the whole, it ceases to be what it is because being this particular component is one of its constituent properties. In the organismic metaphor the essence of the concept of *a whole* – and therefore the possibility of defining it – is designed to start from its identity as a system of *relations of interiority* with itself. This implies that each component of the whole is constituted by the relationships it has with other components of the whole. In mechanical physics, the human body and society, the parts find their sense of being in the overall configuration of references and the relationships between them.⁷⁹

As an alternative to the notion of *relations of interiority*, in *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari introduce the notion of *relations of exteriority*, which characterise the identity of wholes they call *assemblages*. In an assemblage the individual components may be disconnected from a certain assemblage and put into another in which they interact differently; furthermore, the properties of the whole (of the assemblage) cannot be reduced to the resultant properties of its components. The concept of relations of exteriority means that a component part can be detached from one assemblage and integrated with another, with which the part's interactions are different. This implies that in an assemblage, constituent parts can be removed and replaced. The parts can then enter other assemblages and contribute to *new unique wholes*. The ways in which parts are combined in an assemblage are neither structurally necessary nor preordained. They are not directed by some higher force; their combination is contingent.

Walter M. Simon, 'Herbert Spencer and the "Social Organism"', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 21.2 (1960), 294-299. The model, or concept, of society as an organism was also developed in the late nineteenth century by the French sociologist Émile Durkheim. According to Durkheim, the more specialised the function of an organism or society the greater its development, and vice versa. Hence, the 'health' of the social organism can be thought of as a function of the interaction of culture, politics, and economics, which in theory can be studied, modelled, and analysed.

79. This theory has been very useful, and it is still considered necessary, to explain the emergent properties of wholes – that is, the whole has properties arising from the relations between the parts, rather than being merely an aggregation of the properties of the individual parts. The concept is similar to that of *sui generis* developed by Durkheim in the social sciences, to define what he considers the main characteristic of the social dimension of a community. According to Durkheim, in fact, society is a *sui generis* reality, that is, that it has its own complex character, different from the sum of its parts (the individuals).

A Thousand Plateaus is written in a non-linear fashion, and the reader is invited to move among the plateaus in any order. These stylistic choices are entangled in the book's content, as is made apparent in the introductory section, 'Rhizomes'. Here, Deleuze and Guattari discuss a number of literary works, including Henry James' *In the Cage*, F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Crack-Up*, H. P. Lovecraft's *Through the Gates of the Silver Key*, and Frank Herbert's *Children of Dune*. They also refer to the work of the the novelist James Joyce and the philosopher Wilhelm Nietzsche and use a number of examples drawn from the world of nature to propose a rhizomatic conception of thought against the concept of arborescence. The concept of the *rhizome* is crucial.

In botany and dendrology, a rhizome is a modified subterranean stem of a plant that is usually found underground, often sending out roots and shoots from its nodes. Its rhizomatic nature – to independently develop new plants even in unfavourable conditions – has led some thinkers to use it in metaphorical terms to symbolise certain concepts. Carl Jung adopted the term 'rhizome' with regard to the invisible nature of life, which develops mostly under the ground: what appears only lasts a season and then ceases, pausing indefinitely without this vital stream.

Life has always seemed to me like a plant that lives on its rhizome. Its true life is invisible, hidden in the rhizome. The part that appears above the ground lasts only a single summer. Then it withers away – an ephemeral apparition. When we think of the unending growth and decay of life and civilizations, we cannot escape the impression of absolute nullity. Yet I have never lost the sense of something that lives and endures beneath the eternal flux. What we see is blossom, which passes. The rhizome remains.⁸⁰

Philosophically, the concept of the rhizome is one that allows multiplicity. Deleuze and Guattari refer to the rhizome as that which allows for multiple, non-hierarchical entry and exit points in data representation and interpretation. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, they positioned it against an arborescent conception of knowledge. The concept of arborescence is a hierarchical system:

80. Carl Gustav Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), p. 4.

it works with dualistic categories and binary choices. This model is typical of traditional philosophy, which proceeds linearly and hierarchically. It follows strict binary categories, which are dualistic, and it works with vertical, linear and hierarchical connections.

A rhizome, given its multiple, non-hierarchical nature – the botanical rhizomic system functions even when one stem is cut off – works with horizontal and trans-species connections. Rhizomatic thought is able to establish productive connections in any direction.

Let us summarize the principal characteristics of a rhizome: unlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature; it brings into play very different regimes of signs, and even nonsign states. The rhizome is reducible to neither the one or the multiple. It is not the one that becomes two or even directly three, four, five etc. It is not a multiple derived from the one, or to which one is added $(n+1)$. It is comprised not of units but of dimensions, but rather directions in motion. It has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (milieu) from which it grows and which it overflows. It constitutes linear multiplicities with n dimensions having neither subject nor object, which can be laid out on a plane of consistency, and from which the one is always subtracted $(n-1)$.⁸¹

For Deleuze and Guattari, when a multiplicity of this kind changes dimension, it necessarily changes in nature as well, and it undergoes a metamorphosis. Unlike a structure, which is defined by a set of points and positions, the rhizome is made up only of lines; lines of segmentarity and stratification as its dimensions, and the line of flight or deterritorialisation as the maximum dimension, after which the multiplicity undergoes changes in nature. These lines, or ligaments, should not be confused with lineages of the aborescent type, which are merely localisable linkages between points and positions.

81. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (New York: Continuum, 1987), p 23.

Ultimately, the rhizome ‘pertains to a map that must be produced, constructed, a map that is always detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable, and has multiple entranceways and exits and its own lines of flight’.⁸²

This post-structuralist approach suggested by Deleuze and Guattari suggests a different set of metaphors for the social world: mosaic, patchwork, heterogeneity, fluidity, transitory configuration. And this appears to be a more realistic way of characterising extended social formations, such as towns, cities, regions and states. Assemblage theory has recently been fully developed by philosopher Manuel DeLanda in his book *A New Philosophy of Society*, and has become influential across disciplines, proving very effective in articulating place theory.

As geographer Tim Cresswell affirms, places are ideal candidates for the status of assemblages.

You can think of your home in this way. The place where you live is clearly a particular place. It is also a gathering of things, memories, stories, and practices. It includes doors and windows, floors and ceilings. It also includes appliances, photos, bookshelves, the food in the fridge and the notes on the door. All of these things make it a unique place – a unique assemblage. And yet it is different every day. The food gets eaten and replaced. The notes on the fridge door change. Even the wood that forms the floors, doors, and window frames is slowly eroding. Occasionally it is replaced. It is also the case that many of the parts that make up your home could be removed and used in another home. Things such as doors and fridges tend to be mass-produced. But still it is the assemblage that is your place – your home. It is a discrete thing that is made up from the relation between parts that are always changing. All places can be thought of in this way.⁸³

In place theory, assemblage appears in Kim Dovey’s work, specifically in his book *Becoming Places* (2010). Here, Dovey illustrates aspects of DeLanda’s

82. Ibid.

83. Cresswell, *Place: an introduction*, p. 53.

theory, which is constructed through a series of scales of place (neighbourhood, city, nation, etc.).

For instance, a street is not a thing, nor is it just a collection of discrete things. The buildings, trees, cars, sidewalks, goods, people, signs, etc. all come together to become a street, but it is the connections between them that makes it an assemblage or a place. It is the relations of buildings-sidewalks-roadway; the flows of traffic, people and goods; the interconnections of public to private space, and of this street to the city, that makes it a “street” and distinguishes it from other place assemblages such as parks, plazas, freeways, shopping malls and marketplaces. Within this assemblage the sidewalk is nothing more than a further assemblage of connections between things and practices. The assemblage is also dynamic – trees and people grow and die, buildings are constructed and demolished. It is the flows of life, traffic, goods and money that give the street its intensity and its sense of place. All places are assemblages.⁸⁴

Dovey’s book is itself an assemblage of chapters of different kinds, organised in two parts. The first part discusses ideas and theories about place and becoming; the second part presents a series of case studies, often undertaken with co-authors as parts of different research projects. Dovey says something very interesting about the conceptual framework and the methodology of *Becoming Places*:

The chapters of this book are not designed to be read in any particular order; although the case studies of Part II often utilize the concepts from Part I: a series of chapters sketching ideas and theories about place and becoming. Theories are both the beginning and the end of the research: they are the conceptual tools and methods one uses, consciously or not, to analyse and understand the world. Theories are all too often critiqued according to their consistency with other theories. I judge concepts and ideas on the basis of what they enable us to do and see, and how they enable us to analyse and to think; [...]. My interests are in thinking sideways across the gaps between disciplinary paradigms and outside the confines of traditional formalist, spatial and social critique. All place research is interdisciplinary.⁸⁵

84. Dovey, *Becoming Places*, p. 16.

85. *Ibid*, p. 6-7.

Dovey's work represents a systematic effort to introduce a new ontology into place theory, to support the impact and potential of assemblage theory. For some scholars, though, assemblage theory is a problematic approach, because, despite having been introduced in various disciplines, most of the research in this field has lost all the complexity of Deleuze's ontology.⁸⁶ However, it may be said that many scholars, researchers and artists have embraced this theory to raise new questions and to challenge and articulate common notions we have about place.

1.5 Assemblage theory in photography

There is a range of influential research in the field of photography that could be positioned within the assemblage theory approach. Two of these are theoretical research projects that explore photography and place through a historical and critical approach: *Place*, by artists Tacita Dean and Jeremy Millar; and *Land Matters*, by academic and researcher Liz Wells. Wells is Professor in Photographic Culture at Plymouth University. A distinguished writer, curator and critic, she has written extensively on the nature of photographic seeing and theories of photography. Of particular interest for the discourse around assemblage theory is Wells' book *Land Matters: Landscape Photography, Culture and Identity*. This book, at its broadest level, evaluates the engagement of photographers with the subject of landscape and is inspired by the increasing significance of this theme within photography since the 1990s.

Land Matters is a play on words: taken rhetorically, it means that land is important; taken literally the phrase refers to business relating to land. It also refers to the "matter" or substance of land, to soil chemistry. This book is concerned with ways in which photographers engage

86. See Muminovic, 'Places as Assemblages: Paradigm Shift or Fashionable Nonsense?'; see also DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity*.



25.a



25.b



25.c



25.d

Fig. 25

Images from Liz Wells, *Land Matters. Landscape, Photography, Culture and Identity*.

25.a: Wright Morris, 'Haystack', near Norfolk, Nebraska, 1947.

25.b: Kilburn Brothers, 'Cloud's Rest', Yosemite, California (active ca. 1865-1890).

25.c: Terry Evans, 'Field Museum, Echinacea, 1899', 2001, from the series Prairie Specimens.

25.d: Lars Tunbjörk, 'Öland', 1991, from the series Landet tom sig (Country Beside Itself).

with issues about land, its representation and idealisation. Representation of land as landscape, whether in romantic or in more topographic modes, reflects and reinforces contemporary political, social and environmental attitudes.⁸⁷

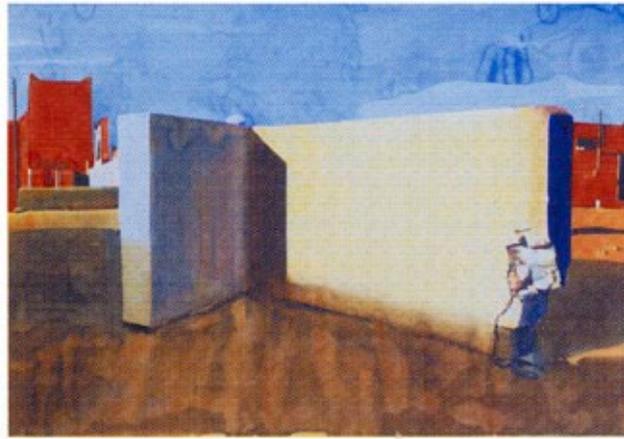
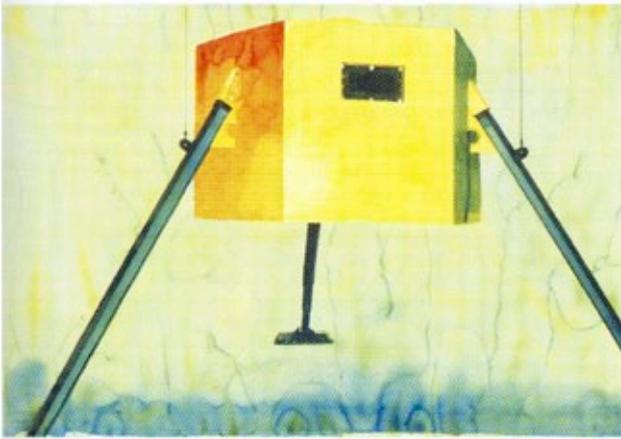
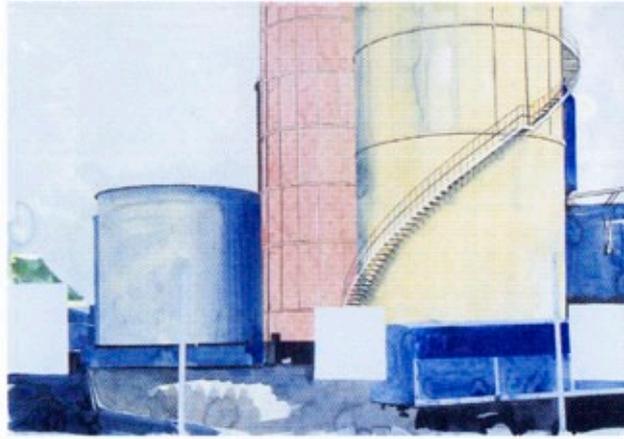
Wells demonstrates how the visual interpretation of land as landscape engages with these attitudes by placing a range of examples of work by photographers working in the United States, Europe, Scandinavia and the Baltic countries within broader art-historical and political concerns (Fig. 25). In this way, she opens up interdisciplinary questions and reflections, creating interesting conceptual connections between art practice and the contemporary debate about geography. The book is organised into six chapters; each chapter is very complex and highly structured and can be read independently from the others.

These concerns run through each substantive chapter, which consider American settlement, the evolution of the American West, the complex conceptualisation of the rural in the UK and the articulation of national identity through landscape in northern Europe. These are framed by a theory-based introduction and a conclusion, which considers landscape photography in relation to the passage of space and time. Overall the result is engaging and informative, and there is a definite sense that each chapter is also a book in its own right. As Philip Hatfield, reviewing the book, notes:

The theoretical frameworks deployed in *Land Matters* will be unsurprising to many cultural geographers given that the politics and meaning of landscape have been explored extensively by geographers, often through the visual mode. Indeed, the debt of *Land Matters* to cultural geography is notable, with the works of Doreen Massey, David Matless, James Ryan and others playing a significant role in the framing of Wells' arguments. As such, while the book may not surprise many geographers, it does attest to the value cultural geography adds to those disciplines with which it intersects.⁸⁸

87. Liz Wells, *Land Matters* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011), p. 1.

88. Philip Hatfield, Review, *Land Matters*, *Cultural Geographies*, 19.4 (2012).



26.a 26.b

26.c 26.d

26.e 26.f

Fig. 26

Yvan Salomone, *Port views*. 26.a: 0036. 3. 1099 (blocs_bloc), 1999; 26.b: 0362. 2. 0600 (colimassive), 2000; 26.c: 0392. 5. 0301 (zwangsideen); 26.d: 0397. 2. 0501 (stimmestumm), 2001; 26.e: 0357. 4. 0400 (portbaniger), 2000; 26.f: 0375. 1. 1100 (cyndycrawfo), 2000. In: Dean, Millar (edited by), *Place*

Land Matters is a complex, dense and unusual academic book about contemporary photographic culture that opens up new possibilities for visual critique, and whose structure fits that of a Deleuzian assemblage.

An earlier book, *Place*, by the artist Tacita Dean and the artist, curator and writer Jeremy Millar, aims at similar goals, even if it is much less theoretically complex than Wells' work: the book presents an assemblage of work by artists who use art to puzzle out the complicated ways in which place can shape and affect us. Arranged into arbitrary themed chapters (called 'rooms'), it reflects a wide variety of artistic positions and practices (Fig. 26, 27).

Some artists find inspiration in the heterogeneity of the crowded city street, while others celebrate the wilds of nature as a counter to urban life. Some present imagined or fantastic worlds of their own invention, or explore the way place is often a creation of the mind. Others investigate the deep marks that myth and history can leave on the land, or consider how place can be used as a form of political control. Territorial divisions demarcating one place from another, often with terrible consequences, are the chosen subject-matter of many artists; others prefer to look at itinerant wanderers with no claims on the earth, or to focus on anonymous non-places that lack any real identity of their own.⁸⁹

The book itself is difficult to frame within a precise context: it is presented as an 'exhibition in a book', questioning place from an artistic perspective. Even if it definitely (and obviously) does not include all the artists who are engaging with the idea of place, it is an interesting survey that recognises the importance of place in contemporary society and in contemporary art practice.

One of the artists mentioned in Chapter (or Room) Eight, 'Heterotopias and Non-Places' is the American photographer Allan Sekula. Sekula was a renowned photographer, theorist, historian of photography and writer. His work frequently focused on wider economic systems, or 'the imaginary and material geographies of the advanced capitalist world'.

89. Tacita Dean, Jeremy Millar, *Place* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2005), text on the cover strip.



From Project for Yokohama

WORKING TITLES 3/31/01 and 6/16/01

No Subs!
Irrational Exuberance (Tsukiji)

WORKING NOTES 3/31/01

The working idea: move between the fish market at Tsukiji, the US naval base and the fisheries high school at Yokosuka, and Frank Gehry's "Fish Dance" restaurant in Kobe. At the Yokohama Archives of History, consider ukiyo-e prints depicting the American naval arrival in the 1850s.

From email to Shinji Kohmoto, 3/31/01:

...among the "external" materials for the vitrine at the history archives would be these:

Japanese and English editions of *Kami Kosen* (*The Factory Ship*) by Takiji Kobayashi. I need two copies of the English edition (U. of Tokyo Press, 1973) to show both the cover and the very moving end-paper portrait of Kobayashi. I assume the Tsukiji police station where he was beaten to death in 1933 was destroyed in the fire bombings and has since been rebuilt or relocated, but my plan for now is to see if it can be filmed or photographed in an evocative way....

Also, the best selling manga *On War* by Yoshinori Kobayashi. Can we get a publicity photograph of the author? Suppose we approach his publisher, saying I am writing a review of his book, which in a sense is true? I am interested in the physiognomic differences between the two men, the gaunt novelist and the carbonist-dandy. What I am imagining here is a dialogue between the dead leftist from the 30s and the contemporary rightist. How is the collision of the US submarine with the Japanese fisheries training ship to be read?

PRAYER FOR THE AMERICANS AND THEIR ALLIES 6/16/01

The sky will be our shield
The market will never fall
The icecaps will never melt
And the sea will never be exhausted



From Project for Yokohama

From Notebook 5/31/01

Frank Gehry's debt to Japan, *Sushi architecture*: It's not the "vitalism" of the fish (see Kurt Foster on Gehry), but the impeccable decorative arrangement of morsels. *Culinary architecture*.

Japanese transformations:

morsel, "building block"
[from sea to Tsukiji, from Tsukiji to your mouth]
"Nature" --{
cartoon, "super-fat"
[subs in toyland]

The *Ehime Maru* outwitted by submarine: the knife ship. But Gehry's *Fish Dance* seems so innocent and playful, cartoon-like: a gift from the Good American, leaping upward playfully.

From Notebook 6/5/01

W observes that everyone in Japan belongs to the same social class.
X confesses to "sking" Yoshinori Kobayashi's right-wing manga *On War*.
Y remarks of Takiji Kobayashi: "No one is interested in the proletarian novel now."
Z comments that there is now no useful distinction to be made between the right and the left.

The American sonar specialist laments: "I miss the Cold War. I didn't want it to end."

Fig. 27

Allan Sekula, from *Project for Yokohama*, 2001. In Dean, Millar (edited by), *Place*

Since the early 1970s, the American artist Allan Sekula has had an enormous influence upon the development of a critically engaged photographic practice, through both his writings and his often large-scale projects that combine photographs and written materials. Contrary to its popular status as a medium of simple veracity, Sekula considers photography a “fragmentary and incomplete utterance, that is reliant upon its context to provide social significance”. [...] More recently, Sekula has explored a fascination with the sea, and its often missing place in global capitalism. His epic project *Fish Story* (1989-1995) explored the movement of manufactured goods in container ships, the hidden bulk of global exchange in a time that speaks more often of electronic instantaneity and the collapse of space. In an extraordinary collection of photographs and texts, Sekula revealed instead the slow and massive movements that lay foundations of global economics, and the dissolution of place aboard these hulks of ships, most often registered in small countries with few regulations and run by a crew that seldom shares a language.⁹⁰

The themes and aims of projects like *Fish Story*, *Geography Lesson*, *Canadian Notes* and *Sketch For A Geography Lesson* challenged the dominant climate of postmodern theory and practice of the late 1980s and early 1990s. A more recent work, *Project for Yokohama* (which, like most of Sekula’s projects, combines images and texts) has all the characteristics and specific aspects of an assemblage (Fig. 27). Here, Sekula gathered various elements, with no apparent relationship, into a unique and new whole, that brings new meaning to the way one can look at the world: the fish market at Tsukiji, the US naval base and Misaki Fisheries High School at Yokosuka and a Frank Gehry-designed fish restaurant in Kobe are assembled ‘with an intelligence and delicacy not dissimilar from the sushi chefs he found’.⁹¹ This assemblage reveals the sea as a resource for both economic and military power.

90. *Ibid.*, p. 164.

91. *Ibid.*

1.6 New thinking in contemporary debates about place

The question of whether assemblage theory introduces a new ontology into place theory is still a subject of discussion; it's a common opinion among researchers that assemblage theory does offer a different approach to place, in relation to phenomenology. However, it is not a new approach that will abolish the understanding of place as a phenomenon emerging from the interaction between people and the built environment: its major contribution seems to be the practical application of theory to analysis and design.

Recently, geographers, artists and writers have attempted to engage with places in a new way, at the intersection of different theories that are informed by both phenomenology and assemblage theory, trying to address the specificity of places in all their complexity.

These authors take a place, usually quite small in scale, and use a number of creative strategies to present the place to the reader as an entanglement of diverse elements and strands using stories of people and things to recreate what Doreen Massey has called the “throwntogetherness” of place.⁹²

An example of this re-invigorated place writing is a project by Patricia L. Price, Professor of Geography at Florida International University. From her initial field research in Mexico, in the book *Dry Places* (Fig. 28, 29) she extended her focus to the border between Mexico and the United States. At beginning, she explains how the background for her research derives from her long interest and field experience in Mexico and her familiar roots in West Texas, and a lifelong connection to that dry place:

Growing up in the dark, cold, and humid Pacific Northwest, yet visiting my grandparents often as a child, then living for six years in Mexico as a young adult, I often wondered about the relationship between place and identity. How is this relationship established? How is it maintained? How does it vary with the physical characteristics of the land, and with our journey across its surface? How do we become of, not just on, the land, or do we ever really do so?⁹³

92. Cresswell, *Place: an introduction*, p. 56.

93. Patricia L. Price, *Dry Places* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), p. ix.

In crafting her book in response to those questions, Price approached the place through a number of different narratives, or stories, about it. She does not claim to be describing, in great detail, a place that exists out there, that is just waiting to be found and described. Rather, she insists on the power of gathering different types of narrative in bringing a place into being, through storytelling.⁹⁴

Narratives about people's places in places continuously materialize the entity we call place. In its materialization, however, there are conflicts, silences, exclusions. Tales are retold and their meanings wobble and shift over time. Multiple claims are made. Some stories are deemed heretical. The resulting dislocations, discontinuities, and disjunctures work to continually destabilize that which appears to be stable: a unitary, univocal place.⁹⁵

Focusing on this process of storytelling, she counterposes stories such as those accounts of manifest destiny told by the agents of Anglo-American expansionism with other less dominant stories, that contest claims to the landscape of the American Southwest. The writing strategy is brave and eclectic: in Chapter 4 she includes discussion of the current academic interdisciplinary debate (referring to philosophers such as Marc Augé, the theologian Belden Lane, the geographer Edward Casey and the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai); Chapter 6 is illustrated with photographs; in Chapter 7 she includes some of her own storytelling through her own creative writing practice, poetry.

Grace

(for my grandparents, Grace and Shorty Price)

I promise myself that today I will drive to Pecos

Sweep the graves clean,

pass by their old house, and try to picture Grace

behind the counter at the five-and-dime, Grace

picking cotton and knowing all about that thorn, Grace

with the Most Beautiful Baby of 1939.

94. See Cresswell, *Place: an Introduction*, p. 57.

95. Price, *Dry Places*, p. 4.

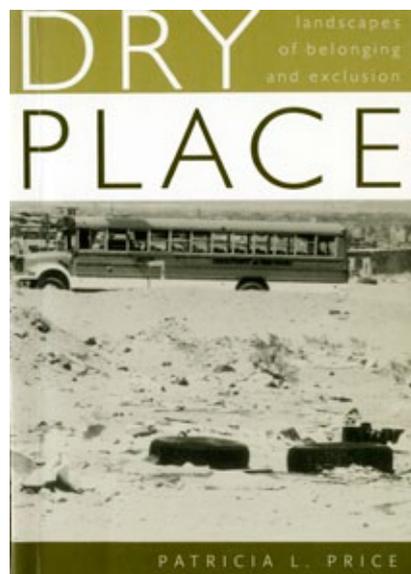
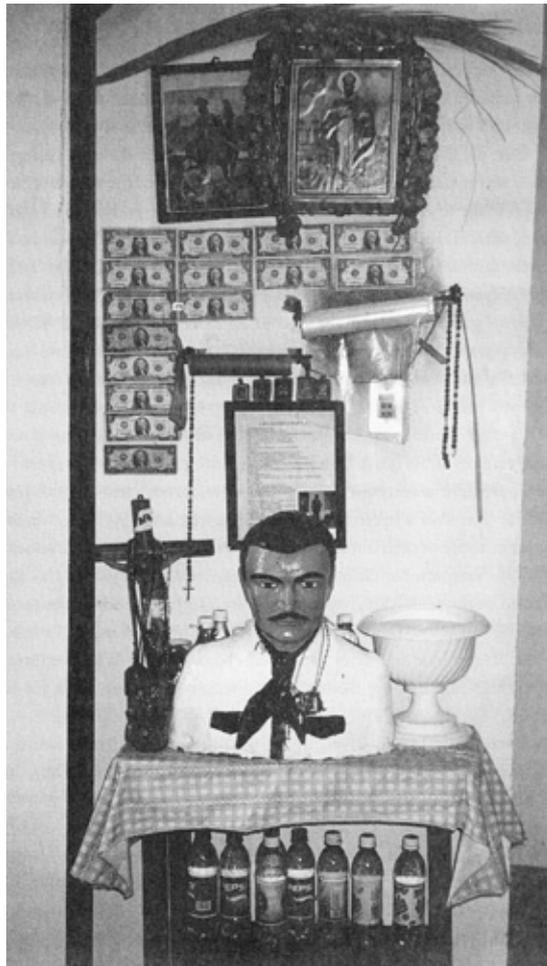


Fig. 28

*Shrine to Jesús Malverde, Culiacán, Mexico. From Patricia L. Price, *Dry Place: Landscapes of Belonging and Exclusion*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004*

Fig. 29

*Patricia L. Price, *Dry Place: Landscapes of Belonging and Exclusion*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004*

But
Mars rotates slowly overhead, an orange toy blinking in the night as
the wind blows a fierce gritty curtain across Interstate 10 and
I cannot see but drive blindly
Away.⁹⁶

Another example of this kind of approach is anthropologist Laura A. Ogden's account of the Florida Everglades, *Swamplife: People, Gators, and Mangroves Entangled in the Everglades* (Fig. 30, 31, 32). Drawing on a decade of fieldwork with hunters in the Everglades, Ogden explores the lives and labours of people, animals, and plants in the delicate and tenacious ecosystem of the Florida Everglades. Her book is an interesting insight into the hidden life of the Everglades and into the way in which an appreciation of oppositional culture and social class operates in the contemporary understanding of wilderness in the United States. As Ogden indicates in her first chapter, her goal is 'to understand the processes by which [gladesmen's] history and experiences [...] became marginalized, illegal, and largely forgotten'⁹⁷ and to restore those gladesmen to the story. Matthew C. Godfrey, reviewing Ogden's book, writes that

Ogden approaches the book from an anthropological view, using what she calls "landscape ethnography" to explore "the ways in which our relations with non-humans produce what it means to be human" (p. 28, emphasis in the original). She discusses several different models and tropes that she feels illuminate gladesmen's interactions with the environment, particularly the rhizome, a spatial philosophy promulgated by French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. The rhizome emphasizes the importance of interaction and relationships between material, semiotic, human, and nonhuman worlds in the formation of a landscape, providing a compass for understanding the ways that humans encounter landscapes and that landscapes experience the human presence. Using the rhizome concept, Ogden concludes that landscapes – and the Everglades in particular – "are

96. Ibid., p. 175.

97. Laura A. Ogden, *Swamplife: People, Gators, and Mangroves Entangled in the Everglades* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), p.3.

