v. 2, n. 7, 2022

Arts, Linguistics, Literature and Language Research Journal

THE PHOTOGRAPHY OF "NEW TOPOGRAPHICS"

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Abstract: In 1975, an exhibition of young photographers unleashed a revolution in the landscape photography genre in the United States, whose public then became interested in industrial *kitsch* and automobile-oriented urbanization – which it organized from residential suburbs to Las Vegas casinos. To capture this panorama of banality and endless sameness, those young people developed frames and depths of field of maximum objectivity. Over the following decades, that sensibility crossed North American borders to move from capturing modern bad taste to objective images of the global panorama of nature altered by human activity.
Keywords: Landscape photography. Photography aesthetics. Contemporary plastic arts. Environmental issue.

THE FORMS AND THEMES OF "*NEW TOPOGRAPHICS*"

In1975,the photographic exhibition entitled *"New Topographics" took place at Eastman* House in Rochester, New York, bringing together Stephen Shore (1947), Robert Adams (1947), Nicholas Nixon (1947), Joe Deal(1947-2010), John Schott (1944), Lewis Baltz (1945-2014), Frank Gohlke (1942), Henry Wessel Jr. (1942-2018) and the German couple Bernd (1931-2007) and Hilla Becher (1931) (SALVESEN, 2010, p.33). Critics point to this exhibition as a milestone in the redefinition of the genre "landscape photography" in the United States (HIGBEE, 2013, p.19-20). In the words of its curator William Jenkins, the title "*New Topographics*" [1]meant a description of place trying as much as possible to avoid opinions and judgments, that is, the search for an objectivity that he considered necessary for a photograph that was documentary, but not in the journalistic or scientific manner. Documentary, in this context, meant the suspension of the *kitsch discourse* with which a committed criticism incensed the landscape photo of Ansel Adams with expressions such as "mother nature" and "for the sake of natural conservation" and in favor of maintaining the myths that surrounded the landscape of the American West, which resisted long after the time of colonization (HIGBEE, 2013, p.22).

Adams' photography poses important questions in comparison with the work that would be developed by the young people of New Topographics. His images often presented a myth of almighty nature, they were photos of remote landscapes and parks where the aspect of the wild land resisted insularly, which already opened a contradiction, that between almighty nature, superior to everything that man could do and his insulation amidst the generalized condition of human activity that transforms the environment in infinite ways. His conception of nature seems to us prior to the industrial revolution or reactive to it when in its beginnings, as with the sublime and the picturesque. His image of the Yosemite Valley (Figure 01) presents nature as a substance that underlies all its atmospheric, mineral and plant cover manifestations. The pictorial variety comes from the passage from the atmospheric to the rock and from there back to the first, this game being the framework of the place in which the vegetation introduces an extra variety to the spectacle of the topography.

This solidarity extended to human constructions, as in the photographs of the famous chapel on the Taos ranch, the work of Spanish missionaries in colonial times in New Mexico; here, the earth construction showed the possible return of the work to the surrounding soil. Despite this, his photos generally presented nature and the human world as universes apart. The photo "Rural Workers and Mount Williamson, Manzanar Concentration Camp, California", 1943 (Figure 02), in addition to the sensitive content of a

1 The English expression "*topographics*" means not only what we understand by topography, but a description of parts of the earth's surface or landscape in general. For this reason we kept the original spelling of "*New Topographics*".

Figure 01 - "Winter storm, Yosemite National Park", 1937. Ansel Adams.

Source: https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/17/arts/design/national-parks-ansel-adams-photography.html. Accessed on 16 June. 2019

Figure 2 - Manzanar Concentration Camp, California", 1943. Ansel Adams.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ansel_Adams_-_Farm_workers_and_Mt._Williamson.jpg

concentration camp for American citizens of Japanese origin during World War II, shows in the foreground the land serially plowed and the (forced) workers as serial men. At medium depth, a straight road traveled by a truck seems to demarcate the two universes. In the background, the grandiose and untouched nature, a stretch of semi-desert and the mighty mountains.

Even the tone of celebration of nature, sometimes sublime, sometimes picturesque, typical of Adams's photography, did not fail to notice from time to time that there could be something essentially common between the two universes, the natural and the human. The flowing and swirling waters of a stream (Figure 04), visible in a stagnant pool on its banks by the foam flakes of the torrent, visually reveal the analogy with the flow of urban traffic in a large American city (Figure 03).

