



**Focales**

5 | 2021

**Le Paysage Temps photographié**

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**Éditeur**

Presses universitaires de Saint-Étienne

**Édition électronique**

<https://focales.univ-st-etienne.fr/index.index.php?id=2998>

ISSN 2556-5125

Antonello Frongia, « In, On, and Out of Time: Some Temporal Structures in Italian Landscape Photography of the 1980s and '90s », *Focales* n° 5 : *Le Paysage Temps photographié*, mis à jour le 01/06/2021. URL : <https://focales.univ-st-etienne.fr/index.index.php?id=2998>

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# In, On, and Out of Time: Some Temporal Structures in Italian Landscape Photography of the 1980s and '90s

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Antonello Frongia

While the critical discourse on the emergence of a new “school” of Italian landscape photography in the 1980s and '90s has generally revolved around architectural, spatial, and geographical issues, a sustained discussion of its engagement with notions of temporality and duration is still lacking. Despite their differences in style and subject matter, the works of Olivo Barbieri, Gabriele Basilico, Giovanni Chiaramonte, Vittore Fossati, Luigi Ghirri, Guido Guidi, and Mimmo Jodice – to name a few – have long been considered as expressions of the same trust in the medium’s potential to convey the phenomenological experience of the *hic et nunc*. At the core of this conceptual framework are recurring notions of vantage point, perspective, scale, as well as walking, travel, exploration, discovery, survey [1]. By methodically suppressing the evenemential – in stark opposition to the rhetoric of reportage and the instantaneity of humanist photography – these photographers have aimed to suspend their images of place in an extended presentness or in a metaphysical temporal vacuum. Different temporal structures, however, remain implicit in their purportedly slow, contemplative attitude, in their evocation of the quotidian, and in their understanding of the landscape as a palimpsest of historical signs. In this paper I wish to begin to reconsider some of these photographic works from the perspective of time, with particular attention to the dialectic of subjective and historical time that is often at the core of their relationship with the built environment.

A case in point is the pivotal exhibition and publication *Viaggio in Italia*, co-curated in 1984 by Luigi Ghirri and long celebrated as the catalyzer of a “new wave” of Italian landscape photography [2]. Beginning with the title and the image on the book cover – the reproduction of a physical map of the Peninsula – the project was adamant in its desire to suggest a renovated (if somewhat ironic) itinerary through the ordinary landscapes of contemporary Italy, rather than a guide to the historical monuments of select urban centers in the tradition of the Grand Tour [3]. The geographical scope of the project was further reinforced by the titles assigned to the catalogue’s ten sections, seven of which correspond to spatial situations of everyday life: “*A perdita d’occhio* [As Far as the Eye Can See]”, “*Lungomare* [Seafront]”, “*Margini* [Margins]”, “*Del Luogo* [About Place]”, “*Capolinea* [Last

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1. See, for example, the recurrence of spatial terms in the titles of exhibitions and publications listed in Roberta VALTORTA, “*In cerca dei luoghi (non si trattava solo di paesaggio)*”, in Roberta VALTORTA ed., *Luogo e identità nella fotografia italiana contemporanea*, Turin, Einaudi, 2013, p. 3-108.

2. Luigi GHIRRI, Gianni LEONE, Ezio VELATI eds., *Viaggio in Italia*, Alessandria, Il Quadrante, 1984 and Roberta VALTORTA ed., *Racconti dal paesaggio. 1984-2004. A vent’anni da Viaggio in Italia*, Milan, Lupetti, 2004. For the idea of a “new wave” of Italian photography, see Claudio MARRA, *Fotografia e pittura nel Novecento. Una storia “senza combattimento”*, Milan, Bruno Mondadori, 2000, p. 224.

3. For the book’s reference to Roberto Rossellini’s film *Viaggio in Italia* (1954), see for example Marina SPUNTA, “Intersections of Photography, Writing, and Landscape: The Italian Landscape Photobook from Ghirri to Fossati and Messori”, in Sarah Patricia HILL and Giuliana MINGHELLI eds., *Stillness in Motion: Italy, Photography, and the Meanings of Modernity*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2014, p. 297.

