

**POETICS OF ARCHIVE AS URBAN PRACTICES:  
THREE RESEARCH GESTURES IN THE ARCHIVE  
OF THE PHOTO-DOCUMENTATION LABORATORY  
SYLVIO DE VASCONCELLOS**

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Abstract

*This article presents three research gestures (enlarging, dismantling and diverting) undertaken at the photographic archive of the Sylvio de Vasconcellos Photo-Documentation Laboratory, in order to highlight aspects that have established a field of debate regarding city, technique and everyday life. This was engaged upon with sources from the Photo-Documentation Service in the School of Architecture at the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, chiefly from the years 1954 to 1964. The research gestures, as poetics, experimented with ways of “making the archive speak”. They also provoked sounds when they brought into discussion the ordinary life captured through photography, and the implications of this technical mediation in the practice of the city and in constructing representations and discourses. By penetrating the devices of the patrimonial archive and focusing on the historical plot surrounding the vernacular, these gestures have glimpsed critical updates of what was discarded, and are also urban practices to the extent that they establish other ways with which to see the city (or un-see it, in the terms of Manoel de Barros and Rita Velloso).*

Keywords

*Archive, Photography, City, Technique, Everyday Life, Dismantle, Divert.*

## POÉTICAS DE ARQUIVO COMO PRÁTICAS URBANAS: TRÊS GESTOS DE PESQUISA NO ARQUIVO DO LABORATÓRIO DE FOTODOCUMENTAÇÃO SYLVIO DE VASCONCELLOS

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### Resumo

*Este texto apresenta três gestos de pesquisa (ampliar, desmontar e desviar) que realizamos no arquivo fotográfico do Laboratório de Fotodocumentação Sylvio de Vasconcellos, a fim de evidenciar aspectos que instituem um campo de debates em torno da cidade, da técnica e do cotidiano. Operamos com fontes provenientes do Serviço de Fotodocumentação da Escola de Arquitetura da Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, majoritariamente dos anos de 1954 a 1964. Os gestos de pesquisa, enquanto poéticas, experimentam modos de “fazer o arquivo falar”. E provocam ruídos quando colocam em discussão a vida ordinária capturada por meio da fotografia e as implicações dessa mediação técnica na prática da cidade e na construção de representações e discursos. Ao perfurarem o dispositivo do arquivo patrimonial e incidirem na trama histórica em torno do popular, esses gestos vislumbram atualizações críticas em torno do descarte e são também práticas urbanas na medida em que instauram outros modos de ver a cidade (ou des-vê-la, nos termos de Manoel de Barros e Rita Velloso).*

### Palavras-chave

*Arquivo; Fotografia; Cidade; Técnica; Cotidiano; Desmontar; Desviar.*

# ARCHIVAL POETICS AS URBAN PRACTICES: THREE RESEARCH GESTURES IN THE ARCHIVES OF THE SYLVIO DE VASCONCELLOS PHOTO- DOCUMENTATION LABORATORY<sup>1</sup>

*Junia Cambraia Mortimer*

## Introduction

The archive is a chink in the fabric of days, the retracted view of an unexpected event. (FARGE, 2017, p. 15)

There is a huge, imposing machine installed in the last room of the Sylvio de Vasconcellos Photo-Documentation Laboratory in the School of Architecture at the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG). A machine whose presence has

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1. This text is the result of a post-doctoral internship conducted in 2019, on the Postgraduate Program in Architecture and Urbanism at the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (NPGAU/UFMG), under the supervision of Professor Renata Marquez. The research project, entitled “Image, technique, everyday life: the archives of the Sylvio de Vasconcellos Photo-Documentation Laboratory”, is related to a research trajectory, along which I sought to explore the image, the archive and, more recently – due to a conversation with Professor Eduardo Costa, from the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism of the Universidade de São Paulo (FAU-USP) –, the book, within the field of history and the theory of architecture and urbanism. In the context of this trajectory, I would highlight two works in particular: the book *Arquiteturas do olhar* [The Architectures of Looking] (MORTIMER, 2017), the result of my doctoral thesis developed at NPGAU UFMG; and the book *Entre imagem e escrita; Aracy Esteve Gomes e a cidade de Salvador* [Between the image and the written word: Aracy Esteve Gomes and the city of Salvador] (published by Editora UFBA), organized with Professor Washington Drummond, at the Universidade do Estado da Bahia (Uneb), and which brought together other researchers from the field of architecture and urbanism interested in the discussion on image and archives, amongst whom were Eduardo Costa (USP), Breno Silva (Instituto Federal de Educação Ciência e Tecnologia de Minas Gerais - IFMG) and Renata Marquez (UFMG), in addition to doctoral students and those graduating from the Postgraduate Program in Architecture and Urbanism at the Universidade Federal da Bahia (PPGAU/UFBA). A short version of this article was presented as a conference at the 6th *Seminário Ibero-americano Arquitetura e Documentação*, Belo Horizonte, in November 2019. I would like to thank Professor Leonardo Barci Castriota, coordinator of the Photo-Documentation Laboratory, for supporting the development of this work. Also, similarly important for the development of the research, from which this article is the result, were the disciplines “Photographic practice” and “Image etc: conversations on photography”, proposed at EA UFMG within the scope of the post-doctoral activities. I am grateful to Renata Marquez, Priscila Musa and Gabriela Pires for sharing the teaching activity within these disciplines, and to the students involved.

become strange due to its dimensions, technology and state of abandonment, in a space transformed into a depository. Like a shipwreck in a sea of technical possibilities, the cast iron body has caused the air in the corridors to become denser, making it more difficult to breathe – not exactly because of the accumulation of dust, but because of the inescapable affirmation of time, and the fleetingness of human life, which that presence has imposed. A modern presence that recalls, almost immediately, the mysterious universe of a short story by the writer José J. Veiga (2008), *A estranha máquina extraviada* [The Misplaced Machine], published in 1968 – a decade after this equipment had been acquired by the School of Architecture, according to correspondence between the Tofot factory and the institution. In Veiga's tale, the machine appears one afternoon in the main square of an imaginary city; no one knew from where it had come, nor what it was for, and there was no trace of it in city hall documents. However, everyone became used to it and incorporated it into the local customs, inserting it into daily life so that, little by little, it turned into an indispensable presence, an inseparable element. Some fell in love with it, others wished to transform it into a monument.

The machine, a piece of equipment for photolithography, is just one of the objects, along with several other pieces of equipment, from cameras to enlargers, in addition to negatives, slides, photographic enlargements, photoliths, printed matter, correspondence and other articles, that constitute the archives of what was once the Photo-Documentation Service (SFD), founded in 1954 by Sylvio de Vasconcellos, then professor at the School of Architecture.

