
editorial

More than three years have passed since our first edition of *scopio* focused on Architecture was published and presented to the public in the city of Porto. That was in October 2010 and it is with great satisfaction that I am now, three years later, writing this editorial for the third edition called *scopio aboveground territory*.

As the result of the effort and dedication of all involved in this publication, we have managed to obtain very encouraging results and feedback in these last three years coming from diverse people and institutions. The evidence of this is the interest shared with *scopio*'s editorial team and collaborators by many other institutions, groups and people, as well as the inclusion of *scopio* in quite a few actions and events focused on common themes of concern belonging to the universe of photography and architecture.

The Editorial Board of *scopio* is who has the main responsibility for curating the collection of photography projects and articles relevant to the topical themes of each edition. This means, besides other things, that we have been inviting diverse authors based on the relevance of their work to the main topics in discussion and asking collaborators, coming from different areas of study, to create diverse content and invite other authors to develop further the concepts and ideas of those main topics. Thus, in these past three years, *scopio* magazine has been able to define itself as an independent publication, initially inspired in some way on the zines and bookzines, which has pursued until now with success an editorial strategy able to integrate the different perspectives of its collaborators within its editorial line.

SCOPIO stance, defining its identity, is one that is interested in a high level of critical analysis and focus directed to the relations between architectural images and public imaginaries, as well as to the understanding of how different types of images build diverse worlds: between fiction and documentary, reproduction and manipulation, or analog and digital. One of the most important features distinguishing *scopio* is its editorial approach encouraging the involvement of the academic, cultural and social sectors, in conceptions and practices that present an ability to broaden the way photography is used for understanding and communicating diverse aspects related to Architecture, to the City and its public spaces and to the Territory transformation, specifically in respect to how all of these spaces are perceived and lived in their multiple strands.

Thus *scopio* has already integrated and given support to two International Seminars focused on the debate and reflection about public space and architectural images – *ON THE SURFACE*¹ – and is also one of the alternative Portuguese publications present in the International exhibition of Archizines², a showcase of new architecture fanzines, journals and magazines from around the world curated by Elias Redstone. *scopio* has already collaborated with Institutions as OARSN – Portuguese Architecture Chamber (RIBA equivalent) and is now also distributed by the editorial group of FAUP and referenced in its editorial platforms.³

1 www.nasuperficie.ccre-online.com

2 www.archizines.com

3 <http://pda.arq.up.pt/plataformas.asp>

The previous editions of *scopio* magazine explore the concept of *Aboveground* through the pre-announced themes of *architecture and city*, which jointly with this issue of *territory*, close this cycle of three *scopio aboveground* magazine editions. These former editions will, nevertheless, constitute *the base* for the first *scopio* book that will be called *scopio aboveground: architecture, city and territory* and that will be published in 2013 with a slightly different format and layout, exploring more extensively the concept of *Aboveground* and of how it can be understood and read in the *photography works of Filip Dujardin, Paulo Catrica and Xavier Ribas*, all published on the *section Project* of former magazine's editions.

The concept of *aboveground* approaches simultaneously two main ideas, being one the concept *on the surface*, associated very much to the photographic image and to the idea that it can be just a thin foil, which can trick the viewer with *its illusion of extreme realism*, and *all the implications that go along with that thought*. The other being *Architecture, integrating both the macro and micro levels – Architecture, City and Territory transformation –* and being itself understood as a constructed space (above the ground), closely associated with the path and the movement necessarily on a any surface for the body to perceive the built environment.

Thus, in *scopio aboveground architecture*, which was much focused on how architecture is experienced through imagination and reality, readers were allowed to travel between the worlds of fiction and documentary, reproduction and manipulation, and analogue and digital. Notions of surface and its illusion of extreme realism, ideas approached by the concept of *Aboveground*, where addressed critically, allowing to understand better how these different but related worlds are presented, especially in our digital age. In particular, the work of Filip Dujardin "reading fictional structures through digital photography" proved that fictional buildings are capable of showing to us that architecture can also represent a private and independent universe belonging to an author that is capable of setting free his spatial imagination, critically exploring spatial solutions and advancing architectonic utopias.