Stop]”, “*Centrocittà* [City Center]”, “*Sulla soglia* [On the Threshold]”, “*Nessuno in particolare* [Nobody in Particular]”, “*Si chiude al tramonto* [Closing at Sunset]”, and “*L’O di Giotto* [Giotto’s O] [4]”.

The 86 photographs comprising this ideal voyage are consistent with these premises. Presenting accurate descriptions of deserted ordinary places, generally seen in the middle distance and from a central perspective, they obliterate any perception of subjective observation and its implications of time. Objective signs of the landscape’s biography are also relatively scarce: with the exception of two views by Gabriele Basilico portraying recognizable modernist buildings of the interwar period [5] and Ghirri’s iconic *trompe l’œil* juxtaposing the exterior of a rural structure and a commercial billboard depicting a contemporary, middle-class interior [6], the eye of the viewer is left to wander through an inconspicuous present. Only in two specific points in the series the temporal flatness of the landscape is enlivened by the presence of people. In the second chapter, three photographs by Claude Nori suddenly unleash the vitality of youthful bodies, first seen on a ferryboat and then at play on a beach; more people appear in the seventh chapter, this time seen at a distance, except for two expressive portraits of young kids by Umberto Sartorello closing the subseries [7].

Except for these occasional bursts of animation and the minimal vibrations of diurnal and nocturnal light (especially relevant in color photographs) [8], throughout the book the landscape itself is portrayed as a timeless, empty theater or, in Ghirri’s words, “a magic suspension of time [9]”. Only two photographs by Guido Guidi (significantly reproduced after Nori’s snapshots) appear to thematize the temporal variable [10]. Both taken with a longer exposure, they record the blurred streaks left on the photographic film by passing vehicles, again suggesting a stark contrast between the accelerated irruption of modernity and the age-old quietude of the rural environment. As Guidi has recently observed regarding his work in the 1980s, “The decisive moment does not exist: time and transformation exist, and what interested me [at the time] was to photograph not the most impressive moment, the climax, but time itself, dead time, obscure moments [11]”. The erasure of information caused by the action of time on the photographic emulsion, he adds, is an inscription of this inherent obscurity, of the state of constant flux that frustrates photography’s ambition to grasp the experience of place [12].

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4. My translation, here and throughout, unless otherwise noted. As clarified in the book’s introduction, the section entitled “Closing at Sunset” refers to urban parks: Arturo Carlo QUINTAVALLE, “*Viaggio in Italia*. Appunti”, in Luigi GHIRRI, Gianni LEONE, Ezio VELATI eds., *Viaggio in Italia*, op. cit., p. 12. As for the other chapters not immediately readable as species of spaces, “On the Threshold” presents a series of interiors, while passers-by are the subject of “Nobody in Particular” and “Giotto’s O” elliptically evokes museums and art objects. Further enhancing the geographical structure of the book was Gianni Celati’s short story entitled “Toward the Delta”, a reportage written while walking in the countryside and across the small villages along the Po river.

5. Luigi GHIRRI, Gianni LEONE, Ezio VELATI eds., *Viaggio in Italia*, op. cit., p. 91-92.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 96.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 53-55 and 103-113, respectively.

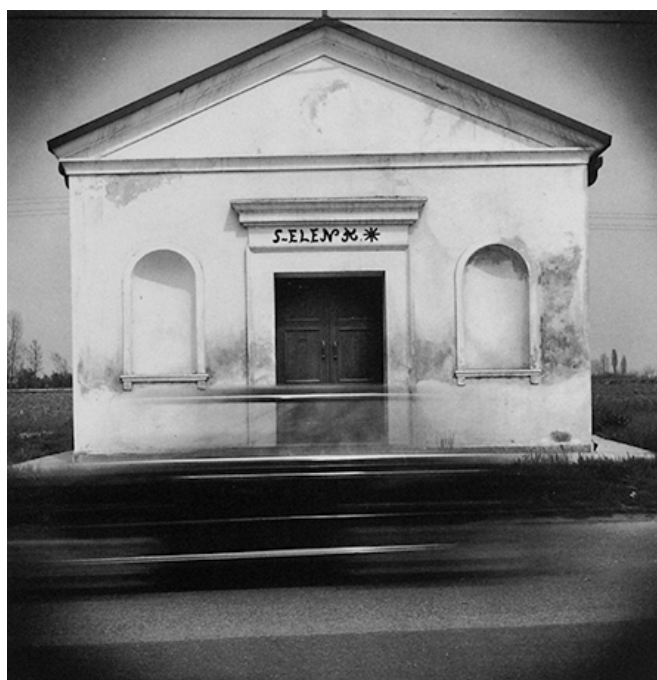
8. It is the phenomenological “vibration of appearances which is the cradle of things”: Maurice MERLEAU-PONTY, *Sense and Non-Sense* (1948), Evanston, Ill., Northwestern University Press, 1964, p. 18.