For this text, I propose to present three research gestures undertaken at this archive with the aim of bringing to light aspects referring to city, technique and everyday life, as a cross-section for exploring the complexity of the modern, with a view to promoting historiographic updates. Each archive gesture, or poetics, as a form of investigation (FARGE 2017, p. 19), emitted different sounds, amongst which, for this work, those that are of most interest, bring into discussion the ordinary life captured through photographic technique as an urban practice, and the implications of this technical mediation for understanding the city. I venture to expand the concept of urban practices (CERTEAU, 2009, p. 159) to incorporate the research gestures engaged upon, understanding them as practices that establish the city, by reconfiguring our understanding of the urban, the habits and the manners related to it.

Archival poetics as urban practices, as defended herein, aims to penetrate historical networks that have formed around technique and everyday life, and that present another city. Within the visual arrangements created, the research gestures

present the everyday, ordinary dimension of urban life and unravel the fabric that has associated heritage, monument and nation, highlighting an *isso foi* (this once was) (BARTHES, 2018, p. 68) from where historical nuances emerge of the Brazilian city and urbanism, thereby contributing to its historiographic review. This signifies creating deviant visualities which, by showing everyday city practices, corroborate the complexity of the universal and local relationship, the modern and the vernacular (MORTIMER; SÁ, 2019), distorting notions of memory postulated therein.

For this work, it was fundamental to approach photography both in its documentary dimension, as historical evidence (KOSSOY, 2009, p. 27), inserted into the discourses of cultural codes, and in its irreducible dimension of what it was, as in a *haikai* (BARTHES, 2005): a pure state of contingencies in which the chitchat of language is economized through silence. It is with attention to this dubious condition of photography, and with equal care towards the other marginal documents that make up this photographic archive (COSTA, 2018, p. 26), amongst letters, notes and other fragments (BENJAMIN, 2012), that we distinguish singularities, samples and diversions. Thus, we have simultaneously reconstituted the dimensions that insert this archive, and its fragments, into its historical period - such as the regime of visibility in the photographs, the documentary manner in which they are used, the performance of the photographers involved, the technical possibilities at the time - and at the same time, as we contemplate these images, we glimpse the sparks, the triggered shots that deviate from the current technical and conceptual protocol of making the real become visible (as Lacan observed in his courses during the 1960s).

I also place this text in dialogue with the field of visual culture, which has its antecedents in Brazil during the 1980s and 1990s, but whose focus on the relationship with the field of architecture and urbanism is relatively timid in the Brazilian context or even limited to an illustrative function of the image. We have sought to reaffirm photographic imagination as an epistemological field, a place of thought, especially within the scope of city studies, and according to a theoretical and historical dimension, constituting a crossroads between the fields of knowledge on art, aesthetics, architecture, urbanism and history.

#### 1. The prolegomena of an archive search

In Brazil, the 1980s and, especially the 1990s, were marked by a historiographic turnaround in the field of architecture and urbanism, brought about by, amongst other factors, an increase of research in archives, renewing sources and documents (COSTA, 2017a, p. 261). Following this movement of expansion and historiographic renewal, in the 2000s, there was an expansion of work dedi-

cated to visual sources, “proposing new paths and meanings for urban history” (COSTA, 2017a, p. 260)<sup>2</sup>, and also for the history of architecture. The documentary renewal incorporated personal archives, and today these collections of objects, images, diaries and letters have helped to resituate the processes of the production of space through urban practices and habits gathered within these material remnants.

The use of visual sources in the field of research on the history of the city and of urbanism, in Brazil, has received important contributions from other fields, most notably history, amongst which, the most prominent have been *Fotografia e cidade* [Photography and the city], by Vânia Carvalho and Solange Lima (1997), *Fontes visuais, cultura visual, história visual* [Visual sources, visual culture, visual history], by Ulpiano Bezerra de Meneses (2003), and, also, *O desafio de fazer História com imagens* [The challenge of making history with images] (2006), by Paulo Knauss. More recently, there has been an outstanding contribution by Iara Lis Franco Schiavinatto and Eduardo Costa, with the organization of the book *Cultura visual e História* [Visual Culture and History] (2016). Costa also organized the dossier *Cidade e cultura visual* [City and visual culture] (2017a) for *Revista Urbana*, from the Universidade de Campinas (Unicamp), and published the books *Arquitetura e visualidade* [Architecture and Visuality] (2017b) and *Arquivo, poder, memória* [Archive, power, memory] (2018). These intellectual productions have emphasized the historiographical dimension in the approach to archives, documents and sources, stressing both rigor and respect for the practices and rules specific to this disciplinary field, history.

On an international level, and still in the field of the history of architecture and urbanism, there has been an important inflection in research on (or based on) the image, with the works of Beatriz Colomina, particularly *Privacy and publicity: modern architecture as mass media* (1996). It should be mentioned that Colomina, while at Princeton, was a colleague of Anthony Vidler, who was also interested in the relationship between image and architecture (VIDLER, 2001), from a Benjaminian historical perspective. The research by Claire Zimmerman (2012a; 2012b; 2014) should also receive mention, especially her studies on the visual relationship between James Stirling, the Smithson couple and the works of Mies van der Rohe, as well as those of Martino Stierli, with special attention to those dedicated to the archive of Venturi and Scott Brown (STIERLI, 2013) and to the study on montage as a modern artistic procedure inherent to the condition of the metropolis (STIERLI, 2018).

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2. This and other non-English citations hereafter have been translated by the author.

When broadening the focus on the use of visual sources or documents beyond the historiographical dimension, I have identified a series of research that also offers a renewal of the theoretical field of architecture and urbanism, in an interchange with the field of photography and the arts. Guilherme Wisnik, most notably in his book *Dentro do nevoeiro* [Inside the mist] (2019), introduced an analytical device, the mist, which opens the way to exploring contemporary architectural production in its relationship with the image. Renata Marquez, since her doctoral thesis, *Geografias portáteis: arte e conhecimento espacial* [Portable Geographies: art and spatial knowledge] (2009), has provided a field of thought and practice in architecture that extends to the investigative dimension of curatorship and editorial. Lastly, Heloísa Espada (ESPADA; ALONSO, 2018), especially in the exhibition *Conflitos* [Conflicts] (2018), and particularly in the resulting publication, sought to create a converging zone between the historical and visual dimension of artifacts and images. All three propose a crossroads of thought between space, image and history that thereby enables other reflections, which results from the contribution arising from a dialogue with art, in the field of architecture and urbanism.

On an international level, theoretical reflection on the photographic image, on the frontier of archives and art, gained density through the work of Eduardo Cadava (1997, 2014) and Gabriela Nouzeilles (2011, 2014, 2016), with special attention to their participation in the exhibition *The Itinerant Languages of Photography* (2014). Also, Joan Fontcuberta (2010, 2012, 2016) from Spain, specifically with her most recent provocations brought together in *La fúria de las imágenes* [The fury of images] (2016), in which she advanced towards the direction of post-photography; and also, from France, there is Georges Didi-Huberman (2008, 2010, 2013, 2017a, 2017b). From his solid, abundant production, most prominent on the one hand were *O que vemos, o que nos olha* [What we see looks back at us] (2010) and “Fábula filosófica da experiência visual” [Philosophical fable of visual experience] (2010), and, on the other, the essay *Cascas* [Husks] (2017a), an experiment in theoretical and historical formulation that takes place between the lines of text, photography and memory. All this research has often culminated in the curation of exhibitions on space, image and history, as we may observe, amongst others, in *Levantes* (2017b).