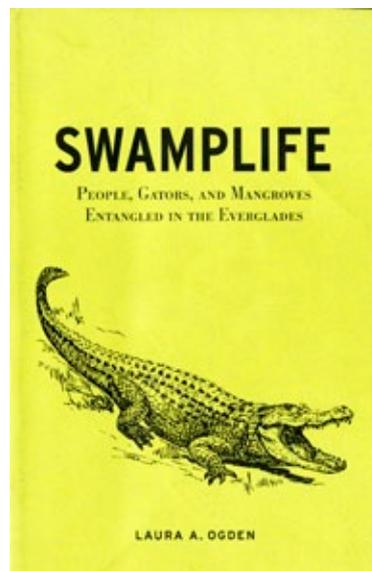
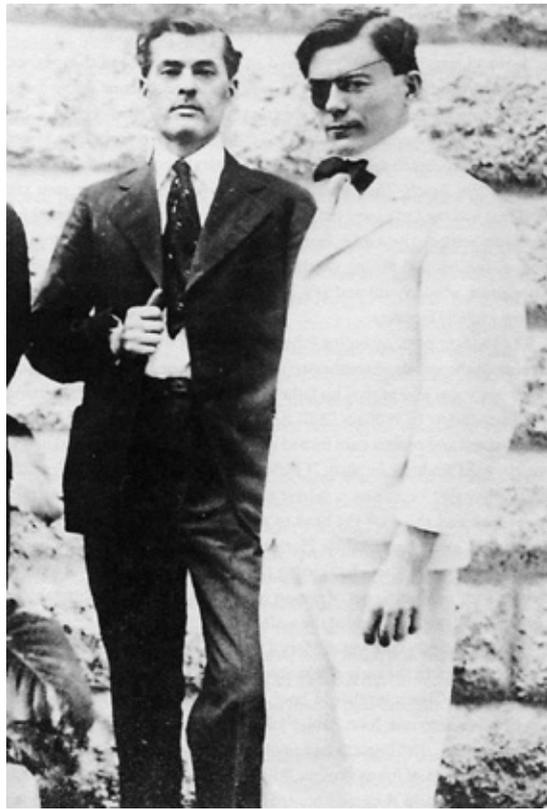


Fig. 30

John Ashley (right) with unidentified bystander. Photograph courtesy of the Fort Lauderdale Historical Society; from Laura A. Ogden, *Swamplife: People, Gators, and Mangroves Entangled in the Everglades*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011

Fig. 31

Laura A. Ogden, *Swamplife: People, Gators, and Mangroves Entangled in the Everglades*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011

assemblages constituted by humans and nonhumans, material and semiotic processes, histories both real and partially remembered”.⁹⁸

Ogden therefore uses the conceptual structures of assemblage theory; however, at the beginning of her book she also states that ‘The story of gladesmen in the Everglades is a story I tell because it is personal’, thus also acknowledging a phenomenological significance for her research. In the book, Ogden intersperses her writings with maps and photographs, the latter being a combination of images from historical archives, vintage postcards, and new photographic surveys made by the photographer Deborah Mitchell, who collaborated on the project.

Within the specific field of photography, two examples are relevant here. The first is an illustrated essay by writer David Chandler, *Dispatches from the Littoral: Notes on Landscape, Place, Memory and Belonging*.⁹⁹ The second is a photo-book by photographer Guido Guidi, *La figura dell’Orante. Notes for a lesson 1*, published within the *Lugo Land* book series.¹⁰⁰

In *Dispatches from the Littoral*, Chandler reflects on a major change in his life: after living all his life in the city, he accepted a job as Professor of Photography at Plymouth University and relocated to a small village of 1,400 inhabitants, St. Germans, in east Cornwall. In a way similar to Frank Gohlke’s *Measure of Emptiness*,¹⁰¹ Chandler’s move to a completely new place inspired a detailed consideration of landscape, place, memory and belonging.

98. Matthew C. Godfrey, Review of Laura A. Ogden, *Swamplife: People, Gators, and Mangroves Entangled in the Everglades, H-Environment, H-Net Reviews* (October, 2011), available at: <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=33782> [accessed 13 January 2020]

99. David Chandler, ‘Notes on Landscape, Place, Memory and Belonging’, presented at the symposium *Everywhere and Nowhere: New Photographic Encounters with Place, Space and Dislocation*, Plymouth University, 4/5 December, 2013.

100. See p. 173, Chapter 3.3 ‘The *Lugo Land* book series and educational programme’

101. See p. 67.



Fig. 32

*Two men fire-hunting for alligators from a dugout canoe, 1906. Photograph by Julian Dimock, printed by permission of the American Museum of Natural History. From Laura A. Ogden, *Swamplife: People, Gators, and Mangroves Entangled in the Everglades*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011*

Sadly, things often become more important to us just as we begin to feel we are losing them. The idea of *place*, for example, has become a pre-occupation of contemporary culture during a time when places have seemed increasingly difficult to distinguish and when local distinctiveness has begun to appear as a term of resistance. If place suggests something specific, and well defined, then we might be tempted to understand it as being in counterpoint to the processes of globalization and in contrast to our generalized language of instability and transition – shifting boundaries, mass migration, climate change. But, if place now seems to offer something fixed and grounded, and perhaps suggests the possibility of meaning itself when set against the hollow, market-driven rhetoric and ephemeral interests of the media, the truth is that place offers no such certainty; the idea of place has always been opaque, it lacks definition, lacks form, and, as an ever-changing entity, as a process that is always evolving, it can't be easily discovered or described.

[...] Nevertheless, as I write this essay I feel out of place. Having lived most of my life in and around cities, I have recently moved to a completely new landscape, to a largely rural environment in the south west of England. In the collective memory and imagination, the peninsula of Cornwall that is now my home is dominated by a dramatic coastal topography that is ancient and mythic. The landscape here retains an image of being untamed, still wild and still gripped by elemental exchanges between human existence and the powerful forces of nature, something that seems bound up with a fierce regional identity.¹⁰²

Part of this text was first published in 2011 as an essay in the catalogue for the group show *Transformed Land*,¹⁰³ organized by Fondation Calouste Gulbenkian in Paris. Later, Chandler presented it in a much more complex way, as an illustrated keynote lecture at the 2013 symposium *Everywhere and Nowhere: New Photographic Encounters with Place, Space and Dislocation*, at Plymouth University. On this occasion, Chandler presented it in the University's auditorium as a public reading. The reading of the text was accompanied by the projection of images that appeared at specific times, creating a parallel narrative.

102. David Chandler, 'Notes on Landscape, Place, Memory and Belonging'.

103. *Terre Transformée - Transformed Land*, ed. by Sergio Mah (Lisbon: Fondation Calouste Gulbenkian, 2011).

Conceived as a collection of sparse notes, the text combines short stories about the author's personal experience (relocating, the descriptions of walks in the new landscape, random encounters with people and things) with philosophical and historical reflections, or reflections on works of art and literature. The images, interspersed with the text, consist of found images, photos taken from old archives, postcards, images of paintings, covers of books, and snapshots taken by the author himself (Fig. 33). The two narratives, intertwined with each other, create a unique, elegant, fluid and engaging new whole through which Chandler explores his themes.

Chandler's work could be considered a phenomenological assemblage, a term that may also be used for a recent work by Guido Guidi, *La figura dell'Orante*.¹⁰⁴ Guidi was mentioned earlier among those photographers whose approach could be considered purely phenomenological, but in the book *La figura dell'Orante* Guidi builds a more experimental kind of narrative. A key figure in European photography, Guidi has spent the last three decades teaching and sharing his knowledge of photography in Italian universities: in this book he attempts to organise and structure some of his renowned photographic lectures according to the hybrid approach that has been discussed here.

La figura dell'Orante. Notes for a Lesson 1 is a meditation on the silent language of visual communication, inspired by (as the title of the book suggests) the famous mosaic of the Basilica of Sant'Apollinare in Classe, between Ravenna (where Guidi teaches), and Cesena (where he lives). Analysing the visual structure of the image represented in the mosaic, Guidi suggests visual analogies and relationships between this figure and other images: the work of well-known photographers, other Italian old master paintings, vernacular photography, his own work and his sketchbooks (Fig. 34, 35), pictures from his family album,

104. Guido Guidi, *La figura dell'Orante* (Lugo: Edizioni del Bradipo, *Lugo Land* series, 2012).



Fig. 34

© Guido Guidi, assemblage of digital files, 2012

From *La figura dell'Orante*, Lugo (RA): Edizioni del Bradipo, 2012

Courtesy Lugo Land - Fotografia e territorio

and self-portraits. All the images that Guidi decides to combine are re-photographed by the author with a ten-eight camera, and assembled as vintage 8x10 pictures in order to create the main sequence of the book. After this comes an enigmatic grid, over two pages, of eighteen smaller images taken with a digital camera (Fig. 33). The book is completed with two texts: the first, *Notes for a Lesson*, written by Guidi himself, opens the book; the other text, placed at the very end of the book *Notes from a Lesson*, is written by one of his former students (now an established photographic historian), Antonello Frongia. This complex assemblage creates a stimulating visual imaginary, sometimes ironic, sometimes mysterious and ambiguous, but always unpredictable and visually engaging.

1.7 Lugo as a phenomenological assemblage

This new approach, developed in cultural geography and described in the previous paragraph, which combines a phenomenological approach to place with poststructuralism and assemblage theory, it is marked by an increased willingness to engage in creative practices, and it has deeply informed my approach to research.

In the attempt to give an account of the town of Lugo in the lowlands of Romagna, approaching it from the discipline of photography, this research inherits from the phenomenological approach the intention to explore the meaning of this land to me, investigating issues related to identity, memory and belonging. To do so, I will present this place as an entanglement of diverse elements, telling a number of photographic stories of different kinds (both personal/artistic and historical/curatorial), in a way that draws much from assemblage theory. From a phenomenological perspective, I am interested in Lugo because it is a place that belongs to my personal story. It is the place where I was born and grew

H. Gamper: la sassata è più facile di uno sparo o di una coltellata ...
P. Handke: probabilmente è ancora libera, è una zona franca ...

P. Handke, Intervista sulla scrittura

A scuola ho appreso con emozione che l'abside di S. Apollinare in Classe è orientata verso Est.

In seguito ho scoperto che nell'arcosolio della catacomba di Priscilla le braccia dell'orante, alzate ad arco, formano un cannocchiale che raccoglie e alza il nostro sguardo verso un intangibile vuoto.

Nella battaglia con Amalec, Mosè alza le mani per assicurare la vittoria: "Le mani di Mosè erano stanche, allora presero una pietra e gliela posero sotto. Egli vi sedè sopra, mentre Aronne e Ur gli sostenevano le mani ... così che le sue mani rimasero ferme fino al tramonto del sole".

In una fotografia di Timothy H. O'Sullivan un uomo, seduto su di un sasso lungo il greto di un fiume, sembra guardare il recedere della luce sulla parete della montagna di fronte.

Le fotografie di Marte e della Luna, riprese dalle sonde spaziali, ci mostrano luoghi pieni di sassi.

E' bello lanciare un sasso nel vuoto.

"Sono belli i sassi" dice il "Matto" Franco Franchi, tenendo in mano un sasso, nel film Amarcord.

Il monello, nel Film di Chaplin, dopo aver lanciato un sasso nasconde la propria mano.

Alla fine degli anni sessanta ho iniziato a fotografare gli amici, le case, i luoghi dove sono nato ..., dall'inverno del 1983, dopo essermi costruito una rudimentale camera per pellicole 8x10 pollici, ho lavorato ad alcuni nuovi progetti: la via Emilia, via delle Industrie a Marghera, una cava del Monte Grappa, Gibellina ... una cava di carbone vicino a Graz Credo che non avrei iniziato nessuno di questi lavori, se lì non avessi trovato almeno un sasso.

PRINCE, BOLOGNA

14

"Rivista" - Bolognese 1993

V501 - KALLIK

Fig. 35

© Guido Guidi, *Ronta*, 1993, from *La figura dell'Orante*, Lugo (RA): Edizioni del Bradipo, 2012
Courtesy Lugo Land - Fotografia e territorio

up, and that I feel attached to. Moreover, my artistic interest in this place has been strongly inspired by a 1982 photograph of the main square of Lugo by Olivo Barbieri, from the project *Viaggio in Italia* (Fig. 51 p. 154). Of all the significant images in the project, Barbieri's image struck me in a completely unique way: it represented a place (Piazza dei Martiri, surrounded by the architecture of the Pavaglione - Fig. 2 p. 26) that was extremely familiar to me, and to which I connected different memories of childhood (in 1982, when Barbieri took the picture, I was six years old). And yet, when I saw that image in 2001, at the beginning of my photographic career, it was as if I was seeing that place and that architecture for the first time. This prompted me to reflect deeply on the transformative and cognitive power of photography, and on its ability to regenerate and rediscover places, things and people that are only apparently familiar.

In relation to assemblage theory, a number of ideas from the work of Deleuze and Guattari, particularly their notion of the rhizome, have shaped my approach to research. For Deleuze and Guattari, the rhizome is a metaphor for the irrational logic of world-making processes, as well as a kind of methodology for producing philosophy (research and writing). As anthropologist Laura A. Ogden states:

Deleuze and Guattari's spatial philosophy offers a way of theorizing landscapes as complex and changing assemblages of relations that dissolve and displace the boundaries of nature and culture. Instead of seeing place or landscape as sites that beckon, contain, and are transformed by the human world, Deleuze and Guattari insist that the world's properties (material, semiotic, human, and nonhuman) come into being only through their relations. There is no finality to these relations of becoming. Instead there are only temporary sites of assemblage.¹⁰⁵

The concept of the rhizome as a global logic and writing machine is critical

105. Ogden, *Swamplife: People, Gators, and Mangroves Entangled in the Everglades*, p.29.

to the construction of this research, which combines different visual stories about Lugo and presents them as a unique whole, or an assemblage. An assemblage is a unique whole in which properties emerge from the interactions between parts. However, assemblages are distinct from organic structures which are also assembled from parts but depend on each part in order to exist: in an organic structure, if you take away a constituent part, the structure would cease to exist in a recognizable way. With an assemblage, constituent parts can be removed and replaced. The parts can then enter other assemblages and contribute to new 'unique wholes'. The way in which parts are combined in an assemblage are not structurally necessary or pre-ordained. Their combination is contingent.¹⁰⁶

Similarly, the four photographic series of my assemblage are not meant to be read (or looked at) in any particular order, and they are also meant to be autonomous and independent from each other. They do not claim to be a complete and comprehensive research project, and do not suggest an idea of place as closed or finished. However, they intersect and relate to each other, and together they contribute to the making of a unique whole and a coherent discourse.

My research does not attempt to give a complete picture of this town/place/land; instead it revels in the indeterminacy of place, and in some of the universal feelings and perceptions that it arouses as an idea. It aims to build a previously unpublished and arbitrary visual map of Lugo, adding a historical dimension to what Luigi Ghirri defines as the *personal map* of each photographer. The idea of a visual map is very interesting for this research, and is inspired by Ghirri's thoughts. Speaking of a photographic sense of project, Ghirri states that the development of research must not discard anything a priori, and should be open to the unexpected. He sees it as a zigzag path, rather than a precise straight line.

106. For an in-depth study of the integration of assemblage theory into place research, see Cresswell, *Place*; Manuel DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory And Social Complexity*; Dovey, *Becoming Places*.

This process of going in a zigzag, starting to trace routes, makes you discover that moving within an environment, and trying to establish a relationship with it, even using a camera, can mean looking at a set of vast problems. Then the line begins to take on the appearance of a real chart. It becomes a map: one starts with a straight line and ends up finding oneself on a map, made up of billions of tiny signs that connect to each other and build a possible horizon.¹⁰⁷

In this chapter I have framed the theoretical context. It is now appropriate to introduce the cultural context to which this study refers. This research is framed in the specific context of Italian photography which, since the 1980s, has focused on the landscape of the Italian provinces.

It is in the relationship with places, with a careful, continuous and tireless gaze on them, that Italian photography, parallel to the discovery and investigation of the landscape, has defined, since the 1980s, its own aesthetic and cultural identity, both as a language and as a practice. This new identity takes shape around the Italian provinces, investigating spaces outside the usual trajectories and not yet consumed by the gaze, by the media and by mass tourism. To the photographers, these places appeared as a reservoir of authenticity in order to re-establish the relationship between man and the environment.¹⁰⁸

For this reason, as a conceptual starting point for my research I have chosen the key project of this particular moment, *Viaggio in Italia*. This project is considered as an artistic watershed by critics,¹⁰⁹ as discussed above. It defines a geography of practitioners working on similar issues that were new at that time: the absences and the gaps in the landscape, the edges of the cities and the limits of the countryside, which had been, at least from the

107. Luigi Ghirri, *Lezioni di fotografia* (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2010), pp. 28-29.

108. Matteo Balduzzi, 'Narrazioni Collettive dello spazio pubblico', in: *Luogo e identità nella fotografia italiana contemporanea*, ed. by Roberta Valtorta (Torino: Einaudi, 2013), p. 257.

109. See *Racconti dal paesaggio 1984-2004. A vent'anni da Viaggio in Italia*, curated by Roberta Valtorta (Cinisello Balsamo: Museo di Fotografia Contemporanea, 2004). See also *Luogo e identità nella fotografia italiana contemporanea*, ed. by Roberta Valtorta (Torino: Einaudi, 2013).

point of view of photographic representation, marginalised.¹¹⁰ For the purposes of this research, it will make sense to start from here, if only because the gestation and birth of *Viaggio in Italia*, conceived by Luigi Ghirri, are contemporary with those of assemblage theory, conceived by Deleuze and Guattari (both were conceived between the late 1970s and early 1980s). A few years ago, the philosopher Manuel DeLanda articulated the theory of assemblage, which is now alive in contemporary debate.¹¹¹ Similarly, my research is an attempt to re-enact the intellectual context of *Viaggio in Italia* as it engages with this contemporary debate, and to relate it to a specific historical context, that of the lowlands of Romagna. Starting from there, I will move back and forth in time, trying to establish connections and relations with the projects that I will discuss.

In the next chapter I will discuss how *Viaggio in Italia*, that prompted the twentieth-century renaissance in Italian photography and was able to create a dialogue between photography and art in general, intersects with the story of Lugo, in the lowlands of Romagna.

110. See Roberta Valtorta, 'In cerca dei luoghi (non si trattava solo di paesaggio)', in *Luogo e Identità nella fotografia italiana contemporanea*, ed. by R. Valtorta (Torino: Einaudi, 2015).

111. See DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society. Assemblage Theory And Social Complexity*; Cresswell, *Place*; Dovey, *Becoming Places*; Muminovic, 'Places as Assemblages: Paradigm Shift or Fashionable Nonsense?'. See also p. 101, footnote 84 of this dissertation.



Fig. 36

© Vittore Fossati, *Oviglio, Alessandria*, 1981, from *Appunti per una fotografia di paesaggio* (Notes for a landscape photography). In *Viaggio in Italia*, ed. Luigi Ghirri, Gianni Leone and Enzo Velati, Alessandria: Il Quadrante, 1984

Courtesy Museo di Fotografia Contemporanea, Milano-Cinisello Balsamo

2. *Viaggio in Italia. An adventure of thought and gaze*

This chapter provides the cultural context of my research. It describes the development of an influential movement in Italian photography which, since the late 1970s, has defined its own aesthetic and cultural identity in relation to the idea of place. The turning point defining this context is the group project Viaggio in Italia, which gathered together the most important of those photographers who were sharing a new conceptual focus on the Italian landscape. An important photograph by Olivo Barbieri, included in the Viaggio in Italia catalogue, was taken¹ in Lugo in 1982.

2.1 *The Viaggio in Italia project and its impact on Italian photography*

This research is framed by the specific context of Italian photography since the late 1970s, which has defined its own aesthetic and cultural identity in relation to the idea of place. The leading figures in this adventure are Guido Guidi, Luigi Ghirri, Mario Cresci, Gabriele Basilico, Vittore Fossati, Vincenzo Castella and Olivo Barbieri, although, as we will see shortly, there were many other photographers in the wider group practising in this context.

According to critic Roberta Valtorta, these photographers' longstanding interest in the relationship between human beings and the environment not only

1. In Italian, it is more common to say to 'make' a photograph, rather than to 'take' one, thus giving relevance to the creative act. In English, to 'make' and to 'take' are both common expressions: if the first emphasises the creative act, the second suggests a more 'documentary' attitude: taking something that already exists in the real world. This second attitude is more in line with the approach of the photographers of *Viaggio in Italia*, and with my approach to photography.

VIAGGIO IN ITALIA



Il Quadrante

Fig. 37

Viaggio in Italia, ed. Luigi Ghirri, Gianni Leone and Enzo Velati, Alessandria: Il Quadrante, 1984

had a topographical aspect, the ‘measurement’ and ‘description’ of place; it also contributed (and continues to contribute) to the complex definition of Italian cultural identity, which is always in tension with art, culture, nature, and the aggressive economic development introduced by the process of globalisation.²

Interest in these issues is still very much alive, and not only in the context of Italy: this is demonstrated by recent critical discourse and by the growing and somewhat belated international interest in the work of the main exponents of this approach (specifically that of Guido Guidi and Luigi Ghirri).

The critic Paolo Costantini has defined these photographers as ‘linked by a singular cultural affinity in the way of thinking about photography and in revisiting and reinventing a landscape that is ambiguously familiar’.³ This group was never officially established, as other artistic groups had been,⁴ nor has it been specifically defined in the critical literature.⁵ However, nowadays some curators and historians refer to it in a more general way as ‘the Italian school of landscape’.⁶

The turning point that defines this context is the group project *Viaggio in Italia* (Fig. 37), conceived and curated by photographer Luigi Ghirri and realised in 1984, the year in which an exhibition of three hundred photographs was held in Bari, for which a catalogue was published. *Viaggio in Italia* is considered today

2. See *Luogo e identità nella fotografia italiana contemporanea*, ed. Valtorta, back cover.

3. Paolo Costantini, ‘Sugli spazi: oltre il paesaggio’, *Casabella*, 560 (1989), 46.

4. In photography there are a few well-known examples: the f/64 group, founded in 1932 by Edward Weston, Ansel Adams, Imogen Cunningham and others, and the Subjektive Fotografie group founded by Otto Steinart in 1951, and more recently, the Düsseldorf School of Photography.

5. Around the same time, in the late 1970s, the Italian art critic Achille Bonito Oliva coined the term *transavantgarde*, to define a group of artists who revived the focus on figurative art and symbolism, which had been less prominent in art movements after the Second World War, such as Minimalism. The principal *transavantgarde* artists were Sandro Chia, Francesco Clemente, Enzo Cucchi, Nicola de Maria and Mimmo Paladino. Another important example is the Arte Povera movement, originally championed by the leading art critic Germano Celant in 1967, which included internationally recognised artists such as Alighiero Boetti, Jannis Kounellis, Mario and Marisa Merz, Michelangelo Pistoletto and Giovanni Anselmo, among others.

6. During the exhibition *Extraordinary Visions: L'Italia ci Guarda*, (Italy looks at us), at the MAXXI museum in Rome, a series of conferences was organised, one of which was organised by Roberta Valtorta, historian of photography and scientific director of the Museum of Contemporary Photography in Cinisello Balsamo (MI). The title of this conference was: “The Eighties: the Complexity of the “Italian School of Landscape””



Fig. 38

© Mario Cresci, *Stigliano, Potenza*, 1983, from *Basilicata*. In *Viaggio in Italia*, ed. Luigi Ghirri, Gianni Leone and Enzo Velati, Alessandria: Il Quadrante, 1984
Courtesy Museo di Fotografia Contemporanea, Milano-Cinisello Balsamo

as the starting point for the development of Italian contemporary photography: it brought together a generation of photographers who were creating a new cultural atmosphere around photography in Italy. They shared a new and intense focus on the landscape, turning their gaze to the poetics of everyday places and to the poetry and potential of the vernacular landscape. Their common aim was to redefine and actualise the relationship between 'place' and 'identity', in their attempt to avoid the enduring stereotypes of the Italian landscape.

Twenty photographers from different generations participated in *Viaggio in Italia*: Olivo Barbieri, Gabriele Basilico, Gianantonio Battistella, Vincenzo Castella, Ermanno Cavazzuti, Giovanni Chiaramonte, Mario Cresci (Fig. 38), Vittore Fossati (Fig. 36), Carlo Garzia, Luigi Ghirri (Fig. 40), Guido Guidi (Fig. 39), Shelley Hill, Mimmo Jodice, Gianni Leone, Claude Nori, Roberto Salbitani (who, however, withdrew from the project shortly before its realisation), Umberto Sartorello, Mario Tinelli, Ernesto Tuliozi, Fulvio Ventura and Cuchi White (Fig. 41). The twenty-first 'traveller' was the writer Gianni Celati (recruited by Ghirri, and with whom he had undertaken a fruitful intellectual partnership). Celati, travelling with the photographers, amassed a huge number of notes that would eventually be given definitive shape in the text 'Verso la foce: reportage per un amico fotografo' (Towards the mouth of the river: report for a photographer friend) which was published in the exhibition catalogue.

By the time the project took form, some of these photographers had already developed their artistic language and published important books; others were proving to be some of the most interesting new Italian figures in the medium, and, together with the earlier practitioners, they became important names in Italian photography (others then took different paths, and even abandoned the medium shortly after this). However, they all helped to create a new cultural atmosphere around photography, sharing a new and intense focus on the landscape.



Fig. 39

© Guido Guidi, *Pomposa, Ferrara*, 1980. In *Viaggio in Italia*, ed. Luigi Ghirri, Courtesy Museo di Fotografia Contemporanea, Milano-Cinisello Balsamo

The deep bond between “landscape” and “journey” (between physically crossing the landscape, the mental path of the journey, and searching for a new approach in photography) is presented in *Viaggio in Italia* in a simple and comprehensive manner. The journey, however – and this was the new approach during those years – does not involve travelling to far and exotic places, or elaborating sensational, programmatically original, intentionally creative forms of photography. On the contrary, the concept of travelling is released from the traditional and – we could say – conformist tendency to search for what is different and risky, turning instead to everyday life, rich in banal situations which are actually not that banal.⁷

A sort of manifesto, on the cover of the catalogue, explains how *Viaggio in Italia*

[...] was born out of the need to make a journey in the newness of Italian photography, and, in particular, to see how a new generation of photographers, neglecting the mythology of exotic trips, sensational reporting, formalistic analysis and spurious, forced creativity, have instead turned their gaze to the reality and the landscape that surround us.⁸

It concludes with an important declaration of intent:

The intention is to reconstruct the image of a place; the journey is both anthropological and geographical, and thus becomes a search, and the possibility of activating a knowledge that is not a cold, scientific category, but rather an adventure of thought and gaze.⁹

The idea of ‘an adventure of thought and gaze’ was very important for the development of this research. This statement indeed suggests the search for an intellectual commitment through photography to renew the way in which the individual stands before reality. In this lucid and conscious dialogue with the complexity of the external world, photography becomes an instrument that is

7. Roberta Valtorta, ‘Stupore dal paesaggio’, in *Racconti dal paesaggio 1984-2004. A vent’anni da Viaggio in Italia*, [curated by] Roberta Valtorta, (Milan: Museo di Fotografia Contemporanea, 2004), p. 12.

8. *Viaggio in Italia*, VV.AA. (Alessandria: Il Quadrante, 1984), text on the cover strip.

9. *Viaggio in Italia*, VV.AA. (Alessandria: Il Quadrante, 1984), text on the cover strip.



Fig. 40

Luigi Ghirri © Eredi Luigi Ghirri, *Formigine, Modena*, 1982. In *Viaggio in Italia*, ed. Luigi Ghirri, Gianna Leone and Enzo Velati, Alessandria: Il Quadrante, 1984
Courtesy Museo di Fotografia Contemporanea, Milano-Cinisello Balsamo

both intellectual and emotional. This approach does not seek truth, but rather a hypothesis of reality that emerges from chaos and multitude. In the same way, my photographic research on Lugo proposes a potential path, or, in other words, a potential interpretation of the place, proposing a conceptually coherent dialogue between the historical archives of the region (of which I offer a new reading) and my photographic practice. Furthermore, in terms of the photographs in *Viaggio in Italia*, my intellectual commitment is also towards the photographic medium itself. Arturo Carlo Quintavalle, in an essay published in the catalogue for *Viaggio in Italia*, is specific:

So, conceptual research? What is to be understood by this phrase? [...] The idea, in short, is that photography should be an idea of photography, so a reflection on making an image, so a re-examination of the image and a complete reversal, it is well understood why, of the previous photograph.¹⁰

Through continuous interaction with the world and with what is in front of them, the photographers of *Viaggio in Italia* appear to be questioning the reality before them, without looking for a precise answer. Rather, their continuously nuanced research path ends up by coinciding with existence itself, and photography itself becomes, above all, human experience. This existential dimension is another important element for the purposes of my research, whose ultimate goal is to find new ideas of place that will be neither apologetic nor critical, but instead mediated and inspired by personal experience. These new relationships are generated by the process of observation, which triggers dialectical links and activates a process of knowledge.

In 1989, five years after the inauguration of *Viaggio in Italia*, Gianni Celati published *Verso la foce*, a book in which he collected together 'four travel journals', one of which returns to the text already published in *Viaggio in Italia*: 'Verso

10. *Appunti*, Arturo Carlo Quintavalle in *Viaggio in Italia*, VV.AA. (Alessandria: Il Quadrante, 1984) p. 10.



Fig. 41

© Cuchi White, *Zola Predosa, Bologna*, 1982. In *Viaggio in Italia*, ed. Luigi Ghirri, Gianni Leone and Enzo Velati, Alessandria: Il Quadrante, 1984

la foce. Reportage per un amico fotografo' (Towards the mouth of the river. Report for a photographer friend). In the foreword, he wrote:

These four travel journals were born when I started working with a group of photographers who devoted themselves to describing the new Italian landscape, including my friend Luigi Ghirri. Considering how they are now, after having been rewritten and made readable, I would call them observational stories.¹¹

Roberta Valtorta suggests that the definition that Celati gives for his stories can be transferred to photography, and attempts a definition of the photography in *Viaggio in Italia* as 'observational photography': a kind of photographic attitude that adopts a very specific approach, exemplified in the history of photography by Eugène Atget, Walker Evans, Robert Frank and Lee Friedlander. However the overarching cultural context of this project is much more complex:

The photographers of *Viaggio in Italia* knew the French humanistic documentary photography and Italian Neo-realism, but they also loved Paul Strand who, in 1955, together with Cesare Zavattini, had published in Italy that tender and rigorous book *Un paese* (A village), which portrays the town of Luzzara in an unforgettable manner; they seem to understand the conceptual shift introduced by the New Topographers (Lewis Baltz, Robert Adams, Stephen Shore, Bernd and Hilla Becher) which had drawn attention to small details and to the margins of the landscape). They were also interested in William Eggleston and Joel Meyerowitz. They knew the avant-garde movements and Italian classical art; they loved Fra Angelico and Piero della Francesca; they were sensitive, for example, to metaphysical painting; they had understood the lessons of Pop Art; they were, in certain aspects, close to the Conceptual Art of those years and to Land Art; some of them had worked with contemporary artists. They had read *On the Road* by Jack Kerouac, but also Borges, Calvino, Perec, Handke; they had seen *Easy Rider* by Dennis Hopper, *Blow-Up* by Antonioni, and *Kings of the Road* by Wim Wenders. They came from the fields of art, philosophy, architecture, design, pedagogy, literature, linguistics, information technol-

11. Gianni Celati, *Verso la foce* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1989), p. 9.



Fig. 41.a: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe
Italienische Reise, 1816



Fig. 41.b: Richard Lassels
Voyage of Italy, or a complete Journey through Italy, 1670



Fig. 41.c: Roberto Rossellini
Viaggio in Italia, 1953

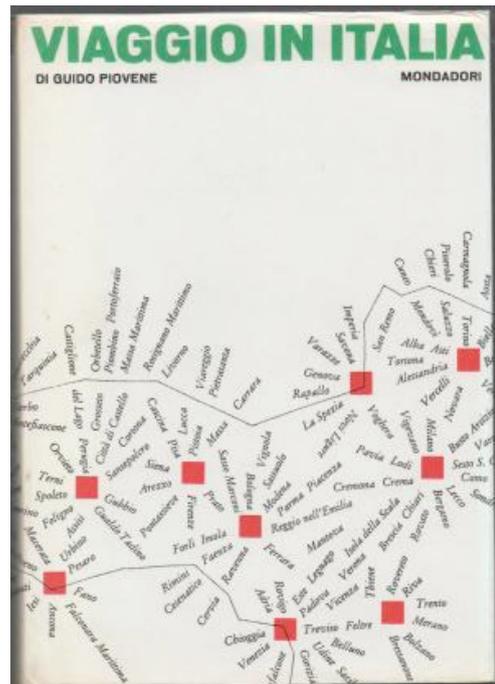


Fig. 41.d: Guido Piovene
Viaggio in Italia, 1957

Fig. 42
Examples of cultural references for *Viaggio in Italia* (Italian Journey)

ogy. They were present in the world of art, the publishing industry, journalism, the film industry, architecture and graphic design, ethnography, anthropology.¹²

Valtorta describes the photography of *Viaggio in Italia* as both 'on the road' and 'pensive' – suspended – with echoes of the songs of Bob Dylan in the background. It suggests a way of looking that suspends an opinion on the world (too vast to be judged in just a snapshot) and opens up to its complexity. This type of photography accords importance to the provincial environment (seen in the work of the Italian film directors Roberto Rossellini, Michelangelo Antonioni and Francesco Fellini), but does not forget the city: Italy is also rich in wonderful cities and urban history (as De Chirico understood with the absoluteness of his empty city squares). Finally, it includes both outdoors and indoors, the faces of people and animals – because everything is landscape: a jumble of indecipherable things connected with each other.