Literature (CHENG, 2011) informs us of the immense influence of the architects Venturi, Izenour and Scott Brown and their book "Learning from Las Vegas" (VENTURI; IZENOUR; SCOTT BROWN, 1978) on those photographers. This work proposed to architects, but not only to them, a look at American cities and suburbs of the 1960s and 70s with the suspension of judgment and opinions about what seemed to them to constitute a tradition or commercial vernacular style oriented to the driver's gaze through the immense road infrastructure of that country. This commercial vernacular style – which shaped everything from motels and gas stations to Las Vegas casinos, passing through the immense residential suburbs – would constitute a true tradition because it was endowed with universal communicability and was already structured by commerce and industry for unlimited technical reproduction, as long as the world of culture could see it. Modern architecture, they argued, already depleted of talent, remained tied to space as its only expressive trait in the manner of Giedion 's formalist theory[2], while the outside world had already formed its style, whether they liked it or not. Thus, the buildings of that emerging world combined simplicity and industrial reproducibility with disposable ornamentation applied like a cheap recyclable skin.

John Schott photographed what those architects would call "decorated sheds" or, alternatively, "ducks"[3], as in "*Route 66 motels*" (Figure 05): they were service stations and motels. Above all, his photos only showed things, no characters that introduced drama and narrative, that might undo that objectivity that sought to get rid of judgment. Robert Adams showed those suburbs on the edge of the Colorado desert (Figure 06), the industrialized houses and their decorative clothing for some individualization, as well as *trailer neighborhoods.* Henry Wessel Jr. _ presented the same houses and their front gardens with bushes trimmed like pom-poms, as in baroque gardens (Figure 07).

But in addition to these themes so familiar to the speech of Venturi, Izenour and Scott Brown, there were others that had a very fruitful development. These are views of those neighborhoods, as in "*Untitled view* – Albuquerque" (1974) by Joe Deal (Figure 08),

2 The subtitle of this author's great work, "Space, Time and Architecture", was precisely "The development of a new tradition". This work was first published in 1939 and spread a conception of modern architecture more in keeping with Le Corbusier's positions. See GIEDION, Sigfried. **Space, time and architecture**: the development of a new tradition. São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2004.

3 "Decorated sheds" and "ducks" were the expressions with which **Venturi**, **Izenour**, and **Scott Brown**, ***cited above,*** respectively named an architecture that understood and accepted the need to produce economic structures that were as *standard* as possible, covered with ornamentation directed, with irony, to the commercial vernacular. "Ducks", in their turn, in reference to a kiosk found on a roadside that bore the sculptural form of a duck, designated modern architecture when space, structure and program were distorted by a generally poorly articulated global symbolic form.

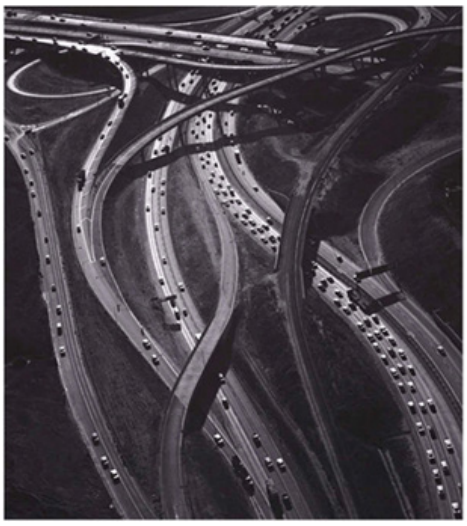

Figure 03- Interchange, Los Angeles Freeway, 1967. Ansel Adams
Source: https://br.pinterest.com/pin/256212666270646237/

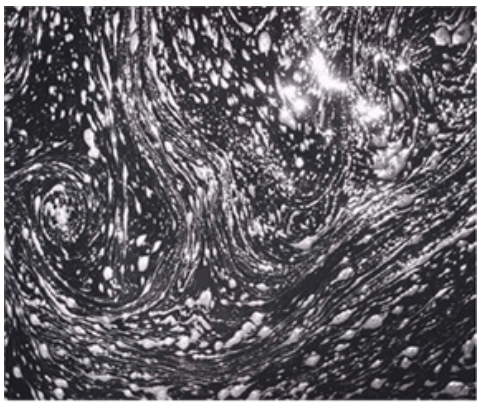

Figure 04- Foam, Merced River, Yosemite Valley, California, 1951-2. Ansel Adams
Source: https://br.pinterest.com/pin/256212666270646237/