9. Luigi GHIRRI, “The Restless Gaze: An Anthology of Sentiments” [1988], in Luigi GHIRRI, *The Complete Essays 1973-1991*, London, MACK, 2017, p. 180.

10. Luigi GHIRRI, Gianni LEONE, Ezio VELATI eds., *Viaggio in Italia*, op. cit., p. 57-58.

11. “Guido Guidi in Conversation with Antonello Frongia and Andrea Simi”, in Guido GUIDI, *Per strada 1980-1994*, London, MACK, 2018, n. p. (including a reproduction of three sequential variants of the same view mentioned above).

12. Guido Guidi in conversation with the author, 5 November 2019.



► Guido Guidi, *Treviso*, 1982, in Luigi GHIRRI, Gianni LEONE, Ezio VELATI eds., *Viaggio in Italia*, Alexandria, Il Quadrante, 1984, p. 58.

As a whole, then, *Viaggio in Italia* privileged the idea of an ambiguous catalogue of spaces over the possibilities of linear narration or explication. Few years earlier, discussing the role played by documentary photographer Paolo Monti in a series of seminal surveys commissioned by the Emilia-Romagna region at the end of the 1960s, art historian Massimo Ferretti had spoken of photography's potential to record the evolution of landscape and to function as a heuristic tool for the anticipation of the future. Photography, he wrote, provides "the possibility of collective reappropriation [...] a memory that is not nostalgia, but rather awareness, attention, and the will to decide"; in other words, "photography as an active memory [13]".

Less optimistic about the medium's power to catalyze a shared vision of the future, in his introduction to *Viaggio in Italia* Arturo Carlo Quintavalle spoke instead of a book "perfectly built on the model of a mnemonic and physical space [14]". Clearly referencing the humanistic tradition of mnemotechnics and Frances Yates' famous book, *The Art of Memory* [15], Quintavalle underscored photography's role as a memory trigger and the book's capacity to chart the complexities of present landscapes. And yet, as he had remarked elsewhere, "Is the archive an instrument of the art of memory, to quote from [Frances] Yates, or rather of oblivion [16]?"

13. Massimo FERRETTI, "Memoria dei luoghi e luoghi della memoria nella riproduzione d'arte", in *L'Immagine della regione. Fotografie degli archivi Alinari in Emilia e in Romagna*, Bologna, Istituto per i Beni artistici culturali naturali della Regione Emilia-Romagna, Comune di Bologna, Istituto Alinari, 1980, p. 39.

14. Arturo Carlo QUINTAVALLE, "Viaggio in Italia. Appunti", art. cit., p. 11.

15. Frances A. YATES, *The Art of Memory*, London, Routledge et Kegan Paul, 1966.

16. Arturo Carlo QUINTAVALLE, "Tempo dell'archivio, archivio del tempo", in Arturo Carlo QUINTAVALLE, *Studio Villani. Il lavoro della fotografia*, Parma, Centro Studi Archivio della Comunicazione, 1980 reprinted in Arturo Carlo QUINTAVALLE, *Messa a fuoco. Studi sulla fotografia*, Milan, Feltrinelli, 1983, p. 26.

A similar disregard for the temporal structures of the landscape can be detected in a number of subsequent projects. Two years after *Viaggio in Italia*, Ghirri co-curated *Esplorazioni sulla via Emilia. Vedute nel paesaggio* [Explorations Along the via Emilia. Views in the Landscape], an exhibition involving twelve Italian and foreign photographers who documented the everyday landscape along the Roman way connecting Milan to the Adriatic Sea [17]. In the essay included in the catalogue, "Photography and Representing the Outside", Ghirri developed a critique of spatial images discussing his childhood experience with maps and the first photograph of the whole Earth taken from space in 1969. While he suggested that photography could function as an antidote to the vertiginous output of images generated by the new technologies, he also observed that "It would be naïve and wrong to think of photography as a static image of this sundown, seen in an exaggerated slow motion, or as a means to stop time"; the medium, he continued, should rather be conceived as a means to achieve "an image of balance and reconciliation, between known representations and those that might occur [18]".