Then, in *scopio aboveground city*, focused on the subject of public space and city life, showing works that try to critically understand and characterize the rich multi-faceted world that exists in the cities, addresses, besides other issues, the notion of visibility and invisibility in the city's architecture and public spaces, ideas also coming from to the concept *Aboveground* and that can be seen in the work of Paulo Catrica "the city is not a palimpsest: reading unmediated experiences".

In *scopio aboveground territory*, which is dedicated to the Territory transformation connected with land art or large-scale landscape architecture, as well as to regional or local planning, the concept of Aboveground is very much related with thinking about both notions of "Aboveground" (as landscape and surface) and of "Architecture", "City" and "Territory" (as historical process and 'depth').

We thought that one of the challenges for this edition could be to address, in some way, how political and economic power is controlling space affecting the built environment in specific ways as well as the lives of people and their culture. Working with the ideas of invisibility and appearance, photography images can be utilized to represent "what is no longer there", meaning gives depth to images and go beyond their appearance. We wanted works that explored creatively ways for using photography as an instrument to confront our memories of space, to reveal "unknown" realities and to present a critical vision of our territory environment.

These issues of invisibility are the foundation of Xavier Ribas work titled *Invisible Structures*, published in the section Project. With his work, that relates very much with Robert Smithson's notion of entropy and with Michel de Certeau's idea of the 'invisible identities of the visible', we are confronted with an invisible evidence of a pre-Columbian Maya civilization buried in the Petén rainforest and, even though the project is making reference to a historical time, the images do not have an "indexical" function, but evoke those sacred spaces through subtle invisible traces. The absence of images portraying the archeological site appearance and going beyond their outer shell, still buried in that rainforest, makes their presence even more sacred and meaningful.

It is important to refer, in this ending of *scopio magazine aboveground cycle* and the beginning of a new one, that digital technology is perceived by *scopio* in a creative way and as a tool to create synergies and establish bridges with the analogue universe and not to replace it. Accordingly, the magazine is now also present in iPad⁴, alongside with its official website and social network. Within this context and beliefs, we intend, in the near future, to create an International Network called *scopio network*, linking diverse Universities, Art schools, Practitioners, Museums, Galleries and Archives internationally.

This network would naturally be articulated with existent contact networks – such as the International Seminar On the Surface – and diverse platforms built or under construction by our research group – CCRE. In this way we will be making possible and easier to exchange ideas and diverse content related with photography image and Architecture through a collaborative platform on the Internet, but also promoting face-to-face reunions through diverse actions, following the same belief that the digital universe can complement and enrich the face to face experience but not replace it. We are thinking that this network and collaborative platforms would support several forum and editorial initiatives, multimedia models, ideas competitions and workshops related with our research agendas. All these will be the instruments used to single out, discuss and communicate the projection of all the different projects and diverse content related with photography image and Architecture.

4 (<https://itunes.apple.com/pt/book/scopio/id576406465?mt=11>)

SCOPIO also intends, in the near future, to cross the Atlantic and be present in Brazil and USA, but for now it can be found only in Europe at specific bookshops related to Photography or to Architecture, City and Territory as, just to mention just a few, the aefaup bookshop (FAUP) in Porto, the Inc.livros e edições de autor in Porto, the A+A bookshop in Lisbon, the STET – livros & fotografias in Lisbon, the AA bookshop in London and the Riba bookshop in Portland, London.

Finally, it's worth mentioning that we are going to make simultaneously to this normal edition of *scopio aboveground territory*, a special limited edition of a 100, comprising the three numbers of *scopio aboveground* in a specific card-board package, with a special price.

sections

Project

For the third issue *aboveground territory* we have invited Xavier Ribas, a Catalan photographer trained as an anthropologist, with professional experience in the fields of urban planning and architecture. His projects and research create a significant body of work related to the notions of place, memory, the city and the unbuilt environment. *Invisible Structures* is a photographic project which focuses on our perception of "buried landscapes and cultures", offering us a new documentary-fiction mediation of those archaeological cities. *Barcelona Pictures* explores the relationship between centre and periphery, as well as the residual spaces with unpredictable practices.

