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MULTILATERAL DIALOGUES PRAXIS INTERLOCUTIONS CONFRONTATIONS

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PORTO, BETWEEN TWO BRIDGES: IMAGES OF A SPACE IN TENSION
PORTO, ENTRE DUAS PONTES: IMAGENS DE UM ESPAÇO EM TENSÃO

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Abstract

This article engages with the theme of "Multilateral Dialogues" by exploring the tensions and interlocutions that define contemporary Porto (Portugal), a city emblematic of tourism-driven transformations. The study aims to present a critical and visual exploration of the urban tensions between the showcase city and the inhabited city. The methodology is an experimental praxis framed as a visual archaeology of the present. This praxis is based on an experimental urban walk that combines 360° video, smartphone photography, and 3D photogrammetry[1]. The visual experiment adopts a reflexive "ethno-graphic" approach: the researcher's body is integrated into the image, questioning the stance of the observer as both tourist and critic, and serving as a primary site of interlocution. The main result is a visual essay that does not aim to document the city objectively, but rather to render perceptible the temporal, social, and material strata that constitute Porto's urban landscape. By attending to subtle details, ruins, and spaces, the study offers a situated reading of the conflicts, cohabitations, and (potential) resistances that shape the contemporary Western city. Ultimately, this work foregrounds the complex layering of life, memory, and commodification, revealing a space under the pressures of tourism-driven capitalism as a site of constant confrontation.

Keywords: City, Tourism, Ethnography, 3D, 360°.

1 Introduction

> “There isn't one space, one big space, one big space all around us,
> one big space surrounding us, there are lots of little bits of space”
> Georges Perec (1974, p. 14, our translation[2]).

In July 2025, I once again[3] stayed in the city of Porto, Portugal. I lodged in a downtown flat rented via the U.S. platform Airbnb, at the very heart of an urban fabric where historical layers coexist with tourist accommodations, globalised franchises, everyday life, and precarious forms of living. One afternoon, with a 360° camera in one hand and a smartphone in the other, I walked for a little under two hours along an itinerary that led me from *São Bento* to the *Horta Comunitária da Bananeira*, passing through squares, stairways, alleyways, and passages connecting the Dom Luís I Bridge and the Infante Dom Henrique Bridge. This pedestrian trajectory, filmed in 360°, gradually sketches a visual cut through a portion of Porto’s centre, a city that has become emblematic of contemporary urban tensions in the West, where tourist capital flows encounter the daily lives of inhabitants. With seven million tourists per year[4] (Falco, 2025), and a ratio of roughly eleven tourists per inhabitant, Porto is among the most sought-after—or besieged, depending on perspective—European cities, offering a stratified urban landscape in evident tension. The walk, between overexposed spaces and relegated zones, forms the basis of a short, experimental visual and critical inquiry. With the 10-minute video presented (figure 1), my aim is not to document Porto *per se*, but to situate a gaze itself caught in the tension between touristic flânerie and critical posture. I am at once an actor and symptom of a Western urbanity in mutation: temporarily inhabiting a tourist rental while seeking to grasp the confrontations at play within this urban multitude.

This reflexive tension inhabits all the images produced—mobile photographs, photogrammetries (3D scans), and 360° recordings—conceived not as archives of an objective reality but as visual tools of symbolic displacement (Emery, 2025a). In this sense, the work neither aestheticises ruin and decay nor straightforwardly denounces mass tourism. Rather, it experiments with what I call here a visual archaeology of the present: attentive to neglected elements, inert bodies, and fragile signs of an urban dis/order under strain in the era of the *Capitalocene*: “the Capitalocene thesis does not seek to supplant biology; it incorporates biogeological change to understand capitalism as a world ecology in which power, profit and life are intertwined”

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1 Video available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tlgS4LqJHz4.

2 From the original in French: "il n'y a pas un espace, un bel espace, un bel espace alentour, un bel espace tout autour de nous, il y a plein de petits bouts d'espaces".

3 The first two occasions were in March 2025 and May 2025 during two-day stopovers for a business trip to Portugal, followed by two further occasions for tourist trips in June and July 2025 for stays of three to four days.

4 In 2009, Porto Airport welcomed 4.5 million passengers. Ten years later, in 2019, it welcomed more than 13 million.

(Moore, 2024, p. 41, our translation[5]). My digital gazes thus become witnesses to a space in tension, where multiple urban strata appear to overlap without ever truly converging. This text accompanies that partially controlled urban wandering. It sheds light on its stakes, at the crossroads of urban studies, ethnographic practices, situated epistemologies, and the critique of forms of life in an age of tourism-driven capitalism that *devours the world*[6]. In this paper, I thus directly engage with the theme of Multilateral Dialogues by positioning the city of Porto as a site of critical inquiry. The tensions I explore between the *showcase city* and the *inhabited city* serve as the central confrontations under analysis. The methodology I deploy functions as a praxis, a form of situated research. Finally, my "ethno-graphic" and reflexive stance as a researcher who is simultaneously tourist and critic establishes a necessary interlocution: a dialogue between my own body, the digital tools I use, and the complex, stratified urban space itself.

Fig. 1: Screenshot of the title insert of the video. Source: Jordan Fraser Emery, 2025.

2 Theoretical and methodological frameworks

In this section, I outline the conceptual and methodological foundations that underpin this visual experimentation. To outline a visual archaeology of the present, I must first situate the urban space itself as a critical and theoretical field of inquiry, before detailing the specific "ethno-graphic" and situated praxis I used to capture its tensions.