My research shares many of the cultural references of *Viaggio in Italia* and offers a deeper relationship with the history of place: through the survey of the photographic history of Lugo, it aims to create interconnections between images over time, to form a new and specific conceptual landscape.

2.2 The project title

It is useful to investigate specific aspects of the *Viaggio in Italia* project: for example, the title, which incorporates multiple cultural cross-references (Fig. 42). Goethe's 1816 *Italienische Reise* (Fig. 42.a) is an obvious point of reference. Earlier, in 1670, the English Catholic priest and travel writer Richard Lassels had published *Voyage of Italy, or A Complete Journey through Italy*, where the

12. Roberta Valtorta, 'Stupore dal paesaggio', p. 20.



Fig. 43
Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot , *Ponte Nomentano*, 1826-28
Oil on canvas, Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam



Fig. 44
Thomas Jones, *Buildings in Naples*, 1782
Oil on paper, National Museum, Cardiff

term 'Grand Tour' appeared for the first time (Fig. 42.b).¹³ The Grand Tour travellers from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century made journeys for artistic or educational purposes, or for pleasure, to the Italy of art and marvellous monuments (the Arcadia of enchanting cities and of the extraordinary beauty of nature, taking long or short itineraries as suggested by illustrated guides with engravings and maps), leaving a legacy of a wide range of journals, novels and stories, paintings (Fig. 43) and watercolours. In Roberto Rossellini's 1953 film *Viaggio in Italia* (Journey to Italy), the tourist journey is undertaken by a couple in crisis (Fig. 42.c). Then there is *Viaggio in Italia*, 1953-1956, by the writer and journalist Guido Piovene (Fig. 42.d), an atypical literary report that describes Italy's economic boom, and *Un Viaggio in Italia* (A journey to Italy), by the Italian poet, philosopher, writer, journalist and playwright Guido Ceronetti, which was published in 1983, the year before Ghirri's project.¹⁴

It is clear that in this range of cultural cross-references the concept of journey was crucial. In addition, the name that I chose for the research project I designed and edited, *Lugo Land*, refers to a journey in an imaginary land, the result of multiple potential visions. It also includes a subtle reference to the diary of the English painter Thomas Jones, written while he was on his Italian journey in the eighteenth century (Fig. 44), in which he calls Italy a 'Magic Land'¹⁵ (one of the meanings of the word Lugo is 'magic forest'¹⁶).

The idea of the journey as a geographical, conceptual and existential fact had been at the centre of the important research activities conducted by Franco

13. The term is sporadically traceable back to the 16th century, in Michel de Montaigne's travel journals.

14. Ceronetti travelled around Italy for a period of around two years, between 1981 and 1983, sometimes on foot, sometimes by train, sometimes by bus. Ceronetti travelled to big cities and small provincial towns and visited squares, monuments and museums, but also prisons, cemeteries, police districts and mental institutions. He revealed, in a book that is halfway between reportage and an intimate journal, the coarseness that hurt him and the consequences of modernity. His cry of alarm is more metaphysical than ideological, and arose mainly from a desire to preserve an 'invisible Italy'.

15. 'Every scene seemed anticipated in some dream - It appeared a Magic Land', Thomas Jones, *Memoirs*, December 13, 1776.

16. See Tim Davis' poem on p. 169-171.

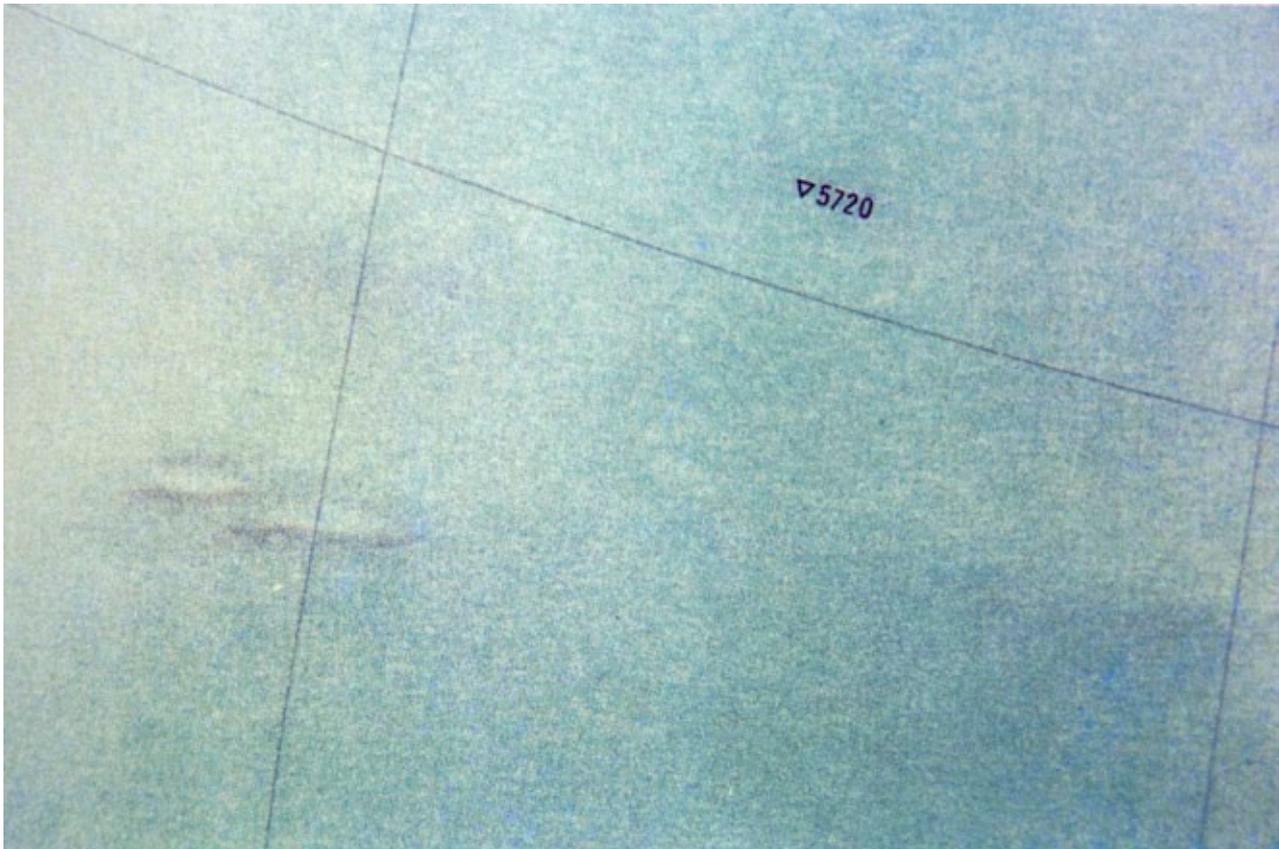


Fig. 45
Luigi Ghirri © Eredi Luigi Ghirri, from *Atlante*, 1973
Courtesy Fototeca della Biblioteca Panizzi - Reggio Emilia

Vaccari and Luigi Ghirri during the 1970s: Vaccari's conceptual approach intended to actually disassemble the way photography worked, while Ghirri approached it as a way of perceiving and being conscious of the geography of everyday life. In 1973, Ghirri carried out his groundbreaking project *Atlante*.

2.3 Atlante

The project *Atlante* (Atlas) by Luigi Ghirri is a photographic essay that was published in 1973 as an artist's book. Ghirri took 34 photographs of the illustrated pages of an atlas: the photographs contained only a few details of the maps (Fig. 45). Ghirri identifies on the pages of the atlas 'the place where all the signs of the earth, from the natural to the cultural ones, are conventionally represented'.¹⁷ The system of signs adopted by an atlas is universally accepted, and is based on conventions that leave no room for interpretative freedom. Ghirri approaches it by considering the atlas by the same standards as any other object encountered in his daily life, thus making himself free to read it as an image. By using a macro lens, the author moves over the pages of the atlas as if he were making a journey on the surface of the globe, in progressively simplified signs, first as verbal identifiers ('ocean', 'desert'), and then reduced to lines that cut and frame the surfaces, until they become softer, in landscapes made up by splotches of colour. In the equally important accompanying text for the project Ghirri reflects on how 'the only possible journey now seems to be within the signs, the images: in the destruction of direct experience'.¹⁸

In this work, I wanted to make a journey to the place that actually eliminates the journey itself, precisely because all the possible journeys have already been described and the itinerary have already been

17. Luigi Ghirri, *Atlante* (Milan: Charta, 1999), p. 43.

18. Ghirri, *Atlante*. See also the website of the Panizzi Library of Reggio Emilia, that contains and preserves the photographer's entire archive.
<http://panizzi.comune.re.it/Sezione.jsp?idSezione=2620>

FOREWORD
LUIGI GHIRRI

I

In 1969 the photo taken from the space shuttle on its way to the moon is published in all newspapers; this was the first photograph of the World.

The picture pursued for centuries by man was presented to our eyes, containing contemporarily all the preceding images, incomplete, all books written, all signs deciphered and not.

It was not only the picture of the world, but the picture which contained all the pictures of the world: graffiti, frescoes, prints, paintings, writings, photographs, books, films.

Simultaneously the representation of the world and all the representations of the world in one time only.

On the other hand this total view, this *redescription* of everything, destroyed one more the possibility of translating the hieroglyphic whole.

The power of containing everything vanished in front of the impossibility of seeing everything at the same time.

The event and its representation, to see and to be contained, reappeared to man as not sufficient to solve eternal questions. This possibility of *total duplication*, however, let us glimpse the possibility of deciphering the hieroglyph; we had the two poles of doubt and of the secular mystery, the picture of the atom and the picture of the world, finally one in front of the other. The space between the infinitely small and the infinitely big was filled by the infinitely complex problem: man and his life, nature. The need for information or consciousness thus arises between two extreme points, oscillating from the microscope to the telescope in order to be able to translate and interpret reality or the hieroglyph.

Fig. 46

Luigi Ghirri, Foreword, in *Kodachrome*, London: Mack, 2012
Originally published by Punto e Virgola: Modena, 1978

traced. By now, all the paradise islands dear to literature and to our hopes have already been described, and the only possible discovery or journey seems to be that of discovering the discovery already made.¹⁹

Atlante inaugurates both a working method that Ghirri would maintain in his many photo-books (the 'craft' of designing the book, which includes everything from the definition of the sequence and the gluing of the prints to the pages to the binding of the book²⁰) and a conceptual attitude to describing the multiplicity of knowledge that would mark his artistic poetics and his visual imagination. A few years later, in fact, in the preface (partially reproduced as an image on the left-hand page: Fig. 46) to *Kodachrome*, one of his most important books, Ghirri writes about the moment in 1969 when newspapers published a photograph of the Earth taken from a spacecraft travelling to the moon (Fig. 47).

The idea of the atlas as a place where all the signs for the earth are contained, and that of the image of the Earth as a complete hieroglyph, are very similar. They clearly imply a conceptual approach and the same 'desire' and 'necessity to interpret and translate the sign and meanings of this sum of hieroglyphs.'²¹

Roberta Valtorta acknowledges how his friendships with conceptual artists such as Franco Vaccari, Franco Guerzoni and Claudio Parmiggiani enabled Ghirri, with a diploma in geometry, to acquire the essential concepts of art. This influence allowed him to shift his photographic activity towards a new vision made up of signs, words and images, instead of simply turning his gaze to the real landscape. Valtorta also asserts that this operation, that evidences great lucidity and courage, at the same time anticipated postmodernism.

19. Ghirri, *Atlante*, p. 43.

20. In the case of the original artist's book *Atlante*, the 34 photographs in the project are contained in a wooden box measuring 330x380x35, which is kept at the Photographic Archives of the Panizzi Library of Reggio Emilia (Fig. 09). Ghirri also made another book dummy called *Weekend*, conceived as a possible variant of the *Atlante* project.

21. Luigi Ghirri, Foreword in *Kodachrome* (London: Mack, 2012. Originally published by Punto e Virgola, Modena, 1978), p. 11.



Fig. 47

Earthrise, December 24, 1968 (NASA)

The Apollo 8 astronauts Frank Borman, James Lovell and William Anders, while they were in orbit around the moon, they saw the Earth rise from lunar surface and Anders snapped a photo. It was the first full-color view of our planet taken from outer space. Ghirri, in his preface to *Kodachrome* (Modena: Punto e Virgola, 1978), refers to it as “the first photograph of the world”.

Fig. 48

Claudio Parmiggiani, *Atlante*, 1970

Photograph by Luigi Ghirri © Eredi Luigi Ghirri

Courtesy Fototeca della Biblioteca Panizzi - Reggio Emilia

Atlante represents the key quest of Ghirri's poetics of the 1970s, and is crucial to an understanding of the subsequent practice of Italian landscape photography and its most significant themes: the attention to the landscape understood as a multiplicity of signs making up the world; the theme of the journey as exploration and perceptual reappropriation and the reflection on the role of photography and its power to change relationships with the real world, which offers a (small) opportunity for knowledge.

2.4 The boot

It was, indeed, a geographical map that the book accompanying the *Viaggio in Italia* exhibition was presented with: the book cover (Fig. 37), designed by Ghirri's wife, Paola Borgonzoni, shows an image of the geographical map of Italy, shaped like a boot, which – with its pastel colours – is reminiscent of the maps hanging in the primary school classrooms of Ghirri's childhood, shortly after World War II.²² These are the same maps that can be seen, for example, in Paolo Guerra's photos of the primary school of Passogatto in 1953 (Fig. 49). And, as in *Atlante*, the map of Italy becomes an archetypal form, the first unit of landscape, an actual abstraction of landscape. Ghirri had loved maps and atlases since childhood, and they now became real, proper conceptual places, total containers of the landscapes of the world.

I have already pointed out that Ghirri was close to a number of conceptual artists, such as Claudio Parmiggiani, whose 1970 work *Atlante* is part of his 'measurement works' performed between 1967 and 1970. Parmiggiani's *Atlante* consists of maps and globes crumpled or reduced in glass jars, the true antithesis of the certainties of the physical world. Parmiggiani published an

22. Ghirri was born in 1943. He therefore attended primary school between 1949 and 1954 approximately.



Fig. 49
Paolo Guerra © Archivio Paolo Guerra, *Passogatto*, Lugo, 1953
Courtesy Lugo Land - Fotografia e territorio

artist's book of the project, with texts by Emilio Villa and Nanni Balestrini and photographs of the artworks by Ghirri²³ (Fig. 48).

Since the end of the 1960s many artists had referenced the boot-like shape of the Italian peninsula (Fig. 49). In 1968 Luciano Fabro began his *Italia* cycle, which presented the geographical image of Italy in different positions and materials (bronze, glass, fur, leather, gold, etc.).

My "Italies" are bound to iconography with a very slender thread, which is because the image of "Italy" is an image that is inferred, a graphic image. This is the reason for choosing a refraction of the form which could tend towards the infinite. Italy exists as an image which prompts someone's recognition, as an image for someone who in some way feels connected to it and has something to do with the symbol which is its moral reduction: the reduction of the to[clarification needed] a graphic form.²⁴

Italia Rovesciata (Overturned Italy) is one of the best-known works from Fabro's series (Fig. 50.a). Ironically suggestive of the country's political and economic situation, Italy is for Fabro an interior landscape, suggested and evoked, but never declared. The critic and curator Bartolomeo Pietromarchi, quoting Deleuze and Guattari, states how the map becomes here 'an open and rhizomatic model, at the same time allegorical, tautological, entropic and virtual, in which it is possible to connect all its dimensions, summable, reversible, capable of constantly receiving changes'.²⁵

In 1975, Salvo painted his first *Italies* and *Sicilies*: the respective geographical maps of these places, clearly recognisable, emerge on the surface of the work

23. Claudio Parmiggiani, *Atlante*. Fotografie di Luigi Ghirri. Testi di Emilio Villa e Nanni Balestrini. (Milan: Scheiwiller, 1970), Edizione di 200 copie numerate (Collezione Biblioteca Panizzi, Reggio Emilia)
<http://digilib.netribe.it/bdr01/visore2/index.php?pidCollection=Ghirri-LA-01-Parmiggiani-Atlante:1&v=1&pidObject=Ghirri-LA-01-Parmiggiani-Atlante:1&page=copertina>. (accessed 13 January 2020)

24. Luciano Fabro, in Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, *Arte Povera* (London: Phaidon, 1999), p. 246.

25. Bartolomeo Pietromarchi, *Italia in opera* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2011), p. 61.



Fig. 50.a © Luciano Fabro, *Italia Rovesciata*, 1968



Fig. 50.b © Salvo, *40 pittori italiani*, 1975



Fig. 50.c © Emilio Isgrò, *Italia*, 1970

Fig. 50

Examples of references by Italian artists to the boot-like shape of the Italian peninsula

through the names of famous philosophers, painters and musicians with which the artist eventually associates his own name (Fig. 50.b). By means of this 'inventory' of names, even though the greatness of the country's cultural history is being evoked, the artist is at the same time declaring its end, and it is the way in which he distances himself from the past. This intentionality is similar to that adopted by the photographers of *Viaggio in Italia*.

Finally, Emilio Isgrò, by means of erasure, turned all the geographical maps of the peninsula and the island into unmarked maps. In *Italy* (1970, Fig. 50.c) the erasing of all toponomastic references from the map is simultaneously a threat of disappearance and an epiphany.

In common with these important works, in *Viaggio in Italia* there is a desire to erase the rhetoric of landscape entirely, in order to retrieve a non-hierarchical 'democratic' gaze. There is a subtle allusion to the history of art and the representations that had emerged over time, and the entire project is presented as a primer of landscape rediscovered through its primary elements.

2.5 *A place without Giotto's O*

For over a hundred years the prevailing visual image of Italy had been the one established in photographic postcards by the firm Fratelli Alinari, founded by Leopoldo, Giuseppe and Romualdo Alinari in 1852, that documented monuments, squares, important streets and buildings with historical and architectural value:²⁶ a stereotypical Italy, a prisoner of its noble past. Never (or very rarely) did these depictions include industrial plants, petrochemical

26. Fratelli Alinari is the world's oldest photographic firm, founded in Florence, Italy in 1852.

factory towers, petrol stations, modernist buildings, the outskirts of provincial towns. This image continued unchanged during Fascism and beyond. Neo-realism interrupted this tendency briefly, but in the background the visual notion of their land that the Italians maintained remained the same.

The visual imagery of *Viaggio in Italia* breaks this established pattern and, in the 300 images of the Bari exhibition (summarised and condensed in the catalogue), a depiction of a different country takes shape, composed of marginal places, strips of asphalt, deserted cities, beaches, small abandoned houses, provincial roads, ramshackle gardens, sheet metal fences, bars and deserted offices. It shines a light on the existence of those places that we happen to see 'when we take the wrong road, or we are lost or tired, or in the stops on journeys, or in the empty days, in the afternoons when we do not know where we can take shelter', as Gianni Celati wrote twenty years later.

The power of this approach would only be felt decades later. Luigi Ghirri and his friends/fellow photographers had (re)-discovered Cesare Zavattini's approach of focusing on the 'non-preordained encounter' and his notion of '*qualsiasi*' (a concentration on the mundanity of the everyday, and the ability to find interesting things to look at or describe, regardless of where you are). This was not a simple readoption of this approach (something that the historical avant-gardes had already done), but rather a reconsideration of the banality of everyday life (or, as Gilles Deleuze, unspoken mentor of this discovery, described it: that swamp in which the thought seems to sink²⁷). Banality was no longer to be rejected, but accepted. The neo-realist film directors had already understood it, and their films influenced the visual approach adopted by Ghirri, Guidi, Basilico, Chiaramonte and Cresci in a particular way.

27. Quoted by Marco Belpoliti in *Viaggio in Italia*, Doppiozero, 2012, available at: <https://www.doppiozero.com/materiali/clic/viaggio-italia>

Separating the photography and cinematography of the 1940s from the *Viaggio in Italia* travellers of 1984 was the change in the landscape itself: Italy was different in the 1980s, and so was the gaze of the photographers and writers who engaged with it. Marco Belpoliti affirms that a new form of realism had appeared, one which transcended the avantgardes and the neo-avantgardes, and which had already surpassed the incipient postmodernism of that decade: a realism that embraced a conceptual way of looking, typical of the art of the previous decade, one that was capable of questioning the very act of seeing. In January 1984, an Italy beyond the Alinari postcards could finally be revealed.²⁸ It was a decisive leap that set new rules.

To paraphrase the critic Antonella Pellizzari, the novelty of this approach is seen in its attempt to gain an intimate understanding of the meaning of the landscape at a symbolic level, and in its attempt to transform the traditional 'Alinari-style' perception of place in Italy through a new lens that was both intuitive and phenomenological. In the critical text for the exhibition catalogue, Arturo Carlo Quintavalle states:

The problem was to place ourselves in front of the landscape as a place ignored and therefore marginalized, excluded, in the search for an Italy of margins, of ambiguity, fake and double-sided. A substantially excluded Italy, which is also the only one we know, understand, and live in, because it is the only one we can consider in direct relation to our dissociated existence.²⁹

In this approach, the phenomenological relationship of the photographer with the urban environment and with the landscape that I addressed in the first chapter (see p. 63) can be seen to emerge. In Ghirri's own words, speaking also on behalf of his fellow photographers:

[...] we photographers have put ourselves in relation to the "place" in which Italians live, neither apologetically nor critically. Rather, we have looked for

28. Ibidem.

29. *Appunti*, Arturo Carlo Quintavalle in *Viaggio in Italia*, VV.AA. (Alessandria: Il Quadrante, 1984) p. 11.



Fig. 51

© Olivo Barbieri, *Lugo, Ravenna*, 1982. In *Viaggio in Italia*, ed. Luigi Ghirri, Gianni Leone and Enzo Velati, Alessandria: Il Quadrante, 1984
Courtesy Museo di Fotografia Contemporanea, Milano-Cinisello Balsamo

dialectical nodes, different paths and stratifications, to start a process of knowledge.³⁰

Following Ghirri's invitation to take part in the *Viaggio in Italia* project, it is important to emphasise that some photographers contributed work from their archive (which had thus been realised before Ghirri's concept was developed), some contributed photographs from research already in progress, and others produced images specifically for the project. Moreover, some photographers physically travelled to distant places, while others photographed their own Italian locality (Gabriele Basilico in Milan, Mimmo Jodice in Naples, Guido Guidi around Cesena, Ravenna and Ferrara). What all the pictures have in common is that they were mostly taken on road trips, and that they are apparently simple, quiet and fairly thoughtful, strongly inspired by literature and poetry and, in many cases, the photographer's attempt to combine autobiography and the outside world.

The 300 photographs in the exhibition and the 86 included in the book/catalogue are organised into ten sections, or chapters, that indicate places, concepts, attitudes of looking: 'A perdita d'occhio' (As far as the eye can see), 'Lungomare' (Sea front), 'Margini' (Margins), 'Del luogo' (About place), 'Capolinea' (Terminal), 'Centrocittà' (City centre), 'Sulla soglia' (On the threshold), 'Nessuno in particolare' (No one in particular), 'Si chiude al tramonto' (Closes at sunset), 'L'O di Giotto' (Giotto's O).

The image that opens the section 'Del luogo' (About place) is a photograph taken by Olivo Barbieri from under the portico of the Pavaglione, a strange and unusual Renaissance building in Lugo's main square (Fig. 51).

I believe the fact that this section begins with a photograph of the town of Lugo

30. 'Nel regno dell'analogo', interview with Luigi Ghirri by M. Belpoliti, in *Il Manifesto*, March 16, 1984.



Fig. 52.a Luigi Ghirri © Eredi Luigi Ghirri, *Palazzo comunale, salone, Cesena*, 1987 - Fototeca della Biblioteca Panizzi - Reggio Emilia



Fig. 52.b © Guido Guidi, *S. Martino in Fiume, Cesena, guardando verso ovest*, 1987

Fig. 52
From *Il museo diffuso*, photographs by Luigi Ghirri and Guido Guidi, Milan: Mazzotta, 1987

should be interpreted in the light of the fact that, in Italian, if the central letter 'O' ('Giotto's O', the title of another section of the project) is removed from the word *luogo* ('place') we get the word *lugo*, the name of the city. The title of this paragraph derives from this consideration: Lugo is therefore a place (*luogo*) without Giotto's O, which might merely intend to emphasise it as a place far from the traditional Italian artistic beauty spots, but which also offers a sort of archetype of an Italian location that is relatively ordinary but still interesting and worthy of attention from photographers interested in a horizontal and democratic viewpoint.

The photograph *Lugo, Ravenna* by Barbieri was the conceptual starting point for the site-specific project *Lugo Land*, which I conceived and have been curating since 2004. *Lugo Land* has developed as a research platform for photography, following the example of a number of earlier reference models developed after *Viaggio in Italia* that belong to its rich and well-articulated cultural legacy, which deserves to be explored at a deeper level.

2.6 *The heritage of Viaggio in Italia and the context of the Emilia-Romagna region*

As with the *New Topographics* exhibition, the importance of *Viaggio in Italia* will only be acknowledged over time; the project is, however, considered as a reference point for a broader and more complex cultural movement. According to Valtorta, when Ghirri gathered together the photographers for *Viaggio in Italia* he was both making a critical gesture and giving life to a compositional moment, achieving what art criticism in Italy had up to that point failed to address. This act actually prompted a period in Italian photography when people's feelings and their questioning of their environment were sought out in the landscape, which would continue for many decades to come.



Fig. 53

Map of Emilia-Romagna (Italy). Emilia-Romagna is a region in central Italy, lying between the ranges of the Apennine Mountains (Appennino Ligure, Appennino Tosco-Emiliano) and the Po plain, bordered by the Adriatic Sea on the East. Bologna is the capital of the region. Other important cities include Modena, Parma, Rimini, Piacenza and Ravenna.

Before analysing the significance of this legacy and cultural trajectory, it is important to underline how the Italian project can be viewed in a wider international context, and the way its extended themes have been addressed by other photographers in other countries, reflecting a widespread interest in landscape in both Europe and the United States that began at the end of the 1960s. In addition to the context of *New Topographics*, the issues addressed by *Viaggio in Italia* were the same as those that had crystallised around the journal *AFAL* in Spain (Pérez Siquer, Massats, Terré, Colom), and the *DATAR* Photographic Mission in France (Depardon, Ristelhueber, Lafont, Doisneau, Koudelka). Photographers experimented with new visual forms that would integrate notions of observation and documentation into their work. The impact of this approach has been pervasive (it can be detected in more recent work by Andreas Gursky, Paul Graham, Candida Höfer, Jem Southam and Guido Guidi, for example) and continues to influence younger generations of photographers internationally, even today.

For the purposes of this research, it is necessary to concentrate on the Italian context, in which there is a vast series of exhibitions, public projects and publications that in part precede, but above all follow, the *Viaggio in Italia* project. This range of outputs highlights the extraordinary persistence of the interest in landscape that has animated the work of Italian photographers for many years.³¹ It may be relevant here to apply a geographical filter to this cultural heritage, because from the second half of the 1980s until today it has been in the Emilia-Romagna region (Fig. 53, 54), and in the broader area of the Po valley, that the most relevant projects for this research, those which have the most continuity with *Viaggio in Italia*, have taken place.

31. For a comprehensive overview of this fragmented scenario, see *Luogo e identità nella fotografia italiana contemporanea*, ed. by Roberta Valtorta, p. 30. See also Roberta Valtorta, *Racconti dal paesaggio. 1984-2004 A vent'anni da Viaggio in Italia*, p. 29.



Fig. 54
Location of the region of Emilia-Romagna in Italy

In the light of the dialectical tensions mentioned above, I will now examine three relevant documentary projects relating to the Italian city of Cesena which are significant for this discourse about place and demonstrate the way in which Luigi Ghirri and Guido Guidi worked in tandem. Sharing a common visual vocabulary, Ghirri and Guidi were two of the leading figures in Italian photography during those years, and were of equal importance, both for the depth of their research and for the cultural impact of their work. The first two projects relating to Cesena were *Due fotografie per il Teatro Bonci* (1983) and *Una città per la cultura* (1985), in which a larger group of photographers were involved. The historian and critic Antonello Frongia, who is very close to Guidi, emphasises how in these series both common elements and distinctions between the approaches of these two Italian photographers emerge:

They brought to maturity a long-distance dialogue developed over the years: the frontality of the viewpoint, the flat and descriptive use of color, the privilege granted to an ordinary vision from the middle distance, the reference to the “silence” of Walker Evans, are all elements of a common vocabulary to the two photographers. They both share the idea of a “transparent” photography, able to place in the background the subjectivity of the author and any claim to creativity. However, it is significant that where Ghirri had brought attention to the monuments, the clear vistas, the distance, Guidi instead privileged secondary roads, surfaces, details. Ghirri’s was a photography of structures, of distance, of the desire for landscape; Guidi’s was a photography of things, of matter, of sedimentation.³²

This distinction between the two approaches emerges in the third project focused on Cesena, *Il museo diffuso*, in which Guidi’s and Ghirri’s research focuses on the theme of the protection of cultural heritage (Fig. 52).