Limited Edition

Carlos Lobo is a Portuguese international photographer who is currently teaching photography at Catholic University of Portugal - Porto [Universidade Catolica do Porto] (since 2008). He is also engaged in CAAA (Guimarães) as a photography curator and in LEBOP as a book publisher. Carlos Lobo is the invited author who has agreed to collaborate with our third issue *aboveground territory*, allowing one of his fine art photographic images to be sold in this limited edition. This photographic image is coming from the Artist book called "BERLIM" that will be soon published by LEBOP, which can be acquired by the exclusive price of 200 Euros.

**invisible structures: representing a
memory that hasn't yet been imagined**

Critic by Pedro Leão Neto

XAVIER RIBAS
19 Untitled photographs from series "Invisible Structures", 2006-2008
120 x 155 cm, C-Type Prints



Xavier Ribas studied Social Anthropology at the University of Barcelona (1990) and Documentary Photography at the Newport School of Art and Design (1993) and the author's social awareness and background in these fields of study is well patent in his extended work covering several territories and places. His photographic projects also operate as both document and fiction, showing how an artistic approach can play an important role when analysing the modernity and contemporary transformation of the territory¹.

Ribas, by integrating into the photographic representations of his projects diverse concepts and ideas coming from philosophy, art

and sociology² is able to create powerful landscape series where art and objectivity combine to address two ways of looking towards our contemporary territory. As Lluís Sabadell Artiga has written, "In terms of our way of looking, the meeting between modernity and landscape has generated residual spaces where our way of looking diverges in two opposed paths: indifference and admiration." (Artiga, 2007). Ribas work covers the second path making us re-examine the diverse "invisibilities" of our territories.

His work is very representative of how political and economic power can control space affecting the built environment in specific ways, as well as the lives of people and their culture. Working with the ideas of invisibility and appearance, photography images are utilized to represent "what is no longer there", meaning that the images gain a depth that go beyond their appearance. Within this context, *scopio aboveground territory*,

2 "In a wider context the work is about the relationship of man and territory, engaging with the notion of the production of space (Henry Lefebvre), the experience of the landscape from the perspective of the everyday (Michel de Certeau), and the notion of anthropological place (Marc Augé). Therefore, the work intends to dialogue with the disciplines of urban studies, social anthropology and archaeology." (Ribas, 2005)

1 Gabriela Vaz Pinheiro, 2010, "The Deception of Images in SCOPIO "Contrast: Michelle Domingos + Patrícia Azevedo Santos" p.78-79 "Through age-old tradition, photography has affirmed itself as an autonomous subject field and practice. By an even older resistance, the artistic project has been using it as a processual helping tool for supporting observation, for cataloguing the capture of fleeting moments that memory will betray and drawing will not succeed to immobilize." "It is therefore demonstrated that the deception of images often serves them as a lever for meaning and that the evidence of the artistic process may very well move from its sensitive operability to a new domain in its own right, as a marker of significance and poetics."

dedicated to the territory transformation connected with land art or large-scale landscape architecture, as well as to regional or local planning, has decided to publish Ribas project titled *Invisible Structures*, which is a very interesting photographic project that works with the idea of "invisible" and "hidden", which consistently runs through his work since the earlier series in the late nineties, in an unusual environment and context.

We start by explaining that this work is one of the two photographic series [*Mud* is the name of the other one], resulting from the project commissioned by Photo España and supported by FNAC (Fonds National d'Art Contemporain). We are here confronted with an invisible evidence of a pre-Columbian Maya civilization buried in the Petén rainforest. This project implied Ribas to travel to Guatemala in March 2006, where he collaborated with a team of archaeologists working in the "Proyecto Arqueológico Waka", directed by David Freidel (Southern Methodist University, Dallas) and Héctor Escobedo (Universidad San Carlos, Guatemala) (Ribas, 2006a).

When we are confronted by *Invisible Structures*, which comprise 19 photographs, including two diptychs and one triptych, we feel a powerful and strange feeling of uneasiness.