From the mid-1980s to the end of the '90s, several commissions, exhibitions, and publications devoted to specific regions and landscapes consolidated the identity of a network of Italian photographers sharing similar interests in the observation of place. The most important of such projects was *Archivio dello spazio* [An Archive of Space], directed by Roberta Valtorta between 1987 and 1997. Based on the precedent of the Mission Photographique de la Datar, it involved 58 photographers, each assigned with a specific area or subject, with the aim of creating an inventory or an atlas of architectural and environmental subjects situated within the administrative borders of the province of Milan. Again, it was an interest in topographic description at a specific historical moment that fueled the archive: although the project entailed seven different "missions", the diachronic approach was never applied. While the focus of the survey, according to Valtorta, shifted progressively from recognizable sites and monuments to the exploration of "non-places" and marginal areas [19], for a whole decade *Archivio dello spazio* continued to operate within an "expanding synchronous space [20]", a one-dimensional temporal framework investigated through a series of individual photographic memories.

This lack of critical and theoretical interest for the temporal depth of the landscape is striking if we consider that American landscape photography – which had a strong and lasting influence in Italy during this period – had confronted the issue of territory as a carrier of historical time since at least the 1970s. The dialectic of historicity and presentness in Robert Adams' *The New West* (published in 1974), the *New Topographics* exhibition (1975), or the Rephotographic Survey

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17. Giulio BIZZARRI, Eleonora BRONZONI eds., *Esplorazioni sulla via Emilia. Vedute nel paesaggio*, Milan, Feltrinelli, 1986. The twelve photographers who contributed to the project were Olivo Barbieri, Gabriele Basilico, Vincenzo Castella, Giovanni Chiaramonte, Vittore Fossati, Luigi Ghirri, Guido Guidi, Mimmo Jodice, Klaus Kinold, Claude Nori, Cuchi White, and Manfred Willmann.

18. Luigi GHIRRI, "Photography and Representing the Outside" [1986], in Luigi GHIRRI, *The Complete Essays 1973-1991*, op. cit., p. 114.

19. Roberta VALTORTA, "L'Archivio dello spazio [L'Archive de l'espace]: point d'arrivée, point de départ", in Raphaële BERTHO, Jean-Philippe GARRIC, François QUEYREL eds., *Patrimoine photographié, Patrimoine photographique*, Paris, Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art, 2013: < <http://journals.openedition.org/inha/4421> >.

20. I borrow this expression from Andreas HUYSEN, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2003, p. 23.

Project led by Mark Klett, Ellen Manchester, and JoAnn Verburg (published in 1984) [21] never prompted Italian photographers and critics to apply a similar critical approach to the landscape of the Peninsula. Even during the 1990s, when the *Observatoire Photographique du Paysage* was launched in France [22], the diachronic perspective remained practically absent from the Italian discourse [23].

Another striking aspect of this denial is that the question of time had been a crucial element in the emergence of Italian (post-)Conceptual photography since the turn of the 1970s, with significant consequences for some of the authors who contributed to *Viaggio in Italia*. "Photographic time", for example, was the subject of the third of Ugo Mulas' influential *Verifiche* [Verifications], a series of 14 text/image meditations on the variables of medium begun in 1970 and posthumously published in 1973 [24]. *Verifica n. 3, Il tempo fotografico* [Verification n° 3, Photographic Time] is a series of 36 photographs taken from the same vantage point, documenting a piano performance staged by Jannis Kounellis in 1969, in which a musician played for several hours the same modified version of an aria from Verdi's *Nabucco* [25]. In the accompanying text, Mulas underscored the constraints of photographic stillness *vis-à-vis* the musical, literary, and cinematic flow, suggesting however that it is precisely through the medium's fragmentation that the unconscious experience of time can be foregrounded and conceptualized:

Time acquires an abstract dimension. In photography it does not flow naturally, as it happens for cinema or literature [...] This immobility is more effective than any actual movement; it is the obsession of the repeated image that reveals the dimension of photographic time [26].