2.1 Contextualising urban tensions in Porto

Urban poetry takes shape within the modern city. As Jean-Paul Sartre (1947, p. 50, our translation[7]) writes, the city is a creation: "its buildings, its odours, its noises, its coming and going belong to the human realm. Everything in it is poetry in the strict sense of the word". Beyond this poetry, however, European authors such as Charles Baudelaire (1811–1867) or Bertolt Brecht (1898–

[5] From the original in French: "la thèse du capitalocène n'a pas pour ambition de supplanter la biologie ; elle incorpore le changement biogéologique pour appréhender le capitalisme, comme une écologie-monde où s'articulent le pouvoir, le profit et la vie".

[6] To refer to Aude Vidal's book (2024).

[7] From the original in French: "ses immeubles, ses odeurs, ses bruits, son va-et-vient appartiennent au règne humain. Tout y est poésie au sens strict du terme".

1956) gradually pointed out that the city is also the product of class division (Klein, 2015); Walter Benjamin even wrote that “cities are battlefields” (2000, p. 248, our translation[8]). My experiment thus situates itself within a critical tradition that interrogates, between *poiêsis* and *praxis*, the urban space, today as a space of tensions within a neoliberal organization of capitalism. Many European cities, inscribed within heritage frameworks, have become an exemplary terrain of the neoliberal city: re/composed *by* and *for* tourism, fragmented by digital platforms, and threatened by the mercantile homogenization of uses and landscapes. As David Harvey (2008, p. 14) argues, “the quality of urban life has become a commodity, just like the city itself, in a world where consumerism, tourism, cultural and knowledge industries have become major aspects of the urban political economy”. Tourism is one of the fundamental stakes of contemporary capitalism, within which many cities sometimes become mere backdrops for travellers (Laffont & Prigent, 2011), at the risk of severing themselves from their original authenticity (Vlès, 2011). Gusman et al. (2019) explain that more than twenty years after being declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO, in 1996, tourism has had remarkable effects on Porto's physical, social and economic features; in particular, its city centre and even more specifically the Ribeira district (Jiang, 2025).

The interest of these historic spaces lies in their rapid transformation from a devalued old area into the centre of an important urban tourism destination on a European level. Based on the spatial and temporal analysis of a set of indicators related to tourism, housing and economic activity, results show that this process is promoting an excessive use of space by tourism and an overexploitation of cultural values (Gusman et al., 2019). With his visits between 1980 and 1996, architect and urban planner Frédéric Bonnet (2015) situated Porto over nearly two decades as a city in profound transformation, in which the poor are particularly left behind. Imbued with new suburban infrastructures funded by European funds, Porto saw the emergence of a new economic universe: multiplex cinemas and shopping centres, upscale housing developments, ring roads, and car dealerships. Gradually, Porto entered the ranks of Europe’s global metropolises. By 2015, Bonnet notes how the city centre had emptied of its residents[9] in favour of waves of Europeans arriving weekly via low-cost flights to discover Portuguese particularities in a city structured on a hilly topography, amid globalised franchises and tourist storefronts. This dynamic accelerates what Bonnet calls “Canada Dry urbanism[10]”, meaning “desperate and mediocre, quietly reshaping the city without anyone noticing[11]”. Yet, far from unique to Porto, this trajectory mirrors the intense *touristification* observable in other European hubs.

In Lisbon, for instance, geographers Agustín Cocola-Gant and Ana Gago (2019) describe a transnational gentrification where neighbourhoods like Alfama are hollowed out to serve short-term rentals. Similarly, Barcelona has become the epicentre of “tourismophobia” (Milano, 2017)—a social reaction against the loss of urban habitability—while Venice represents the extreme horizon of this process: a city that Salvatore Settis (2016) characterises as suffering from a monoculture of tourism, where the inhabited city has all but vanished. Porto thus emerges as a local symptom of the global "capitalocene" (Moore, 2024), illustrating how tourism-driven capitalism serves as an extractive force reshaping cities worldwide. In this context, the tensions are not merely local anomalies, but manifestations of a broader logic of commodification that threatens to erode the very specificities that attract tourists. Within this framework, I define *tension* not as a simple binary conflict, but as a stratified state of friction that manifests simultaneously on multiple levels. It is, first, a social and spatial tension between the showcase city designed for tourist consumption and the inhabited city of daily life, memory, and precariousness. Second, it is a material and temporal tension, where the accelerated pace of tourism-driven development and commodification overlaps with, but fails (yet) to erase, the temporal, social, and material strata of ruins, neglected spaces, and local subjectivities. Consequently, I aim to sketch out, in an experimental mode, a visual archaeology of the present: an attempt to render perceptible a layering of traces, residues, and

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8 From the original in French: “les villes sont des champs de bataille”.

9 Property prices have indeed risen significantly and the phenomenon of Airbnbisation is growing at a rapid pace, contributing to a decline in the city centre population (Baumert et al., 2023).

10 "The city centre has been emptied of its inhabitants–tens of thousands of them–to the benefit of the suburbs and, more recently, countries where young people deprived of prospects by the economic depression are emigrating, more or less permanently: Brazil, Angola and Mozambique itself, but also Germany, England and France. As the young architect André Tavares brilliantly explained to us, Europe has had paradoxical effects here: an undeniable contribution through the mixing of cultures and massive investment (including in education and universities), but also ultra-rapid growth supported by a financial industry that is mainly “above ground” and very risky [...]".

11 “[...] entire blocks are being demolished, ‘cleaned up’, and investors are buying up all the buildings and narrow plots of land in a former block for a single ‘clean and safe’ property development”.

ongoing tensions; echoing Alain Mons' "anthropoetics of the time of cities", in which he discusses the genre of "old cities stratified by history" (Mons, 2013, p. 100, our translation)—such as Porto in my eyes.