The images of this body of work seem to make the viewer plunge into a discontinuous and nonreferential³ jungle spatiality. One can spend a lot of time in front of them trying to understand those spaces and feel helpless in terms of knowing how to deal with them: there is no hint of socio-cultural context to read. Simultaneously, we also feel a significant exuberance and density in the pictures, which come from the author's strong emotional and pictorial resolve of the jungle in its most basic and sensual form.

The author also explains how the title of this series refers to the terminology used in the context of the Maya archaeology to designate the site of a disappeared structure (Ribas, 2006a). This work has, in fact, a clear anthropological look because it discloses what is beyond the symbolic and biographical elements of that Maya civilization: the

3 "These images represent tangled fragments of jungle, with no horizon, discontinuous, indifferent, interchangeable. (It is difficult to retrace one's steps in the rainforest). These images 'bursting with jungle' represent the edges of archaeological excavations, they look outwards, trying to capture an unconstructed space. At first glance, these images make us think of a wild space, natural, undefined, as if without motif. However, this disorganized and entropic space is, in fact, a historical site, the site (niche) of a buried city beneath the rainforest floor." (Ribas, 2006b)

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genius loci coming from the remnants and sediments buried under that jungle's earth.

One might say that Ribas *Invisible Structures* hold the notion that who is on top of things has a dose of structural invisibility that is not shared by outsiders and, in the case of this work, this is manifest both in terms of its ubiquitous nature and the invisibility of some images, which also seem to dissolve the vanishing point that photography usually puts into focus. Nevertheless, the existence of historical structures, which are not visible and have still to be deciphered by an archaeological work, helps to understand Ribas' explanation that in *Invisible Structures* he is representing a memory that hasn't yet been imagined. In addition to this, it is also true that "In the rainforest, however, the perception and the intuition of something that is hidden offer a more appropriate framework to appreciate this historical presence. We can perceive this, for example, in the mounds, which denote buried ceremonial or residential structures, and which can be perceived at first glance as 'small jungle-covered hills'" (Ribas, 2006b). Lastly, we can also comprehend more clearly how his work interrogates issues related to the territories' representation of time and memory, of visibility or invisibility of history, and of politics in the 'reconstruction' and 'discourse' of archaeology.

Reading Ribas' text *Invisible Structures* in SOURCE photographic review (Ribas, 2006b) we are also able to understand better how his series of images echoes some of Robert Smithson's ideas: "The memory that is represented here is not the monument, but a projection, a threshold, a memory 'which is not yet', or that is as yet 'unthought', as in a state of 'inversion' (Robert Smithson). Or, a memory which, simply, does not let itself be thought, as if the rainforest was not only the direct consequence of the desolation and the crumbling of a civilization, but also the necessary strategy for the preservation of its fragments: we could say that it hides itself, that it buries itself and that it eludes us."

We also think that those images try to explore the phases of "before" and "after" of an architectural process of the dead, since they try to capture the "invisible" architecture of the past and in doing so deal with Smithson's ideas of architectural entropy and ruins (Flam, 1973) in a very particular way. In fact, "... at first glance, those images make us think of a wild space, natural, undefined, as if without motif. However, this disorganized and entropic space is, in fact, a historical site, the site (niche) of a buried city beneath the rainforest floor" (Ribas, 2006b).

As Ribas writes "The sprawl of the ancient Maya city, made up of 'squares' (plazas), roads and common residential structures, is of secondary archaeological interest compared to its ceremonial centres and elite residential compounds, and it tends to remain unexcavated, deep in the rainforest floor, estranged from the work of archaeological documentation and historical interpretation that begins exploring from the centre. This 'periphery' of the city, and in a sense of archaeology, or of history, is the subject of this work." (Ribas, 2006b)

Further on, he states that "Paradoxically, the presence of this historical memory of the pre-Columbian Maya civilization can be perceived more intensely in its overgrown invisibility than in the reconstructed spaces of the archaeological parks, which are somehow disappointing in their inevitable similarity to the character and aesthetics of theme parks." (Ribas, 2006b). It seems to us that, in doing this, Ribas is disclosing something vital and magical of this pre-Columbian architecture, which seems to be ignored in Disneyfied archaeological settings.