32. Frongia, ‘La città come testo fotografico’, in: *Luogo e identità nella fotografia italiana contemporanea*, ed. by Roberta Valtorta (Torino: Einaudi, 2013), pp. 165-166.

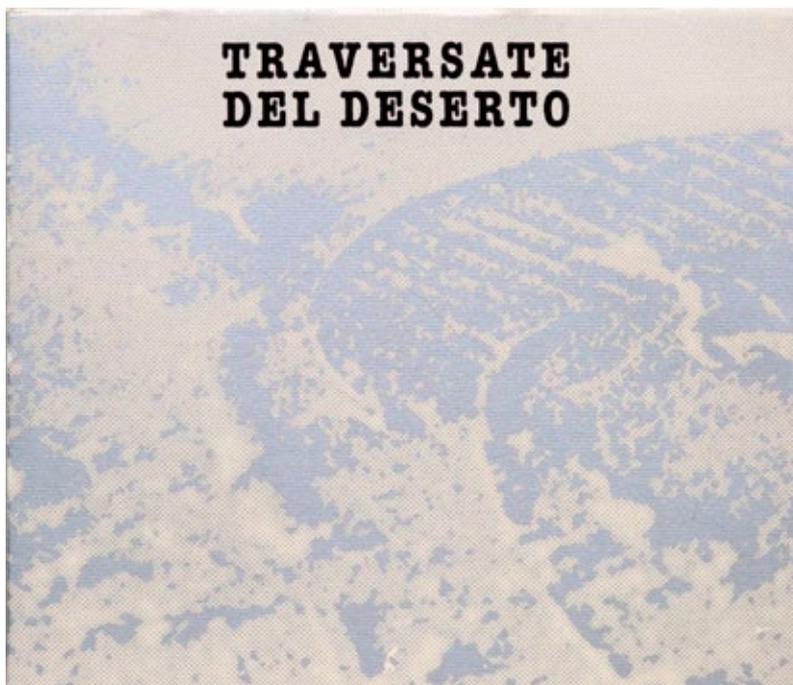


Fig. 55
Esplorazioni sulla via Emilia. Vedute nel paesaggio, various authors, Milan: Feltrinelli, 1986

Fig. 56
Traversate del deserto, curated by I figli del deserto, Ravenna: Essegi, 1986

In 1986 (two years after *Viaggio in Italia*), two important projects took place in Emilia-Romagna, once again promoted by Ghirri. They both involved some of the photographers from the *Viaggio in Italia* project, and they insist on a mode of collective investigation: *Esplorazioni lungo la Via Emilia* (Explorations along the Via Emilia – Fig. 55) and *Traversate del deserto* (Crossings of the desert – Fig. 56). They both address the gradual disappearance of the landscape and the consequent loss of the identity of places, and are built around the relationship between photography and writing. Moreover, in both cases the photographic element was edited and coordinated by Luigi Ghirri and the literary element by Gianni Celati.

Esplorazioni lungo la Via Emilia is a vast multidisciplinary project that included cinema and music, as well as photography and literature, and was promoted by the municipality of Reggio Emilia and the Emilia-Romagna region. As photography historian Laura Gasparini notes, the Via Emilia here becomes a paradigm for a new type of exploration that is no longer premised on the revisiting of the best-known locations in the ‘Grand Tour’ tradition – that is, monuments or idyllic landscapes as depicted in postcards – but rather on investigating the landscapes of contemporary everyday life, of an advancing modernisation and industrialisation.

Traversate del deserto, on the other hand, engages philosophers, photographers, writers and sociologists with the idea of the environmental and cultural desertification of contemporary society. If in this project texts and images do not depict or discuss the locality of Emilia-Romagna, it is important to emphasise that it was produced and edited by a cultural association in Fusignano (a small town in the province of Ravenna), called I Figli del Deserto, among whose members were the photographers Giovanni Zaffagnini and Cesare Ballardini. Ballardini and Zaffagnini, in subsequent years, in turn contributed to the representation of the landscape of their province with important photographic



Fig. 57

© Thomas Struth, *Duomo di Milano (interno)*, from the series *Mailand*, 1998

Courtesy Città Metropolitana di Milano / Museo di Fotografia Contemporanea, Milano-Cinisello Balsamo

series that were subtly critical of the changes taking place: the series *Dal vero*, by Ballardini (realized at the end of the 1980s and published in 2010 in a book edited by me for the *Lugo Land* series by Edizioni del Bradipo) and the series *Tecla*, by Giovanni Zaffagnini, created between 1989 and 1992 and published by I Figli del Deserto.

Between the end of the '80s and the '90s, and even after Ghirri's death in 1992, many site-specific projects have taken place that investigate the landscape of Italy. These initiatives have had the merit of continuing to focus photographers' attention on the now burning question of the crisis of the landscape in post-modernity, and to promote an awareness of this to public bodies which had previously been completely uninterested in either the landscape or the culture of photography. Although this process happened on a national scale, it was in the Po valley that the two most important publicly commissioned projects took place: the project *Archivio dello Spazio*, from the late 1980s to the late 1990s, and the association *Linea di Confine*, in the 2000s: these functioned as containers, consolidating the experience already gained and encouraging reflection on the ongoing cultural phenomenon of photography that was already on the way to becoming historicised.

Inspired not only by *Viaggio in Italia* but also by the experience of the French DATAR mission (1984), in 1987 the project *Archivio dello Spazio* was established. This was a major series of photographic explorations of the area of the province of Milan. For ten years, from 1987 to 1997, it involved a wide range of Italian photographers – fifty-eight in total, including several generations, from masters to emerging practitioners. The aim was to offer a dense reading of these regions – places which had agricultural origins, and which had been gradually shaped by intensive industrial development and the subsequent advent of the chaotic and irreversible post-industrial phase. On account of its duration, the number of photographers involved, its continuity and intense methodology,



Fig. 58

© Stephen Shore, from Luzzara (*Laboratorio di fotografia 6*), Rubiera (RE): Linea di Confine, 1993
Courtesy Linea di Confine per la Fotografia Contemporanea

the *Archivio dello Spazio* project represents the most relevant and large-scale example of public commissioning in Italy, and one of the most significant in Europe. The curator Roberta Valtorta had thought of it as a practical but also theoretical representation of Italian landscape photography at the end of the century. Departing from *Viaggio in Italia*, it intentionally amplifies the sense of a commonality of practice and the need for a continuous democratic sharing of work, to which Valtorta adds its role of offering a relevant educational purpose.³³ The *Archivio dello Spazio* project was followed by a number of photographic commissions, assigned to Italian and international authors, which can be considered as the natural development of the project: *Milano senza confini* (Milan without borders, 1998-1999 – Fig. 57); *Idea di metropoli* (The idea of the metropolis, 2000-2002); *Storie immaginate in luoghi reali* (Imagined stories in real places, 2007).³⁴

In 1989 the curator Paolo Costantini, the photographers Guido Guidi and William Guerrieri and the cultural activist Roberto Margini (who would later resign), founded the association *Linea di Confine* in Rubiera, in Reggio Emilia; this organisation is still active today (its full name is now: *Linea di Confine per la Fotografia Contemporanea*³⁵). It is based on the ‘ability to look at international languages, without losing the memory of popular culture and the relationship with their places, in the possibility of living with confidence in the great processes of modernization’. *Linea di Confine* takes as a reference point significant international examples of documentary research into landscape (American photography, and in particular that of the *New Topographics*, and Italian photography of the 1980s) to prompt assignments by established Italian and foreign photographers. *Confine* (border) refers to that between the two

33. See *Archivio dello Spazio 1987-'97*, Vv. Aa. (Udine: Arti Grafiche Friulane, 1998); see also ‘Archivio dello Spazio’, *Museo di Fotografia Contemporanea*, available at: <http://www.mufoco.org/collezioni/archivio-dello-spazio/>

34. For a complete list of the photographers involved, see Roberta Valtorta, ‘L’Archivio dello spazio’, in: *Fotografia e committenza pubblica. Esperienze storiche e contemporanee* (Milano: Museo di Fotografia Contemporanea, 2009), p.p. 77,78.

35. *Linea di Confine*, available at: <http://www.lineadiconfine.org/> (accessed 13 January 2020)

provinces of Modena and Reggio Emilia, where Rubiera is located, but it also suggests the meaning of a limit, or boundary. In fact, the project, through photographic commissions, addresses the precariousness of a mutating landscape which lies 'in between': on the boundary between the city and the countryside, between the natural and the artificial, between the provincial and the global. Its activities often take place in the form of laboratories, where photographers in charge of commissioning engage with the work and ideas of photographers from younger generations (Fig. 58).³⁶

In the same year, 1989, the important exhibition *L'insistenza dello sguardo. Fotografie italiane 1939-1989*,³⁷ curated by Paolo Costantini and Italo Zannier, took place in Venice, marking the 150th anniversary of the invention of photography. In the text in which he proposes the concept of the 'insistence of the gaze' (an expression 'borrowed' from Roland Barthes, from an open letter to Michelangelo Antonioni³⁸) the curator Costantini writes:

The photographs presented in this exhibition do not have the primary intention to fascinate, if it is true that fascination is the supreme act of distraction [...]. In the insistence of this gaze, in the tenacious will to scrutinize the surface of things, photography moves decisively towards the inaccessible and mysterious elements that are hidden in our daily landscape.³⁹

The contemporary section of this show, entitled 'A Panorama', presented the photographers of *Viaggio in Italia* (both older and younger practitioners), and those who were participating in the new projects. This section hypothesised the landscape as a guiding theme for an analysis of the history of Italian pho-

36. See *Trans Emilia*, the Linea di Confine Collection (Wintherthur: Fotomuseum Winterthur, 2006).

37. See *L'insistenza dello sguardo. Fotografie italiane, 1839-1989*, ed by Paolo Costantini and Italo Zannier (Florence: Fratelli Alinari, 1989).

38. 'Barthes, in an open letter to Antonioni, defines "the insistence of the gaze" as one of the virtues of the artist' (Luca Fiore, Review of *Per Strada* by Guido Guidi, *Luca Fiore*, 29 December 2018, Available at <https://luca-fiore.com/2018/12/29/per-strada-by-guido-guidi/> [accessed 13 January 2020])

39. See *L'insistenza dello sguardo. Fotografie italiane, 1839-1989*, p. 13.

tography, past and present. This perspective, on the occasion of the celebration of 150 years of photography, was clearly intended as a first attempt to historicise this important aspect of Italian photography.

This process of historicisation was continued in another exhibition, held in 1993 as part of the Venice Biennale: *Muri di Carta. Fotografia e Paesaggio Dopo le Avanguardie*, curated by Arturo Carlo Quintavalle. Having offered a dense discussion of the idea of landscape in the history of art and photography, and after creating important links between the historical avant-gardes and the contemporary scenario, he attributes a central position to Ghirri's work and to *Viaggio in Italia*, which, he says:

plays a crucial role in understanding the meaning of our research, that also moves on from the work published ten years ago, *Viaggio in Italia*, with which many of those who I have gathered in this volume were involved: this was not a planned investigation of our country but, on the contrary, the project itself has become a meeting place for memories and traces of our land that each of us carries within us.⁴⁰

As once again stated by Roberta Valtorta, the group of photographers gathered together by Quintavalle, while not entirely homogeneous, nevertheless moves coherently between the innovative impact of the avant-gardes and Ghirri's approach of the 'normalization of the gaze'. According to Quintavalle, it was at this point that Ghirri's oeuvre assumed a definitive relevance within the history of twentieth-century art.

Although throughout the 1980s Ghirri was the main figure who was active in the movement, the continuation and legacy of a particular photographic culture in Italy is due above all to the authoritative figure of Guido Guidi, mentioned above. As evidence of Guidi's importance both on the Italian scene and at an international level, a series of recent publications and exhibitions, in Italy and abroad, have emphasised the significance of his

40. Arturo Carlo Quintavalle, 'Punti di vista: i modelli della memoria', in Arturo Carlo Quintavalle, *Muri di carta. Fotografia e paesaggio dopo le avanguardie* (Milan: Electa, 1993), pp. 32, 35.



Fig. 59

© Francesco Neri, Zona Bassette, from the series *Dove Viviamo_1:1*, Osservatorio Fotografico (RA), 2010
Courtesy Osservatorio Fotografico

work, evidenced by the Guidi retrospective exhibition at the Fondation Cartier-Bresson in Paris in 2014 and the extensive publishing on his work. In addition, his lectures at the Academy of Fine Arts in Ravenna and the IUAV in Venice have influenced recent generations of photographers (these include Sabrina Ragucci – Fig. 71, Marcello Galvani – Fig. 70, Cesare Fabbri, Francesco Neri – Fig. 59, Luca Gambi, Michele Buda, Alessandra Dragoni, Francesca Gardini and Jonathan Frantini) with some of whom, for several years, I have shared a common path.

In this new context, inspired in part by the innovative experiences of *Linea di Confine* and *Archivio dello Spazio*, new curatorial projects and research platforms have emerged in Romagna: the *Lugo Land* project (which I conceived in 2004), *Osservatorio Fotografico*⁴¹ in Ravenna (founded in 2009 and curated by the art historian Silvia Loddo and the photographer Cesare Fabbri), *Gruppo Fotografico 93*⁴² in Cesena, and more recently the *Fototeca Manfrediana* group in Faenza, formed in 2010.⁴³ With some goals in common, these projects have the dual aim of organising photographic investigations into specific topics (for which international photographers have sometimes been commissioned), and offering visibility to young practitioners. In particular, the books in the *Lugo Land* series, published by Edizioni del Bradipo, and those of *Osservatorio Fotografico* have helped to define a *new geography* of photographers and put them in dialogue with the national and European context. These events further testify to the way in which the photographic culture in Emilia-Romagna and the photographers active in the region constitute a key reference for contemporary Italian photography.

The next chapter describes the *Lugo Land* project in detail.

41. *Osservatorio fotografico*, available at: <http://osservatoriofotografico.it/>

42. *Gruppo Fotografico 93*, available at: <http://gf93.it/>

43. *Fototeca Manfrediana* is a non-profit cultural association whose primary aim is to promote photography, as a resource and as a language. Its activities involve researching, collecting and cataloguing images of Faenza and its surroundings. It currently boasts an archive of about ten thousand images, which cover one hundred and fifty years of history (<https://www.fototecamanfrediana.it/>).

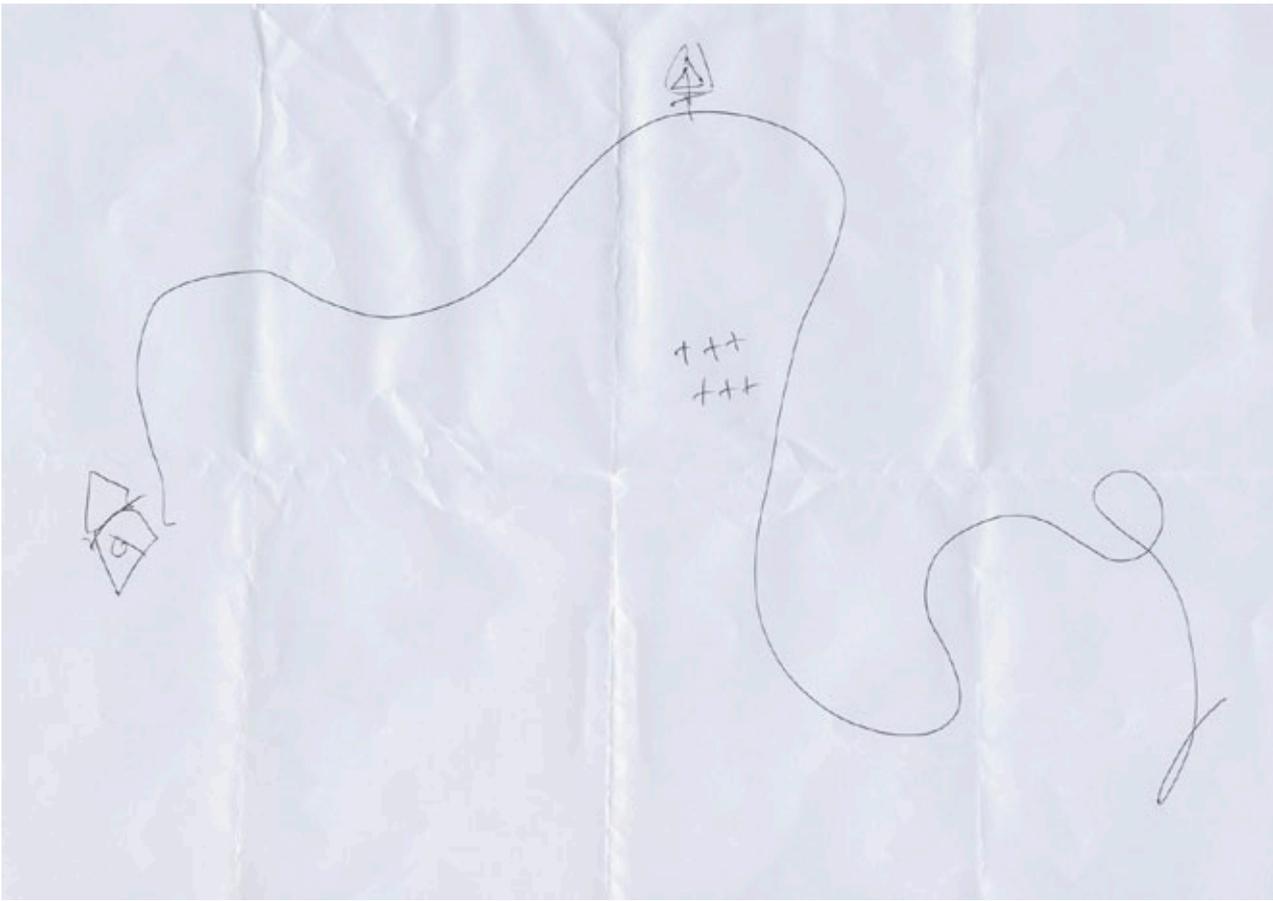


Fig. 60
Map, from the series *Né vicino, né lontano. A Lugo*, © David Farrell, Lugo Land, 2007
Courtesy Lugo Land - Fotografia e territorio

3. **The *Lugo Land* project and the opening of a historical perspective in place research**

This chapter introduces the Lugo Land project, which I initiated in 2004 in my home town, Lugo. I will first present a brief history of the project, describing some of the outputs that have been produced. I will then argue that, by opening up a historical perspective to the regional survey, the research undertaken through the doctorate both extends my conceptual understanding and contributes more widely to rendering more complex notions of Lugo as place.

3.1 Lugo Land: an introduction

As mentioned above, in 2004, in addition to my practice as a photographer, I established a curatorial project in my home town of Lugo (the principal town of the lowlands of Emilia-Romagna), which I then called Lugo Land. Within the trajectory of a strong Italian legacy, with important precedents in this area of the Po valley such as *Linea di Confine* and *Archivio dello Spazio*, *Lugo Land* began as a public commission which I conceived and curated. One of the main goals of the project has been to construct a visual archive of the lowlands of Romagna, inviting contemporary artists to respond to the location. Later the project expanded, inspired not only by the Italian context (strongly focused on commissioned projects) but also by other European photographic projects with a different approach, focused more on promoting independent artistic practice and on supporting research with a historical perspective on



Fig. 61

© David Farrell, from the series *Né vicino, né lontano. A Lugo*, Lugo Land, 2007
Courtesy Lugo Land - Fotografia e territorio

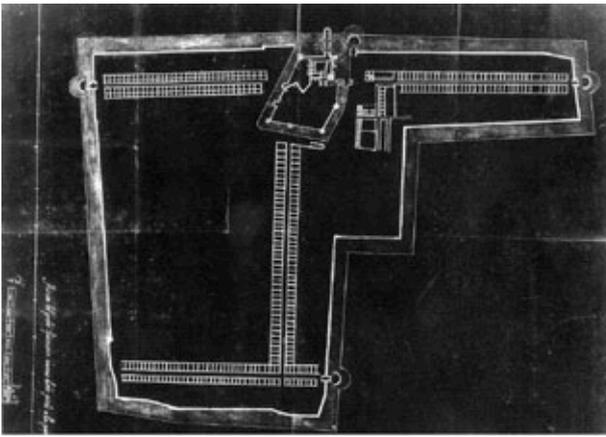
place (Photoworks¹ in the UK and the Werkstatt für Photographie² in Germany are two examples of these). Since 2010, *Lugo Land* has also involved educational projects, and from 2018 the project has been recognised on a regional level as a non-profit association for social and cultural promotion. Today the main areas of activity are:

- the publication of photo-books in the series *Lugo Land*, published by Edizioni del Bradipo, which I have curated.
- the organisation of artists' residencies in collaboration with a number of universities outside Italy: the University of Pennsylvania School of Design in Philadelphia; the Architectural Association (AA) School of Architecture in London, and the Photography Program of Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York. These collaborations take the form of art residencies and workshops, sponsored by the universities themselves, which I have curated together with colleagues, artists and professors Terry Adkins, Joshua Mosley, Francesco Neri, Sue Barr, Saskia Lewis, Tim Davis and Ken Lum.

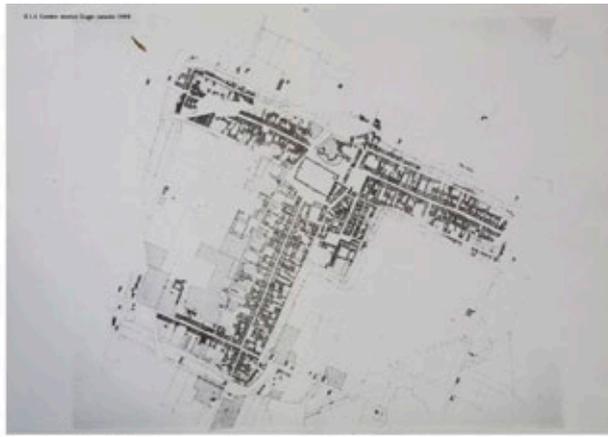
These different types of practice within the same area are brought into this research. In general terms, the town of Lugo will be the subject of this research, in the same way in which the city of Luzzara was the focus of research by Paul Strand and Cesare Zavattini in the 1950s, as mentioned above. Like Luzzara, Lugo is not a particularly special place – in some respects it just happened to be there: it's the place where I was born and where I live – I moved back after a number of years of study and apprenticeship in Bologna and Rome. But most importantly, Lugo is the subject that has allowed me to explore the medium of photography as both photographer and curator: it has enabled me to in-

1. Photoworks is a UK development agency dedicated to photography, based in Brighton, England and founded in 1995. It commissions and publishes new photography and writing on photography. *Lugo Land's* debt to Photoworks refers in particular to the work carried out from 1997 to 2010, under the direction of David Chandler (see David Chandler, 'Photoworks: a Cross Channel Photographic Mission', in *Fotografia e committenza pubblica. Esperienze storiche e contemporanee*, curated by Roberta Valtorta, Museo di Fotografia Contemporanea, Cinisello Balsamo, 2009 (Milan: Lupetti, 2009).

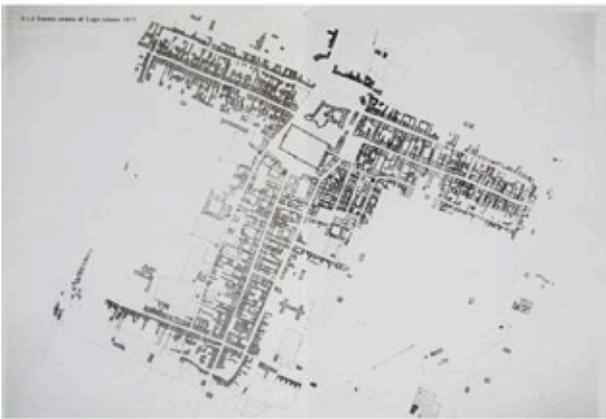
2. See p. 69.



Terra di Lugo - 1568



Municipal Cadastre, Lugo - 1860



Municipal Cadastre, Lugo - 1873



Municipal Cadastre, Lugo - 1910



Fig. 62
Maps of the historic centre of Lugo, Municipal Cadastre

Fig. 63
© Olivo Barbieri, *Lugo*, from the series *Lugo e il mare*, 2006
Courtesy Lugo Land - Fotografia e territorio

investigate my own biography and my personal geography, in constant dialogue with the history of the medium. I have always liked and admired the work of photographers and artists who have opened up new artistic worlds without moving too far away from home, and who have conceptualised themes relating to ideas of landscape, place, geography, memory and belonging.³

In the recent publication *Place and Identity in Contemporary Italian Photography*, edited by Roberta Valtorta and published by Einaudi, the *Lugo Land* project is mentioned as among the inheritors of the visual and photographic culture associated with the *Viaggio in Italia* project that reflect on the idea of place: in the essay 'Collective Narratives of Public Space' the critic and curator Matteo Balduzzi describes *Lugo Land* as a project that has made the town of Lugo di Romagna 'a circumscribed place of work and reflection on documentary photography'.⁴

This PhD research has further explored the artistic and cultural context of my native region, giving a historical perspective to place-based research. By investigating historical archives, I have created cultural and conceptual connections through images over time. Before discussing the archives that have been the focus for the project, it is appropriate here to offer a brief overview of the *Lugo Land* project in order to understand its evolution and aims.

3.2 Genesis of the project. The Lugo Land commission

The *Lugo Land* project developed from three public commissions (two monographs and a collective one) which I curated on behalf of the Municipality of

3. In the Italian context, Luigi Ghirri and Guido Guidi are the two most important references. Of the important Italian photographers of this period, Guidi stayed closest to home to develop his photographic language. In the previous chapter I discussed Ghirri's 'sedentary' and 'imaginary' journey in his *Atlante* project.

4. Matteo Balduzzi, 'Narrazioni collettive dello spazio pubblico', in: *Luogo e identità nella fotografia italiana contemporanea*, ed. by Roberta Valtorta (Torino: Einaudi, 2013), p. 275.

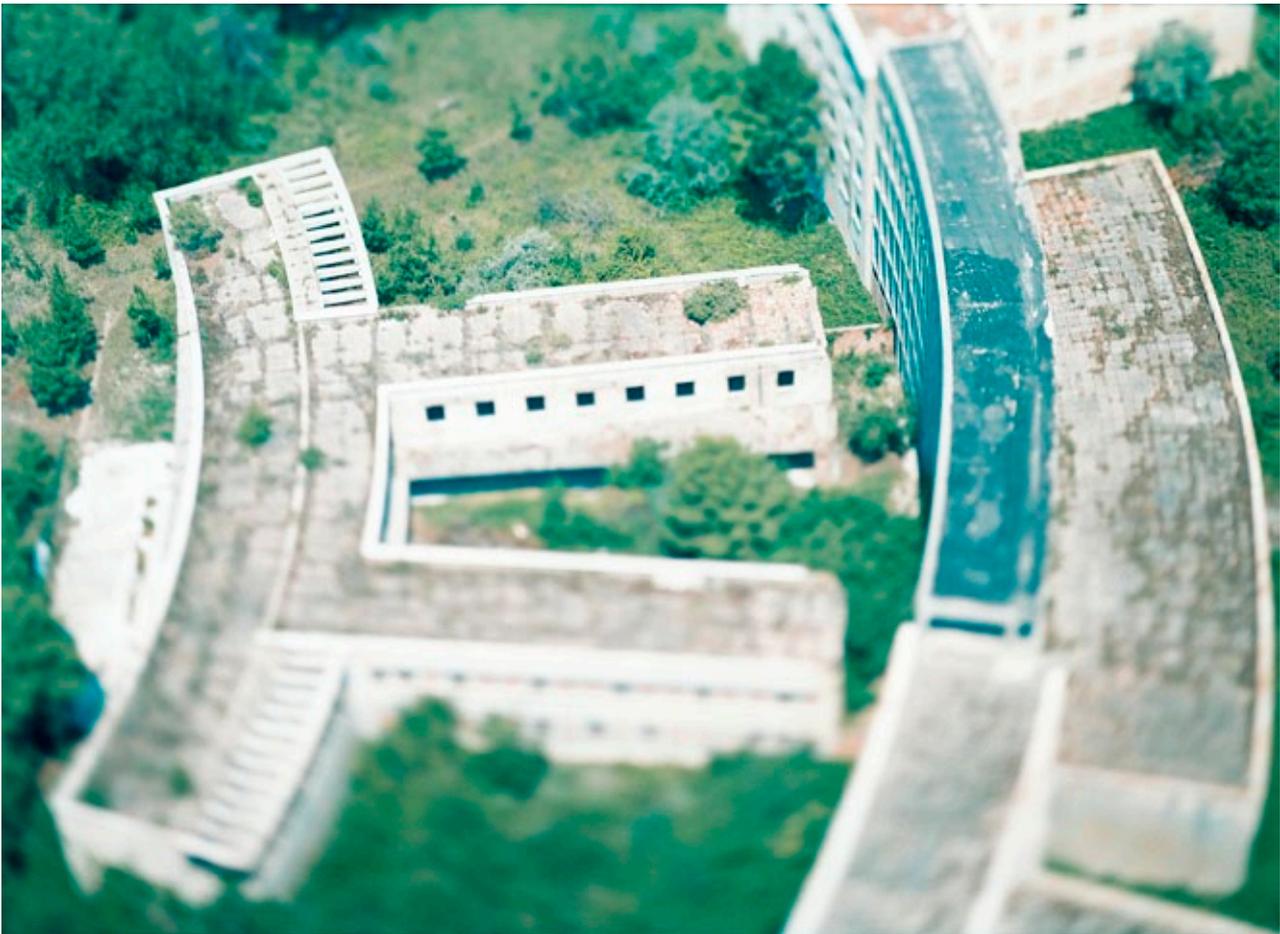


Fig. 64
© Olivo Barbieri, *Cervia*, from the series *Lugo e il mare*, 2006
Courtesy Lugo Land - Fotografia e territorio

Lugo from 2005 to 2009, at two-year intervals. The idea for the first commission came from a dialogue with the photographer Olivo Barbieri, whose 1982 picture of Lugo (Fig. 51) has always been an important point of reference for me. This photograph was the conceptual and ideal starting point to begin a survey project about the area, inspired by the legacy of Italian landscape photography in the 1980s. Barbieri was therefore entrusted with the first commission in Lugo (produced during 2005, and presented in 2006), which was published in the book *Lugo e il mare* (Lugo and the sea)⁵.