2.2 Thinking an archaeology of the present

To conceive an archaeology of the present is primarily, as Jonathan Tichit (2023) proposes, to question current societies and what they are leaving behind, by deploying a specific form of metaphorical temporality where one observes "[...] the entanglement of material remains that constitute the heterogeneous mass of our present" (Olivier, 2009, p. 87, our translation[12]). The addition of the term *visual* to this archaeological experimentation stems from my visual research practice, as well as a comment by philosopher Christophe Denis regarding one of my creative works[13]. Tichit further notes that "the traces left by the occupation of a territory raise complex socio-political stakes throughout history. [The visual] contributes to making them appear as symptoms, wounds that time will transform into scars" (Tichit, 2023, p. 9, our translation[14]). Indeed, in this framework, I problematize the image not as a (passive) documentation or a mimetic reflection of reality, but as an active phenomenological operator of this archaeology; I consider that "image is not just a physical-chemical thing, but the mediation between the iconic object, the body and the mental image of the observers, in a social and historical context" (Andriolo, 2018, p. 19). Unlike the smooth and commercial imagery of the showcase city, the images produced here function as heuristic devices. They do not merely show the city; they render the invisible frictions perceptible. The image thus becomes a site of tension itself, capable of revealing the symptoms mentioned by Tichit. Yet, for such a visual archaeology to be possible, I believe one must know how to *see* these socio-political stakes — that is, the tensions that traverse and constitute the urban space in the present; and to see these tensions, nothing serves better than to re/play them in a situated manner.

2.3 A situated ethno-graphic practice

Through this experimentation, I place myself at the edge of a contemporary effort to extend *human ecology*[15]*,* one that pays close attention to the experiential contexts that compose life-worlds (Cefaï et al., 2024). This entails, above all, moving as far as possible away from a moral stance and adopting ethnographic descriptive methods that deliberately avoid a top-down perspective[16], privileging, as Jane Jacobs (1992) once argued, an observation of the city at human eye-level rather than from a bird's-eye view. Accordingly, I use two digital devices to experiment with the partitioning of visual data collection, without, however, attempting to objectively re/present the city: a Google Pixel 8 Pro smartphone (2023) and a Samsung Gear 360 camera (2017). First, I relied on 3D Live Scanner: a free smartphone app developed by Luboš Vonásek (2022), and built on Google ARCore technology and the Huawei 3D Modelling Kit. As shown in Figure 2, it allows photogrammetry with a smartphone. By moving the device around and/or above an element, it automatically captures a sequence of images from different positions and angles to re/construct a 3D model. It allows me to isolate and extract the material strata of the city—ruins, textures, and neglected corners, forgotten—to explore their wear and resistance. Unlike the seamless, mimetic replications found in global mapping services, the 3D models produced embrace imperfection. The glitches and holes in the scans are not errors but data: they render the fragility of these marginal spaces and the inaccessible nature of a past that is disappearing under the unrestrainded pressure of progress. In this sense, the tool does not merely document; it creates a tactile encounter with the city's decay.

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12 From the original in French: "[...] l'intrication des restes matériels qui constituent la masse hétérogène de notre présent".

13 My visual interpretation (Emery, 2023) of a Giuliano Da Empoli's interview posted on Marc Veyrat's LinkedIn profile in June 2025: https://www.linkedin.com/posts/marc-veyrat-9a15458_texte-image-arts-num%C3%A9riques-i-giuliano-activity-7354478764308799490-wNR6?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop&rcm=ACoAAA9whEcB8VOBjnz10mlqxfiL0-k-3kaorlU.

14 From the original in French: "les traces laissées par l'occupation d'un territoire soulèvent des enjeux socio-politiques complexes au fil de l'histoire. [Le visuel] contribue à les faire apparaître comme autant de symptômes, de blessures que le temps transformera en cicatrices".

15 Human ecology originated with sociologists Robert E. Park, Ernest W. Burgess, and Roderick D. McKenzie at the University of Chicago in the 1920s. It has remained a cornerstone of urban studies and typically serves as the inaugural chapter in urban sociology and anthropology textbooks (Cefaï et al., 2024, p. 11).

16 That of transport and communication networks designed by planners and designers, or that of crime gradients on a map, for example, as designed by sociologists.