At last, it can be said that Ribas' photographic project is concerned about the human experience of both past and contemporary cultures and that *Invisible Structures* is focused on our perception of "buried" landscapes and

cultures offering to us a new documentary fiction mediation of those archaeological cities. As a matter of fact, "The archaeological parks tend to be spaces designed with an urban mentality and for tourism (entrance fees, souvenirs, toilets, picnic and rest areas, etc.). In the rainforest, however, the perception and the intuition of something that is hidden offer a more appropriate framework to appreciate this historical presence. The mounds which denote buried ceremonial or residential structures, and which could be perceived at first glance as 'small jungle-covered hills'; the distances between them concentrated by an impenetrable vegetation; the traces left by the archaeological excavations, now filled in, the earth less densely packed, mediate more effectively than the reconstructed landscapes and monuments of the archaeological parks. The images here propose that we approach this historical site not from the point of view of the visible, but through the perception of an absence." (Ribas, 2006b)

Before ending this article, we believe it is worth looking at another work of Ribas, which is the photographs of the marginal spaces on the periphery of Barcelona, captured between 1994-1997, right after it had suffered a massive urban redevelopment as a consequence of the 1992 Olympics (Ribas, 1998).

The images of this photographic project present us with a set of residual spaces, at the edges of the city of Barcelona. These leftovers, Augé's non-places or Foucault's "heterotopias", which are the result of the destruction of pre-existing spaces, still leave traces of the territory's original structures, portions of the past too stout or too peripheral to obliterate. These series constitute powerful visual statements, which makes us question a certain way of creating landscape, in this case, the landscape associated to the process of social and economic transformation induced by the 1992 Olympics on that territory.

It is also important to refer that Ribas's *Barcelona Pictures* have a very particular aesthetics, which re-represent those outskirts and their residual spaces between motorways, housing blocks, industrial states and other alike suburban sprawl architectures (Ribas, 2003). The vantage point of these images and the way light and colour are mastered seem to impregnate both our retina and consciousness in a way that make us look at these territories with a new awareness, making observable what was before unseen and encouraging us to question the way those spaces are re-symbolized and appropriated by people. These territories and structures, the result of the cultural phenomenon that Marc

Augé calls Supermodernity (Augé, 1995) and that are the inverse of place (non-relational and non-historical) seem to challenge Ribas both as an anthropologist and photographer.

It is manifest in this work of Ribas that he is also trying to understand why the general public went to these residual spaces in weekends to spend there their free time. Thus, behind these *Barcelona Pictures*, there is also a social anthropologist trying to investigate the meaning of those marginal spaces and why these people used them for their Sunday leisure. In fact, as Ribas said "The question is: Why do people turn these residual spaces into the centre of their leisure activity?" and referring to Camus comments that "It could be argued that occupying these places is a response to a desperate situation. Or as Albert Camus puts it in *The First Man*, the poor person's lot is to live eternally surrounded by common names (and places). However, when I've visited such cathedrals of organized leisure as Isla Fantasia, Port Aventura or Montigalà, I've found more tranquillity in the adjacent patches of wasteland converted into improvised Sunday dining rooms, than in the park interior itself. It strikes me that behind this improvisation there lies more design than accident. It is possible, then, that the interest in these spaces is due more

to people coming to see the periphery as a place of freedom. Or put another way, that freedom can only arise in a residual space, and therefore presents us with an image of desolation." (Ribas, 2003). In view of all this, we can uphold that Ribas's rich and profound body of work recording these chaotic suburbs give an important spatial and social understanding of current developments and of how people live those spaces, strengthening in this way the perception and understanding of our contemporary landscape.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that *Barcelona Pictures* relates to quite a few of Ribas prior concerns patent in several of other photographic projects as, for example, in the 8

series presented in his book *Sanctuary* (Ribas, 2005). This means, besides other things, having an interest about the relationship between centre and periphery, and for residual spaces with unpredictable practices, as well as wanting to understand how those spaces can be symbolically appropriated and on how this figurative transformation allows their domestication. In fact, we can say that the work of Ribas is a network combining, intersecting and connecting the Augé's anthropological space with Certeau's practiced place (Certeau, 1984) or, in other words, between the non-place and its transformation in a "place" by its use and symbolic transformation.

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