Figure 05 - "*Route 66 motels*", 1975. John Schott.
Source: https://www.abebooks.fr/edition-originale-signee/Library-John-Schott-Route-Special-Limited/12793611057/bd. Accessed on 16 June. 2019

Figure 06 - "*Tract House VI",* Westminster, Colorado, 1974. Robert Adams.
Source: https://journals.openedition.org/transatlantica/7218. Accessed on: June 16, 2019

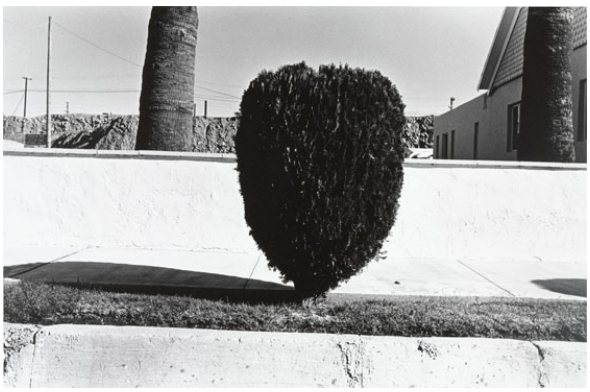

Figure 07 – "Untitled", Yuma, Arizona, 1968. Henry Wessel Jr.
Source: https://www.moma.org/artists/6317. Accessed on: June 16, 2019

in which there is only one plane to which the surface of the earth is assimilated, with the natural elements, the newly opened streets and the houses. All the elements arranged in this plane are not enough to individualize strong structures, but rather form a continuum, as in Pollock's *drip-paintings.* Nicholas Nixon's downtown views, such as " *Southeast view of the Fenway Area*", Boston, 1975 (Figure 09), were bird's eye photos of the mass of buildings and infrastructure works with unlimited depth of field to the fullest extent in depth. The surface of the earth to the horizon, at 2/3 of the height, showed that same continuum in which no form stood out and predominated over the others.

Lewis Baltz in "Palo Alto" (Figure 10) showed a strictly frontal view of the wall of a house or commercial building of absolute practicality and reproducibility, which occupies almost the entire photo except a narrow margin of the floor plane at the bottom of the photo. The only thing that stands out is an air conditioning unit, a light board on the dark floor and a door in the wall, which had been covered up, leaving only a crack in the wall to denounce it, otherwise the door would not even be noticed. The flattened mortar and the vestigial design of the door give that tactile and vaporous aspect that we find in minimalist paintings such as those by Robert Ryman. The frozen frontality and minimalism simulate the vision of a superhuman eye, like a metaphysical vision, which is sharply contrasted with the vulgarity of a back wall and its hangers.

In "*East Wall, Western Carpet Mills, 1231 Warner*", Tustin, 1974, (Figure 07) Baltz presented a front view of an industrialized shed with a flat roof and no openings. This object does not occupy the foreground, but is in the background well set back. In the Foreground. Only the gutter of the street and the front of a grass that extends in depth to the shed make up the frontal plane. The image is minimalist, with the shed drawing two narrow and absolutely flat strips at half height above the horizon, but which, not occupying the entire width of the photo, leaves corners where the continuum in depth can be glimpsed, whether urban or rural. Above all, there is an alternation between metaphysical air and vulgarity, which only increases and enhances the distance that objectivity requires.

Stephen Shore was the only one to exhibit color photos in 1975. In "*Church Street and Second Street",* Easton, 1974 (Figure 12) shows a diagonal view of a corner between two broad streets. However, three posts, a tree and a stone landmark on the sidewalk in the foreground delimit two vertical planes strictly parallel to the photo plane. Passersby, worn out building facades covered by wainscoting, cars in a parking lot and traffic signs make up the scene of indistinct banality, but the planes parallel to the photo that the streetlights demarcate give the image that air of mystery or suspended life, despite the fact that here everything is in the order of the commercial vulgarity of *main street* in North American cities. There's also a human character almost in the foreground viewed from the back, we don't know if ironic or mysterious, or both.