In 2005 Barbieri had just begun to explore the landscape by photographing from a helicopter, and creating miniature still photographs from actual landscapes. Starting from the main square of Lugo, and ideally lifting off from the Pavaglione (the building he photographed for *Viaggio in Italia*), Barbieri investigated the area that separates Lugo from the sea, reflecting on issues of history, architecture, technology and reality (Fig. 64). Lugo is a place with a very special association with flight. It was the birthplace of aviator Francesco Baracca, the First World War hero to whom the city's museum of the same name is dedicated; the local airport is home to one of Italy's leading helicopter schools; and by a strange coincidence the old town of Lugo itself forms the shape of an aeroplane (Fig. 62), as can clearly be seen from the air even today (Fig. 63).

Barbieri's project was followed by a second commission, for which I chose the Irish photographer David Farrell. Produced during 2006 and presented in 2007 in the form of an exhibition and a book, Farrell's work *Nè vicino, nè lontano. A Lugo* (Neither near nor faraway. In Lugo)⁶ was made from a series of journeys photographing and wandering through the landscape of the lowlands of Romagna. In his journey, the photographer was guided by some improbable maps, drawn by travellers he met along the way, and whom he approached and

5. Olivo Barbieri, *Lugo e il mare* (Rome: Punctum, 2005).

6. David Farrell, *Nè vicino, nè lontano. A Lugo* (Rome: Punctum, 2007).



Fig. 65

65.a: © Graciela Iturbide, *Parco del Loto, Lugo*, 2008, from the project *Lugo Land*, 2009

65.b: © Graciela Iturbide, thumbnails of the series *Lugo*, from the project *Lugo Land*, 2009

Courtesy Lugo Land - Fotografia e territorio

asked to draw a map on an A4 sheet, indicating a place worthy of being photographed (Fig. 60). Farrell created a photographic narrative combining those maps with analogue photographs of landscapes and self-portraits, taken in an atmosphere of mist and fog (Fig. 61). In the self-portraits, the photographer is seen bearing witness to essentially empty landscapes, holding a digital camera, as way of reflecting on what it means to be a photographer in that particular moment, as the process of photography was shifting from analogue to digital photography.

In 2008 I proposed a collective investigation, inviting six established Italian and international photographers and six emerging Italian practitioners to take part. This third commission was called *Lugo Land*, and the title was then adopted for the whole project. Each photographer was invited to make a sequence of five images about Lugo (Fig. 65, 66, 67, 68). The images were then presented in 2009 in the form of an exhibition and a book: the latter was published in the form of 21x15cm postcards, contained in a box. Some of the photographers used this commission to experiment with new visual languages: Marco Delogu, for example, began his series of black suns in Lugo. For this occasion, American photographer and poet Tim Davis, besides producing the five images, wrote the text 'Seeing through Lugo', which, in a poetic way, summed up perfectly the intentions of the project.

A city is a series of façades. There is nothing more promising than nothing.

They say Lugo comes from a Celtic word Lug, which the Romans read as *Lucus Augusti*, or something translatable as *magical forest*.

The First Law of Thermodynamics states that energy cannot be created or destroyed. There is a finite amount of energy in the universe. That is not true of human meaning. Even in the least promising, nearly non-narrative situation, there is always more meaning, as long as there are humans there to sniff it out. Animals are lovely, but they don't know about meaning.

Fluorescent lights cast the same glowy democratic light everywhere.



Fig. 66

66.a: © Guido Guidi, *X 08 Lugo*, 2008, from the project *Lugo Land*, 2009

65.b: © Guido Guidi, thumbnails of the series *X 08 Lugo*, from the project *Lugo Land*, 2009

Courtesy Lugo Land - Fotografia e territorio

Is there anything more powerful that we get from a work of art than a sense of the artist's resourcefulness? Think of Messaien and the *Quartet for the End of Time*, or Borges writing so many essays about books he could not see to read.

I wouldn't know how to photograph a magical forest.⁷

Among the photographers involved in the 2009 *Lugo Land* commission, Graciela Iturbide and Guido Guidi deserve special mention, and their work made a very valuable and particular contribution: Iturbide, who came to Lugo in 2008, the year she received the prestigious Hasselblad Award, transformed seemingly common and banal subjects and places into powerful and lyrical images, and her vision of Lugo makes us think of Mexico (Fig. 65); Guido Guidi interpreted the commission in a refined and subtle manner, reflecting on the form of the publication and the size of the postcard: Guidi photographed urban thresholds (doors, shop windows, shutters – Fig. 66) using a special device on his large format camera which allowed him to create two separate exposures on the 20x25 plate, so that the size of the half-plate matched the postcard size, simulating the contact print. For the exhibition, he then showed the original contact prints, decentralising the passe-partout so that each print had only the selected image framed, leaving the second hidden.

For all three commissions, the main outcome was the publication of a photo-book, published by Edizioni Punctum.⁸ It is appropriate to acknowledge how the involvement of many of the photographers was made possible thanks to the contacts and relationships I developed over several years of work assisting with the organisation of *Fotografia: Festival Internazionale di Roma*, under the artistic direction of the photographer and curator Marco Delogu.

7. Tim Davis, 'Seeing through Lugo', in: *Lugo Land*, Vv. Aa., curated by Luca Nostri (Roma: Punctum Press, 2009), p. 8-9 of the leaflet.

8. See *Lugo Land*, available at <http://www.lugoland.it/>



Fig. 67

67.a: © Marco Delogu, *Aero Club F. Baracca*, Lugo, 2009

67.b: © Marco Delogu, thumbnails of the series *There's a reason for everything*, from the project *Lugo Land*, 2009

Courtesy Lugo Land - Fotografia e territorio



Fig. 68

68.a: © Luca Nostrì, *Cimitero ebraico*, Lugo, 2008

68.b: © Luca Nostrì, thumbnails of the series *Halachà*, from the project Lugo Land, 2009

Courtesy Lugo Land - Fotografia e territorio



Fig. 69

© Cesare Ballardini, *Villa Pianta*, 1986, from *Dal vero Lugo Land* series, Lugo: Edizioni del Bradipo, 2011
Courtesy Lugo Land - Fotografia e territorio

3.3 The Lugo Land book series and educational programme

Since 2009, I have transformed the project into a photo-book series, developing it further, away from the formula of the commission. The aim was to encourage the publication of projects that concerned the area, but which had been produced completely autonomously by different photographers. The reason for this choice lay in the fact that, thanks to the rich photographic culture of the region described in the previous chapter, a new generation of photographers in Romagna had collected and updated that legacy, developing their own personal research. However, these works struggled to find space in the Italian publishing market, and therefore the creation of a book series which had the territory of the Romagna lowlands as a common theme and starting point, and which promoted independent research within the trajectory of an important cultural tradition, seemed to me the natural direction for the project.

The first book in the series was an interesting and unpublished photographic work from the late 1980s by Cesare Ballardini which had a direct relationship with the project *Traversate del deserto*, mentioned above: Ballardini is in fact one of the founders of the cultural association *I Figli del Deserto* (see page 163), which organised the exhibition and catalogue. That experience proved to be of fundamental importance for Ballardini's future research, because from this moment on he began to develop a sophisticated and personal approach to landscape (Fig. 69). The series *Dal vero* by Ballardini was made between 1986 and 1989 and started life as an ideal contribution to *Traversate del deserto*. The photographs depict minor abandoned or neglected places in an agricultural region contaminated by the intrusions of the contemporary and by the ruins of modernity. In the lucid coldness of his black-and-white shots, they become scenarios in which the human figure is almost programmatically absent and merely evoked. In these disasters, however, Ballardini's photographic eye manages to detect contrasts, allusions, which, without rhetoric or emphasis,



Fig. 70

© Marcello Galvani, *Sesto Imolese*, 2007, from *Di palo in frasca*
Lugo Land series, Lugo: Edizioni del Bradipo, 2015
Courtesy Lugo Land - Fotografia e territorio

give the chosen scenes a tone which is certainly mysterious, but also subtly bewitching and confident. Between 2009 and 2010 Ballardini revisited the photographs, making a final selection of images and creating a new and final edition of prints. The result of this work was presented in an exhibition in Lugo, and in the first of the *Lugo Land* book series for Edizioni del Bradipo.

This volume was followed by *La figura dell'Orante* by Guidi (see pp. 117-119), and by the first monographic book by Marcello Galvani, *Di palo in frasca*, which deserves a special mention. Galvani is a practitioner from my generation (born 1975), one of the most interesting on the Italian photography scene. He is part of a venerable line of photographers whose work is based on the ordinary, on everyday things, on the characters in everyday life. His images are the result of everyday casual encounters with individuals and places. In Galvani's images there is no journalistic intent, no social commentary, but instead a personal, intimate and eccentric vision of the things that surround him. Although caught in a snapshot, Galvani's deliberately humble subjects are fixed in and given almost timeless, absolute positions of wonder and mystery by virtue of compositional abilities, of calculated light, of subtle irony and of a particular metaphysical lightness (Fig. 70).

The *Lugo Land* series was intended to fit in all respects the legacy of the tradition established by Ghirri and Guidi while seeking new directions, both in the choice of the works to be published and in book form. Since 2005 *Lugo Land* has resulted in ten books, which have been the fruit of very different workflows and processes. This led to the creation of photographic and editorial works that differ from each other, but in some way share the same philosophy. Along with Roberto Calasso, writer and editorial director of the Adelphi publishing house, I like to think of the idea of a publisher based on the affinity between the people involved in the project, as well as between all the published books, which are therefore pieces of a single mosaic, 'rings of a single chain, or seg-



Fig. 71

© Sabrina Ragucci, *Centro sociale 'Il Tondo'*, Lugo, 2008, from the project *Lugo Land*, 2009
Courtesy Lugo Land - Fotografia e territorio

ments of a snake of books'.⁹ This idea of books being in some way connected to each other is a feature of fundamental importance for this PhD research, which proposes, as a final result, four book projects that are independent of each other but strongly interrelated from a historical, cultural and conceptual point of view (this aspect will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter).

Since 2010, other crucial meetings have brought unexpected ideas and directions, and broadened both the aims and the structure of the publishing projects. In 2010, the artist and professor Terry Adkins, of the University of Pennsylvania School of Design, whom I met during an art residency at the American Academy in Rome, proposed an artists' residency in Lugo for the University of Pennsylvania's MFA students. Coming to Lugo to develop a project then became an award for MFA candidates, selected by application and dialogue between *Lugo Land* and the faculty of the University of Pennsylvania School of Design. Taking place since 2010, the residency is now named after Professor Adkins, who died prematurely in 2014.¹⁰

As a result of this idea, and in collaboration with photographer Francesco Neri, connections have been made with other universities and colleagues, such as those with professor and photographer Sue Barr at the AA in London and with Bard College and its renowned faculty: Tim Davis, Stephen Shore and Larry Fink. Taking the experience of the UK association Photoworks under David Chandler's directorship from 1997 to 2010 as a model, this way of understanding collaboration, of sharing interests and different experiences through the establishment of partnerships with other organisations, was a crucial principle of the policy adopted by *Lugo Land* over time. These collaborations have been realised in the production of workshops and artists' residencies on specific

9. Roberto Calasso, *L'impronta dell'editore* (Milan: Adelphi, 2013), p. 82.

10. The residency is named after Adkins' project *The Lone Wolf Recital Corps* (see: 'The Legacy of Terry Adkins and the Lone Wolf Recital Corps', *MoMA*, available at: <https://www.moma.org/calendar/events/3368>), and it is now known as *The Lone Wolf Lugo Land Residency*.



Fig. 72

© Emma Ressel, *Olives in the Street* (Plate X), Lugo, 2017
Lugo Land series, Lugo: Edizioni del Bradipo, 2018
Courtesy Lugo Land - Fotografia e territorio

themes, aimed at the production of limited-edition books. Among the most interesting books published as a result of these collaborations is Emma Ressel's *Olives in the Street* (Fig. 72). The photographs were realised over a period of one month, in the summer of 2016, during Ressel's stay as the recipient of the third Bard Lugo Land Residency, and curated by Tim Davis, Francesco Neri and me. They consist of fictional tableaux that reference the iconography and food of the region. In an essay for the book, American critic and curator Laurie Dahlberg states how,

more than just defying the idea of a photographic 'moment,' [Emma Ressel's] photographs share the studious, meditative feeling of Baroque still life paintings. Even her images of rooms — places of human activity, implied by the presence of a cheery fire, disarranged chairs, or a live television — take on the timeless and uncanny quality of the unpeopled, parallel worlds that those earlier painters constructed so convincingly. [...] Ressel's work is filled with 'pretty excellences,' but it is backed by a wry malevolence and a deceptive wit. In fact, the beauty of these compositions, filled with a sense of light and air and succulent color that belongs only to photography, endows them with the fascination of the Trojan Horse: it's the gift that we happily accept on first sight, only to discover that we've let in something just a little bit nasty...¹¹

The project received the Stinnett Philadelphia Museum of Art Collection Award, and five prints were acquired by the museum for its permanent collection.

3.4 *A historical perspective on place-based research*

Before starting this research, and through the *Lugo Land* project, I had always been involved in contemporary photography. This PhD research has enabled an additional level of investigation, exploring the photographic

11. Laurie Dahlberg, in Emma Ressel *Olives in the Street* (Lugo: Edizioni del Bradipo, 2016), p. 39.



Fig. 73
© Luca Nostri, *Francesco Baracca Square, looking east*, Lugo, 2016
From the series *The Hanging Garden*, 2009-2020

history of the region and expanding the time-frame backwards, to the nineteenth century. This decision has developed and come to fruition during the years of research and work on the *Lugo Land* project, and is the result of different motivations and some chance encounters.

Unlike many towns and places in the Po valley which grew up relatively recently following land reclamation,¹² Lugo is an ancient settlement. Its history is still clearly reflected and stratified in the architecture and urban layout of the city. At first glance Lugo looks like a medieval town (Fig. 74). Its main square is dominated by a medieval castle, while a renaissance church and other buildings face rationalist architecture from the Fascist period opposite. At the centre of the main square lies a monument – a masterpiece by Italian expressionist artist Domenico Rambelli (Fig. 73). However, the origins of the town are much more ancient (Fig. 80, 81). The castle lies in fact at the centre of an example of Roman centuriation: its main streets (the *Cardo* and the *Decumanus*), remain the same today, while the broader structure and design of the centuriation is still very visible and present in the landscape (Fig. 75).

The name Lugo derives from the Latin *lucus Dianae*, ‘a grove consecrated to Diana’, or *lucus Augusti*, from the Latin word *lucus, luci*, which means ‘sacred grove’. According to a recent interpretation, it could also mean ‘a clearing in the woodland, hit by sunlight’. Another hypothesis is that the toponym may derive from the name of a Celtic divinity, Lugh (son of the Sun, god of light and the arts), which would, however, relate to the Latin word *lux, lucis* (light). However, the land where the town of Lugo stands today was inhabited even before Roman colonisation, as shown by the remains of a Neolithic village of the Sasso Fiorano culture, dating back to the fifth millennium BC.

12. The town of Luzzara, for example, photographed by Paul Strand, originated in medieval times. The toponym refers to the Latin *luteus*, which means ‘fangoso’, (muddy).



Fig. 74

© Archivio Alinari, *Lugo di Romagna. The castle and the main square, late 19th century*

Despite this ancient history, it was during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that the city took on its contemporary appearance, particularly after the construction of the Pavaglione. The Pavaglione is the grand, imposing and unusual building designed to hold the local market, which was photographed by Barbieri in 1982 (Fig. 51) and that I photographed in 2014, climbing the temporary scaffolding built to restore the Monument to Francesco Baracca (Fig. 2).

There is therefore a correlation between the period in which photography was invented and developed and that in which the city of Lugo took its current form. A 1920 photo of Lugo by Fratelli Alinari (Fig. 74), which I discovered in 2004 (while working on the project *Lugo e il mare* with Olivo Barbieri: Fig. 63, 64), struck me for its modernity: the foreshortened aspect of one of the main squares of the city is identical to the contemporary view of the square. From that moment I began to collect, archive and study historical photographs of the city and maps of its urban layout, and to respond to them for some of the *Lugo Land* projects. The Barbieri project *Lugo e il mare*¹³ mentioned above (see pp. 179) for example, in addition to the photographs taken in 1982, had as its starting point an urban land registry map, whose shape surprisingly resembled that of a First World War aircraft (and therefore has a relationship with the 'aerial' project by Barbieri – Fig. 62, 63). Another example is the workshop organised with students from the Architectural Association in London, 'Walking and photographing along the axis of the Roman Centuriation', which proposed a visual and historical reflection on the urban layout of the territory, still strongly characterised by centuriation (Fig. 75).

The attempt to relate the history of the locality to its contemporaneity has deepened during this doctoral project, for which historical research has been carried out in a systematic way and articulated conceptually. Adding

13. See Olivo Barbieri, *Lugo e il mare* (Rome: Punctum Press, 2005).

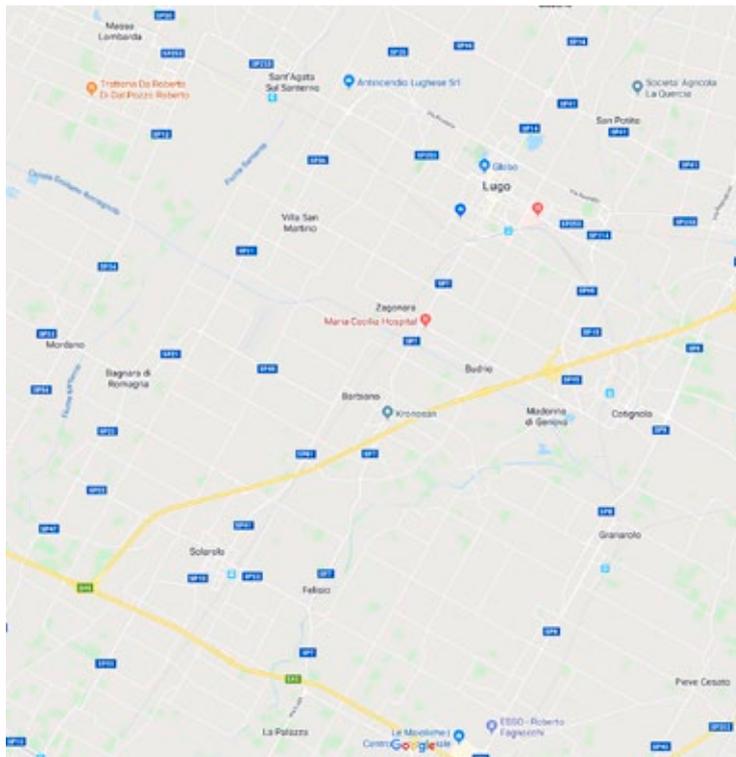


Fig. 75

The Roman centuriation in the Lugo territory

‘The countryside around Lugo bears the evident traces of an extensive and well-preserved centuriate network, which declines 28 degrees east of the geographic north and consists of “classic” square centurias. The continuity of the meshes is so conspicuous in the territory that a topographical analysis of them might seem superfluous. The reticulate is in fact splendidly composed and, in relation to what can be observed in the Romagna plain, it goes downstream of the Via Emilia.’ (From *The Roman centuriation in the Lugo area: hypothesis for a park-museum*, Luca Baccherelli degree thesis in Landscape Geography, University of Bologna, 2010)

a historical perspective to the visual and imaginary map of Lugo which I am tracing has allowed me to actuate and redefine the debate around place and identity with particular reference to the Italian context.

Working on historical and artistic archives to re-contextualise and re-evaluate them is a common practice nowadays in both academic and artistic contexts. There are a number of recent interesting examples in the Emilia-Romagna region alone: besides the Fototeca Manfrediana in Faenza mentioned earlier (see Chapter 2 p. 171), in Ravenna the Arrigo Dolcini Archive was enhanced in 2019 through cultural activity very similar to the way I have approached the Guerra archive.¹⁴

To refer to an example that has had great impact in the media, the promotion of the Guerra and Dolcini archives seems to follow the approach taken towards the now famous Vivian Maier archive, which has gained international attention in recent years.¹⁵ Vivian Maier (1926–2009) was an American street photographer who worked for about forty years as a nanny, mostly in Chicago's North Shore, pursuing photography in her spare time. Her work has been discovered and evaluated posthumously, thanks to the resourcefulness of the American collector John Maloof. In the last ten years, her work has received international attention in mainstream media, and has appeared in gallery exhibitions and several books and documentary films. If, on one hand, the phenomenon of Vivian Maier has alerted both a professional audience and the general public to an original photographic archive, on the other I think her work has been sensationalised. However valuable her photographic work is, there are many archives of the same quality that are surely worthy of being highlighted: the Guerra archive could easily be seen on the same level, not only because of the quality and typology of the pictures, but also for the artist's biography.

14. See Arrigo Dolcini, *Professione fotografo, 1950-60* (Ravenna: Danilo Montanari, 2019).

15. In recent years, Maier's work has been widely published. To mention a few examples: *Vivian Maier: A Photographer Found*, ed. by John Maloof (New York: Harper Collins, 2014); *Vivian Maier: The Color Work*, ed. by Colin Westerbeck (New York: Harper Collins, 2018); *Vivian Maier, Self-portrait* (New York: Random House USA, 2014).



Fig. 76

Carlo Visani © Archivio Visani, *Workers' houses built during the fascist period, Via Corridoni, Lugo, 1929*
Courtesy Lugo Land - Fotografia e territorio

My interest in a more in-depth study of the photographic history of Lugo began in 2012, after learning in more detail about the Paolo Guerra archive, that was rediscovered in the attic of the photographer's house by the local historian Giacomo Casadio. Paolo Guerra was a local amateur photographer, active during the post-war years, who managed to turn photography into a real profession. His rich photographic archive (about 60,000 35mm negatives, and a few thousand in medium format, from a later period) tells, in an original way, the story of the rebirth of the city following the impact of the conflict of the Second World War on the town. The Paolo Guerra archive has been significant, for three main reasons:

- it presents many points of contact with a Neo-realist cultural approach and aesthetics, which links it directly to the cultural context under discussion: we mentioned earlier (pp. 139) how the various references to the title of the project *Viaggio in Italia* include the homonymous 1953 film by Rossellini, and how the photographers involved in that project had been influenced by cinema and by Neo-realist culture. Moreover, I mentioned (p. 147) that the cover of the volume *Viaggio in Italia* was chosen by Ghirri because it reminded him of the maps hanging in the classrooms of elementary schools, the same ones that we find in the photographs of elementary schools in Passogatto taken in 1953 by Paolo Guerra (Fig. 49). One of the children in those images could have been Luigi Ghirri (born 1943), in his native town's elementary school.

- it addresses in an original way a key event in the history of the area: that is, the rebirth of the city following the impact of the conflict of the Second World War on the town (Fig. 77, 78, 79).

- it can be related to a broader history of photography, particularly in relation to those photographers who, in different places and at different times, were firmly rooted to the place and time in which they worked. Borrowing a term from social anthropology, these photographers, including Eugene Atget, Stan-



Fig. 77
Cotignola after the departure of the Second World War front, 1945, Historical Archive, City Museum

islaw Witkiewicz, Andre Kertesz, Brassai, Josef Sudek, Robert Doisneau and Jitka Hanzlova, can be considered 'participant observers', intimately and knowingly acquainted with the group they were or are photographing.

This encounter motivated and prompted research into other local archives. As I explained earlier in discussing the research methodology, initially my historical research was conducted in as systematic and comprehensive a way as possible, in public and private archives, museums, collections, and through word of mouth. The research then took a decisive direction when I discovered the vast and complex Visani archive: as I addressed in the Introduction, in carrying out research in the archive of Giulia and Veronica Visani I found the key that shifted the research concept that I used to implement the photographic work. It is now appropriate to enlarge on some of the issues, mentioned in the introduction, that the adopting of a historical perspective entails.

David Bate acknowledges a twofold relation between history and photography:

On the one hand photographs have made their own impact on history, by providing images of objects, places, spaces, faces, and events that have existed in the past; although not to be taken simply at face value, such images provide a new type of historical artifact as visual archives. On the other hand, those same photographs have affected how we think of the past, because the cultural "past" has never before been so visually recorded and represented.¹⁶

Bate continues by proposing that the issue of how or what history is when we consider the impact of photography itself is, not least in its effect on human memory, a real challenge to conceptions of history, given the vast number of archives and repositories of photographs in existence.

Bate quotes the historian John Tagg, who, following Foucault, focused on the

16. Bate, *Photography: the Key Concepts*, p. 3.



Fig. 78
Carlo Visani © Archivio Visani, *Pavaglione after the departure of the Second World War front, Lugo, 1945*
Courtesy Lugo Land - Fotografia e territorio

Fig. 79
Paolo Guerra © Archivio Paolo Guerra, *Car race at Pavaglione, Lugo, 1946*
Courtesy Lugo Land - Fotografia e territorio

discursive practice of photography, emphasising the importance of a history of photography that ‘recognizes its plurality, the “multiplicity of social sites and social practices”¹⁷. For Tagg, photography cannot be used as an unproblematic source, as ‘it does not transmit a pre-existent reality which is already meaningful in itself’¹⁸. Bate explains this complex topic well by stating how, for Tagg, the history of photography should be reconsidered within the history of the discourses and institutional spaces in which it appears. This is why, rather than aspiring to a general history of photography (which for Tagg would not make sense), it would be more appropriate to attempt a historical project of photography:

a historical project that asks why pictures were taken, what they were used for, how they were made to signify, for whom, and where. [...] In a sense, Tagg makes the semiotic point that the photographic signifier (the picture) only had a signified (meaning) within the signifying discourse that use it.¹⁹

In other words, in historical research it is essential to identify the original conditions and circumstances within which the research is carried out. In the case of this research, the historical trajectory I propose is informed by the specific debate around place and identity developed in the Italian context during the 1980s and 1990s: my approach as a historical researcher has been to impose a theoretical perspective on photographic artifacts from the past (the archives) which does not crush their autonomy as facts. Drawing on a theme addressed by Siegfried Kracauer, and taken up by Alan Trachtenberg, the historian’s task resembles the photographer’s, as they both traverse the thin line between facts and meanings, ‘between visual details in themselves and the significance discovered through them.’²⁰

17. Ibid., p. 237.

18. John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation* (Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota University Press, 1993), p. 119.

19. Bate, *Photography: The Key Concepts*, p. 238.

20. Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs*, p. xiv.



Fig. 80

© Luca Nostri, *Archaeological excavations of a Franciscan necropolis (13th century)*, Piazza Savonarola, Lugo, 2018. From the series *The Hanging Garden*, 2009-2020

Kracauer's intuitive suggestion that combines the practice of the historian with that of the photographer is very interesting for the purposes of my interdisciplinary research.

The historian employs words, narrative and analysis. The photographer's solution is in the viewfinder: where to place the edge of the picture, what to exclude, from what point of view to show the relations among the included details. Both seek a balance between "reproduction and construction", between passive surrender to the facts and active reshaping of them into a coherent picture or story.²¹

For both the historian and the photographer, the attempt to order facts into meaning is a real political act, 'a matter of judgement and choice about the emerging shape of the present and the future',²² and 'a tool for making a past suitable for the future'.²³

Ultimately, what unites Kracauer's, Trachtenberg's, Tagg's and Bate's arguments is an idea of photography that is never neutral – where the photographs 'are not simply the transparent evidence of history but are themselves historical interpretations, already offering a kind of representative power about which we should ask questions concerning the conditions of the productions of their meanings'.²⁴

I will return to this subject in the next chapter, in which I will introduce the final work, the result of the combination of historical research and artistic practice, filtered by notions of place. The practice which I present started before the PhD research and has been carried out progressively and continuously throughout the research. It is important to emphasise that it has been increasingly influenced and shaped by historical research, and vice versa, in a reciprocal dia-

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.

24. Bate, *Photography: The Key Concepts*, p. 238.



Fig. 81

© Luca Nostri, *Archaeological excavations of the Castle of Zagonara (13th century)*, Zagonara near Lugo, 2018. From the series *The Hanging Garden*, 2009-2020

logue that I hope has enriched and empowered both practices. Both have been carried out with no preconceived or pre-established methods of investigation, following an open approach which has led over time to unexpected encounters that have opened up new directions. In this specific case, a crucial encounter was with a number of private courtyards in the lowlands of Romagna, in which, and through which, over time, a number of practitioners (including myself) have employed the medium of photography to define themselves, as well as the society in which they have lived or are living.



Fig. 82

© Luca Nostri, *Francesca and Ada in the courtyard*, Lugo, 2015
From the series *The Hanging Garden*, 2009-2020

4. **Research work:** *Four Courtyards*

This chapter introduces the practice element of the thesis which is presented alongside this dissertation. It attempts to present a creative portrait of the town of Lugo, following the trajectory of Italian photography developed since the late 1970s, which I describe in the introductory paragraph. I then introduce the practice element, which consists of an assemblage presented as a set of four books, each presenting a photographic series, resulting of the investigation of four case studies. All the photographic series develop around a courtyard, either in the town of Lugo or in the surrounding lowlands. I discuss the reasons that led to the construction of the assemblage, and I describe the four case studies, in each of which the research process deepened. I also touch upon the way the four projects relate to each other.

4.1 *City portraits and archival images: an introduction*

In Chapter 1 I discussed the phenomenological approach to places in photography developed from the late 1970s in the American and European context as a consequence of a wider philosophical debate. In Chapter 2 I focused on the Italian context, introducing first a specific period of Italian photography and its influence and legacy in the particular geographical area of Emilia Romagna. For the purposes of this research, it is necessary to take a step back and expand the discourse again to the entire Italian peninsula, analysing a number of important photographic projects that have specifically addressed the urban landscape and the topography of the city.