In the approach adopted for this work, I have sought to examine the tension between different disciplinary fields – historiography and aesthetics –, adopting as an assumption the threshold between documentary analysis (invested with an effort of historicity) and subjective reception (invested with a dimension of timelessness), as I have investigated at other opportunities (MORTIMER, 2017, 2018a). I also emphasize that:

Exploring the image as a source for studies in the field of architecture and urbanism implies facing up to the challenge of addressing the historical-cultural moment, which Roland Barthes (2018) termed *studium*, with the perspective of the subject, *punctum*. Thus, we face the image as though facing a sign, a mark, a vestige, which we may situate in terms of codes and readings in the historical process, but which, at the same time, risks destabilizing this same construction due to its negative dimension: the indecipherable and irreducible, which is so characteristic of what is visible (MORTIMER; DRUMMOND, 2020, n.p.).

Aware of this tension, typical of photography, I ventured to engage upon three different research gestures, or procedures, in the archives of the Sylvio de Vasconcellos Photo-Documentation Laboratory, and which explore the potencies and limits of visual sources in the field of architecture and urbanism. This field of possibilities (potencies and limits) has transitory contours that are reconfigured according to the demands and disciplinary rules to which these images are submitted, as sources and/or objects of research. It thus composes a framework or even a visibility regime for images within the research process, by conditioning the use of a given source. This signifies that the visibility regimes that condition the appearance and circulation of images are forged, first, by the available technical means that produce the documentary matrix; and, second, by the disciplinary codes to which they are submitted as research material. This present work concerns the tension between historiographic effort and aesthetic regard, between the horizontality of the narrative plot and the verticality of the sensitive experience. It is, I believe, at this threshold that the possibility lies for reinventing the images.

#### 1.1 Description of the archives at the Sylvio de Vasconcellos Photo-Documentation Laboratory

The Sylvio de Vasconcellos Photo-documentation Laboratory currently occupies a space at the UFMG School of Architecture, which unites the remnants of two important services that were developed within this institution, very actively during the 1960s: the Photo-Documentation Service and the Graphic Service. The archive comprises negatives, slides, photographic enlargements, photolithography, photographic equipment, as well as correspondence, reports, instructional manuals, record books, classificatory envelopes, in addition to furniture (Figure 1).

The Photo-Documentation Service was created in 1954, under the direction of Sylvio de Vasconcellos (1916-1979), architect and intellectual from the state of Minas Gerais, “with the aim of documenting through photography the architectural and artistic collection of Minas Gerais” (CASTRIOTA; ÂNGELO, 2011, p 145). Vasconcellos was in charge of the sector until 1969, although five years earlier, in 1964, he had been stripped of many of his functions, including his position as direc-

tor of the School of Architecture, due to the civil-military coup that took place that same year. This fact therefore reduced his activities in the Photo-Documentation Service, the leadership of which was attributed to different officials. From the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s, a period in which Sylvio de Vasconcellos was most active in the sector, the main laboratory professionals included cinematographer Marcos de Carvalho Mazzoni, photographer Gui Tarcísio Mazzoni and laboratory technician Efigênia Chaves.



**Figure 1. Rooms at the Sylvio de Vasconcellos Photo-Documentation Laboratory**

From the left to right: the room with the photolithography reproduction machine; air-conditioned room for the imagery collection of the Sylvio de Vasconcellos Photo-Documentation Laboratory; the analogue photo laboratory. Photographs taken with a Nikon F80 camera and expired B&W film, both from the School of Architecture collection.

Source: Junia Mortimer, 2019.

As well as aiming to document the architectural and artistic heritage of Minas Gerais, other objectives included registering the institutional life of the school and the university, supporting teaching activities and providing services, especially of enlarging. It is known that the Photo-Documentation Service operated in close relationship with the graphic services that existed at the same time for the production of the *Edições Escola de Arquitetura* [School of Architecture Editions]. According to Castriota and Ângelo, these editions were responsible for publishing 67 titles between 1961 and 1963. This explains the presence of thousands of photolithographic fragments in the photo-documentation collection<sup>3</sup>.

## 2. The poetics of archives as urban practices

Placing oneself before a photographic archive, either as a source for constructing a narrative, or as the very object of investigation itself – in the field of ar-

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3. The SFD archive - namely 35 mm and 120 mm negatives, photolithography and enlargements from the period – was subjected to digitization and preservation projects approved between 2003 and 2007 by the Minas Gerais State Research Support Foundation (Fapemig), the Municipal Culture Fund, the Caixa Econômica Federal and Petrobras, which made it possible to “digitize more than 25,000 images”, in addition to developing a “physical recovery system for the collection, with new packaging and the construction of an air-conditioned room” (CASTRIOTA; ÂNGELO, 2011, p. 145).

chitecture and urbanism –, implies, according to the approach we have constructed herein, exploring at least two disciplinary dimensions: that of the historiography of the urban, and that of aesthetics. What differentiates them, in our case, is the ways in which the visualities created with the documents – provisional visual arrangements – have distinctly mobilized already constituted historiographic theories and narratives.

Some visualities, due to insufficient information indexed to the documents, have assumed an aesthetic dimension insofar as they provide a reflection on the history of the city, through the photographic universe, in a concentrated, vertical manner; more abyssal than sequential (NAVAS, 2018, p. 21). Within these visualities, a game is played out between presence and absence, visible and invisible, the existence of which occurs “throughout the course of a construction on the same place, as architecture is capable of doing” (NAVAS, 2018, p. 21).

Other visualities, to the contrary, assume a historiographical dimension when, on arranging the documents found in a complex plot of events, especially related to the history of the city of Belo Horizonte, they produce a lasting relationship between the materiality and the narrative that one wishes to produce.

The three research gestures that I present are: **enlarging**, **dismantling** and **diverting**. The main reason for dwelling upon these, from amongst others that I came across throughout the process, is the fact that they demonstrate methodological limits in attempting to make the file “speak”<sup>4</sup>. At the same time, such gestures potentialize a game between different visibility regimes (or disciplinary frameworks) for documents, which sometimes, although not always, follow the rules of the historiographical narrative. At the threshold between *punctum* and *studium* (BARTHES, 2018), between the verticality of the abyssal and the horizontality of the plot (NAVAS, 2018), these procedures outline paths to be followed when searching photographic archives, although they do not crystallize as methods. They are transitory gestures that, located within this research, have made it possible to foster the debate surrounding city, technique and everyday life, in the 1950s and 1960s, and to update this discussion for the contemporary city. Hence, I argue that they are urban practices, when considering that the urban dimension is not restricted to activities in the public sphere; and that small gestures, surviving the cold light of an air-conditioned room, when being narrated, set into motion city, subjects, habits and ways of life.