In the wake of Mulas' inquiries, Ghirri's early works also explored the conceptual imbrications of photographic and experiential time. For  $\infty$  *Infinito* (1974), he took a series of 365 snapshots of the sky and arranged them into a grid that can be read as a direct response to Mulas' third *Verification*. In both instances, the material form of the final work was determined by the objective conditions of its making: 36 frames provided by the roll film, 365 views for each day of the year. Ghirri presented *Infinito* as a test on the medium's "impossibility of translating natural phenomena [i segni naturali] [27]", no matter how rationally or systematically it is employed. At the same

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21. While expressing different motives and advancing different ends, all these projects posited a similar dialectic between past and "new" landscapes. See Robert ADAMS, *The New West: Landscapes Along the Colorado Front Range*, Boulder, Colorado Associated University Press, 1974; William JENKINS ed., *New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-Altered Landscape*, Rochester, International Museum of Photography at the George Eastman House, 1975; Mark KLETT et al., *Second View: The Rephotographic Survey Project*, Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 1984.

22. Daniel QUESNEY, Véronique RISTELHUEBER-GUILLOTEAU, Caroline STEFULESCO, *L'Observatoire photographique du paysage*, Paris, Ministère de l'Environnement, Cité des Sciences et de l'Industrie, 1994.

23. A belated acknowledgement of this theme can be found in Sandra BONFIGLIOLI, "La fotografia e i tempi della città", in Marisa GALBIATI, Piero POZZI, Roberto SIGNORINI eds., *Fotografia e paesaggio. La rappresentazione fotografica del territorio*, Milano, Guerini, 1996, p. 151-153. For a recent example, see Piero ORLANDI, Andrea ZANELLI eds., *Ritornando sull'Appennino*, Bologna, Compositori, 2010.

24. See Ugo Mulas: *Immagini e testi*, with a critical essay by Arturo Carlo QUINTAVALLE, Parma, Università di Parma, 1973 and Paolo FOSSATI ed., *Ugo Mulas. La fotografia*, Turin, Einaudi, 1973.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 152-153.

26. Elio GRAZIOLI, *Ugo Mulas: Dentro la fotografia*, Nuoro, Museo d'Arte Provincia di Nuoro, 2004, p. 138.

27. Luigi GHIRRI, "'∞' Infinity" [1974], in Luigi GHIRRI, *The Complete Essays 1973-1991*, op. cit., p. 49.

time, in a typical conceptual twist that characterized much of his thinking, Ghirri suggested that it is precisely the camera's inability to grasp the actual phenomena that grounds "its naturalness and its autonomy [28]", or its potential to generate new epiphanies of the invisible.

Over the years, Ghirri further expanded his ideas on time and history. In 1978, writing about a theme park near Rimini featuring small-scale versions of all the main Italian monuments, from Piazza del Campo to St Peter's, that he had photographed for his series *In scala* [In Scale], he suggested that such a miniature world could be understood as an "absolute non-spatial, non-temporal but historical unity [29]". As Jacopo Benci has recently remarked in an illuminating essay on Ghirri's philosophical sources, similar ideas connecting the realm of playful observation and historical consciousness could be found in *Infancy and History*, a 1978 collection of essays in which philosopher Giorgio Agamben stated:

The essential character of the toy [...] can be grasped only in the temporal dimension of a "once upon a time" and a "no more" [...]. The toy, dismembering and distorting the past or miniaturizing the present – playing as much on *diachrony* as on *synchrony* – makes present and renders tangible human temporality in itself, the pure differential margin between the "once" and the "no longer" [...] *Miniaturization is, in other words, the cipher of history* [30].

In tune with these ideas, Benci suggests, Ghirri relied on photography – the art of miniaturization – to visualize the existential transience of the individual *vis-à-vis* the immanent "unity" of the Italian historical landscape.