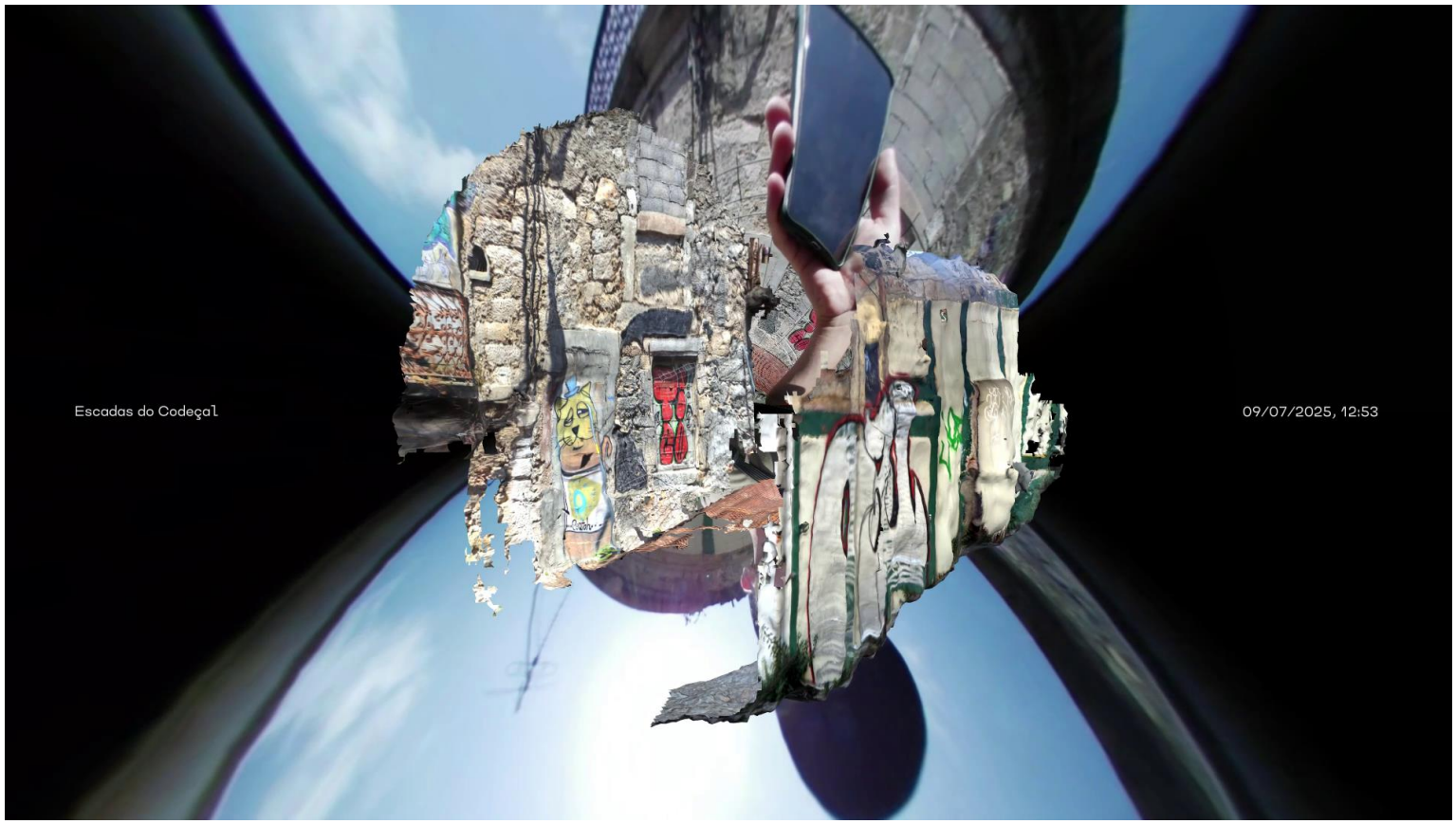

Fig. 2: Screenshot of the video where a photogrammetry (3D scan) is visible. Source: Jordan Fraser Emery, 2025.

Secondly, I use a 360° camera. It captures through two 180° lenses positioned back-to-back in a single device; the software then digitally stitches 360° from these opposed perspectives. In this process, the traditional distinction between field/off-field is modified, which prevents me from subtracting my filming body from its own re/presentation (Emery, 2021). My corporeality is therefore subjected to the visual evidence of its own presence: “Their physical presence, which occupies a certain space, moves in a certain way, possesses a certain language, and expresses characteristics of gender, sexuality, generation, race/ethnicity, region, nationality, etc.” (Nascimento, 2019, p. 460, our translation). Crucially, my bodily presence is not neutral; it operates as a *tourist body*, itself an agent of the tensions I investigate. By renting an Airbnb and consuming the city’s spaces, my body becomes the primary site of *interlocution* between the critical researcher and the dynamics of the showcase city. Consequently, the method adopted proceeds from a “situated” visual gesture (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 2004; Emery & Ibanez-Bueno, 2024), grounded in my own phenomenological experience, as a social observer drawing on my sensitive urban experience (Rocca, 2023). I have sought to assume a position that is not visually external to my research apparatus.

I am, indeed, entirely foreign to the life of Porto, temporarily benefiting from the comfort and atmosphere daily composed by its residents, yet whose very quality of life is questioned by its transformation into a showcase. This ethical ambiguity is constitutive of my approach. It permeates the entire experiment: I do not seek to detach myself from my own involvement, but rather to make it the engine of a visual reflexivity. My use of 360° video allows me to assume this engaged, mobile, and sometimes uncomfortable subjectivity. On my own scale, I participate in what Sharon Zukin (1998) calls the “critical infrastructure” of culture, denoting the ensemble of individuals (journalists, scholars, art critics…) who shape cultural tastes and translate them into the consumption sphere, attributing value in particular through reflexive consumption that emphasises the aesthetic qualities of historical urban elements and spaces, thereby contributing to the production of a symbolic urban economy that accelerates its anesthetisation and, in turn, transforms, defaces or erases the elements and spaces previously valued. In this manner, my gaze upon the urban landscape is itself a social construction (Charmes, 2005), and because my view of the city is associated with a way of investing in and acting upon it (Lucan, 1998), my distant relationship to Porto needs to be formalised visually. Crucially, the choice of these digital tools actively shapes my mode of perception and potentiates the methodological framework.