Bernd and Hilla Becher, the couple of German photographers, attended with the kind of industrial "documentation" that consecrated them, documentation in the style of William Jenkins, of course. This practice of documentation always shows series of photos of industrial buildings or series of 360° views of the same building, invariably in black and white and with extremely precise framing. This is what happened in the 1975 exhibition with "*Harry E. Colliery Coal Breaker",* Wilkes Barre, Pennsylvania, 1974 (Figure 13) composed of photos of a coal mill for steel mills. In general, the work of these photographers collided that "metaphysical" aspect, as if it

Figure 08 – "*Untitled view* – Albuquerque", 1974. Joe Deal.
Source: http://photography-now.com/artist/joe-deal. Accessed on: June 16, 2019

Figure 09 - "*Southeast View of the Fenway Area*". *Boston,* 1975. Nicholas Nixon.
Source: https://sbeldenblog.wordpress.com/2014/09/09/nicholas-nixon-new-topographics/. Accessed on: June 16, 2019

Figure 10 – "Palo Alto", from the series "*The Prototype Works*", 1973. Lewis Baltz.
Source: http://1995-2015.undo.net/it/mostra/139360. Accessed on: June 16, 2019

Figure 11 - "*East Wall, Western Carpet Mills, 1231 Warner*", Tustin, 1974. Lewis Baltz.
Source: https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2014/dec/04/lewis-baltz. Accessed on: June 16, 2019

Figure 12 – "*Church Street and Second Street*", Easton, 1974. Stephen Shore
Source: https://newrepublic.com/article/115243/stephen-shore-photography-american-surfaces-uncommon-places. Accessed on: June 16, 2019

were a superhuman vision, with the vision of huge, worn and dirty machines, so that every utopian suggestion that machinery has ever had, were undone.

Frank Gohlke, in photos like "*Grain Elevators, Minneapolis*", 1973 (Figure 14), dealt with grain storage infrastructure, that is, the huge silos built along highways and railroads, in suburban environments or in industrial clusters. The photos show things built on a gigantic scale or just suburban, affected by wear and tear and the absence of users. There is a certain air of abandonment not far removed from De Chirico's metaphysics. In "*Grain Elevator, Kinsley*", Kansas (Figure 15) a similar situation leads to visual rhymes between the railroad cross in the foreground and the silo in the much further back, so there is no defined depth of field, for example: everything is in focus, which gives rise to a limitless environmental representation in depth.

At this point in the recognition of the 1975 exhibition, we can already say that the "*New Topographics*", through its themes, its approaches and its objectivity, continued a basic operation of modern art that consists of discovering and creating unprecedented beauties from the incorporation of the banal, the vulgar, the formless, the ugly and non-artistic. Thus, photographic subjects previously considered uninteresting gained importance, as well as new modes of framing and new angles were developed. Above all, the absence of human characters moved away from the narrative centered on showing figure against background, which made the depth of field unlimited and made the photographic composition something similar to the *all-over* of abstract expressionist painting. These formal definitions, which seem to us to be deeply rooted in North American contemporary art, were consolidated after the 1975 exhibition through the individual journeys of the photographers and guided their research towards a universalist sense that was already far removed from the national mythology that involved traditional North American landscape photography.. The growth of environmental movements inside and outside the US would make the interest in this photography expand and become politicized.

These repeated operations of modern art already show a meaning that shifts in time to a complete inversion. For example, the silos photographed by Frank Gohlke – presented earlier (Figure 14) with their wear and tear and abandonment, in such an "objective" way – were already an enormity of the way in which these same subjects had been photographed at the beginning of the 20th century, for commercial catalogs from which images used by architects such as Le Corbusier (Figure 16) and Walter Gropius were extracted, as harbingers of an era of total domain of technology of the environment in a positive, even optimistic key, and as examples by which architects could guide themselves. through the paths of functionalism. Gohlke's photo, by comparison, is an index of how far we have fallen from the sensibilities and expectations of the modern movement in architecture and art. The opportunity of the "*New Topographics*" for architectural thinking is to show that perhaps what, from the architectural point of view, could be seen as purely negative, error, failure or insufficiency of human action oriented to the rationalization of the world, can have a meaning and respond to real determinants that are not configurable by the project.

After the 1975 exhibition, the themes, framing and depth of field of these photographers developed as if to expand the already established repertoire. Lewis Baltz goes from the common industrial suburbs to those farther outskirts where land, garbage dumps and rubble meet polluted streams,

Figure 13 – "*Harry E. Colliery Coal Breaker*", Wilkes Barre, Pennsylvania, 1974. Bernd and Hilla Becher.
Source: http://photography-now.com/artist/bernd-hilla-becher. Accessed on: June 16, 2019

Figure 14 - " *Grain Elevators,* Minneapolis", Series I, 1973. Frank Gohlke.
Source: http://www.howardgreenberg.com/exhibitions/frank-gohlke-grain-elevators?view=slider#8r.
Accessed on: June 16, 2019