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4. It should be mentioned that the absence of detailed photographic scripts and the presence of unexpected documents of another nature in the archive shifted our focus from the protocol of the photographic operation, very well studied by other authors (COSTA, 2018), in order to prioritize deviations and ways to make them emerge in archive research, assigning a methodological dimension to the work.

## 2.1 Enlarging: urban gestures<sup>5</sup> in a collection of slides

Like every aspiring historian, at least those aligned to Benjamin and who dwell upon visual material (BENJAMIN, 2017a; 2017b), when I approached this archive, I went in search of fragments, remains, leftovers, threads. Knowing that more than 20,000 negatives had been digitalized and were available online, I went in search of what was outside that scope. And I found the immensity of an outfield that constituted each and every image. I focused on the outfield of the visual sources that had been digitalized, and first became seduced by a small collection of slides.

Perhaps due to the presence of color, having just finalized an extensive research study at my original university with a black and white photographic archive<sup>6</sup>; perhaps to the pleasant aspect of the slides on the light box. Perhaps simply because of the reduced size of this collection, which amounted to less than 3,000 images – a more palatable number than the tens of thousands of photoliths, or negatives. Or – perhaps because of everything. I chose this as one of my points of entry.

With the slides on the light box, I spent some days observing each of the images. Scanning the buildings, the angles, the colors, the condition of the films; I imagined places, cameras and the possible temporalities. I confess that I found it impossible to stop looking at the slides, sheet after sheet, folder after folder, until I had finished them all. I immediately noticed that certain presences had caught my attention more: small urban gestures, captured in the middle of the city, but of an almost private or intimate dimension, rose up between the buildings, between the constructive details, between the imaginary. I enlarged them with a magnifying glass so as to see better (Figure 2).

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5. The use of the term “urban gestures” refers to the work developed by the research group *Laboratório Urbano* at the *Corpocidade 5* event, which took place in December 2016, an edition dedicated to the theme. To learn more, see: JACQUES, P.; BRITTO, F. *Urban gestures*. Salvador: Edufba, 2017.

6. Here I refer to the research project *Imaginários e visibilidades: práticas urbanas em fotografias soteropolitanas (1950-1970)* [Imaginations and Visibilities: Urban Practices in Salvadoran Photographs (1950-1970)], dedicated to the collection of mathematics teacher and amateur photographer Aracy Esteve Gomes, in Salvador. The result of this research is to be published in the book *Entre imagem e escrita: Aracy Esteve Gomes e a cidade de Salvador* [Between the image and the written word: Aracy Esteve Gomes and the city of Salvador] (published by Edufba, 2020), organized by myself and Professor Washington Drummond.



Figure 2. From the series “What we see, who looks back at us”

Slides on the light box.

Source: Junia Mortimer, 2019.

Who was that looking back at me? Certain subjects, photographed perhaps inadvertently, were questioning me about my research gesture. After coming to a kind of intensive fruition with this set of images, I went on to look for information that would allow me to situate the collection, to identify dates, geographic locations, monuments, people, etc. To the desperation of a researcher – or would it be the very worst luck of all? – the images in that archive had not been indexed. Faced with the improbability of completing a historiographic work within the deadlines of the current project, I just allowed myself to see it all and to understand who was looking back at me: I accepted the limitation of those sources for that moment of the investigation. I took advantage of the possibility that they offered of associating the research gesture with poetics, when creating aesthetics, and that first archival practice resulted in a set of photographic images<sup>7</sup>, which I entitled “What we see,

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7. I entitled this set of images “What we see, who looks back at us”, in reference to the title of Georges Didi-Huberman’s book, *What we see looks back at us* (2010), which brings together different essays on visibility, according to a markedly Lacanian perspective (especially the psychoanalytic foundations of the mirror theory and the classic episode of the sardine can) (LACAN, 1978). LACAN, J. *The four fundamental concepts of Psychoanalysis*. Edited by Jacques-Alain Miller. Translated by Alan Sheridan. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978.

who looks back at us” (2019), in reference to the title of Georges Didi-Huberman’s book, mentioned in the first part of this article. As the author argues (2010, p. 34): “we open our eyes to experience what we do not see, what we will no longer see – or rather, so as to experience that which we do not see with all the evidence (the visible evidence) even though it looks at us as a work (a visual work) of loss” (Figures 3 and 4).



Figure 3. From the series “What we see, who looks back at us”

Slides on the light box.

Source: Junia Mortimer, 2019.

I did not continue with the undertaking of a historiographical narrative on the city, technique and everyday life through this series, since it became unfeasible, given the deadlines to which I was working. Nevertheless, it was this set of images that enabled me to enquiringly expand the horizons and imagination regarding memory, subjects and heritage; regarding the processes of choice in the constitution of the archive as a device of power, as Ariella Azoulay (2019) has untiringly explored; regarding what and who was allowed to appear in those documented images. I left them, the images from the series, reserved for future investigations, governed by other temporalities. And so, I then decided to look at the main source of this photographic file, the medium format negatives. Thus, I move on to the next research gesture to be presented in this text.



Figure 4. From the series “What we see, who looks back at us”

Slides on the light box.

Source: Junia Mortimer, 2019.

## 2.2 Dismantling: urban disputes in the photographic fascicle Architectural Documentary 3 (1961)

I remained with the 120 mm negatives and returned to the light box with around 17 thousand frames. I looked at them accompanied by the three volumes of record books, produced after the photographs had been taken, but which had been organized so as to identify the digitalization processes from the first decade of the twenty-first century, as confirmed by Carla Viviane Ângelo (CASTRIOTA; ÂNGELO, 2011, p 145-182), an information scientist who accompanied the archival research and cataloging work in projects undertaken in the 2000s.

Amongst the prophets, pediments, balustrades, coverings, stonework, balconies, crosses, churches, sanatoriums, butterfly roofs, concrete curves, student posters against the coup (that of 1964 and not of 2016), academic ceremonies or even the visit of Miss Minas Gerais to the premises of the UFMG School of Architecture, in 1963, and so many other images, one specific set drew my attention (Figure 5).

In this one, we see poor people and vernacular architectures, photographed in accordance with the technical standards of heritage photographs. In the record book, these photographs, along with the others that make up this set, are concerned with the space of the Pindura Saia, Ilha dos Urubus, Av. Bias Fortes favelas and the Vagões settlement. All the photographs were taken in Belo Horizonte, in 1961, and these favelas no longer exist. What would have led the photographers from this laboratory, apparently dedicated to other socio-spatial situations, to photograph

such favelas? Where would these images have been used? How would they have circulated? And according to which visibility regime?



Figure 5. Photographs by Gui Tarcísio Mazzoni and Marcos Mazzoni contained in the archive at the Sylvio de Vasconcellos Laboratory (1961)

Source: Gui Tarcísio Mazzoni and Marcos Mazzoni, 1961.