2.4 Digital tools as praxis extensions

The spherical microcosm of the 360° image is not the reduction of a world enclosing bodies and spaces upon itself; rather, it formalises phenomenological affections where the world and the bodies are intertwined in a single unity and can no longer be considered separately (Emery, 2024, p. 95). Consequently, the traditional analytical distinction in anthropology between an *outside* and an *inside* (Müller, 2015)—now widely criticised–is rendered difficult to maintain. Similarly, the use of photogrammetry potentiates the archaeological aspect of the experimentation. By requiring a slow, circular movement around objects to capture their volume and texture, the tool orients a phenomenological pace of attention. Thus, these digital tools are not simply recording devices but active methodological agents that structure the very possibility of this visual archaeology. Hence, my experimentation situates itself between conducting research by *Walking with video* (Pink, 2007) and a tourist Vlog[17]; borrowing from the urban walks, photographs, and artistic derives of Gordon Matta-Clark, such as his *Walls* series[18] (1972; Figure 3). As with the architect-artist's overall practice, my larger aim is to "juggle with the visual syntax" and its frames (Matta-Clark & Bear, 1993, p. 206). This resonates with the videographic sensibility of *Legoland* (2000; figure 4), Jill Magid's short film shot during a nocturnal urban walk with her *Surveillance Shoe* (2000; Figure 4). With her shoe-camera, the artist privileges a spatial experience in which the body becomes part of a fluid, decentered whole[19]. It is this same desire to question the dis/order[20] of the urban with specific technologies' affordances that drives me. This concept, introduced by psychologist James Gibson (1979), refers to the different behavioural possibilities that an individual can adopt depending on the characteristics of an environment or object. In a technological context, it refers to the opportunities for user interaction enabled by technology. In other words, an affordance is the way in which an object or environment suggests or facilitates certain actions based on its properties and capabilities. Herewith, my entire approach specifically resonates with the notion of an "ethno-graphic" (Fassin et al., 2020) inquiry, positioned between the realms of research and creation.

17 A type of blog whose main medium is video, which may or may not be open to comments.

18 Photographs of walls exposed after the destruction of a building, showing traces of paint or the sedimentation of lives that appear and persist after demolition.

19 The artist explores the tangible and videographic relationship between her body and space, questioning whether, as a woman, she can transition from being the object of gaze to the subject in the urban scene.

20 "Disorder is 'an order that cannot be conceived' (Bergson). Disorder is therefore, in contrast to the established order, whether it emanates from power or the dominant producer, an alteration, an inversion, a negation, or even an aberration" (Maximy, 2000, p. 66).

Fig. 3: *Walls* — Source: Gordon Matta-Clark, 1972.

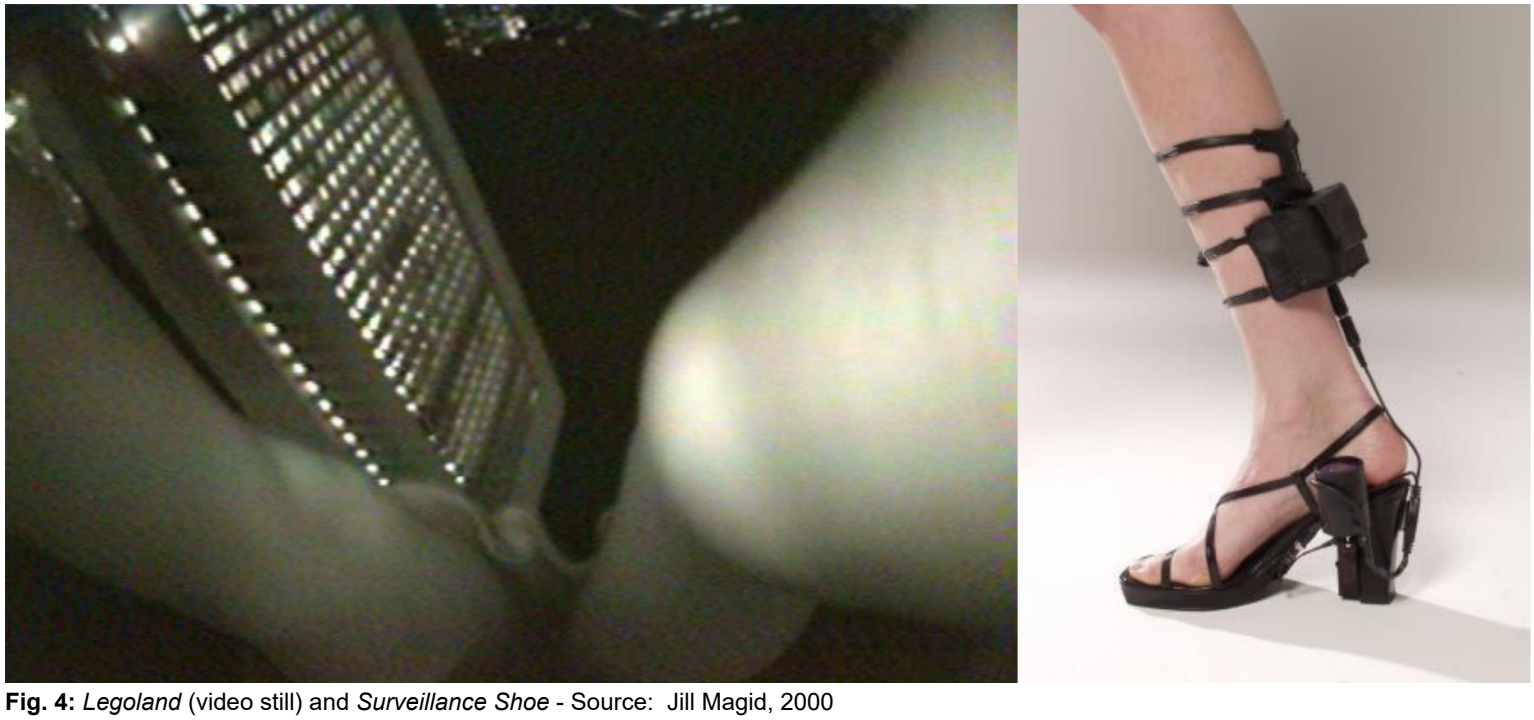

Fig. 4: *Legoland* (video still) and *Surveillance Shoe* - Source: Jill Magid, 2000