Figure 15 - " *Grain Elevator, Kinsley*", Kansas, 1974. Frank Gohlke.
Source: https://www.moma.org/collection/works/48251?artist_id=2207&locale=pt&page=1&sov_
referrer=artist. Accessed on: June 16, 2019

no man's lands anyway, which, however, are quite "functional" to modern civilization. The frames are on two planes, horizontal and vertical, with the horizon at half height, or almost a single plane: that of the ground. These frontal framings by Baltz and Gohlke (Figures 17 and 18), among others, tend to assimilate the objects to the horizontal and vertical planes, a simplification of the type that occurred in certain paintings by Mark Rothko (Figure 19). Thus, the development of the "*New Topographics*" has led contemporary production to formal structures, sometimes flatter, sometimes more three-dimensional, which seem to repel defining actions and a Gestalt as strong as seen in older modern art, which seems to diminish objects, shapes and contrasts in favor of more or less homogeneous patterns composed, paradoxically, of the most heterogeneous things and materials.

According to these last formal traits, some photographic images result from patterns and colors simply cut out by the framing of the continuous surface of the earth, approached with the characteristic objectivity. They became frequent motifs, for example, aerial photos that show both natural features and those imposed by human activity on portions of territory. Photographers such as David Maisel (1961) (Figure 20), Emmet Gowin (1941), Edward Burtynsky (1955) and Alex MacLean (1947), among others, have made visible patterns that emerge from this superposition, such as mining craters or gigantic accumulations of industrial debris amid deserts or other natural landscapes. Natural disasters, such as the region devastated by the Mount St. Helens, Washington, through the lens of photographers such as Frank Gohlke (Figure 21) look very similar to disasters caused by human activity.

These subjects often bring with them views from above to the earth's surface or aerial and satellite photos, which tend to assimilate the topographical surface to the image plane. This operation does not fail to show certain analogy with the procedures of contemporary modern plastic arts to the "*New Topographics*". This is what happens with painting, whose image is assimilated to the literal surface of the canvas, as in the famous flags and targets by Jasper Johns (1930) or even in his *all-over paintings* with hatch patterns (Figure 18).

The aerial photos have also shown images of subdivisions and other interventions whose lines and patterns would previously only be partially visible through urban and engineering drawings (Figure 23). These images now appear endowed with the visual concreteness of photography in which patterns of color and shapes are shown in the repetition of buildings and various devices.

The scale of activities such as mining and the consequent lands devastated by exploitation or simply by the accumulation of waste, appears both in the aerial photo and in frontal views (Figures 24, 25 and 26) without being able to show the end of it. Some photographers discovered the disenchantment of landscapes that could embody sublime nature if they were not invaded by garbage, scrap or commercial and consumption facilities, as shown in Figures 27 and 28, the last two already mentioned.

Since the 1975 exhibition, "*New Topographics*" has captured urban, suburban or rural banality, that is, a certain bad taste that affects every landscape touched by man and consumption. Now, a "no man's land" is emerging everywhere, marked by anonymity, by unintentional uniformity and also by the absence of care, by the automatic accumulation of layers superimposed on advertising signage and infrastructure, not to mention the scrap of everything that is being discarded on an already planetary scale.