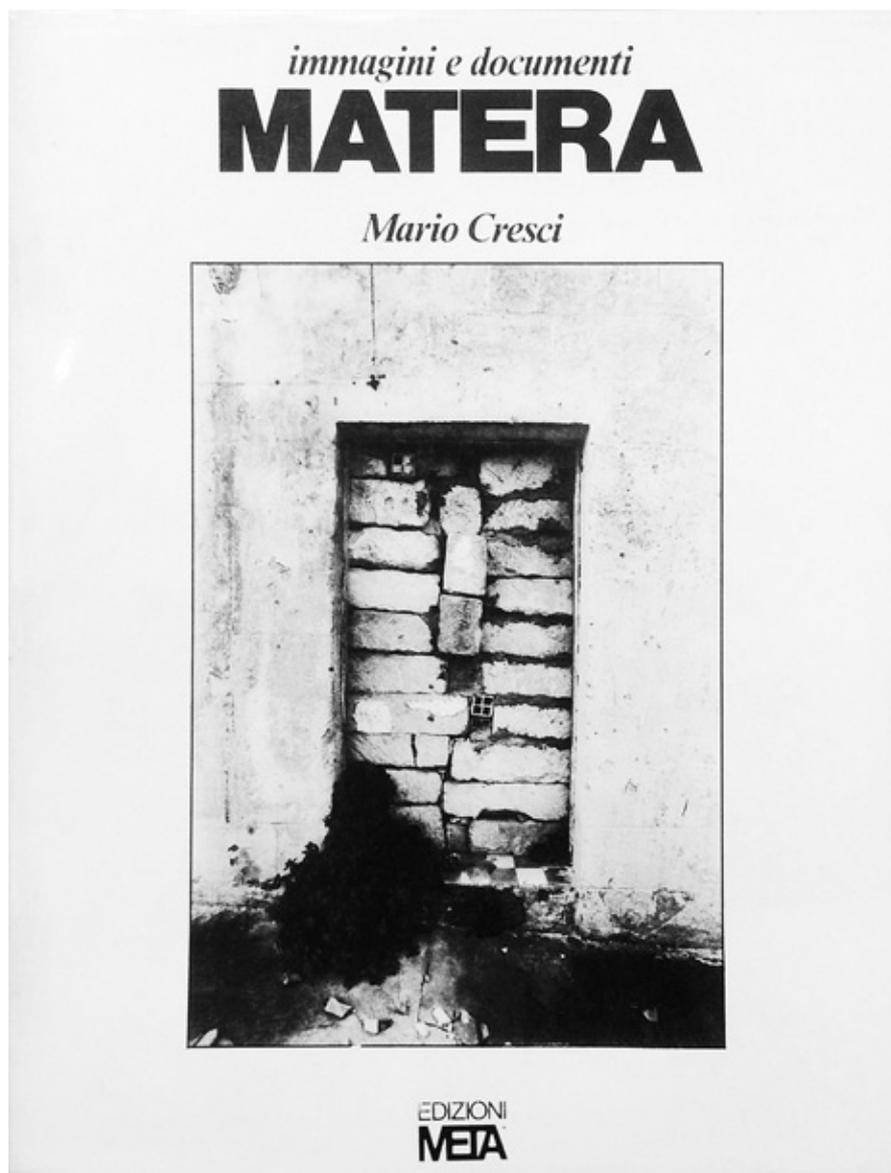


Fig. 83
Mario Cresci, *Matera. Immagini e documenti*, Matera: Meta, 1975

Since the 1960s, a wide range of Italian photographic and written texts have concerned the theme of the city. A comprehensive analysis by Antonello Frongia explains how, through detailed processes of selection, editing and commentary, photographers have developed elaborate visual and verbal-visual texts capable of conveying the meaning of the complex relationships that the city imposes on its inhabitants. The main vehicle for this form of investigation was the photo-book, which has played an important role as a visual space that ‘suggests that the citizen spectator should recover an active role in the attempt to decode and recompose signs, reinvent paths, build new relations’.¹

Frongia identifies three main families of representation, based on the ‘hermeneutical relationship that the photographers intended to establish with their subject of investigation and with their citizen public’.²

1) A first model is that of portraits of the city: photographic representations that, while demonstrating an awareness of the fragmentation of the medium and of the contemporary environment, rely on the possibility of recognising the face and history of the city. An important example of this typology is Mario Cresci’s project *Matera: Images and Documents*, an innovative photographic text composed of over three hundred images and a collection of documents relating to parliamentary debates on the restoration of the Sassi from 1951 to 1971. A complex project structure emerges from the book, concealed by a language that is seemingly merely direct and descriptive. The aim of the book is not only to offer a description of the physical place, but also to describe the ‘phenomena of the magic of social life and meaning that then could still be defined as “anthropological”’.³

1. For an exhaustive analysis of the large number of photographic texts that since the 1960s have covered the themes of the city in the context of Italian photography, see Frongia, ‘La città come testo fotografico’.

2. Frongia, ‘La città come testo fotografico’, p. 112.

3. M. Cresci, in A.C. Quintavalle, *Muri di carta. Fotografia e paesaggio dopo le avanguardie* (Milano: Electa, 1993), p. 242.



Fig. 84

© Guido Guidi, *Villa Fossa, Cesena*, 1972. In *Viaggio in Italia*, ed. Luigi Ghirri, Gianni Leone and Enzo Velati, Alessandria: Il Quadrante, 1984
Courtesy Museo di Fotografia Contemporanea, Milano-Cinisello Balsamo

2) A second group of texts has emerged, mostly during the period of social conflict in the 1970s, from the attempt to identify, critique and analyse the urban reality through which the crisis is manifested, acting in the context of social relations and developing new ways of communicating with the public. A significant example of this trend is an early project by Gabriele Basilico in Glasgow. Basilico represents a new generation of photographers who were studying in the climate of student protest at the end of the 1970s. In 1969, while still at an early stage in his career, Basilico carried out a photographic investigation into the urban conditions of Glasgow. Recognizing 'the complexity of a global description of an urban reality',⁴ the series focused on a specific aspect: the detrimental effects of the ongoing transformation brought by an urban redevelopment project that generated an alienating rift between the existence of the inhabitants and their living spaces.

3) A third approach favours 'constructivist' forms of research. This modality is not preordained by the physical or socio-political structures of the city, but rather the subject of investigation is defined in the course of the work through a substantially phenomenological relationship between the photographer and the urban environment. The *Viaggio in Italia* project is an interesting example of this approach, which aims not so much to 'portray' specific cities or to illustrate the obvious contradictions of a society in crisis as to establish a dialectical comparison with the outside, in order to trigger some form of visual understanding (Fig. 84). These photographers often combine the phenomenological approach with an investigation that is interested in some way in exploring the urban topography, and in some cases even deepening the memories of a subjective past.⁵

4. G. Basilico, 'Glasgow: Appunti Visivi del Processo di Trasformazione della Città', *Popular Photography italiana*, 154 (September 1970), 35-38.

5. See Frongia, 'La città come testo fotografico', p. 112; see also Maria Antonella Pellizzari, *Percorsi della fotografia in Italia* (Rome: Contrasto, 2011), p. 161.



Fig. 85

© Michele Buda, *Universo*, from *Via Emilia. Fotografie, luoghi e non luoghi 1*, Linea di Confine, 1999
Courtesy Linea di Confine per la Fotografia Contemporanea

In the light of the analysis proposed by Frongia, my research, although it aligns mainly with the third approach, uses research methods that are specific to the first. As mentioned in the introduction, this research proposes, in fact, a particular portrait of the city of Lugo, in the area of the lowlands of Romagna, inspired by a phenomenological approach which includes photography itself as a subject, as a field of investigation. In my investigation, Lugo is both a mental space – an archetype of any generic Italian place (see p. 157, where I discuss the word *LuOgo*) – and a concrete place, existing in reality and meaningful to me as my ‘homeland’, and which allowed me to explore ‘the feeling and the enigma of living in a place’.⁶ The central point of my proposal, which emerged from and was inspired by historical analysis, is the identification of the space of the courtyard as a definitive space.

In terms of the motivation for this decision, it is necessary to return for a moment to the photographic projects discussed in the previous chapter, in relation to the legacy of the *Viaggio in Italia* project in the geographical area of the Po valley (see p. 162-163): *Archivio dello spazio*, *Esplorazioni lungo la via Emilia*, *Traversate del deserto*, *Linea di Confine*. These projects, despite their specificity, often placed an emphasis on the transformation of landscape understood as the loss of the identity of places, a consequence of the globalisation process. In *Esplorazioni lungo la Via Emilia*, for example, the Via Aemilia consular Roman road becomes a metaphor for the industrialisation and depersonalisation of the contemporary landscape; *Traversate del deserto*, in a similar way, brought together philosophers, photographers, writers and sociologists around the idea of the environmental, cultural and existential desertification of contemporary society; the name itself, *Archivio dello spazio* (Archive of the Space), seems to suggest the need to record (perhaps for the last time) an endangered landscape, threatened by globalization; finally, the organization

6. Pellizzari, *Percorsi della fotografia in Italia*, p. 161.



Fig. 86

© Paola de Pietri, from *Via Emilia. Fotografie, luoghi e non luoghi 2*, Linea di Confine, 1999
Courtesy Linea di Confine per la Fotografia Contemporanea

Linea di Confine has produced several projects inspired by the concept of *non-place* formulated by Marc Augé,⁷ such as the 1999 project *Via Emilia: fotografie, luoghi e non luoghi*,⁸ which once again brought together authors from different generations on the subject of the transformation of the area and the construction of new infrastructures: compared to the 1980s project mentioned above, this new survey placed more emphasis on the success of the process of globalisation, which by that time had almost transformed the area along the Roman road into a sprawling metropolitan area (Fig. 85, 86).

My project on Lugo instead brings the attention back to a potential idea of place, but not in a Romantic or nostalgic sense. It does not suggest a return to an idea of *genius loci*, Norbert-Schulz's 'spirit of place' discussed in Chapter 1. Rather, it takes inspiration from the concept suggested by the Italian writer Daniele Del Giudice, espoused by Guidi himself: instead of the spirit of a place, Del Giudice proposes an idea of the spirit in a place.⁹ Therefore, my attempt in some way proposes to investigate resistances and the persistence of the ideas of places, which maintain a specific and continuing identity as a result of history. The methods of investigation, however, have some similarities with research carried out in the rich context of the photography of Emilia-Romagna.

In relation to this it is useful here to mention, for example, two projects by Franco Vaccari, photographer and key figure in Italian photography, in whose research the use of archival images to investigate the present has been a constant element of his practice since the 1970s, such as in his projects *Modena dentro le mura* (1970), and *In palmo di mano* (2012). In 1970 Vaccari re-ed-

7. Non-place or nonplace is a neologism coined by the French anthropologist Marc Augé to refer to anthropological spaces of transience, where human beings remain anonymous and that do not hold enough significance to be regarded as places. Examples of non-places would be motorways, hotel rooms, airports and shopping malls. See Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (London: Verso, 1992).

8. *Via Emilia. Fotografie, luoghi e non luoghi*, curated by William Guerrieri e Guido Guidi. *Via Emilia. Fotografie, luoghi e non luoghi 2*, curated by William Guerrieri.

9. Daniele Del Giudice, 'La conoscenza della luce', in: *Esplorazioni sulla Via Emilia. Scritture nel paesaggio* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1986), p. 73. See also: Frongia, 'La città come testo fotografico', p. 164.



Fig. 87
© Franco Vaccari, from *In palmo di mano*, 2012

ited Francesco Valdrighi's *Dizionario storico-etimologico delle contrade e spazi pubblici di Modena* (Historical-etymological dictionary of the districts and public spaces of Modena), the title made more concise as *Modena dentro le mura*¹⁰ (Modena inside the walls). The text was enhanced with early twentieth-century photographs from the Orlandini photographic studio. With these images, now preserved in the Raccolte Fotografiche Modenesi archive, Vaccari realised a sort of reportage, focusing on details that would have gone unnoticed in the image as a whole. With this intervention, Vaccari is able to reread and re-present photographs from another era without indulging in a nostalgic reference to the passing of time.¹¹

The series *In palmo di mano*¹² (In the palm of the hand - Fig. 87) was a response to the invitation to create an artwork for the city of Carpi, and focuses on the photographic collection of the Centro Ricerca Etnografica (Centre for Ethnographic Research) in Carpi. Drawing on the entire collection, Vaccari focused on extracting images that featured the female figure as the main subject of the photographs, presenting women as the fulcrum of the culture and economy of the area: by collecting together the images that represent the female figure, the artist is able to examine and foreground the role played by women in the economic, ritual and leisure activities of the region. The images published in the book produce a new idea of woman, independent and at the forefront of her time, capable of transcending the blurred boundary between humanity and nature, highlighting the complicity between herself and objects and rituals that allows her to move into the realm of the magical. In this case, photography is used as a trace of a presence, beyond its aesthetic or documentary value, and the archive is investigated not simply as a deposit of a historical memory but as a locus for the production of meaning.¹³

10. Luigi Francesco Valdrighi, *Modena dentro le mura*. curated by Franco Vaccari (Modena: P. Toschi e C.).

11. See the press release for the exhibition *Franco Vaccari – Viaggi nelle fotografie: 1. Modena dentro le mura 2. L'album di Debora*, Fotomuseo Giuseppe Panini, Modena, 2004. Available at: <https://www.exibart.com/evento-arte/franco-vaccari-viaggi-nelle-fotografie-1-modena-dentro-le-mura-2-lalbum-di-debora/>

12. Franco Vaccari, *In palmo di mano*, curated by Luca Panaro (Carpi - Modena: APM, 2012).

13. See Anna Zinelli, review of the exhibition Franco Vaccari, *In palmo di Mano* (curated by Luca Panaro at Palazzo



Fig. 88
© William Guerrieri, *Riconoscimento pubblico n. 18* (dyptich)
from *Identità di gruppo*, 1995

The photographer William Guerrieri, a pupil of Vaccari (and previously acknowledged as the creator / curator / coordinator of *Linea di confine*), for many of his series also takes research in historical archives as a starting-point, with the aim of investigating the cultural codes of photography and its role as a repository for collective memory, as well as the precarious identity of places. In the series *Identità di gruppo*¹⁴ (1995), Guerrieri reuses images found in local publications and newsletters of voluntary associations produced in the Emilia-Romagna region (Fig. 88). He re-photographed these images, modifying and recomposing them together with a number of texts from the local newspapers themselves, to investigate political as well as visual perspectives on urban life, solidarity groups and the identity of public spaces, in an attempt to find an artistic solution to the problem of cultural standardisation. In the 2009 series *The village*¹⁵, Guerrieri explored what remains of Modena's Villaggio Artigiano ('artisan village'), originally developed in the 1950s to support local small businesses, following the principle of combining '*casa e bottega*' (home and workshop), acknowledging the inseparable work-life connection. Today the Villaggio is a neighbourhood undergoing regeneration: Guerrieri, in search of the historical, cultural and social traces of the place, has created a series of fifty photographs, combined with archival images that are not a prompt for nostalgic or surreal speculation, but which, with their iconographic value, suggest a possible dialogue with the here and now "Home and Workshop", emblem of an inseparable link between work and life. Today the Village is a neighborhood undergoing requalification and Guerrieri, in search of the historical, cultural and social traces of the place, has created a series of 50 photographs, combined with archive images that are not a pretext for a nostalgic or surreal speculation, but which, with their iconographic value, suggest a possible dialogue with the *here and now*¹⁶.

dei Pio di Carpi - MO), *Itinera*, 6, (2013). p. 309.

14. Images from the project are published in the exhibition catalogue Guerrieri, W., *Oggi nessuno può dirsi neutrale* (Bolzano: Ar/Ge Kunst).

15. William Guerrieri, *The Village* (Rubiera - RE: Linea di confine).

16. See the essays 'Partial Neutrality' by Val Williams, and When Nobody can Call Himself/Herself Neutral. The Representation of New Sociality in the Work of William Guerrieri, in Guerrieri, W., *Oggi nessuno può dirsi neutrale*

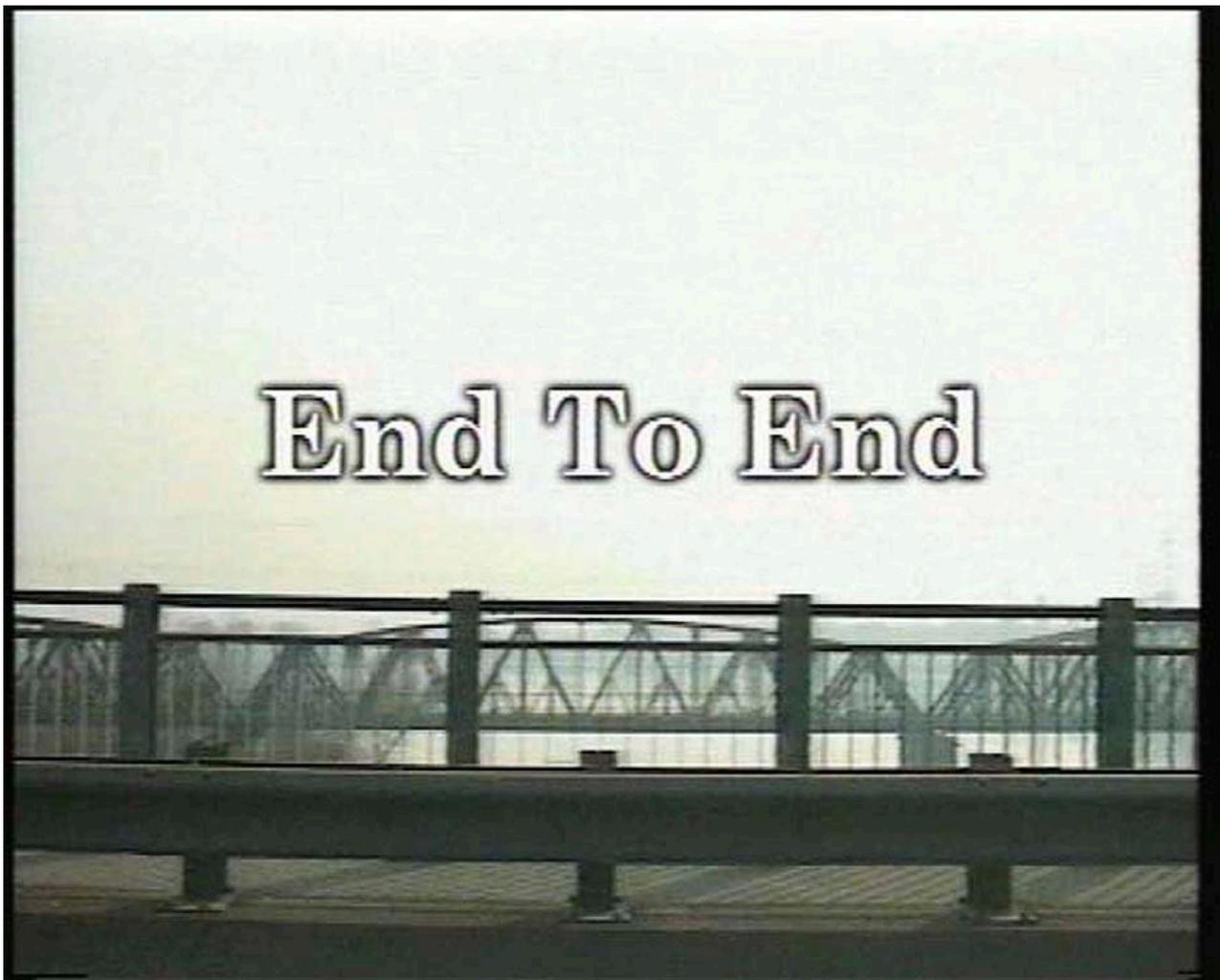


Fig. 89

© Lewis Baltz, *End to End*, from *Via Emilia. Fotografie, luoghi e non luoghi 2*, *Linea di Confine*, 2000
Courtesy Linea di Confine per la Fotografia Contemporanea

Guerrieri is also the curator of an important 1993 project by Lewis Baltz based on the Via Aemilia, commissioned by *Linea di Confine*. Baltz produced a film entitled *End to End* (Fig. 89),¹⁷ which consists of a long uninterrupted tracking shot of the Via Aemilia, with a soundtrack of excerpts from local radio broadcasts. The footage was later overwritten with a text telling the story of the social life of Emilia-Romagna, from the Società di Mutuo Soccorso¹⁸ to the foundation of the Partito Democratico di Sinistra,¹⁹ and from the Resistance in the Second World War to the launch of the big consumer cooperatives.

By juxtaposing diverse means of expression (historical narration, music, video), as well as past and present moments in history, Baltz shows how it is still possible to relate to landscape through a representation that, though fragmentary and incomplete, nonetheless appears to be comprehensible.²⁰

While sharing some of the strategies of re-reading the archival image adopted by Vaccari, Guerrieri and Baltz, my intention, rather than presenting macro themes linked to the social history of a locality, was to bring to light specific and unknown photographic histories, through a curatorial approach that respected as much as possible the photographer's original gaze. At the same time, I proposed an original interpretation, suggested by the reciprocal dialogue between this activity and my personal photographic practice. Moreover, both in the archives I studied and in my personal work, a shared experience of place and community emerges in which the photographer is a participant observer, intimately and knowingly acquainted with the group he or she is photographing. The relation between photography and history that I propose

(Bolzano: Ar/Ge Kunst).

17. Lewis Baltz, *End to End*, from *Via Emilia. Fotografie, luoghi e non luoghi* (Rubiera: Linea di Confine, 2000).

18. These are associations, established in Italy around the second half of the nineteenth century, that were created to make up for the deficiencies in the social support of the state and thus gave workers a way of protecting themselves from the financial risk presented by events such as accidents at work, illness or job loss.

19. A left-wing political party.

20. Nicoletta Leonardi, 'Vision, Culture, and Landscape: the case of Linea di Confine', in Urs Stahel and Thomas Seelig (eds.), *Trans Emilia*, (exh. cat.) (Basel: Christoph Merian Verlag, 2005), pp. 47-53



Fig. 90

William Henry Fox Talbot, A Scene in a library, c. 1844

From *The Pencil of Nature* (published in six parts between 1844 and 46)

is a reading of the way these stories interweave and influence each other, from both an artistic and a historical point of view.

In the following section I will explain how looking at groups of photographs and considering them in the context of the courtyard location allowed me to create original and unexpected relationships, and provided a new perspective on all the photographic series while respecting the nature of the photographer's eye.

4.2 Courtyards

The urban space of the courtyard is the element around which my reasoning revolves, and around which I have experimented and built my conceptual architecture, from both a curatorial and an artistic perspective. All the bodies of work that I present in my 'assemblage' unfold and develop around a courtyard, either in the town of Lugo or in the surrounding lowlands: a different one for each photographer, at different moments in time. I argued earlier that this choice was initially inspired by the discovery and study of the Visani archive (see. p. 36). However, it is interesting to note that the use of the courtyard as an experimental space dates back to the dawn of photography.

In a short case-study example, in which he questions the meaning and value of photographic representation, David Bate analyses the photograph 'A Scene in a Library' (Fig. 90) by William Henry Fox Talbot, the eighth plate of *The Pencil of Nature*.²¹ From the Talbot archives, we know that it was not actually taken inside a library: these books were not actually laid out in a library, but were arranged on a makeshift shelf in the courtyard of Talbot's home. With this image

21. Published in six instalments between 1844 and 1846, *The Pencil of Nature* was the first photographically illustrated book to be commercially published.

“Talbot has quite literally constructed the connoted meaning of “a library” from an arrangement of books and bits of wood outside his house. He creates meaning with the picture’.²² Along with the epistemological implications that this act from the beginning of photography involves, it is interesting here simply to consider the site of the courtyard as a space of work and experimentation.

The locus of the courtyard seemed to me the ideal key with which to provide a report on a place that could be both a description of a real and concrete urban space and an interesting conceptual space in which to address the theme of the place in a more abstract way. In my attempt to give an account of Lugo, the space of the courtyard represents a place within a place, which first of all suggests a vision from the inside, an intimate regard, and therefore in this sense it reflects my approach as someone ‘who belongs there’.

This argument unites all the photographers of the assemblage in this research, who are in fact distinguished by a natural closeness to their subject matter, and they can be considered participant-observers in the events they are recording, intimately and knowingly acquainted with the subjects they are photographing. Moreover, their work emanates from a shared experience of place and community and is rooted in the place and time in which they were photographing. Like some of the photographers of *Viaggio in Italia*, they are not itinerant: each focuses on their immediate environment and each, in very different ways, summons up the specificity of a historical moment or period. I believe that these characteristics are also found in my work.

Furthermore, the idea of the courtyard suggests a threshold between inside and outside, between public and private, and in this sense it reflects in an interesting way the ‘constructive’ and phenomenological approach described above, which combines

22. Bate, *Photography: the Key Concepts*, p. 242.

topographic investigation with personal experience. In this sense it can also be understood as a liminal place, a borderline place. This offers an interesting metaphor for the threshold between the inner world of the photographer (the particularity of the photographer's personal experience, as well as his/her artistic individual vision) and the external world.

As a physical place, on the other hand, it is a space that has a particular importance in this part of Romagna, which is characterised by a slight geophysical depression (hence the name, 'lowlands'), which means that the aquifer is very high, and this prevents the houses from having subterranean cellars, or basements, which would be at constant risk of flooding. This is why inner courtyards as urban spaces are very common in the area, and are typical of its historical centres and residential buildings, which are often built around large internal courtyards. The courtyard is therefore historically a particularly important and characteristic space in this region.

If the city of Lugo as a place is the object of this research, my account of it is a fragmented narrative, through some of the courtyards of the city, over time. Although these fragments are somehow connected, like pieces of a mosaic, the history I am trying to map here is characterised not only by a unitary trajectory of causation and continuity, but also by an accumulation of diverse experiences which 'resonates intermittently across time and space'.²³ Collectively, these *four courtyards* are a way of reading the past, 'not just the scenes recorded and the faces immobilized into permanent images, but the past as culture, as ways of thinking and feeling, as experience'.²⁴ They map a possible visual path through the town of Lugo from the beginning of the twentieth century to today.

23. This expression is borrowed from the preface to the exhibition catalogue *In the Face of History. European Photographers in the 20th Century*, ed. by Kate Bush and Mark Sladen (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2006), p. 11.

24. Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs*, p. 288.

4.3 Four courtyards: *Lugo as a conceptual assemblage*

The research work combines the characteristics of a conceptual assemblage with a phenomenological approach. I have approached Lugo as a place through a number of different photographic narratives, creating a conceptual assemblage made up of four photographic series, of which two are the result of historical research and two constitute an artistic practice. The different kinds of practices are presented here with equal weight, and have influenced each other.

This assemblage does not claim to describe, in a fully comprehensive way, a place that exists out there, just waiting to be found and described. Rather it insists on the power of photographic narratives, sometimes competing narratives, to bring a place into being through visual storytelling. Moreover, it does not claim to be a complete and all-encompassing research project, and does not suggest an idea of place as closed or finished. The four photographic series (four case studies) making up the assemblage intersect with and relate to each other, and together they contribute to the making of a unique whole and a coherent discourse.

An important aspect of my research is the book form: the four series have been shaped, or edited, as a set of photo-books, presented for viewing or reading as an ensemble of interactive images. As outlined in the Preface (p. 24), this thesis is presented in part through five separate elements, presented as a slip-cased, soft-bound series of books. Book 1 consists of the present document, which discusses the theoretical and cultural framework of the thesis, its methodology, conceptual structure and claims of originality; Books 2,3,4 and 5 present the practice elements of the thesis, which are based on four case studies. The final output of the work is therefore a set of five books. I recognised the book form as the ideal visual space to reinforce my idea of a conceptual assemblage. Aligning with the metaphor of the rhizome discussed in Chapter 1, these books

are not meant to be read (or looked at) in any particular order, and they are also meant to be autonomous and independent from each other. However, they intersect with each other and they aim to offer an original and particular form of presenting photographic work.

What the four case-studies have in common is that each one presents a consistent body of work which unfolds around a courtyard in and around the town of Lugo: a different one for each project, in different moments of time. This, then, gives the title to the practice elements of the thesis: *Four Courtyards*.

Taking up some of the considerations expressed previously, the courtyard as a conceptual place (a conceptual entrance into the town) has gradually oriented my research methodology. The choice of the courtyard as the common denominator of the photographs presented was mainly inspired by the discovery of the photographic archive of the sisters Giulia and Veronica Visani. On the one hand I use the courtyard as a conceptual filter to select, edit, and sequence the photographs in the archives I have investigated. On the other, the idea of the courtyard has progressively oriented my personal photographic practice. I stress once again that these two processes have influenced each other throughout the course of the research.

In relation to the work of historical research, drawing on research by Alan Trachtenberg, my purpose is not to ask why photographers have made their pictures in this or that way, but to ask what the pictures presented in the sequences say about their subject, how the images reflect upon the 'opaque mass of facts' of their time. My historical selection is tightly focused: I chose to focus on two photographic archives: the Visani sisters archive and the Paolo Guerra archive. I have chosen the path of discussing these two archives in detail, rather than making a more cursory survey of a number of different ones, in order to exemplify a way or reading photographs not as pictures alone, or as docu-

ments, but as cultural texts. I believe that the photographs by the Visani sisters and by Paolo Guerra are not simple depictions but constructions, and that the history they show is inseparable from the history they enact: a history of photographers employing their medium to make sense of their society. It is also a history of photographers trying to define themselves, as well as to create a role for photography as an art and as a way of living.

These last two features have in turn motivated my photographic practice. My research in recent years has focused on the area in and around Lugo, known as Bassa Romagna (the lowlands of Romagna), which I have investigated over time with artistic and curatorial projects. In 2010, after years of training in Bologna and Rome, I returned to Romagna to find familiar places and approach them through photography. I was interested in working within the trajectory of the photographers who had investigated the Italian province in the 1980s, grasping the extraordinary in the ordinary. I was also interested in a slow and continuous exploration, in order to absorb an intimate and personal (phenomenological) essence of the place, and of the landscape of the lowlands through photography. To quote Robert Adams again:

Landscape pictures can offer us, I think, three varieties – geography, autobiography, and metaphor. Geography is, if taken alone, sometimes boring, autobiography is frequently trivial, and metaphor can be dubious. But taken together ... the three kinds of information strengthen each other and reinforce what we all work to keep intact – an affection for life.²⁵

By combining artistic and curatorial practice, my work can be considered as a new and imaginary map of Lugo, stretched over time. Far from being a cartography of the way things are, or were, this assemblage constitutes a potential horizon, a possible entry point for the social landscape of the lowlands of Romagna.