Among the photographers of Ghirri's generation, Mario Cresci has also been particularly active in the investigation of the temporal structures of both photography and landscape, again in partial response to Mulas' conceptual *Verifications*. Born near Genoa and educated in Venice, Milan, and Rome, Cresci moved to the Southern cities of Tricarico and Matera in the late 1960s, where he began his interdisciplinary activity as a photographer, artist, graphic designer, and social activist. His series *Ritratti reali* [Real Portraits] (1970-1972) investigated the intersection of anthropological, performative, and representational time with documentary photographs of local inhabitants in their dwellings holding a family picture in front of the camera: "Once again – Cresci wrote – we have a photograph within a photograph as a document within a document: an annihilation of time whose fixity evokes the past [31]". With *Movimenti* [Movements] (begun in 1967), Cresci developed a parallel series in which he photographed similar situations, asking his sitters to shake their heads during a long exposure so as to erase their own physiognomy [32].

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28. *Ibid.*

29. Luigi GHIRRI, "In Scale" (1977-1978), in *ibid.*, p. 52.

30. See Jacopo BENCI, "On Some Hitherto Overlooked Sources of Luigi Ghirri's Work, 1972-1982", in Marina SPUNTA and Jacopo BENCI eds., *Luigi Ghirri and the Photography of Place: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, Bern, Peter Lang, 2017, p. 101.

31. Mario CRESCI, *L'archivio della memoria: Fotografia nell'area meridionale 1967/1980*, Torino, Regione Piemonte, 1980, n. p. For a close analysis of these works, see Nicoletta LEONARDI, *Fotografia e materialità in Italia: Franco Vaccari, Mario Cresci, Guido Guidi, Luigi Ghirri*, Milan, Postmedia, 2013, p. 64.

32. Similar experiments with portraiture and long exposures can be seen in Guidi's series *Mariangela Gualtieri* (1968), reproduced in Guido GUIDI, *Lunario, 1968-1999*, London, MACK, 2020, n. p. During the 1960s, Cresci and Guidi had both attended the Institute of Industrial Design in Venice, where they were trained in the analytical methods of the Bauhaus.



› Mario Cresci, *Tricarico*, 1979 (from the series *Movimenti* [Movements]), in *L'archivio della memoria: Fotografia nell'area meridionale 1967/1980*, Turin, Regione Piemonte, 1980, planche 62.

In 1975 Cresci developed these conceptual premises into his major book, *Matera*, a topographic and anthropological atlas comprising historical pictures, transcriptions of State laws on the preservation of the prehistoric city, maps, as well as over 300 original photographs printed full page without any immediate comment or caption [33]. "I photographed some areas of the [city] – Cresci wrote – from the same vantage point of some pictures taken in 1949, and I showed the two views side by side in order to underscore how things were transformed by time [34]". A catalogue of archetypes, *Matera* staged a dialectic between the mineral stability of a premodern civilization and the modern landscape of capitalist technology.



› Mario Cresci, *Edilizia popolare nella 167 and Vicinato nel rione Malve*, non daté, in *Matera: Immagini e documenti*, Matera, Meta, 1975, p. 140-141.

33. Mario Cresci, *Matera: Immagini e documenti*, Matera, Meta, 1975. The captions to the photographs were listed separately at the end of the book.

34. *Ibid.*, n. p.