Within the montage of one of the pages in *Documentário Arquitetônico 3* [Architectural Documentary 3] (Figure 6), the one dedicated to the Pindura Saia favela, three photographs situate the reader into the urban environment under study, from a more open angle, at a distance, to closer shots, near the buildings. The captions provide information on the construction of the houses, indicating the stages of the process, and the incorporation of new materials. In one of them, we read: “A brick masonry residence with two phases of construction, the first being covered with ‘Roman’ roof tiles and the second with ‘French’ tiles” (MAZZONI; MAZZONI, 1961, n. p.). The photographs denote a technical knowledge of architectural representation and an appropriate balance of light. They also provide information on the characteristic urbanity of this space, built around dirt roads and decorated with clothes hanging from the fences. Highlighted in the upper righthand corner of the page, a space of privilege for the act of western reading, is written: “The good I praise, the evil I criticize. I must reserve my soft words for the workers, for the beggars, who are the slaves of misery”. This is a quote by Carolina Maria de Jesus, from her book *Quarto de despejo* [Child of the Dark: The Diary of Carolina Maria de Jesus]<sup>8</sup>, first published in 1960, just a year before this documentary.

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8. N.B. – For direct citations, the English version was used of Jesus C. M. de. Child of the Dark: The diary of Carolina Maria de Jesus. E. P. Dutton and Co., Inc. New York, 1962, p. 58. Available at: <https://archive.org/details/childofdarkdiaryoojesu/mode/2up>. Viewed on: November 17, 2020.

And herein we come across one of the places where the improbable photographs circulated towards that archive.

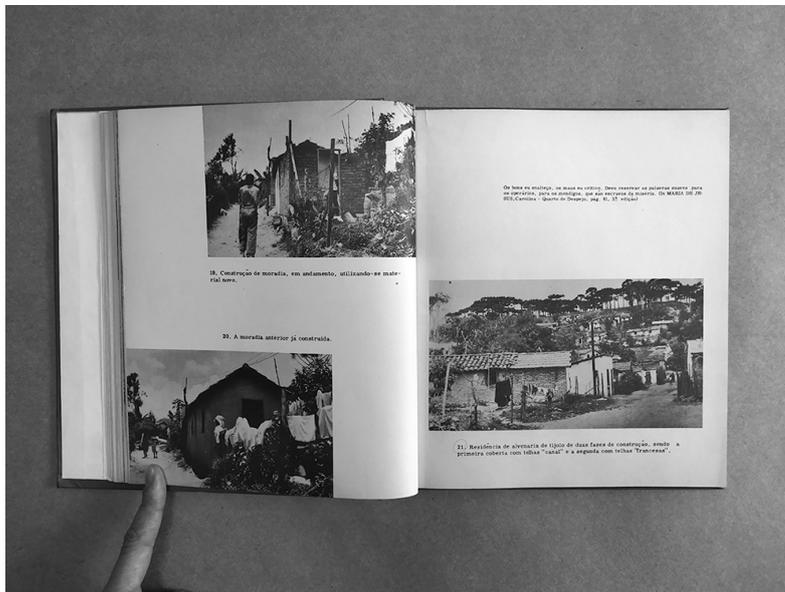


Figure 6. Architectural Documentary 3

Source: Junia Mortimer, 2019.

The series of photographic fascicles entitled Architectural Documentary was a result of a partnership between the Photo-Documentation Service and the Graphic Service of the UFMG School of Architecture<sup>9</sup>, with a production of more than sixty titles<sup>10</sup>, including work by in-house teachers, translations and some services (Figure 7).

The theme of Architectural Documentary 3 – “Favelas” – followed “Paving” (WASNER, 1960), the theme of number 2, and preceded “Coverings” (BRITO; STRAMBI, 1961), the theme of number 4. This was a very unique sequence: how could this complex socio-spatial theme have infiltrated these two typological fragments, of architectural – *coverings* – or urban – *paving* – components. In addition to these, the

9. The photolithography contained in the air-conditioned room, like the reprographic machine that occupies the last room of the Laboratory space, are vestiges of the Graphic Service that served the School of Architecture alongside the Photo-Documentation Service. The actions of these two sectors overlapped, but documents state that, during the period that this study covers, 1954 to 1969, they were independent and were submitted, in 1963, with the Research Section, to the Superior Institute of Research in Planning (ISPPLA), dismantled by the civil-military coup of 1964.

10. Amongst these titles, we find, for example, the ambitious volumes of the *História da Arquitetura* [History of Architecture], by João Boltshauser, as well as his *Noções de evolução urbana das Américas* [Notions on the urban evolution of the Americas]; we also find a translation of the *The Athens Charter*, by Le Corbusier, published by the Academic Directorate.

other published themes were “Porches” (PINHEIRO; MAZZONI; MAZZONI, 1960), the theme of the first issue; “The first houses of Belo Horizonte” (MOURA, 1961), in issue number 5, and, finally, “Farms in Minas Gerais” (MENEZES, 1969), which closed the series. In general, each edition was under the responsibility of one professor. Favelas, for example, was under the charge of photographer Gui Tarcísio Mazzoni and cinematographer Marcos Mazzoni, from the Photo-Documentation Service. Professor Suzy de Mello, author of the presentation text for this volume, mentions that: “In addition to their beautiful photographic work, they were also responsible for the comments and captions that enrich this volume, complementing it with laws and decrees related to the theme to which they were so dedicated” (MELLO, 1961, n.p.).

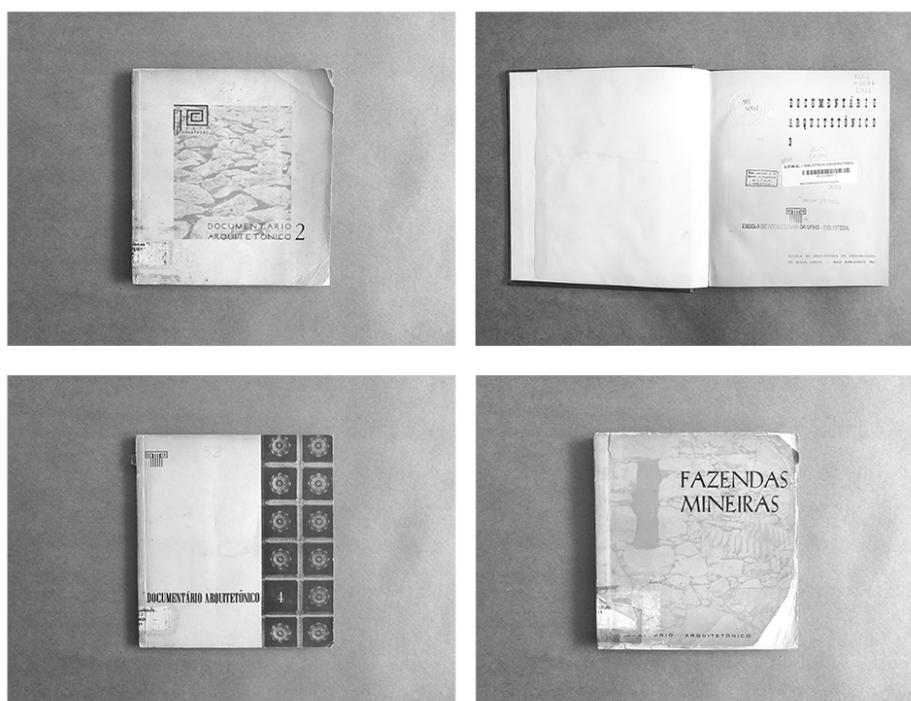


Figure 7. Covers of editions of the Architectural Documentaries series numbers 2, 4, 5 and 6, published by the Graphic Service of the School of Architecture at UFGM, in partnership with the Photo-Documentation Service (1961 to 1969)

Source: Junia Mortimer, 2019.