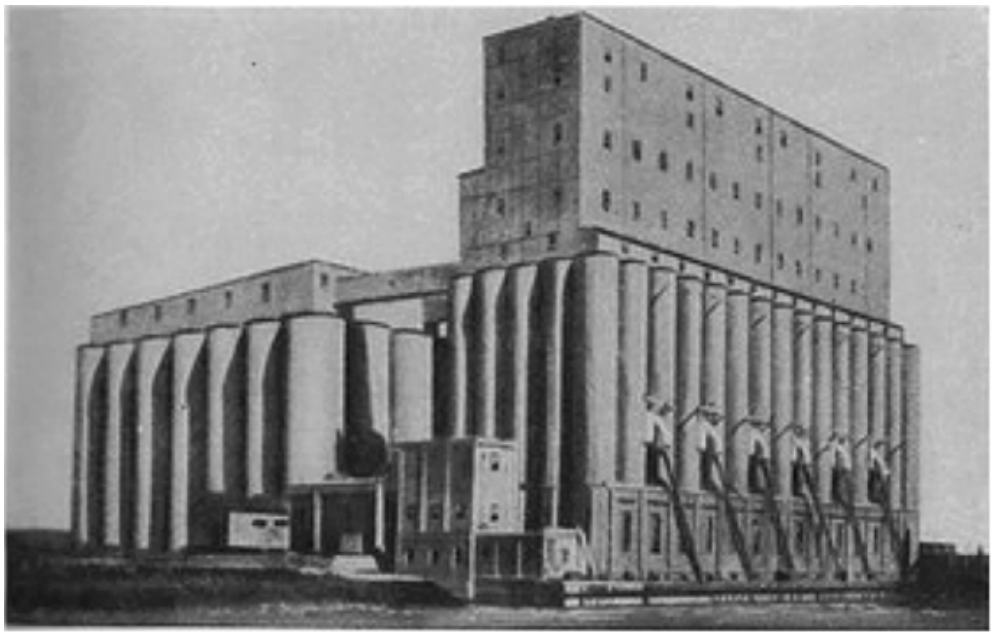

Figure 16- Illustration from the book "For an architecture" by Le Corbusier, 1925.
Source: LE CORBUSIER. **For an architecture.** São Paulo: Perspectiva, 2004, p.14.

Figure 1 7 - From the series "*Candlestick Point*", 1982. Lewis Baltz.
Source: https://www.pinterest.ca/pin/688065649291778103/?lp=true Accessed: June 16, 2019

Figure 18 – "*Marsh fire (I), Bolivar Peninsula", Texas,* 1978. Frank Gohlke.
Source: http://www.mocp.org/detail.
php?t=objects&type=browse&f=maker&s=Gohlke%2C+Frank&record=7 Accessed: June 16, 2019

Fig ure 19 - "Untitled", 1969, acrylic on paper, 153.4x122.7 cm. Marc Rothko.
Source: https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/rothko-untitled-t04149. Accessed on: June 16, 2019

Figure 20 – "*Drainage and peat burns*". David Maisel.
Source: http://struangray.com/twiglog/2009/05/. Accessed on: June 16,, 2019

Figure 21 - Forest felled near Elk Rock, northwest of Mount St. Helens, Washington, 1981. Frank Gohlke.
Source: https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/109. Accessed on: June 16, 2019

Figure 22 – "*The Barber's Tree*", 1976, oil on canvas and wax. Jasper Johns.

Source: http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/life/2013-09/02/content_16938061_7.htm. Accessed on: June 16, 2019

Figure _ 23 – "*Dense trailer park with cul-de-sacs*", 1994. Alex Mac Lean.

Source: https://alex-maclean.tumblr.com/post/129662546082/sailing-italy-2005-alex-s-maclean-landslides. Accessed on: June 16, 2019

Figure 24 – "*Aeration pond, toxic water treatment facility*", Arkansas, 1989. Emmet Gowin.
Source: http://whitney.org/collection/emmetgowin . Accessed on: June 16, 2019

Figure 25 – "Otter *Juan Coronet Mine #1*", Kalgoorlie, Western Australia, 2007. Edward Burtynsky.
Source: https://artblart.com/tag/mining/. Accessed on: June 16, 2019

Figure 26 – "Deactivated B-52 Airplane Yard", Tuscon, Arizona, 2012. Alex MacLean.
Source: https://www.artsy.net/artist/alex-maclean. Accessed on: June 16, 2019

Figure 27 – "Stacks of tires in *Oxford* n°8", Westley, California, 1999. Edward Burtynsky.
Source: http://utdhiltonphotofall06.blogspot.com/2006/10/chapter-3-deadpan-edward-burtynsky.html.
Accessed on: June 16, 2019

Figure _ 28 – "Scrap deposit by a river", Southeastern New Hampshire, 1991 . Alex MacLean.
Source: https://www.itsnicethat.com/articles/caroline-walls-art-140619. Accessed on: June 16, 2019

THE MEANING THAT THE "*NEW TOPOGRAPHICS*" SUGGESTS

Often when discussing contemporary art and culture, the question modern or postmodern arises. The British sociologist Anthony Giddens (1938) (GIDDENS, 1991), for example, defends the thesis that we are in a radicalized modernity and reserves the term "postmodern" for what he generally calls reflexivity, in its particular presence in the field of artistic modernity, or the use of the achievements of modern art to criticize and remake it. It seems to us, accordingly, that the "*New Topographics*" suggests thinking about the continuity of modernity as a condition of our time. To continue on this path, we need to have some concept of modernity and, in this sense, we turn to the thinker Hannah Arendt (1906-1975) in her work The human condition of 1958 (1999), whose concept of modernity does not seem to have been shaken by the recent transformations such as those captured by "*New Topographics*", quite the opposite. Furthermore, that is a purely contemplative concept, with no pretensions to guide human action.