Consequently, my methodology extends beyond the moment of capture into the realm of post-production, which I treat as a reflexive laboratory for ethno-graphic analysis. Using the Insta360 Studio software (Figure 5), I can manually de/form, stretch, and contract the 360° image, not only for aesthetic effect, but to visually reveal and play with the tensions: a playful de/formation that comes with presets (Crystal Ball, Tiny Planet, Wide Angle, MegaView and Dewarp) and precise, numerical settings (pan, tilt and roll angles, field of view and distortion control). Herewith, I can invoke Gaston Bachelard, for whom "[...] the imagination of a movement requires the imagination of a matter. To the purely kinematic description of a movement—even a metaphorical one, must always be added the dynamic consideration of matter worked by the movement" (Bachelard, 1987, p. 300, our translation[21]). My postproduction thus functions as a videographic transformation, operating as a kind of *trans-morphosis*, making the video a relay surface: a connective tissue between my body, my movements, and the spaces traversed, where the visual score I carry unfolds. It is a consideration of space from not only an optical but also a sensory standpoint, as it includes the spatio-temporal dimension, with a certain blurring of spatial coordinates to conceive, as possible, a non-distanced relation to space, made of grazings, overlaps and affects. The city is no longer considered merely as decor, but as a sensitive, stratified and dislocated milieu, where my digital eyes capture traces without claiming to totalize them.

Fig. 5: Screenshot of the Insta360Studio software. Source: Jordan Fraser Emery, 2025.

As Aude Vidal (2024) points out, there exists a particular approach to travel as a "trophy hunt" in the age of the smartphone, especially in the use of photography, which demands interrogation. In my work, there is no intention to fix a filmic state from a single perspective, as in the imagery of social media flows, which often halts both form and meaning without any conflict of forces. My approach aligns rather with a critique of dominant visual forms: against the informative, advertising, or spectacular image, since I aim to allow incomplete, drifting, sometimes failing images to emerge. Images that seek to resist efficiency, while making a certain use of spectacularly effective methods, and which, in the fragility of this use, might render other urban

[21] From the original in French: "[...] l'imagination d'un mouvement réclame l'imagination d'une matière. À la description purement cinématique d'un mouvement—fût-ce d'un mouvement métaphorique –, il faut toujours adjoindre la considération dynamique de la matière travaillée par le mouvement".

possibilities imaginable. While it can generally be assumed that the image is finished at the moment of the click, here, the capture is merely the beginning. My experimentation consists of visually re/playing urban tensions and my theoretical understanding of them. I thus oppose my image regime to the dominant regimes of urban imagery: the postcard and the Instagram image (linear perspective), which frame, select, idealise, and largely exclude ugliness or context; and the satellite (Google Earth/drone) and architectural views, which offer an objective, disembodied, and seamless view from above. Furthermore, establishing post-production as a crucial stage of my research implies that the image is not an end in itself, but a raw material, used notably to create visual metaphors.

This constitutes a defence of a scientific digital aesthetic (Emery & Ibanez-Bueno, 2024): editing and pixel manipulation as integral to the analytical process–a way of thinking with and through the work of the image. Indeed, technological tools and post-production can expand perceptive capabilities upon reception. In this sense, videography, editing, and special effects serve as "partners of intellection to elucidate the situations encountered" (Viart, 2019, our translation). They represent cognitive resources capable of nourishing and extending the power of ethnographic description and, more specifically, its "vision" (*voyance*) (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 41). This notion from Maurice Merleau-Ponty, developed by Mauro Carbone (2011, pp. 65-68), explicates the capacity to see the visible as much as the conditions of visibility itself. As Lucie Roy expresses, "[the visual] brings thought to language by carrying it over, referring it back, or, in more common terms, by representing screenically its links between thought and the world. Yet, these links are configured within the embodiment and framing that thus orders and hierarchizes the sites of their perception" (Roy, 1996, p. 32, our translation[22]).

3 Experiencing an archaeology of the present

Having established my methodological framework, I now apply it to the specific case of Porto. If I stayed from July 8 to 10 on *Rua do Paraíso*, in the Marquês neighbourhood, it was on *Rua das Flores*, in the Ribeira district, that I began my recordings on July 9 at 12:57 p.m. There one finds *São Bento* station and metro, as well as the tourist office where visitors gather before heading toward the banks of the Douro and the Luís I Bridge, located only a few hundred meters away. The Ribeira district is undoubtedly the most iconic neighbourhood in the city. It has been listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1996 and, as mentioned before, has undergone significant urban renewal and commodification. Stretching along the riverbank, it features picturesque cobbled streets, historic buildings, traditional shops and numerous places to eat and drink. My walking trajectory, shown in Figure 6, was not pre-planned; rather, it unfolded tentatively, leading me toward sites I had intended to re/discover: the Luís I Bridge to reach, on the opposite bank, an abandoned ceramic factory (*Antiga Fábrica Cerâmica do Senhor de Além*) adjoining a derelict chapel (*Capela do Senhor de Além*), before returning across the Infante Dom Henrique Bridge toward a disused washhouse (*Lavadouro das Fontaínhas*) beside a community garden (*Horta Comunitária da Bananeira*).