Suzy continues by adding that this study had unpretentiously sought “mainly to register some of the constructive solutions adopted by those living in the favelas, to which – through their picturesqueness, ingenuity and even purity – justify a publication such as this” (MELLO, 1961, p. 1). The semantic field created around the terms “ingenuity”, “picturesqueness” and especially “purity”, place this speech in a perspective between genuine enthusiastic admiration and political populism.

This part of Suzy's text leads us to the debate surrounding the vernacular, so very present at this historical moment, as, for example, in the *Architecture without Architects exhibition*, held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (MoMA), in 1964, by Bernard Rudofsky, or even at the exhibitions organized by the Italian-Brazilian architect Lina Bo Bardi, such as *Bahia* (1959), which took place in Ibirapuera, and also *Nordeste* (1963), at the Popular Art Museum of Salvador, inaugurating the Solar of Unhão. As director of the of Modern Art Museum of Bahia, Lina Bo Bardi fostered intense reflection on the distinction within the artistic circuit of the so-called erudite art and vernacular art, and acted in such a way as to valorize vernacular northeastern artifacts. This earned her harsh criticism from the economist Celso Furtado, responsible at the time for the Superintendency of Development in the Northeast (Sudene). The two ended up understanding one another when it became clear that they both shared the same developmentalist stance of the left, and that they clearly supported the processes of mechanization for the countryside and industrialization for cities, through Sudene – that which would affect the habits and cultures of the northeastern populations. However, what interested Lina, in fact, was the survival of vernacular poetics, even within other productive processes – which, for Furtado at that time, was not an issue. It is possible to identify the tension between archaic and cosmopolitan, vernacular and modern in countless other artistic and intellectual productions of the period, from Paul Ricoeur to Ferreira Gullar, through to Glauber Rocha, Jorge Amado and Pierre Verger.

In the case of Suzy de Mello, her admiration for the ingenuity is necessarily associated with her regret for the living conditions of those populations: “Amongst the favelas of Belo Horizonte”, she continued, the Mazzonis “chose three that, due to their characteristics, represent quite a few aspects found in this sad type of human agglomeration”. Suzy went on to introduce the social worker from the Department of Housing and Popular Neighborhoods (DBP), at Belo Horizonte City Hall, Catarina van Brederode, as the technical voice that completed that edition with “a broad explanation of the problem of favelas”.

The DBP, to which the social worker Catarina van Brederode was linked, had been created in 1955, under the administration of Mayor Celso Mello de Azevedo, as a measure suggested by the Commission for Dismantling Favelas, which, in turn, was created in the same year “with the objective of registering them [the favelas] and proposing policies to solve the problem” (SOMARRIBA; VALADARES; AFONSO, 1984, p. 40). The actions of the DBP were, however, guided by the following social imagination: “The organ would reach out to the ‘marginal’ population, integrating them into society through social assistance (medical and dental care, professional courses, etc.) and with the construction of hygienic housing” (OLIVEIRA, 2012, p. 107). Thus, the movement of the favelas at that time, accor-

ding to the researcher Samuel Oliveira, was opposed to “managing the territory directed by the city hall”. The movements were against the idea of dismantling the favelas, but the “DBP offered numerous political opportunities in order to negotiate benefits” (OLIVEIRA, 2012, p. 110).

In the sequence of the Introduction text, written by the DBP social worker, the Documentary has been organized into five parts, four dedicated to the photographed territories and one appendix. Amongst the documents contained in this last part are, in full, the creation laws (1955) and structuring laws (1956) of the DBP, as well as the regulation and modifications decreed at a later date. Following on, there is an inclusion of the regulations for the Municipal Department of Popular Housing, in Porto Alegre, an experience that inspired the DBP’s creation, and the subsequent laws to implement its operation in the capital of Rio Grande do Sul. Lastly, there is also a Code of Honor, prepared by the auxiliary bishop of Rio de Janeiro, Dom Hélder Câmara, within the context of the Saint Sebastian Crusade, in the 1950s, for the favela dwellers, – in the terms of the author – divided into norms for men, women and children.

The four parts of the fascicle referring to the photographed territories are structured according to a brief text, also written by the SFD photographers, which historically locates the favela under study and provides some general data, accompanied by a location map. In the sequence, photographs, captions and quotations configure the essays dedicated to each separate favela. In this part of the document, as suggested by the montage previously presented, the tonic of the discourse changes. What used to be an exception – the ingenuity and curious arrangement sometimes emerging – becomes the rule; the constructive agency becomes central to the urgent burst of life. The typological visual approach to buildings, which follows architectural photographic practice, especially that of heritage itineraries, widely practiced by SFD photographers, is complemented by captions that provide technical descriptions of the construction solutions presented, in accordance with the terminologies belonging to the field. As an example, in another documentary arrangement, referring to the favela of Avenida Bias Fortes, we read: “A recent construction with horizontally placed planks, with slatted joints of different widths. On the main façade the boards have no vertical direction. ‘French’ tiles cover the 4-roomed roof. The axis of the gate onto the plot is supported by a concave bottle bottom” (MAZZONI; MAZZONI, 1961, n.p.).

As technicians, the photographers, indeed, scrutinized those places, those people – but not without resistance: the simple gesture of a face turning away at the moment the photo is taken is already a gesture of resistance. However, I have also allowed myself to consider that the photographs, or, rather, the arrangements

created with these photographs for Architectural Documentary Issue 3, including captions and literary citations, present something that escapes the technical discourse of dismantling the favelas by the DBP. The arrangements guide the inventive ingenuity of that constructive culture, bringing the ability to divert material from trash towards the construction of something new to the very heart of a debate marked by disqualifying speeches, physically and morally, of places and residents. There, there is a potency for changing the discourse of stigmatization, there is material to work on the pride of being a resident of a favela, without however, denying, for example, the need for assistance with regards to their proximity to sewage and the number of sick people. In addition to praising the diversion of the discarded, I also perceive, through excerpts from Carolina Maria de Jesus' book, a movement that singularizes the trajectories, which deviates from generalization, and from the complete dilution of bodies and subjectivities into mere demographic categories.