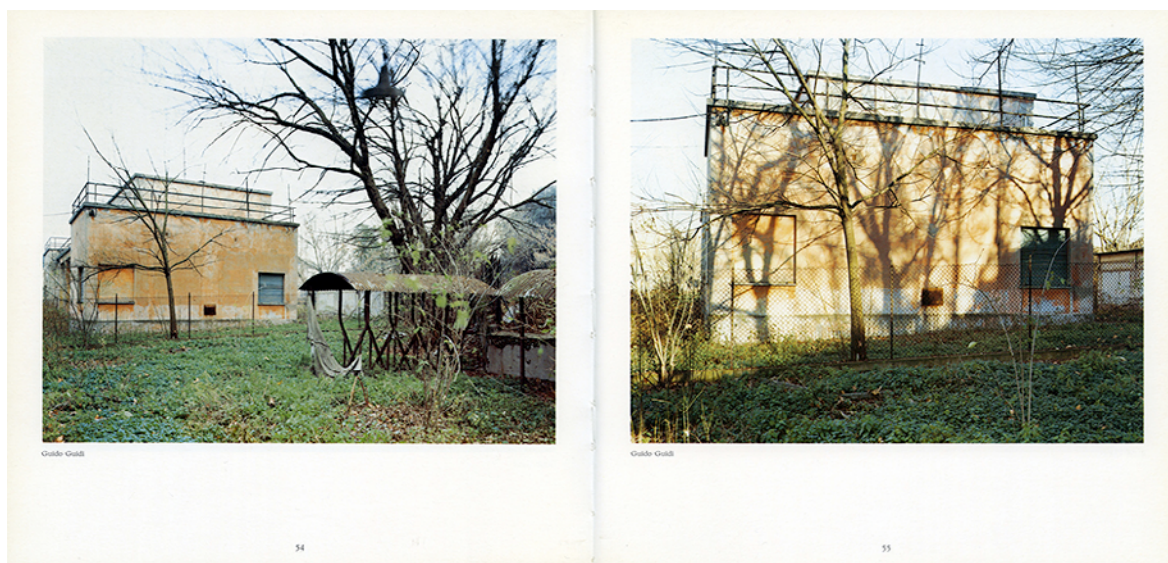


The work of Guido Guidi provides a further example of the long-term consequences of the conceptual approach that was typical at the turn of the 1970s. The two photographs discussed above, in which he used the long exposure to emphasize the power of time to modify and erase the matter of things, were part of a larger body of work developed since the late 1960s according to different strategies. While Mulas, in his *Verification n° 3*, had relied on the sequential numbers on the edge of the film to signal a chronological progression, Guidi often acted in the opposite way, using unreadable captions and smeared date stamps (in addition to intentional printing flaws and occasional sepia toning) to subvert the medium's supposed power to stop and define time. Clearly indebted to Walker Evans' photographs of vernacular architecture, Guidi's early views of ordinary buildings and wooden shacks defied any obvious chronology, leaving the viewer to speculate whether they should be seen as historical or contemporary documents. A similar temporal disjunction can be perceived in the black and white diptychs he created in the 1970s by printing two sequential negatives on the same sheet of paper, which he mounted on cardboard to mimick a 19th-century stereograph. Beginning in the early 1980s, Guidi extended this approach to color photography, often taking two separate views of the same scene with his 8 × 10 in. camera, either within minutes or days. It was coherent with this program that Guidi's first retrospective book, published in 1995, was entitled *Varianti* [Variants] [35].



› Guido Guidi, *Fosso Ghiaia*, 1972, in *Varianti*, Udine, Art&, 1995, planche 24.

35. Guido GUIDI, *Varianti*, Udine, Art&, 1995.



► Guido Guidi, Untitled [Cesena], 1987, in Luigi GHIRRI and Guido GUIDI, *Il museo diffuso: Beni culturali e didattica a Cesena*, Milan, Mazzotta, 1987, p. 54-55.

These fragmented and mostly metaphorical responses to the issue of time suggest that a predominant character of Italian photography of the 1980s lay in its reluctance to acknowledge the temporality and historicity of the landscape. Focusing their attention on issues of representation and on the medium's problematic relation to time, many photographers distanced themselves from the flow of dramatic changes that was affecting the economy and the environment, such as consumerism, increasing rates of urbanization, land consumption, exponential growth of motorized traffic, deindustrialization, gentrification, and the privatization of public space. While several collective projects began to record the emergence of a "new" landscape, they rarely chronicled or analyzed the actual transformation of specific places. Indeed, a distinguishing character of Italian photography during this period can be seen in the recurring juxtaposition between the immanent history of the national landscape and its "contemporary" or postmodern condition, at the expense of more critical analyses of its biography and its future [36].

While a comprehensive discussion of the temporality of Italian landscape photography was never developed in its heyday of the 1980s and '90s, we are now in the position to reconsider its value as both an extended record of physical change and a collective meditation on the rhetoric of photographic image. Four decades after the first major project of this kind, organized in Naples by urban and architectural historian Cesare de Seta [37], a systematic mapping of all the public

36. For a philosophical counterpart to this approach, see Rosario ASSUNTO, *La Città di Anfione e la città di Prometeo: Idea e poetiche della città*, Milan, Jaca Book, 1984. A novel concern for the "changed political and economic conditions [...] created by neoliberal politics and [...] globalization" emerged with some clarity only at the beginning of the millennium: see William GUERRIERI, "Attualità del documentario", in Roberta VALTORTA ed., *Luogo e identità nella fotografia italiana contemporanea*, op. cit., p. 216.