25. Robert Adams, *Beauty in Photography: Essays in Defense of Traditional Values* (New York: Aperture, 2004), p. 14.

However, this approach does not have to be considered 'localistic' (meaning 'limited to a particular locality'); on the contrary, it revels in the indeterminacy of place, and, starting from a local perspective, it aims to tell universal stories. I will now present a summary account of each of the four case studies (the four courtyards), which will help me to deepen this mutual influence. For each case study, I will discuss the research methods, and how each study relates to the others.

Four courtyards

1

Veronica and Giulia Visani

Cortile

1897-1913

2

Paolo Guerra

Vicolo Rocca and other places

1946-1955

3

Luca Nostri

Anselmo

2010-2019

4

Luca Nostri

The Hanging Garden

2009-2020



Fig. 91
Raw contact scan of the Visani glass plates contained in box 1/29

1 ***Cortile***

Veronica and Giulia Visani

1897-1913

Curatorial work.

This project presents the photographic work of Giulia and Veronica Visani, two sisters who belonged to a family of artists and who lived and photographed at the turn of the nineteenth century. They were quite unusual figures for the time, as a female photographic partnership, and their personal relationship was also unusual: Giulia was a single mother and, in the absence of a father, was supported in bringing up and educating her son Carlo by her sister Veronica, a testimony to the solidity of their relationship, well beyond a professional bond. The sisters worked as studio portraitists, in a style that was common at the time that reflected the strict aesthetic of painting: their professional photographs were composed and captured in a studio with long exposures, and the subjects were generally seated against plain or staged backgrounds, lit by soft natural daylight from a window.

The body of work presented here, however, focuses not on the commercial work of the two sisters, but rather on their private photography, which depicts their immediate family. All the photographs in this unusual and eclectic family album were taken in the courtyard of their family home in the old town of Lugo between 1897 and 1913. The courtyard was the place where the Visani family experienced affection, friendship and social relationships, and where Giulia and Veronica were free to experiment with the camera, exploring different genres: the portrait, the self-portrait, the staged tableau and the snapshot. The images they created have a freshness and a lightness, both in atmosphere and



Fig. 92

Giulia and Veronica Visani © Archivio Visani, *Carlo in the courtyard (looking north)*
Lugo, summer 1905. Digital contact print (2019) from glass plate
Courtesy Lugo Land - Fotografia e territorio

in composition, that is far from the rigidity of the nineteenth-century portrait, and incorporating an aesthetic approach that was ahead of their time (Fig. 92). Following the seasons, their pictures tell us about moments in an emancipated family of artists, active protagonists in the cultural scene of the time, lived and preserved between the walls and plants of the same courtyard. The intimate and private character of these moments gives the photographs, and the place itself, a timeless dimension which goes beyond any form of contingency.

The historical research and curatorial work on the Visani sisters' work consists of the following:

- The Visani archive currently hosts 337 silver glass-plate negatives (in various states of corrosion, contained in 29 boxes – Fig. 91), a few dozen original contact prints, a number of documents from the time, and four cameras of different sizes. The glass plates and the original prints have all been digitised and edited for the first time.
- The images selected for the publication have been digitally restored. Of the 337 plates, 104 were taken in the courtyard behind the house, which, for this publication, is used as a criterion for selection, and as a possible entry point for this set of intimate photographs. From the 104 photographs, 55 have been selected, and organised in a sequence for the book.
- The size of the photographic reproductions in the book reflects that of the original glass plates (1:1 scale). This aims both to maintain the innate photographic quality of the pictures and to describe the photographic objects in the archive.
- The glass plate reproduced on page 55 of the book *Cortile* (Fig. 92) depicts a view of the garden, looking north. At the top right, glued onto the surface of the plate, a piece of tissue paper on the edge of the frame, written by hand and in italics, reads 'Cortile Visani' (the Visani courtyard): it is this



Fig. 93

© Luca Nostri, *The Visani courtyard, looking north*, Lugo, 2018
From the series *The Hanging Garden*, 2009-2020

detail that inspired the title of this case-study and that can be seen on the cover of the book.

- My essay about the Visani sisters is included in the book project. In the essay I touch on their biography and family context, which is very important for an appreciation of their images. Moreover, I put the work of all the artists of the Visani family in context, with respect to the photographic and cultural milieu of the time. This latter aspect connects their archive in an interesting way with that of the photographer Paolo Guerra, through a completely original discovery: Giulia's son, Carlo, who we see depicted in the sisters' photographs from a newborn to an adolescent, many years later became Paolo Guerra's art teacher at the Municipal School of Drawing and Plastic Arts in Lugo, when Guerra was a teenager, and I have reason to believe that this meeting was fundamental for Guerra's career, as I will discuss in the next case study.
- Moreover, in the course of my research at the Visani archive, I myself photographed the Visani courtyard, whose architecture has remained almost unchanged. Some elements which appear in the images of Giulia and Veronica Visani are still present in the space (the block of marble, the wisteria, some ancient vases). I have included some of these photographs in my series *The Hanging Garden* (Fig. 93).



Fig. 94

Paolo Guerra © Archivio Paolo Guerra

from *Vicolo Rocca and other places. Photographs from the brothels of Lugo, 1945-1955*

Courtesy Lugo Land - Fotografia e territorio

2 ***Vicolo Rocca and other places***

Photographs from the brothels of Lugo

Paolo Guerra

1946-1955

Curatorial work in collaboration with Giacomo Casadio.

The photographer Paolo Guerra was born in 1913 in the town of Lugo, in the Po valley. Having worked for a while hand-painting bicycles, he took up photography around 1940, when he was given a 35mm Leica camera. His archive consists of nearly 50,000 negatives, all of which were taken with a 35mm Leica. The photographer catalogued his work personally, cutting the negatives individually and organising them into folders and boxes in roughly chronological order, from 1946 to 1965. There are no original prints. The archive has been kept for decades in the attic of the family house in via Mazzini and it was discovered by chance in 2010 by local historian Giacomo Casadio, who became the custodian of the archive, and who collaborated on this research. Paolo Guerra's photographs chronicle different aspects of life in Lugo following its liberation from the Fascists and from German occupation, and reflect the town's recovery from the social scars and deep economic problems left by the war. In Guerra's photographs, this period of transition is recorded with great immediacy and affection.

Among the negatives, it has been possible to identify 435 of them, randomly archived, that the photographer took inside the two brothels that existed in Lugo until 1958, when the Legge Merlin (Merlin Law), which criminalised prostitution, was introduced. There were two brothels in Lugo (both in the city centre), one in Via Tellarini and the other in Vicolo Rocca. The latter was a hundred



Fig. 95

Paolo Guerra © Archivio Paolo Guerra
from *Vicolo Rocca and other places. Photographs from the brothels of Lugo, 1945-1955*
Courtesy Lugo Land - Fotografia e territorio

metres away from Guerra's house (however, prostitution was also practised in other places, including the Trattoria alla Pesa). Almost all of these pictures are portraits of prostitutes, made over a nine-year period from 1946 to 1955. We decided to treat these portraits as a specific and idiosyncratic collection within the photographer's archive. The women are photographed with a playful approach and with great irony, elegance and affection. Most of the pictures were taken in the courtyards of the two brothels, and a few in the interiors. This body of work not only serves as a record of the women and of the businesses that housed them: it also reveals much of the photographer's uncultivated but compelling sensibility.

This study of Paolo Guerra's archive has uncovered more details about the photographer's life and work and has positioned his legacy within the broader context of Italian post-war photography and culture, the Neo-realist movement in particular. After researching some of the photographer's personal documents, I discovered some drawings bearing the stamp of the Municipal School of Drawing and Plastic Arts, an experimental art school founded in Lugo by Domenico Visani (Giulia and Veronica's uncle) and later directed by his son Carlo (the signature on the school's stamp is Carlo Visani's). Although I have not yet managed to find the original school registers in the municipal archives, these two drawings prove that Paolo Guerra attended Carlo Visani's art classes for some months. I have reason to believe that this experience may have had an important influence on Paolo Guerra's career as a photographer. In 1929 Paolo Guerra was sixteen years old and working as a bicycle painter. It is quite probable that he may have learned the basics of photography from Carlo Visani, who was an architect and photographer. Furthermore, two drawings found among Guerra's papers depict two small birds in the branches of a tree. The way the birds are framed in the drawings, and their style, are very similar to some of Visani's images, in which he placed people, often women, up on trees: some of the prostitutes in Guerra's photographs of brothels are also photographed in this way.

For my assemblage, I decided to focus on photographs of the brothels, as they were mainly taken and staged in and around the brothel courtyards. This is the first time that these pictures have been curated as a specific body of work. Casadio and I gave this body of work the title *Vicolo Rocca*, from the name of the street that housed one of the brothels.

However, in the appendix to this research, as both a parallel narrative to the brothel photographs and a further visual context, I have included a selection of one hundred street photographs from Guerra's archive, taken between 1946 and 1953, the result of a long and detailed process of editing, realised in collaboration with Giacomo Casadio. This part of Guerra's work reflects the recovery of the town of Lugo, marked by the Second World War's legacy of social scars and deep economic problems. After 1946, life in Lugo took place against a background of a severely deteriorating urban panorama. What is really surprising about these photos is their unusual ironic energy and sense of lightness, contrasting with a cityscape that was partially still in ruins. They also depict everydaylife in Lugo at the time that the photographs of the brothels were taken.

The historical research and curatorial work on the Paolo Guerra's archive consists of the following.

As mentioned above, the archive was investigated with the collaboration of local historian Giacomo Casadio, custodian of the archive. I also invited the historian Marina Spunta to contribute a text. The decision to involve other actors in the research process was inspired by the work of Deleuze and Guattari, who, in their development of assemblage theory, identified a potential research method that specifically involved collaborative work.

- The 56 images within this book have been selected from a group of

435 photographs of prostitutes from the brothels of Lugo. All 435 photographs of prostitutes have been digitised and archived. The 56 photographs selected for the publication have been digitally restored. A slightly different selection of photographs has been printed in the darkroom from the original negatives, as exhibition prints.

- On November 16, 2016, I organised a research day at Plymouth University with my former PhD supervisor David Chandler, with interventions by Professor David Chandler, Professor Marina Spunta (University of Leicester), Giacomo Casadio and myself.
- I contributed an editorial note and an updated biography of the photographer, in collaboration with Giacomo Casadio, for the photo-book *Vicolo Rocca*.
- I invited Marina Spunta to write an essay about the photographs presented in *Vicolo Rocca and other places*, to be included in the book.
- As a further step, in collaboration with Giacomo Casadio, I edited Paolo Guerra's street photographs into a collection of 350, covering the years between 1946 and 1959 (fourteen years after the end of the Second World War). A selection of pictures is presented in the Appendix 1, and it offers the basis for a new publishing project about Guerra as a Neo-realist street photographer in Lugo.



Fig. 96
© Luca Nostri, *Solarolo, Via Gaiano Casanola, 24*
From the series *Anselmo*, 2010-2019

3 *Anselmo*

Luca Nostri

2010-2019

Artistic work.

A 2012 essay by David Chandler, 'Notes on Landscape, Place, Memory and Belonging', opens with a reflection that has greatly influenced me: 'Things often become more important to us just as we begin to feel we are losing them'¹. Chandler refers here in particular to the idea of place, but it could equally refer to a person, a thing, or a landscape.

In the summer of 2010, after seven years in Rome, I returned to Romagna: one of the reasons for this was my interest in photographing it. In the months immediately following my return, while I was trying to adjust to the transition, I began spending time with my grandfather Anselmo (born in 1925), in the belief that this time with him was not wasted. I followed him in his daily wanderings, between the courtyard of his house (the house where I grew up) and the small adjacent industrial area. I do not remember how much this area had changed during the years I had been away, but I was intrigued by the strange sense of disorientation that I felt as I walked through it, amplified by the contrast with the familiar presence of my grandfather. As a former master mason, Anselmo always returned from his short wanderings with something: industrial materials found in the local dump, abandoned objects or other objects traded with his friends, which he then reused in bizarre and unusual, but functional, ways.

1. Chandler, 'Dispatches from the Littoral: Notes on Landscape, Place, Memory and Belonging'. See p . 101.



Fig. 97
© Luca Nostri, *Solarolo, Via Gaiano Casanola, 24*
From the series *Anselmo*, 2010-2019

Artist statement

This series of photographs, in progress from 2010, is a tribute to Anselmo, and at the same time it offers a reflection on the transformation of the landscape and the environment in which I grew up. The photographs were taken with two field cameras, a 13x18cm (5x7 inch) large format camera and a 6x9cm medium format camera. At first I photographed the objects with the medium format field-camera, in order to be able to photograph in a way that was more immediate, free and generous, in order to become familiar with these interesting artifacts that attracted my attention. At the same time, I used the 13x18 camera to photograph the surrounding landscape, occasionally making portraits of my grandfather, stopping him for a moment in his daily tasks.

For many years I continued to photograph without having a project in mind. During the course of this research, I realized at a certain point, having completed the editing of the Visani archive, that Anselmo's courtyard could be the leitmotif around which to build a series and a photographic sequence.

The series alternates portraits of my grandfather (alone or in company, as fragments from his daily life), photographs of the objects and materials that were re-used and re-assembled with his particular knowledge, views of the landscape from my grandfather's house (which he built, and where I grew up) looking outwards, views of the house in the context of the surrounding landscape (the same view is sometimes photographed several times over the years), and photographs of the things in the landscape which he built as a carpenter during his working years.

In October 2019, I had the chance to exhibit twenty-five of these pictures, organised for the first time as a body of work, at the Maxxi Museum in Rome, which acquired them for their permanent collection.



Fig. 98
© Luca Nostri, *Solarolo, Via Gaiano Casanola, 24*
Fom the series *Anselmo*, 2010-2019

For the occasion, one of the museum's photography curators, Simona Antonacci, wrote:

Luca Nostri's research focuses on an area of the province of Ravenna known as Bassa Romagna, which he has investigated over time with various artistic and curatorial projects. In the summer of 2010, after years of training in Bologna and Rome, the artist returned to Romagna to find familiar places and photograph them. In this series Luca Nostri gradually restricts the field to the yard of his grandfather Anselmo, whom he follows in his daily wanderings. This micro cosmos is inhabited by small artisan constructions and assemblages of apparently incongruous domestic objects, which the artist contemplates as mysterious and enigmatic presences. Continuing in the wake of the authors who investigated the Italian province in the 1980s, grasping the extraordinary in the ordinary, Luca Nostri explores this vernacular landscape slowly, absorbing the most intimate essence of the place through photography.²

2. Text written by Simona Antonacci for the display of the series *Anselmo*, as part of the exhibition *Maxxi Collection. The New Display*, 16 October 2019 - 26 January 2020, curated by Bartolomeo Pietromarchi. The project *Anselmo* won the second edition of the Graziadei Prize for Photography and was acquired by the MAXXI Architecture Photography Collections thanks to Graziadei Studio Legale.



Fig. 99

© Luca Nostri, *Poster of the Rosetta nebula*, Lugo, 2010
From the series *The Hanging Garden*, 2009-2020

4 *The Hanging Garden*

Luca Nostri

2009-2019

Artistic work.

Like the *Anselmo* series, this series also started about 10 years ago, with no precise aim. I was interested in photographing the urban and social landscape of the lowlands of Romagna, inspired by a venerable tradition of photographers who dedicated their work to exploring a world that was close to them in some way, to which they belonged. I have addressed this approach and the work of some of these photographers in Chapter 1, in my discussion of the phenomenological approach in photography.¹

I would like, at this point, to take a long step back and mention the photographer who, one might say, pioneered, more than anyone else, an existential relationship with the places in which he lived: Eugène Atget. Curator John Szarkowski identifies him as the originator of this type of photography as a method of exploration through which he sought a better understanding of the world through a direct relationship with the outside world.² Although his artistic 'canonisation' was more or less posthumous, and was initiated by artists such as Man Ray, who saw in Atget's work something that Atget himself did not see,³ his systematic record of the city of Paris in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century is a fundamental point of reference for all photographers for whom the specificity of place is fundamental, and 'for whom the photographic

1. See p. 51 of this dissertation.

2. See John Szarkowski, *Mirrors and Windows: American Photography since 1960* (New York: MoMA, 1978), p. 25.

3. See David Bate, *La fotografia d'arte* (Milan: Einaudi, 2018), p. 89.



Fig. 100
© Luca Nostri, *Former hunting office, Pavaglione, Lugo*, 2015
From the series *The Hanging Garden*, 2009-2020

exploration of a topographical subject ultimately devolves into an enquiry into human existence'.⁴ Photographer Berenice Abbott, one of the first and most enthusiastic promoters of Atget's work, recognised in his images of Paris his ability to fill unpeopled architectural photography with human experience. It is thus my duty to refer to Atget, because in my series I have tried to experience my familiar territory afresh, and to create photographs which somehow measure the weight of history on human subjects.

Artist statement

The territory of the lowlands of Romagna is not defined by real geographical or political boundaries (to quote Herman Melville, 'It is not down in any map; true places never are'⁵). It consists of a dozen towns and hamlets that share a specific and idiosyncratic identity, determined by the interaction between various elements: the flat landscape of the Po valley, a certain architectural balance, a specific historical background from its ancient origins.

At the very centre of this piece of land there is a courtyard, or, precisely, a hanging garden. It is located inside the Rocca Estense, or Este Castle, in Lugo, the main town of the lowlands, which lies geographically at the centre of the region. It offers the ideal starting point for a photographic exploration of the area that combines historical-political elements with a personal geography.

Although it is known as a hanging garden, it is actually an embankment, which was made into a garden during the late eighteenth century. For years it has been a closed space, almost abandoned, and the vegetation has grown sponta-

4. Kate Bush, 'At the Brink', in: *In the Face of History: European Photographers in the 20th Century*, p. 16.

5. 'Queequeg was a native of Kokovoko, an island far away to the West and South. It is not down in any map; true places never are.' Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick or, The Whale* (New York: The Modern Library, 2000), p. 79.



Fig. 101

© Luca Nostri, *After the opera*, Piazza Baracca, Lugo, 2018
From the series *The Hanging Garden*, 2009-2020

neously lush, to the point at which some of the beautiful century-old trees that have grown too close to the castle walls will have to be removed, because they are making the structure unstable.

Today it is a rarely visited public garden which offers a privileged view of the city square and of the main monuments: the monument to Baracca, the Pava-glione, the Teatro Rossini, and of some of the main arteries, built along the axes of Roman centuriation, that lead into the surrounding lowlands. As noted above (see p. 153), the architecture surrounding the main square sums up, in a democratic manner, the most important historical events of the region. From the privileged point of view offered by the hanging garden courtyard, I observed and photographed public events, historical traditions, events and rituals repeated over time, linked to the cultural and social history of the territory, that were often surprisingly similar to those depicted in some of Paolo Guerra's photographs. The series begins with a series of photographs looking inside and outside the garden. It continues with an exploration of the area, spiralling away from its centre. I photographed this area of land with a large format camera, addressing issues related to place, memory and belonging in an attempt to identify its labile boundaries.



Fig. 102

© Luca Nostri, *Igor*, via Emilia, Castlebolognese, 2016
From the series *The Hanging Garden*, 2009-2020

Conclusion

In this final chapter I will discuss how my investigation, which combines historical research with artistic practice, has answered the research questions listed in the Introduction. I will then present a summary of my findings, and reflect on how this research can contribute to new knowledge. Finally, I have included a self-reflective section, discussing how this study has affected me both as artist and as researcher, and offering some ideas about what the study could lead to.

C.1 Research objectives

In the preface of the exhibition catalogue for *In the Face of History*, held at the Barbican Art Gallery in London in 2006, curators Mark Sladen and Kate Bush state that photography, like history, involves a balancing act between objectivity and subjectivity:

The historian collects his or her facts and then interprets them; the photographer selects one frame from a myriad of possibilities, and presses the shutter to make an indelible record. In previous times, we tended to believe in the essential objectivity of both pursuits. Now, after post-modernism, all we can be sure of is that photographers and historians – and anyone else with the ambition to explain the world – also bring themselves to bear, as individual subjects, on the objects of their scrutiny.¹

1. *In the Face of History. European Photographers in the 20th century*, p. 11.

I have approached this research from the viewpoint of an artist-photographer whose work responds to a place. My aim has been to study the photographic history of this place, and engage in a conceptual and artistic dialogue with it. The final result comprises, then, a personal body of work, combined with both a subjective history of photography and a history of subjective documentary photography in Lugo.

In *Reading American Photographs*, Alan Trachtenberg states that ‘the value of photographs as history lies not just in what they show or how they look, but in how they construct their meanings’.² I have discussed how the local archives I investigated are not simple depictions but constructions, created by photographers in order to make sense both of themselves and of their society. As a result of my historical research, I have created groups of images and edited them as photo-books, and presented them to be seen or read as an ensemble of interactive and cohesive images. My purpose has been to ask both why photographers made their pictures in this or that way, and what the pictures presented in sequences say about their subjects, how the images reflect upon the “opaque mass of facts” of their time.³ I have chosen photographic works of sufficient intelligence, insight, subtlety, and beauty to reward my treatment of them as artistically important.

Trachtenberg warns of the risk of over-reading by the reader of photographs. At the same time, speaking of the camera’s affinity for the indeterminate, he acknowledges, in agreement with Kracauer, that photographs, like the natural objects themselves, will always be surrounded by a fringe of indistinct multiple meanings.⁴ For Kracauer, the historian’s universe ‘is of much the same stuff as our everyday world’, and it is up to the historian to ‘chart a course through these expanses’:⁵

2. Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs*, p. xvi.

3. *Ibid.*, p. xv. See also *Introduction*, footnote 1 of the present document.

4. *Ibid.*, p. xvi.

5. Kracauer, *History. The last thing before the last*, p. 45-46 and 46-47.

The historian cannot assemble the evidence needed unless he is guided by an idea, however vague, of what he wants to recover of the past and why he wants to recover it; and reversely, the evidence he gathers may in turn oblige him to modify his original hunches. So it goes on, spontaneity constantly alternating with receptivity. [...] One might also say that the historian follows two tendencies - the realistic tendency which prompts him to get hold of all the data of interest, and the formative tendency which requires him to explain the material in hand. He is both passive and active, a recorder and a creator.⁶

Following Kracauer's approach, I have proposed an original reading of the Visani sisters' and Paolo Guerra's archives, imposing on them a curatorial approach influenced by a specific cultural context. Moreover, this curatorial process has influenced and redirected my artistic practice and given rise to a process of exchange and mutual influence.

By combining a historical research project with artistic work, my own goal has been not just to deepen the relationship between a place and its photographic representations, but also to enhance and facilitate a creative process through dialogue between the two approaches. The final assemblage, made up of the four books project, is proposed here as a new way of presenting photographic work in book form: although each book can be presented as autonomous and self-sufficient, a parallel narrative arises from the dialogue among them, and between them and the viewer's own experience. However, as Trachtenberg observes:

the relation between images and imputed meanings is fraught with uncertainties, or, like opaque facts, images cannot be trapped readily within a simple explanation or interpretation. They have a life of their own which often resists the efforts of photographers and viewers (or readers) to hold them down as fixed meanings.⁷

6. Ibid., p. 47.

7. Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs*, p. xv.

In Trachtenberg's analysis, two ideas were particularly stimulating for my research: the first of these is that ordering facts into meaning, data into history, is not just an idle exercise but a political act, a matter of judgment and choice about the emerging shape of the present and future. Trachtenberg argues that it may be less obvious in the making of a photograph than in the writing of history, but in both cases the viewfinder is a political instrument, a tool for making a past suitable for the future.⁸ The second idea is that the meaning of an image does not arrive intact and whole, just as it is the prerogative of the present to invent and choose the meaning of the past.⁹

In terms of practice, then, without claiming regimes of 'truth' within the storytelling, but rather opening up questions that unsettle any sense of a unified history of place, my assemblage forges an alternative meaning of documenting social histories through photographs and texts. This answers the third research question positively – whether the investigation of a specific piece of land, filtered through the photographic medium, can generate a process of 'knowledge' and 'consciousness' of the place from both a historical and an artistic perspective.

In my thesis I propose the use of a conceptual plan which, combining a phenomenological approach with post-modern assemblage theory, has given a multidisciplinary approach to my project, without departing altogether from the field of photography. The theory and the project have been conducted at the same time: they have evolved together and they have influenced each other in a reciprocal way. At the beginning of the project, for example, I was more inclined to a phenomenological approach towards the location of the Romagna lowlands. However, new unexpected ideas and connections germinated after the discovery of the Visani archive and the analysis of the Guerra archive,

8.Ibid., p. xiv.

9.Ibid., p. xvii.

which led me to modify the conceptual planning I had established, thanks to a number of ideas developed from assemblage theory, which were ideal for a multidisciplinary approach.

The analysis of the specific literature that was developed, not only in the photographic context but also in other fields (in cultural geography in particular, as described in Chapter 1), gave me a later opportunity to define the structure of the project. According to Dovey, theories can inform both the beginning and the end of research: they are the conceptual tools and methods one uses, whether consciously or otherwise, to analyse and understand the world. For Dovey, theories are all too often critiqued according to their consistency with other theories, while it is far more interesting to judge concepts and ideas on the basis of what they enable us to do and see, and how they enable us to analyse and to think.

In the Introduction to this thesis I explained how the study of the Visani archive strongly redirected the structure of this research. In fact, the images in the Visani sisters' eclectic and rich family album, shot in the little courtyard of the house at the turn of the century, has given me the opportunity to consider the space of the courtyard as a conceptual filter through which to approach other archives and images with an original point of view. This way of thinking has directed my later choice of focusing my attention on a particular collection of images from the Guerra archive, taken in the two brothels which existed in Lugo until 1958: a series of portraits set mostly in the brothel courtyards. The images show the prostitutes and the place itself with equal weight, but also how the setting, in terms of place, for the photographer was fundamental in expressing his own ideas (such as, for example, the idea of taking photographs of the women sitting on the trees in the courtyard).

The consistency of the two archives determined my decision to focus my re-

search on them – I analysed them in depth, inspired by Trachtenberg's *Reading American Photographs*, which addresses the more complex story of American photography by focusing on just a few significant archives, rather than on a more comprehensive survey of its history as a whole.

The two archives and the concept of the courtyard have influenced my artistic work, guiding the idea of proposing two series of photographs that complement the assemblage: the first of these is set in the courtyard of the house where I was born, and focuses on the figure of my grandfather. The second is set in a space that has been private since the eighteenth century: the Rocca Estense's hanging garden. Nowadays this courtyard is a public garden in the process of restoration. It faces the main square of the city, in the geographical centre of the lowlands of Romagna. These two photographic series have allowed a binary approach to place, combining research into a private space with the study of a public space. This dual approach is significant for two reasons:

- Olivio Barbieri's 1982 photograph, mentioned above (Fig. 50 p. 142), represents a partial view of a unique building, the Pavaglione, which is basically an enormous internal courtyard. This building creates an almost paradoxical sensation of a huge private and intimate place, which delimits a wider public space, the Piazza Mazzini. Furthermore, the dimensions of the latter are very unusual for a town such as Lugo.

- The dual public/private context is also relevant as a response to both the Visani and the Guerra archives: the public aspect is almost completely excluded in the Visani sisters' work (which is indeed a private family album), and this characteristic of the work is strengthened by the conscious choice to limit it further, to within the walls of the courtyard. The second set of photographs is set in the courtyard of a brothel, where the relation between public and private is ambiguous and fluid, and is reflected on a social and cultural level.

Guerrieri reminds us that the concept of place, as we know, takes us back first of all to the theme of identity, noting that it is an essentially anthropological concept, one dictated by social relations, and it was in this sense that it was used by photography for at least two decades. As addressed in Chapter 1, in the 1980s photography adopted it to refer to that wealth of social and cultural relationships that characterised provincial life, the background of many of the artists themselves. Anthropology also carried out a major reflection on this notion, to the point of conceiving of a simple negation of the concept itself in the early 1990s, i.e. the 'non-place': a new anthropological reality which was by then rife throughout the Western world.¹⁰

In the Italian context, as mentioned earlier in Chapter 2, the work of the photographers was characterised by a need for the renewal of the language and by a new form of sensitivity towards the landscape. New expressions were introduced to refer to a different attitude of the gaze towards a generic 'exterior' and towards things, such as, for example, the 'slow gaze', and the 'spirit *in* the place', drawing on the work of a number of writers and their descriptions of the world (such as Italo Calvino, Gianni Celati, and Daniele Del Giudice - see page 219). In recent years, instead of 'spirit in the place' which denotes a solitary and individual gaze, Guerrieri has proposed the expression 'consciousness of place', which entails a necessarily collective awareness insofar as it has to do with phenomena that interact with the place as well as its socio-economic relationships.¹¹

This expression, borrowed from the sociologist Aldo Bonomi, prefigures the existence of or potential for a cultural and political process that might mediate the effects of globalisation across the territory. This position works on the notion that the territory, in physical and material terms and thus not only virtual and immaterial, continues to

10. See William Guerrieri's essay, "The *Anselmo* series: place and "consciousness of place", in Luca Nostri, *Anselmo* (Rubiera - RE: Linea di Confine Editore).

11. *Ibid.*

exist in the relationships between individuals and plays a key role in their exchange relationships. At a certain point, it seemed the disappearance of the territory had already occurred, but the economic crises of recent years, the migratory phenomena and, not least, the threat of pandemics have proposed the relationship between the local and the global once more and indeed on new terms. This is a relationship that research photography will also have to reconsider, in order not to be swept away by events and find itself mimicking prefabricated models, spewed out by the culture of globalisation itself.¹²

I believe that my historical-artistic rereading of Lugo and the area surrounding it aligns with Guerrieri's vision, which entails a collective awareness for photography against the solitary and individual gaze. My research has valorised a number of local photography collections from both a historical and an artistic viewpoint and considered them an expression of the history of the community itself. Here lies the significance of photography for a history of place in this thesis. Through the conceptual filter of the courtyard it has been possible to gather and compare a number of different individual photographic approaches, bringing them to a more collective level.

This reasoning answers my first research question: in contemporary society, is the notion of place merely an expression of a nostalgic closure, or can it still be considered an important source for understanding and investigating the world? No matter how ambiguous and evanescent, the notion of place is surely an important source for reading our society through the lens of a camera. In this research, the filter of place contributes in an active way to the reading of the photographs and to their creation, in both cases prompting unprecedented approaches and virtuous mechanisms. In the contemporary era of digital abstraction, fast connection and social networks, the space of the courtyard as a conceptual filter recalls a specific material, private, circumscribed, delimited place: a vital space, and in my opinion more and more important in the contemporary world, as both a physical and a conceptual space.

12.Ibid., p. 71.