In 1961, the same year that the Documentary was published, the city "invested in removing the residents of Vila Pindura Saia and other communities, in an attempt to accelerate the program of dismantling the favelas" (OLIVEIRA, 2012, p. 116). According to researcher Samuel Oliveira, the onslaught generated reactions. And the marches against the collective eviction of favelas highlighted the disputes, bargains, strategies and tactics necessarily involved with the approximation of the social movements, such as the Federation of Favela Workers of Belo Horizonte (FTFBH), with the public authorities (OLIVEIRA, 2012). Perhaps the photographs and montages by the Mazzonis appeared in this context: if the strategy, in the terms of Michel de Certeau (2009), of the DBP leaders was to discuss the dismantling of the favelas, so the movements, as in the case of the FTFBH, tactically accepted the policy in order to obtain new health centers and places of work; if the strategy of the DBP assistant, Catarina van Brederode, was to speak of humanization, hygiene and construction standards of new buildings, the SFD photographers tactically highlighted the potent constructive culture of those subjects. Similarly, if the strategy of the Mazzonis was to register those poor buildings and those urban conditions for the purpose of constituting the SFD archive, tactically the favela residents took advantage of the visibility provided, technically romanticized, to dispute new water sources or other forms of assistance, made possible by the DBP, such as those that appear in the photographs.

However, the hypothesis that Architectural Documentary 3 contributed to the eradication of these four clusters, which no longer exist, is somewhat astonishing. There are those who also suspect that Carolina Maria de Jesus' book, from which excerpts appear on the pages of the Documentary, may have served to support arguments in favor of urbanization, justifying, contrary to what was imagined, the eviction of the residents of the Canindé favela, where she lived. Perhaps one day, it

will be possible to clarify this ambiguity, with further research. It may also be that it this only concerns the mere existence of that particular work, which is itself part of a series, and of an archive, and at the same time a dismantling.

Dismantling Documentary 3, where some of the rare, precious negatives circulated that recorded four favelas in Belo Horizonte in 1961, brought out the complexity of the plot, which involved the photographic, editorial and archival practice and the vernacular, daily practice of the city.

In view of the ambiguous condition of the images, we were urged, as the lattermost gesture of research, to explore the displacements announced by those photographs and their very presence within the archive. In a diversion of time and space, which challenged the research situation, we took the archive to the city of today.

### 2.3 Diverting: the gleaners and I<sup>11</sup>

On a blue swimming pool protective canvas and a few large pieces of cardboard, Odilon Tavares places his generous collection of second-hand books. He does not know the exact number, but there are certainly more than 2 thousand titles, according to accounts in a report in the newspaper *O Tempo*<sup>12</sup>, in its edition on November 2, 2018, regarding city-hall inspectors collecting around half of the material from the open-air second-hand book shop. Odilon stated in the report that, “They arrived here, put my books into bags, and threw them into a van. One of the inspectors said that I’d have to pay a fine of 1,500 Reais to get my books back and that, if I stayed here, they’d be back to take the rest” (Figure 8).



Figure 8. From the series “Diverting the discarded”, with Odilon Tavares

Photographs taken with a Nikon 80 camera and expired B&W film, equipment and material from the collection of the Sylvio de Vasconcellos Photo-Documentation Laboratory.

Source: Junia Mortimer, 2019.

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11. Here I make an explicit reference to the title of the documentary by Agnès Varda, *The Gleaners and I*, in its translation into Portuguese as *Os catadores e eu*. Direction and script: Agnès Varda, 2000. (78 min).

12. PBH inspectors take 2,000 books from the seller. *Jornal O Tempo*, Novemebr 2, 2018. Available at: <https://www.otempo.com.br/cidades/fiscal-da-pbh-levam-2-000-livros-de-vendedor-1.2062985>. Viewed on: July 10, 2020.



Figure 9. From the series “Diverting the discarded”, with Odilon Tavares

Photographs taken with a Nikon 80 camera and expired B&W film, equipment and material from the collection of the Sylvio de Vasconcellos Photodocumentation Laboratory.

Source: Junia Mortimer, 2019.

Odilon sells books found in the trash at a fixed price of five Reais. He mounts his second-hand book shop every day on the corner of Rua Grão Mogol and Avenida Contorno, in Belo Horizonte, in the Central-South region of the city, markedly middle and upper-middle class. The manner in which it is mounted is random and attracts spontaneous approaches. According to the bookseller<sup>13</sup>, it is the surprises found in the trash that most attracted him to his profession as a collector, although the working conditions are unjust, given the rental prices of the haulage vehicles offered (between one and two thousand Reais). This is also why he decided to focus on books. In addition to those that he exhibits and keeps on the sidewalk of the street, with other materials collected by his friend Horácio, also a collector, Odilon displays photographs of the countless bookshelves in his house: until now, as I am writing this text, he has never counted his collection (Figure 9).

In the back room of the Rafaelo Berti Library, of the UFMG School of Architecture, and in the same city where Odilon daily assembles his second-hand bookshop, on some metal shelves, there are hundreds of editions produced by the school’s Graphic Service in the 1960s and 1970s. Amongst them, there are no editions of the Architectural Documentaries, which we analyzed using the second research gesture in this text, but there are duplicate editions of volumes V and VI of the ambitious *História da Arquitetura* [History of Architecture] written by João Boltshauser, in the 1960s. There are also duplicate editions of his three volumes of *Noções de evolução urbana das Américas; de Escultura ornamental barroca do Brasil* [Notions of urban

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13. In November 2019, I increased my attendance at Odilon’s second-hand street bookshop and engaged in a series of conversations with the bookseller, which resulted in the series “Diverting the discarded”, the basis for creating the third research gesture presented.

evolution in the Americas; Baroque ornamental sculpture of Brazil], by Carlos del Negro; and a booklet on fluid technique art, by Carvalho Lopes; amongst others. Periodically, librarians deposit copies of this stock onto the discarded shelf for potential interested parties.

During conversations with Odilon, with his permission, I took photographs of him with expired cameras and rolls of film belonging to the old Photo-Documentation Service. I also used the structure of the Laboratory to develop and enlarge these images, which I then inserted into editions discarded by the Library. Taking these books, at the end of 2019, to Odilon's second-hand bookshop became the research gesture through which the convergence of the practices, the investigative and the urban, became more visible (Figure 10).



Figure 10. From the series “Diverting the discarded”, with Odilon Tavares. Inserting the enlargements into surplus books from the Graphic Service of the UFMG School of Architecture to donate to the street bookseller’s collection

Source: Junia Mortimer, 2019.