37. The first significant public commission was organized in Naples by de Seta in the wake of the major earthquake that hit Campania in 1980. See Cesare DE SETA ed., *Napoli '81: Sette fotografi per una nuova immagine*, Milan, Electa, 1981 and the following publications in the series. For an overview, see Giuliano SERGIO, "Fotografare Napoli negli anni Ottanta: un caso di committenza pubblica innovative", in Malvina BORGHERINI and Monique SICARD eds., *PhotoPaysage: Il paesaggio inventato dalla fotografia*, Macerata, Quodlibet, 2020, p. 111-133.

and private commissions carried out in the country would allow us to establish the foundation of a new *observatoire photographique du paysage* [38]. New research on the exact places and times in which these photographs were taken could help us restore a documentary value that is often lost or marginalized in the process of their “artification [39]”, while new diachronic perspectives could be constructed by comparing different visual and documentary sources related to the same subjects.



› Guido Guidi, *Gambettola*, 1984, in Antonello FRONGIA and Laura MORO eds., *Guido Guidi. Cinque paesaggi, 1983-1993*, Rome, Postcart/Iccd, 2013, p. 10.

A 1984 photograph by Guido Guidi showing a non-descript WWI memorial in the village of Gambellara, not far from his hometown Cesena, provides an example of such possibilities. Taken with a hand-made view camera and a low quality lens evoking the esthetic of Eugène Atget, this photograph of a vernacular *lieu de mémoire* seems to stage an interplay between the historicity of its nominal subject and of the medium itself – a dialectic that is further underscored by the relationship between the circle of cut grass on the ground the prominent black vignetting projected by the lens. While this photograph provides another example of Guidi’s subtle meditations on the ambiguous documentary value of the medium, comparison with later images of the same place reveals its potential for a civic understanding of the ordinary landscape. The same site, for example, has been recently recorded in a national survey of Italian war monuments with information about its origins and meanings, including the memorial role of the trees, each planted in the early 1920s to remember a fallen soldier of the local community [40]. Sequential Google

38. A tentative scheme for a survey of this kind can be found in Francesca ZANOTTI, *Fotografia “documentaria” e paesaggio contemporanea in Italia: Ipotesi per un archivio digitale*, Master’s Thesis, Università Roma Tre, 2016.

39. For an introduction to this issue, see François BRUNET, “La photographie, éternelle aspirante à l’art”, in Nathalie HEINICH, Roberta SHAPIRO eds., *De l’artification: enquêtes sur le passage à l’art*, Paris, Éditions de l’École des hautes études en sciences sociales, 2012, p. 29-45.

40. *Pietre della Memoria*, “4528 - Cippo ai Caduti nel Parco della Rimembranza – Gambellara”: <http://www.pietredellamemoria.it/pietre/cippo-ai-caduti-nel-parco-della-rimembranza-gambellara> >.

Street views dating from about the same time add further visual information on the changes affecting the larger setting of the monument. Here and elsewhere, individual acts of maintenance and renovation add up to suggest an ongoing process involving the progressive banalization of space, the erasure of historical signs, and the privatization of public space.



- Google Street View™, 122 Via Gambellara, Gambellara, Emilia-Romagna, September 2015, accessed November 16, 2018: < <https://goo.gl/maps/DMScdRMEdnEGT1A38> >.

A digitized archive made available online on an interactive platform would allow photographs of this kind to return the public domain where they belong and to be appropriated by the present inhabitants of the landscapes they depict. At the same time, such archive would be crucial for a better understanding of the subjects, themes, styles, visual languages, iconographic models, and intertextual references of this generation of landscape photographers, whose interactions have never been studied.

## L'auteur

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Antonello Frongia est professeur associé en histoire moderne à l'Université Roma Tre. Ses recherches concernent l'histoire de la photographie, avec une attention particulière portée à l'image de la ville moderne et au rôle de la culture photographique dans les débats pluridisciplinaires sur la modernisation de l'Italie et des États-Unis. Il est membre des comités d'administration du *Mufoco – Museo di Fotografia Contemporanea di Cinisello Balsamo*, de *Linea di confine per la fotografia contemporanea* et de la *SISF – Società Italiana per lo Studio della Fotografia*.