22 From the original in French: "[le visuel] porte au langage la pensée en y reportant, en y rapportant ou, en termes plus usuels, en représentant écraniquement ses liens entre la pensée et le monde. Or, ces liens se trouvent configurés dans la mise en corps et en cadre qui ordonne et hiérarchise de la sorte les lieux de leur perception".

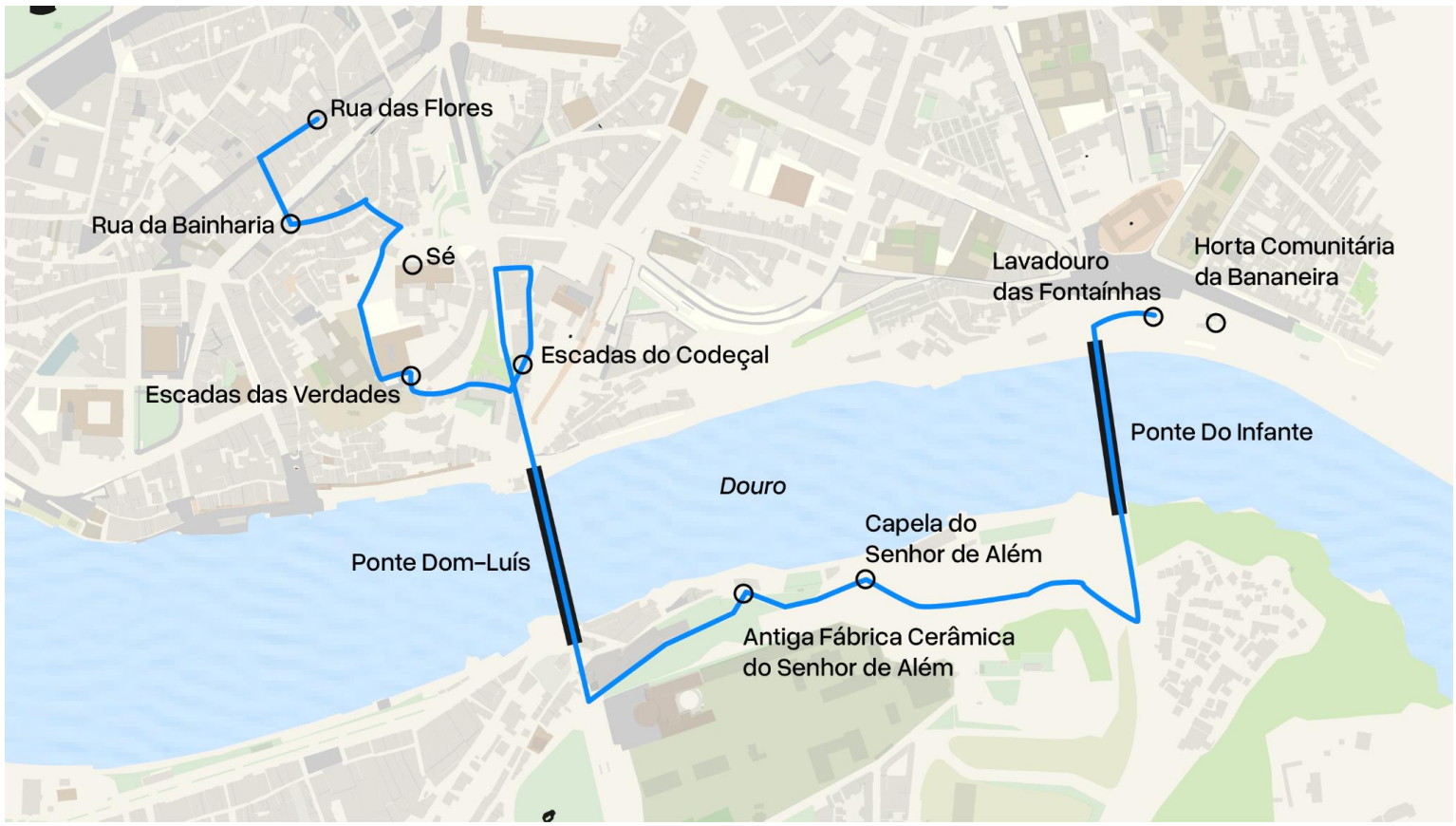

Fig. 6: Path taken and main points mentioned. Source: Jordan Fraser Emery, 2025, using Adobe Illustrator and Open Street Map with the author's notes.

As shown in Figure 7, I begin my video with a poster affixed in the street where I am temporarily lodging: it concerns a demonstration called for on 29 June 2025 by the association *Habitação Hoje!*[23]. This visual attests to local resistance against the logics of commodification and real estate speculation affecting Porto. *Casa para viver* (a house to live in) stands as a call for the fundamental right to housing, at the heart of an urban space where the proliferation of Airbnb rentals and soaring rents make life difficult, if not impossible, for many residents. This visual embodies the tension between tourist narratives and local subjectivities; it operates as a sign of struggle, seeking to inscribe a graphic trace into the urban atmosphere, politicising the wall and attempting to restore or grant it a voice. It is precisely to formalise this inherent tension that I embody, as a tourist body, that I appear in the first ten seconds of the 360° video, within a digital wormhole that punctures the image. As the visual journey unfolds, walled-off, dilapidated façades seem to signal the gradual abandonment of a working-class fabric. At the same time, the constant flow of tourists embodies Porto's integration into the global tourism circuit. As shown in Figure 8, this is particularly striking at 02:22, when, from the *Escadas das Verdades*, a spatial juxtaposition in low-angle view reveals an urban fracture: residents disappear behind walls, while the city is staged for visitors from the bridge.