In June 2020, in the middle of the pandemic, a large part of Odilon’s street collection was set on fire<sup>14</sup>. The commotion in the face of the violence of the act and the horror of the images that circulated on social networks prompted residents

14. According to the report published on the website of *Encontro BH Cidade magazine* (Available at: <https://www.revistaencontro.com.br/canal/cidade/2020/06/sebo-a-ceu-aberto-tem-livros-queimados-na-avenida-do-outline.html>), on June 30, 2020, and also on the website of the newspaper *O Tempo* (Available at: <https://www.otempo.com.br/diversao/magazine/ambulante-que-um-sebo-a-ceu-aberto-em-bh-tem-3-000-livros-queimados-1.2355037>), on the same day, Odilon’s collection was set on fire on the 27<sup>th</sup> of that month. At the time, the bookseller lost about 3,000 books. Viewed on: July 10, 2020.

to donate thousands of books, helping to restore the bookseller's collection<sup>15</sup>. In addition, a partnership between Odilon Tavares, Marcos Franchini and Giuliano Camatta enabled the development of a project, via collective funding, to guarantee not only the survival of the collection, but also its circulation and displacement in an itinerant second-hand bookshop<sup>16</sup>. According to comments that circulated on social networks regarding the event, this movement was read as a collective action that, even if it does not actually resolve, it does at least encourage us to face what is right in front of us - with regard to the wave of regression and ignorance that, sometimes, seems to squash our inventive possibilities.

## Conclusions

The historiographic turnaround made possible by archives – amongst other epistemological aspects – in the field of the history of architecture and urbanism promoted profound changes during the 1980s and 1990s in manners linked to understanding previously established historical narratives and to the imagination of others, according to the possibilities of the documents. By addressing a photographic archive, including visual and textual sources, this research is inserted into this movement and, at the same time, seeks to reflect on the research practices or gestures, within an archive, when facing the documents, in order to make them speak. The disciplinary limits of history, theory and aesthetics were tensioned through the construction of temporary, precarious arrangements with slides, photographic enlargements, letters, books and new documents produced during the research, in order to raise issues related to everyday life, technique and the city, with special attention to the period between 1950 and 1970. Placed in a photographic archive dedicated mainly to the function of registering heritage, these issues, already faced by other researchers, such as Maria Cecília Londres and Silvana Rubino, place limits onto historical narratives surrounding monument, memory and nation.

During the research, sets of slides surfaced that had no dates nor archival indexing, thereby placing limits, and making it difficult to transpose in order to achieve more interesting historiographic developments. The enlargements we

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15. According to reports published on the websites of the newspaper *O Tempo* (available at: <https://www.otempo.com.br/diversao/magazine/dono-de-sebo-que-teve-3-000-livros-queimados-ganha-o-triplo-em-48-horas-1.2355408>) and also in the newspaper *Estado de Minas*, (available at: [https://www.em.com.br/app/noticia/gerais/2020/07/01/interna\\_gerais,1161794/after-fire-owner-of-tallow-to-the-outdoors-of-bh-receives-10-thousand-donations.shtml](https://www.em.com.br/app/noticia/gerais/2020/07/01/interna_gerais,1161794/after-fire-owner-of-tallow-to-the-outdoors-of-bh-receives-10-thousand-donations.shtml)), both on July 1, 2020, the bookseller received in donations three times more than the number of books burned, reaching around 10,000 volumes.

16. More information may be found on Odilon's itinerant second-hand bookshop project, made possible through collective financing, on the Instagram account "Sebo do Seu Odilon". Available at: <https://www.instagram.com/sebodosuodilon/>. Viewed on: July 10, 2020.

proposed aimed to highlight situations, looks, subjects and gestures that detach the registered heritages from their official itineraries so as to create an urban environment permeated by affections, disputes, conflicts and also care as a public dimension of the city. When enlarging these small photographic diversions, perhaps unforeseen in the eyes of the photographers and unexpected for the researcher who delves into that archive, we are diverted from the architectural monument as an element of the nation's heritage, to show, in a ghostly manner, urban life, its presences and absences.

In terms of urban historiography, the research has aimed to shed light on the urban struggles of the late 1950s and early 1960s in Belo Horizonte, based on an analysis of the photographs and texts of the publication *Architectural Documentary 3*, the result of a partnership between the Photo-Documentation Service and the Graphic Service of the UFMG School of Architecture. By inserting it into a tangle of events and speeches, we have sought to highlight the limits and possibilities of the photographic image in the field of urban history, considering the visibility regime of those photographs produced by the SFD professionals. Between the hygienist speech of the social worker from the Department of Popular Neighborhoods and Favelas and excerpts from the book *Quarto de despejo* [The Child of the Dark], the photographs and captions of this Documentary testify to the inherent contradictions in a professional field in which, at that moment, the technocratic presumption and the elitist approach clash with the humanist stance and the genuine appreciation of the invention of spatial strategies (popular poetics by Lina Bo Bardi [MORTIMER *et al.*, 2018b]).

Lastly, the intention was also to explore photographic activity as a research practice - to photograph as a way of thinking/doing - by displacing films, cameras, tripods and other photographic devices from the archive under study to the city of Belo Horizonte. Moreover, the structure of the darkroom was also activated, to develop and to produce enlargements that participated in this gesture of diversion by assigning other purposes to the media that had gone into disuse. I insisted on the theme of everyday life and technique in order to update historiographical research, located in the 1950s and 1960s, for a cultural debate on discard, informality, gleaning and recycling in the contemporary city. The presence and dialogue with the street bookseller Odilon Tavares were fundamental to this research gesture.

The research gestures we have explored in this photographic archive deal with the complexity of photography, as a visual source or way of thinking/doing, and present, as urban practices, habits and life forms of different temporalities. They also point towards disciplinary tensions, possibilities and theoretical, historiographical and aesthetic limits when dwelling on an image in the field of urbanism. Faced with

the fury of images that characterize the contemporary moment (FONTCUBERTA, 2016, p. 260), these gestures bring into play reconfigurations of our ability to see, which may also take place through practices that refer to “un-seeing”, be it in the poetic dimension of Manoel de Barros, in *Menino do mato* [Forest boy] (2013), or in the reflexive dimension woven by Rita Velloso (2018) against spectacularization.

To place oneself before a photographic archive is to be in front of a history machine. When facing this machine, we identify the governing logic of its structure, we classify its forms and functions, and peering into its mysteries we see a re-invention of the images, showing other cities. Taking up the story of J. J. Veiga with which we started this text, it may be stated that this machine:

[...] has already performed a miracle, but this – just between ourselves – I think is an exaggeration of superstitious people, and I prefer not to talk about it. I – and I believe that the vast majority of citizens also – do not expect anything in particular from it; for me it is enough that it stays where it is, making us happy, inspiring us, comforting us. My worry is that, when we least expect it, some young man lands from outside, one of these dispatchers, who understands everything, and will look at the machine from the outside, from the inside, think a little and start explaining the purpose of the machine, and to show that he is skillful (they are always very skillful) will ask the garage for a set of tools, and without paying any attention to our protests, get under the machine and will start loosening, hammering, and engaging, and the machine starts working. If that happens, the charm will be broken and there will be no more machine (VEIGA, 2008, n.p.).

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