This work can, without much rigor, be read as a philosophical anthropology in which typical human possibilities are presented in an existential key, that is, in which man is a being that has its own being as a question. This anthropology is something like the categorical history of the deconstruction of the worldliness of the world. This last concept designates the referential chain in which human existence takes place, the chain of all things, beings and other human existences that meet in the world. The character of the world changes over time, with each historical epoch being characterized by a different arrangement of the categories that are the *animal laborans,* the *contemplative life* and the *vita activa,* which includes the dimensions of *homo faber* and action. This typical structure was molded to Hellenic antiquity: the slave as *animal laborans;* the artisan and the merchant as *homo faber;* free men as the formation of the common will in the plurality of agents to act through the word in their desire for the immortality of the name and in the visibility in the world, and finally, the philosopher as the *contemplative life* of the free man who turns his back on human activity for contemplative understanding.

The temporality of the *animal laborans,* from the savage to the slave, was every day the same as all the others, highlighting neither past nor future, not constituting a history. It was the total involvement with the means of subsistence that were consumed as soon as they were obtained, with no surplus that supported any activity other than "from hand to mouth". As there was no articulated structure of time, it was not possible to conceive of things that would be durable and that would stabilize a world in the face of the continuous maelstrom of time.

Homo faber is the producer of human artifice, from utensils to cities, that is, of the totality of objects of use and of some duration that stabilize the world and allow time to articulate and for there to be a history. Their worldliness or public sphere was, however, limited by productive activities and exchanges. The action properly arises with the class of free men whose family property, including slaves, freed them from toil and exclusive occupations with economic exchanges. These were the men who, ambitious for the immortality of the name amidst the plurality of their peers, carried out politics through the word and made history, which is an emanation of human actions that propagate them in time as a process of causality until this process is interrupted by other actions that establish a new process and a new course of activities that reconfigure the world and the relationship to transcendence. The

philosopher's contemplation was concerned with a secularization of religion capable of thinking the world and man in terms of immanence and transcendence.

In composing her concept of modernity, Arendt (1999) seems to follow, at least to a certain extent, the conception of her master Martin Heidegger, of modernity as an "age of technique", in which everything that comes across in the world does so as "energy reserve stock". If that is really the case, all that is encountered in modernity are means of assuring the animal dimension of human life, the *animal laborans*.

Since the beginning of modernity, in which the 16th and 17th centuries were decisive, there have been shifts in the existential possibilities of man so that in the mature modernity in which the 20th century already lived the role of *animal laborans* consolidated in the world, the world of men as animal species. Not by chance, the systemic character of competition and the union of interests in antagonistic blocks in all spheres of human activity, give a good example of this animal species character. It must be noted that these results were obtained through philosophical reflection and not through political economy, to which philosophy can perhaps provide a more original and universal basis of meaning. We live the rupture of all cultural worlds in this modernity in which everything that comes together does so as a reserve of energy, a world that relates to the Earth through generalized exploitation and transformation. The Earth seems, little by little, to be transformed into what the author called the constitution of a protective technological prosthesis for the most defenseless of species, something like a global protective shell.

Among the origins of modernity, the author noted that the most far-reaching event seems to have been the one that took place outside the visibility of the world, so to speak. The invention of the telescope and the first observations using this scientific instrument by Galileo established the proof that the Earth is a star like the other planets, which orbits around the Sun in a decentered universe. The scientific instrument made it possible to observe what the sensitive perception did not reveal, and an agonizing doubt about the possibilities of man knowing the truth emerged.

Galileo's experiments with falling bodies and Newton's formalization of universal gravitation created the modern mathematical science of nature, where the truth of knowledge is what man puts into things, or the conditions according to which he forces nature to show out in the experiment. If man has lost confidence in knowing the world through experience, contemplation and sociability, he has gained the certainty that experiments give to the creations of his mind. The alienation from the world was accompanied by the development of subjectivity for which everything else is opposed to. Industrialization developed confidence in manufacturing supported by science, technology in short, a power that inspired the old dream of replacing the uncertainty and unpredictability of politics with manufacturing and its well-tested procedures. Thus, history started to be conceived in the molds of technology and becomes a science with its immanent development laws, whose knowledge was intended to instrument policy and government.