This refers directly to my second and third research questions, that aim to study the relation between photography and the collective consciousness. The collective consciousness has a relation with collective memory, which should not be viewed as a remembered past, but as a way of analysing the present. Artistic and cultural expressions are, however, expressions of a collective consciousness. They can also be expressions of multiple social realities. Stories which unfold around local courtyards in history could enable audiences to come together around a common experience and a shared heritage. The use of the courtyard as a common denominator gave me the opportunity to actualise very different socio-cultural subjects: the interpersonal relationships of the Visanis and the theme of prostitution in Guerra's work.

The images produced by the Visani sisters are, for instance, a very interesting example of the photographic genre that appeared in the mid-nineteenth century: the family album. The photographer, often a close relative, reproduced an image of the family as they liked to be represented, recording happy occasions, births, celebrations. Year after year, in the same small courtyard of the family house, those intimate moments constitute a timeless element, beyond any contingency. They testify to a family model that still endures today, where people recognise themselves. For example, they were an inspiration to me for the project on my grandfather Anselmo, staged around his courtyard.

Guerra's photographs of the brothels give an extraordinary insight into the two brothels that existed in Lugo until 1958. The phenomenon of prostitution has changed radically over time, but it has been present in society since ancient times. Guerra provides us with a glimpse of the phenomenon that is deeply rooted in his time and place, but it is a theme that is still relevant today, and is one which also concerns social minorities, and the theme of the outsider in society.

One last consideration about the relation between photography, place and collective knowledge concerns a public restoration project recently established in Lugo. Over the last five years, exactly while I was conducting this research, the Pavaglione has been restored and redesigned. This was a complex project that has had a strong impact on the local community, and one that, in a place like Lugo, occurs just once in a person's lifetime: the form of your own city changes, it acquires a new appearance, and even its function, the way the public space is employed, is modified. After a call for bids, the project was assigned to an architectural team (the P'ARC landscape architecture team from Cesena, and the stARTT architecture and landscape team from Rome) that proposed a project entitled *Homage to Luigi Ghirri*. These architects had recognised in the photographer's gaze an original atmosphere and an individual language that they have tried to translate into architecture. For once, architecture did not influence and inspire photography: instead, quite the opposite happened. In light of the fact that ordinary people have been unaware of the significance of the title of the project and its importance as a cultural reference point, this is a concrete and significant example of the impact that art, in this case photography, can have on a locality and its community, from both a cultural and a material point of view. In this case, the power of Ghirri's imagination contributed concretely to the modification of the form of the city, affecting the daily life of its inhabitants. In my series *The Hanging Garden* I included some photographs relating to the restoration of the Pavaglione and its new use, taken in collaboration with the P'ARC and stARTT architectural team.

C.2 Contributions to knowledge

As mentioned in the introduction, this research is framed by the specific context of Italian photography since the late 1970s, which has defined

its own aesthetic and cultural identity in relation to the idea of place. Trying to narrow down the cultural context, I mentioned in Chapter 3 how the rich photographic tradition of the Italian region of Emilia-Romagna developed in particular thanks to the work of two of the most important photographers in this context, Luigi Ghirri and Guido Guidi, both of whom originated from this region. In the last few years their work has finally received the international recognition it deserves, through the publication of a number of monographs and international exhibitions. Their project has also drawn new attention to the discourse on photography and place, but also to the contemporary photographic context of Emilia-Romagna.

Specifically, my research can contribute to new knowledge in three key respects:

1) The bringing to light of photographs and other documents relating to Lugo as a specific place in Italy.

For example, my research on the Visani archive followed the invitation of the Regional Department of Cultural Heritage to build on the study of the Visani family of artists that was undertaken in 2009.¹³ This study had partly addressed the work of the Visani sisters, in a short essay that briefly mentioned the existence of an archive of a few hundred glass plates: there had been no scope for considering these in that study. I therefore worked on and edited all the Visani sisters' production that remains: 400 glass plates, which have been studied and viewed for the first time. These plates had been archived by the nieces of the photographers (Giulia and Artemisia Visani), identifying some of the contents of the plates by looking at the negatives against the light. In the summer of 2016, when I scanned all the exist-

13. See *I Visani a Lugo: Paolo, Giulia, Veronica, Domenico, Carlo. Arte, fotografia e architettura tra Ottocento e Novecento*, curated by Orlando Piraccini (Faenza: Edit, 1999).

ing plates, the Visani nieces saw the positive images on the computer screen for the first time.

In terms of the Guerra archive, I worked in collaboration with Giacomo Casadio, the archivist, in order to reorganise it rationally. Together we identified and edited for the publication project all the photographs taken inside the brothels. We also made a selection of images depicting the life of the town between 1946 and 1959: I chose this timeframe because Guerra's amateur and professional practice overlapped during these years of activity, and it was an important period for the history of the town as it arose from the ashes of the Second World War. Starting from the 50,000 initial negatives, we progressively edited them down to a selection of 130, which were exhibited in a public exhibition in Lugo in April 2019, in collaboration with the local department of cultural administration. This section, which is not included as part of the assemblage, is presented in the Appendix. It is interesting to notice in the photograph on p. 136 (Fig. 48) the map of Italy hung on the wall of the primary school in Passogatto: it is the same image Ghirri mentions, and which he chose for the cover of his book *Viaggio in Italia* (Fig. 36 p. 116).

The discovery and the investigation of these photographic documents have profoundly influenced and changed not only my artistic practice but also my perception of the place and its history. Other photographs that are interesting in terms of expanding the cultural context of this research, but that are excluded from the final assemblage, include some unedited images by Luigi Ghirri, found in the archive held at the Panizzi Library; some photos by Olivio Barbieri that emerged thanks to a series of conversations with the author, and some images by the Alinari brothers, found in the Alinari archive in Florence. Furthermore, the discovery of the existence of a Municipal School of Drawing and Plastic Arts in Lugo, founded by Paolo Visani (and later di-

rected by Giulia Visani's son, Carlo Visani) has been significant in light of the question of whether culture in general and the study of history can benefit from a process of consciousness of place, and of collective cognitive action.

As well as a conceptual relation based on the idea of the courtyard, this research has also highlighted connections related to the biography of the artists involved. While researching among Paolo Guerra's personal documents, I discovered a fascinating relation between Guerra and the Visanis: for a few months in 1936 Guerra attended the Municipal School of Drawing and Plastic Arts, under the supervision of Carlo Visani. These historical facts prompt us to reflect on the importance of artistic education and practice, especially at a local level.

2) The conceptual structure, at the intersection of questions of place and identity, phenomenology, models of assemblage (Deleuze/Guattari) and research through photography, will contribute to the enhancement of knowledge and understanding within practice-led photography research.

In cultural geography, there are many successful examples of books inspired both by both phenomenology and assemblage theory, and in some of these the researchers combine academic and artistic work, as mentioned in Chapter 2. In the literature specifically on photography I have found no direct example of a similar structure to date. In my case, the filter of place has allowed both an original reading of the archives and the combination of both a historical/curatorial and an artistic approach. These two approaches have influenced each other: they have led to a completely new vision of the place and an innovative point of view towards it, exploring the use of the courtyard as a setting by the photographers over time. In the field of photography, practitioners frequently suggest similar ideas at different times and in different places: in this case, with a curatorial shift, I have proposed a read-

ing of the Visani and Guerra archives through the locus of the courtyard. This decision has then driven my personal work.

With reference again to the exhibition *In the Face of History* mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, both the Visani sisters and Paolo Guerra were firmly rooted in the place and time in which they were photographing, often concentrating on what was local and particular to their lives. Rather than observing their subjects from a physical or emotional distance (as some Modernists would have done), they were closely associated with the people and the places represented in their pictures, or they were in various ways participants in the events that they recorded. Their work manifests a deep emotional bond that ‘emanates from a shared experience of place or community’¹⁴ (looking at my artistic work with objectivity, I can affirm the same). However, although these artists were securely rooted in their time and place, I believe the interwoven reading of these images could foster a more global reading of the photographs and provide more abstract and universal reflections about notions of place, of private space, and about the act of photographing one’s immediate surroundings.

One last thought on the conceptual structure: while I was studying and analysing the relevant literature, I often had the sensation that humanistic academic research almost inevitably presents some speculative aspects, and in some cases the conceptual system could seem forced and arbitrary. However, in some cases, academic speculation or, using an interesting Italian word, the conceptual *delirio*,¹⁵ can result in various reasonings and associations that are of fundamental inspiration for the artistic work. The Italian word *delirio* comes from the Latin delirium, which literally means “de” (out) of the “lira” (the groove dug by the plough): thus ‘to get out of the groove’. My

14. *In the Face of History. European Photographers in the 20th Century*, p. 11.

15. The English word would be ‘delirium’.

study started within a specific groove traced by Italian photography, and attempted an original shift in direction, inspired by historical research and by a conceptual structure drawn from cultural geography.

3) A set of books that is, by its nature, original (in that these documents have not been brought together previously): this may contribute to experimentation with the book as a form of photographic communication.

I have reiterated how the four books that constitute the work have been considered to have an independent life, but from their combined reading a complexity of relations emerges, offering a reflection on the history of a community and also on the history of photography.

In the books, beside the main photographic sequence there are images and texts which on the one hand expand the historical-cultural context of each book, and on the other allow the interwoven reading of the four books in the assemblage, suggesting more complex relations. For example, in the book *Courtyard*, about the Visani sisters, I inserted a short essay, discussing the two sisters' biography and presenting their family. The Visani family context is fundamental not only to a full understanding of the photographs, but also to introduce the artists Domenico Visani (Giulia and Veronica's uncle) and Carlo (Giulia's son), and to mention the Municipal School of Drawing and Plastic Arts. My research has highlighted how one of Carlo's students was Paolo Guerra, before he undertook his photographic career. In the Paolo Guerra book, *Vicolo Rocca*, after a short biographical note I inserted two drawings found among his personal papers, with the stamp of the school and Carlo Visani's signature. They represent two birds on a branch, and they seem to recall Guerra's photographs, at the end of the book sequence, of girls climbing on the trees. This creates a historical and visual connection, as if the drawings made while he was at the school had in some way influenced Guerra's future photographic practice.

And still: in the Visanis' photographs, we often see a wall with exposed bricks, typical of the courtyards of the *cielo-terra* (terraced) houses in the historic centre. The same kind of wall in the brothel courtyard can be found in the background of some of the portraits taken by Guerra, and even in some of my photographs in the series *The Hanging Garden*, taken in the courtyard of my house in Lugo, once again the same wall typology and the same place typology, in the historic centre of Lugo.

Furthermore, my series *Anselmo* responds directly to the Visanis' images, as a personal and eclectic family album dedicated to the figure of my grandfather. At the same time, in relation to Guerra's work, the photographs of the objects assembled by my grandfather are very similar to the objects depicted in Guerra's street photographs, and they belong to the same philosophy: 'do the best with what you have' or 'whatever works' (in Italian, '*l'arte di arrangiarsi*' and '*basta che funzioni*'). They are evidence of an approach to things that is typical of this land of peasants, but which is obviously reflected on a universal level and unites many other places in the world.

Finally, my series *The Hanging Garden*, which developed from the starting point of the castle courtyard of Lugo, touches on themes related to public and private space, and in this sense can be related to Guerra's images of brothels.

C.3 Summary of reflections

The common theme of the courtyard has offered me a glimpse into private places in completely different contexts and times: within a family of artists and its circle of close friends at the beginning of the last cen-

tury; inside the brothels of the post-war period; in the life of a contemporary retiree and inside a century-old hanging garden in the process of restoration, overlooking the main town square: places in time that tell local and at the same time universal stories, and that I hope are an interesting starting point for reflections about the act of looking.

In *Land Matters*, Wells affirms how, since its inception, photography has been used 'to chart sites and note changes consequent upon human access and habitation. Photography thus has a role within cultural geography, one that is founded in realist principles, in the credibility of the photographic'. Wells continues by saying how:

Part of the pleasure of viewing images is the noting of rhetorical devices and strategies deployed by photographers as visual narrators. But our relation to land and the way it is recounted photographically transcends the topographic.¹⁶

In the series presented here, photographers address not only the society they live in, but also themselves, through the courtyards. Filtering these places through the prism of their own personal vision, they create new and original visual worlds. This research was for me further proof of photography's value as a cultural object, and its ability to face general themes within a local environment. Again, Wells suggests that, despite the fact that photographic vision is highly constructed, nonetheless

photography significantly contributes to our sense of knowledge, perception and experience, and to (trans)forming our feelings about our relation to history and geography and, by extension, to our sense of ourselves.¹⁷

16. Wells, *Land Matters*, p. 262.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 56.

Personally, I was surprised to find out that the Visani archive existed literally on the other side of the street to my grandfather's house, where I spent most of the weekends of my childhood. The same kind of house (just like the one I live in today), just a few hundred metres away, housed the brothels of the 1950s. Moreover, six years ago I bought the same sort of house in the old town of Lugo, in via Passamonti, where I live today and which I photographed for the series *The Hanging Garden*.

In many ways, this research is a starting point. For what the research on the Guerra archive, in collaboration with Giacomo Casadio, demonstrates in this thesis is the need to establish a proper photographic foundation to reflect the quantity and the cultural artistic value of the Guerra archive, with the aim of preserving the original negatives and making it accessible to other researchers, and to a wider public. This is a long and complex project that would demand funding, considering the size of the archive – 50,000 negatives – but one that is urgently required.

I mentioned (p. 157) the possibility of comparing Paolo Guerra's archive to that of Vivian Maier, for several reasons: for the consistency of the material, for the type of photography, generally framed within the genre of 'street photography', for the historical period, largely superimposable, but also for the fascinating biography of the photographer. I also mentioned that, however valid her photographic work is, it has been, in my opinion, the subject of vast media speculation. I think there are many archives of work of the same quality that are equally worthy of analysis. The major problems relating to working on this type of material concern the interpretation of the photographs by researchers and historians, who read them from their own point of view and within a contemporary photographic culture. So what the public sees are photographs that have been posthumously edited for various purposes and audiences. As Marvin Heiferman emphasises in relation to Maier's work:

What is somewhat problematic about the work is that what we look at in print, online, and in contemporary prints made from Maier's uncropped negatives is exactly what Maier saw in the viewfinder of her camera, not what she might have chosen to make prints of, had she been so inclined. So to a larger extent, what makes the work captivating is that it invites viewers to see the world through the eyes of a woman who most certainly was an artist, but for reasons we'll never know, could not or would not present herself as one.¹⁸

Heiferman also affirms that because of photography's ubiquitous nature, it is a medium that, more easily than others, enables the resurrection and recontextualisation of forgotten images and their inclusion in a history that, because it is still young, continues to be rethought and rewritten. In my case, the Guerra and Visani archives have been reconsidered in light of the debate around place and identity in Italian photography developed at the end of the 1970s. However, my creative perspective on them has been pursued with the intention of respecting and highlighting their authorship and vision of the world.

Following the Paolo Guerra research day organized in Plymouth, David Chandler underlined how

Viewing Guerra's work in this way, through a contemporary filter, could obscure as much as it reveals about Guerra's photography; but, as an important introduction to his work, it serves the vital function of highlighting just how interesting a photographer Guerra was, and how significant his contribution could be to the history of the Italian photography in the post-war era.¹⁹

The same significance (in a different historical period) can be said of the complex and layered Visani archive. In fact, alongside the archive of the sisters Giulia and Veronica, which has been studied in depth in this research, the Visani collection preserves the photographic archive of Carlo (Giulia's son), photographer and architect. His archive is made up of thousands of glass plates and negative sheets, spanning the

18. Marvin Heiferman, in: *Vivian Maier: a Photographer Found*, p. 36. Translated in English from the Italian edition.

19. Chandler, email exchange following the Paolo Guerra Research Day at Plymouth University.

period from the late 1920s to the 1950s,²⁰ that are still uncatalogued, as well as other documents and drawings of architectural projects. It would be interesting to continue the historical investigation on the work of Carlo, looking for other interpretations for a reading of the present, as for example the courtyard of Giulia and Veronica allowed a reading of the figure of my grandfather, and a portrait of the city of Lugo starting from the Hanging Garden of the Castle. In addition, the archive of Carlo Visani could connect the archive of Giulia and Veronica with that of Paolo Guerra from a temporal point of view, positioning itself precisely within the time gap between them. As I accepted the request of the Regional Department of Culture and Heritage to analyse the Visanis' photographic production more deeply, I invite other researchers to continue the study of the fascinating figures of Veronica, Giulia and Carlo Visani.

From both an intellectual and an artistic point of view, this path has definitely changed my approach to photography. When I started this PhD, in 2014, I was already working on a series of images of my grandfather, which I did not know how to decipher. At a certain moment during this research, the idea of the courtyard turned out to be the perfect meeting point between the archives I was studying and these photographs. As well as changing my perception of a place (the Romagna lowlands, my homeland), my approach to taking pictures has also changed. I have looked for a new distance from things; I have found new subjects, I have experienced a different way to build a photographic sequence and to organise a body of work. Finally, I have a different understanding of the idea of place.

Place is a concept that must be understood in dynamic terms. A place is not the same forever; it is defined by social relationships rather than specific physical characteristics, which may, however, determine a certain evolution of it. This thesis ends in a period of global pandemic, which is changing, and has already changed, our perception

20. See *I Visani a Lugo: Paolo, Giulia, Veronica, Domenico, Carlo. Arte, fotografia e architettura tra Ottocento e Novecento*, curated by Orlando Piraccini (Faenza: Edit, 1999).

of the world and places. In this period of uncertainty, a reflection by Guerrieri that suggests a potential direction for future research seems of particular significance:

it should be borne in mind that the place cannot be led back only to the subjectivity of the individual, understood as a monad, insofar as individual identity has an intrinsically relational character. In this sense, with the help of clinical psychology, we might imagine place as the expression of an *internal groupality* through which individuals activate processes of identification which allow for the absorption of the culture of origin. The dynamic character of place may thus reside in the tension between a condition of stasis imposed by 'identitary restrictions' and the intrinsically destructive quality deployed by any creative process.²¹

With this research I have come to value the act of investigating photographic archives and the photographic history of places in a new way: this is something I would like to pursue in the future, and include in my future photographic practice. I also think I have a better understanding of the value and importance of photographs as cultural objects. Finally, this research was a very positive and stimulating experience, which changed my way of seeing the world – and, I can also say, my way of understanding photography. It made me reflect on the importance and necessity of using photography in a critical and conscious way in the contemporary world. Finally, it gave me new conviction, new stimuli and new confidence to continue to confront the world through the photographic medium. I am very grateful to all the people I met and who accompanied me on this adventure.

21. William Guerrieri, "The *Anselmo* series: place and "consciousness of place", in Luca Nostri, *Anselmo*, p. 67. The expression internal groupality belongs to the psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Diego Napolitani.



Fig. 103

Paolo Guerra © Archivio Paolo Guerra, *Self-portrait on a motorbike*, around 1955
Courtesy Lugo Land - Fotografia e territorio

Appendix

Paolo Guerra, photographer: an archive rediscovered

In this Appendix I present the research on the archive of the photographer Paolo Guerra which is not part of the Four Courtyards assemblage, but which represents a further deepening of the historical and cultural context of this thesis. As addressed in Chapter 3 (p. 187) and in Chapter 4 (pp. 219-223) Paolo Guerra's archive is a very interesting example of a rediscovered collection which has significant value from both a cultural and an artistic point of view.

The photographer Paolo Guerra was born in 1913 in the town of Lugo, in the Po valley. Having worked for a while hand-painting bicycles, he took up photography in the 1940s, almost by chance, when he was given a 35mm Leica camera. Over time, Guerra managed to make photography his profession, eventually including other family members in the business. In September 1949 the Guerra family moved to a new location in Corso Mazzini, where they opened a commercial photography studio which provided him and his family with a steady income. He retired from photography in the early 1970s, leaving the business to younger family members. Guerra died in 1981 at 68 years of age.

Paolo Guerra's archive consists of 132 boxes, each of which contains a variable number (usually from 15 to 20 per box) of small strips of film with about 30 negatives on each, individually cut and from different film-rolls. The photographer catalogued his work personally, cutting the negatives and arranging them in chronological order from 1946 to 1965. There are no original prints. At a rough estimate, there are about 50,000 negatives.

Except for the material from the last five years of the chronology, when the photographer, at that time a full-time professional, also used a medium-format Rollei camera, the archive is made up of 35mm black-and-white negatives taken with a Leica M3. The archive has been stored for decades in the attic of the family house in via Mazzini, and it was discovered by chance in 2008 by local historian Giacomo Casadio, with whom I have collaborated for this research.

This appendix takes into account the photographs taken between 1946 and 1959. This time frame is significant for two reasons: from a biographical point of view it is an interesting period in which it is difficult to distinguish the photographs taken by Guerra for commissions from those taken for his own personal interest; from a historical point of view, Paolo Guerra's photographs document the rebirth of his home town, Lugo, from the ashes of the Second World War.

From April 1944 to September 1945, the Senio river, in the Lugo countryside, was in fact the front line of the Second World War. For six months, continuous shelling fell on Lugo and neighbouring towns until the last decisive bombing on April 9, the day before Liberation. In Lugo it was estimated that approximately a thousand buildings had been completely destroyed and more than five thousand people left homeless. It was at the end of the war that Paolo Guerra, almost by chance, took up photography.

The first images in Guerra's archive date from 1946. The images from the early period are direct and raw, but with a sense of composition and a visual intelligence. What is surprising is their unusually ironic and joyful atmosphere, and their sense of speed and lightness, accentuated by the background of the city in ruins.

For the specific context of this research it is interesting to note that Guerra's work presents many points of contact with the Neorealist movement, which

embraced a range of disciplines, establishing itself first in literature and cinema and only later in photography. It could be said that Paolo Guerra's work represents one of the first examples of photographic Neorealism.¹ This aspect of Guerra's work could provide a subject for further research, as there is no scope for further study of it here.

However, it is worth pointing out some starting points from which to analyse Guerra's work in the context of Neorealism. Paolo Guerra is a figure who hovers between the status of amateur photographer and auto-didact and his later career as a professional photographer. Amateur practice is an important aspect of the Neorealist phenomenon, which gave much emphasis, for example, to the immediacy of the oral tradition, with the aim of "adhering to reality, like sweat on the skin".²

Moreover, in addition to presenting a portrait of a town at a crucial historical moment, a certain idiosyncratic photographic quality emerges from the images – a certain attitude of the photographer, a certain energy: a delicate balance between the external world and the sensitivity of the photographer, who seems to be involved in many of the situations in which he finds himself, be they a dance party, a boxing match at the Rossini theatre or a hangover at the bar. This union between art and life was typical of Neorealist poetics. In this sense, the artistic experience becomes an adventure in living (in fact, even in literary and cinematographic Neorealism the immediacy of the approach is more important than either the plot or the script). In the work of Guerra this overlap between art and life seems to me to emerge clearly.

1. The pioneer photographer of photographic neorealism is considered Alberto Lattuada, who in 1941 published *Occhio quadrato* (Milano: Edizioni di Corrente, 1941). Other important exponents, but who operated in the following decade, are Pino Pasquali, Pietro Donzelli, Franco Pinna and Alberto Giacomelli.

2. The quote is a famous expression of the writer and screenwriter Cesare Zavattini, but the source is unclear.



Fig. 104
Installation shots of the exhibition 'Paolo Guerra, photographer: an archive rediscovered',
curated by Giacomo Casadio and Luca Nostri, Pescherie della Rocca, Lugo, 2019

In a famous text, the writer Italo Calvino, an important exponent of literary Neorealism, explains how the secret of the Neorealist approach was not so much in its universality of content or in its collective sentiment:

[...] on the contrary, it was as clear as day to us that the stories that were told were simply raw material: the explosive charge of freedom which inspired young writers in those days resided not so much in their urge to provide documentary information as in the urge to express. Express what? Ourselves, life's rough taste which we had just experienced, the many things we thought we knew or were, and perhaps really did know and really were at that time. Characters, landscapes, shoot-outs, political messages, dialect words, swear-words, lyric passages, violence and sexual encounters, all these were but colours on our palette, notes on our scale: we knew only too well that what counted was the music, not the libretto [...].³

In my opinion, Paolo Guerra has not only documented a specific place, but has also managed to express himself through the raw material of a town in ruins which was exploding in the desire for a new start. His work could be an important and point of reference for investigating the new concerns of a certain type of photography that emerged in Italy during the 1940s, which had 'no pretensions to art but rather saw itself as pure testimony',⁴ and whose main practitioners 'largely amateurs, were culturally guided by a leftist ideology'.⁵

As a final consideration, this Neorealist reading of Guerra's work puts it in dialogue with the *Viaggio in Italia* project and with the photographers of the Italian Landscape School, who included among their initial cultural references many literary figures from the Neorealist movement, as mentioned in p. 125. The photograph of Paolo Guerra seen in the images of the elementary schools

3. Italo Calvino, preface to *The Path to the Spider's Nests*, translated from the Italian by Archiblad Colquhoun (London: Penguin Books, 2009), p. 9; the Preface was originally published in I. Calvino, *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* (Torino. Einaudi: 1964).

4. Italo Zannier, 'Reality and Italian Photography', in *The Italian Metamorphosis, 1943-1968*, organized by Germano Celant (New York: Guggenheim Foundation, 1995), p. 319.

5. Ibid.

of Passogatto (shown on p. 136), showing the map of Italy hanging on the wall that was then used by Ghirri as the cover of the *Viaggio in Italia* catalogue, represent a visual synthesis of this relationship which could usefully be explored elsewhere.

Part of the research that I carried out with Giacomo Casadio on the Paolo Guerra archive consisted of making a selection from the photographer's work from 1946 to 1959. This selection offers the basis for a new publishing project about Guerra as a Neorealist street photographer in Lugo. As addressed in the Introduction, this further research on the archive of the photographer Paolo Guerra represents a further deepening of the historical and cultural context of this thesis, but it is not part of the *Four Courtyards* assemblage. This is why it is presented in the Appendix and not as a photo-book presented as a separated pdf. The final edited collection consists of 350 images. A selection of 92 images was presented in March 2019 at the exhibition 'Paolo Guerra fotografo. Un archivio ritrovato' (Paolo Guerra, photographer: an archive rediscovered), which I curated with Giacomo Casadio at the Pescherie della Rocca in Lugo (Fig. 96). In this Appendix I present a further selection of 50 photographs, all taken in Lugo between 1946 and 1959.



Fig. 105

Paolo Guerra © Archivio Paolo Guerra, *Lugo (RA)*, 1946-1959
Courtesy Lugo Land - Fotografia e territorio



Fig. 106, 107
Paolo Guerra © Archivio Paolo Guerra, *Lugo (RA)*, 1946-1959
Courtesy Lugo Land - Fotografia e territorio



Fig. 108, 109

Paolo Guerra © Archivio Paolo Guerra, *Lugo (RA)*, 1946-1959
Courtesy Lugo Land - Fotografia e territorio



Fig. 110
Paolo Guerra © Archivio Paolo Guerra, *Lugo (RA)*, 1946-1959
Courtesy Lugo Land - Fotografia e territorio



Fig. 111, 112

Paolo Guerra © Archivio Paolo Guerra, *Lugo (RA)*, 1946-1959
Courtesy Lugo Land - Fotografia e territorio



Fig. 113
Paolo Guerra © Archivio Paolo Guerra, *Lugo (RA)*, 1946-1959
Courtesy Lugo Land - Fotografia e territorio

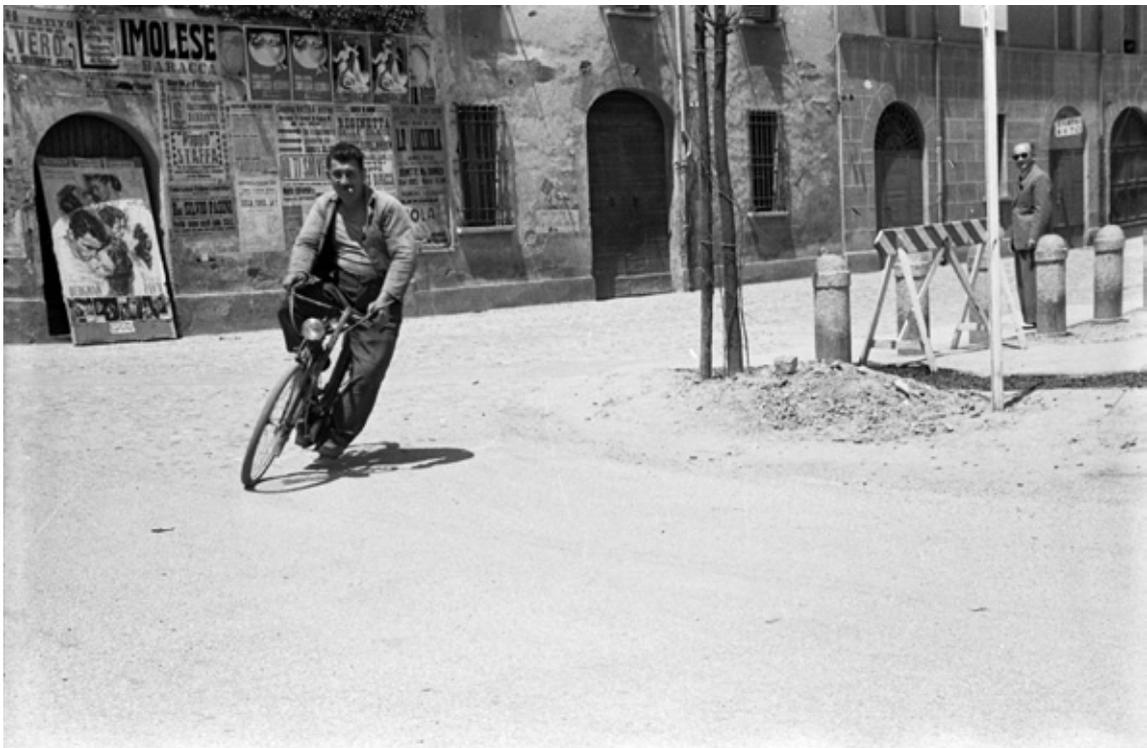


Fig. 114, 115
Paolo Guerra © Archivio Paolo Guerra, *Lugo (RA)*, 1946-1959
Courtesy Lugo Land - Fotografia e territorio



Fig. 116, 117
Paolo Guerra © Archivio Paolo Guerra, *Lugo (RA)*, 1946-1959
Courtesy Lugo Land - Fotografia e territorio



Fig. 118, 119
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