This movement of subjectivity was felt, as the author pointed out, in the surprising development of art in modernity against the predictions of its death. The autonomy of the arts, when breaking with the ties of tradition and the norm of style, established a path that moves through inversions of values: depth - plane; local color - luminous or chromatic field; solidity of objects - decomposition of forms; turning away from tradition -

becoming fascinated with primitive and non-Western arts; move away from the naturalistic appearance - seek expressive deformation; the screen as a visual field - the screen as an arena of action; sublimation of matter - ostensible materiality; the beautiful is ugly and the ugly is beautiful. These inverse value pairs allow us to see how much "New Topographics", in the formal procedures and thematic choices that we have highlighted, is found under the arc of advanced artistic modernity.

The alienation of the world in which science operates makes it tend to constitute an "Archimedean point" of observation outside the Earth, a point independent of any centrality, outside the condition in which man emerged and has existed. This position of science has made man in modernity capable not only of generalized exploitation of all continents but also of triggering natural processes that would not occur spontaneously on Earth, such as nuclear fission and fusion, such as petrochemical transformations and everything else. With such technologies, it is understood that manufacturing has assumed the unpredictability that was previously characteristic of human action, unpredictability of which we are already receiving the bill to pay. Even less offensive-looking forms of energy such as hydroelectric power or the vast fields of wind power can hold some unpleasant surprises. But the march of modernity, the "age of technique", shows no signs of slowing down and we are anxiously awaiting that inventions in the making, as spectacular as the fusion reactor and the quantum computer, finally come to fruition.

The conception of modernity that Hannah Arendt presents to us is inseparable from a transformed nature or, in an optimistic way as in Giddens (1991), from a created environment. This environment being created in the movement of the human species by shielding its survival, already displays traits more than suggestive of its reality, such as all the violence, inequalities and the general disturbance of natural balances. Like everything that has a biological character, this environment has, side by side, its well- kept spaces and a lot of scattered ugliness, bad taste, chaotic appearance, slums, garbage, scrap and industrial waste superimposed on the natural landscapes, which seem beautiful to us because they are products of eons of biological evolution on Earth; the accelerated process of transformation triggered by human activity does not have the privilege that modern architecture once dreamed of.

Here the interrogation of modern and contemporary architecture by the "*New Topographics*" becomes of significant interest. Modern architecture, explicitly by some authors, proposed to carry out a project that came from the beginning of the 20th century, when the difficulties of architecture were understood as the absence of a style of modernity and the consequent ugliness and confusion between historicisms and eclectics. As early as 1828, it was published the book "In what style should we build?" (HÜBSH, 1992), the first attempt to create the style of modernity, although fatally tributary to the dispute between Greek, Gothic and Romanesque as German national styles. However, there are strong echoes of this work even in Le Corbusier. *Arts* & *Crafts* and *Art Nouveau* were so many attempts to control the chaos of the industrial revolution through style, that is, the appearance suited to the things of the world.

The modern movement, in spite of all the variations, intended to organize the constraints that affect the project through a kind of form that is at the same time functional and endowed with a strong configuration. This compromise between art and technique was believed to be possible, but it wavered as modern

architecture made its grandiose experiments, until it fell into disrepute or into skepticism. The postmodern movement understood the crisis again in a stylistic key, believing either that the commercial vernacular was already the style of modernity, like Venturi, or that generalized historicism could remedy the desertification of meaning that accompanied modern architecture already depleted of talent. Habermas, polemicizing with the postmodern architects, spoke of a possible continuity of the modern movement that had allowed "the aesthetic bias of constructivism and the link to the purposes of strict functionalism to freely unite" (HABERMAS, 1992, p. 149). He also attributed the opposition to the modern to its "dubious position (…) [in the face of] the colonization of the lifeworld by the imperatives of autonomous economic and administrative systems".

In other words, Habermas conceived a political struggle against the strength of systemic determinants that could restore architecture's ability to dominate functional constraints through a strong *Gestalt*. What "*New Topographics*" does to shows us is that systemic determinants have made the development of capitalism, industry, territorial occupation, and infrastructure become *so much* more complex and global in scope, so that hardly anyone can see any possibility of coordination, equally global, by a strong Gestalt.

The "*New Topographics*" shows that all uglinesses, disharmonies and disorders have a systemic functionality, something much more in tune with the modernity conceived by Hannah Arendt (ARENDT, 1999), the conception of a biological movement no matter how much politics is applied to it. On the other hand, after the postmodern adventure, contemporary architecture seems to have shed its pretensions to a style of modernity that would coordinate all productions. The profession is so divided into different specialties and interests that different architects on different fronts act according to their priorities, as well as engineers and other professionals who interact with architecture. The designer architect produces even brilliant coordinations, but valid for each architect, each particular building or local urban complex.

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