[23] Habitação Hoje! website: https://www.habitacaohoje.org.

Fig. 7: Screenshot of the start of the video. Source: Jordan Fraser Emery, 2025.

The high-angle gaze over the same street from that bridge a few minutes later (03:12) captures an urban stratification that is both material and social, where ruin becomes decor and tourist circulation functions as a normalising force. It highlights the disjunction between living in the city and consuming it temporarily as a spectacle, revealing a gap between inhabited spaces and the commodified uses of urban space. This tension becomes particularly evident at 02:50, when my recordings construct a visual bridge between the real estate branding of a portoHaven and the persistence of an urban fabric under construction. This cut juxtaposes two languages: that of the city sold as a sanitised, designed tourist haven, and that of walls that speak a decrepit memory. On the Dom Luís I Bridge, at 3:27, the frame juxtaposes multiple layers of territorial consumption: in the foreground, a commodified, standardised, and branded hospitality space (“Eat. Sleep. Swim. Repeat”); in the background, a tourist boat navigates the cliffs inhabited by the old city. Here, everything functions as a vertical staging of the town, where the act of seeing can become a paid privilege. This perspective is symptomatic of the capitalism of experience: the city is looked at, rented, repeated, while the real–the social tensions, the invisibilized spaces–is diluted within the frame of a consumable image.

Fig. 8: Screenshot of the video at 02 minutes 22 seconds. Source: Jordan Fraser Emery, 2025.

These commercial typographies and slogans stand in opposition to the writings of the “urban voiceless”[24] (Emery, 2024, p. 535) and their urban inscriptions (Fraenkel, 2012): graffiti and other contestatory visuals maintain a resistant memory, even at the threshold of erasure, rooted “in a sense of social injustice that is intrinsically connected with the pattern of uneven urbanisation [...]” (Siwi, 2016). The images captured from the two bridges reflect tourist flows and extractive capitalism as much as they reveal a certain resistance from materials, elements, and local subjectivities that crumble yet refuse to disappear. These images illustrate the stratified thickness of Porto, which appears to me as a microcosm of the Capitalocene. The tag *Abandon dreams*, shown in figure 9, which I read and captured at 5:28, serves as a fragment that seems to respond cynically to the promoted tourist dream. The surrounding wild vegetation opposes the cleanliness of commercial slogans, forming a poetics of disenchantment. Everywhere, a discreet despair emerges in the margins of urban experience. I then think of Marie-José Mondzain’s metaphor of *Saxifrages*: these tiny plants that uniquely grow within the cracks of stone, imposing the fracturing order of their presence.

> Saxifrages grow between the paving stones of the pavements, where those who have neither home nor work must be recognised as one of us. Saxifrages attack walls, not to demolish what protects us, but to create openings that allow us to pass through and exchange glances. Saxifrages are the agents of the neighbourhood, and here again they demonstrate their political significance (Mondzain, 2005, para. 8, our translation[25]).

As the journey progresses, my documentation increasingly presents ruins, pierced by graffiti and gnawed by vegetation (3:52; 6:42). Silent witnesses of the city’s past, caught between modern traffic arteries and renovated buildings, they illustrate a layering of urban temporalities and the persistence of spaces no longer in use. These spaces embody a form of architectural recumbent

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[24] “The term ‘voiceless’, which we use, refers to a person who has lost their voice or is unable to speak. We use it here figuratively to describe people who are silenced in an urban context, either by coercion or by an inability to express themselves or, rather, to be heard!” (Emery, 2024, p. 535).

[25] From the original in French: "Les saxifrages poussent jusqu’entre les pavés des trottoirs où ceux qui n’ont ni logis ni travail doivent être reconnus comme étant des nôtres. Les saxifrages s’attaquent aux murs non point pour démolir ce qui en eux nous protège mais pour y inscrire des ouvertures qui permettent aux pas de franchir et aux regards de se croiser. Les saxifrages sont les agents du voisinage et là encore ils manifestent leur inscription politique".

form: traces of a bygone cycle, symptomatic of an urban present discarding what can no longer be capitalised–such as the homeless (00:17), whom I perceive as a contemporaneous recumbent effigy[26] (Emery, 2025b, p. 30)–as in my visual work in São Paulo's streets, *Jacentes GISANT·E·S 001* (2023).

Fig. 9: Screenshot of the video at 5 minutes 28 seconds. Source: Jordan Fraser Emery, 2025.

Through my photogrammetries (3D scans), forgetting becomes a visible and marked topography: an act of extraction insofar as it re/presents existential dissonances within the urban order, those that the habitual perception of urban flow renders invisible or accentuates through stereotyping. My low-angle (6:22) or high-angle (9:12) views over community gardens, constructed atop former agricultural or industrial terraces, emphasise these living traces of precarious yet resilient popular urbanism. These collective gardens perhaps constitute a concrete response to the erasure of popular uses of the city. The figure of the gardener (8:42), captured from afar, embodies at least a silent subjectivity that continues to act at its scale–against the monumental tourist gaze. The persistence–neither demolished nor rehabilitated–of ruined buildings where community gardens are traversed or glimpsed suggests localised land pressures, concentrated along certain axes deemed profitable. These suspended margins paradoxically attest to a differentiated urbanisation, where the value of places is measured as much by their visibility as by their potential for return, particularly tourist-oriented. The urban landscape of Porto's city centre thus appears progressively gnawed away by forces beyond the residents' control. As Eric Charmes (2005, our translation) explains, "the fact that many buildings have survived the decades changes nothing: their uses have disappeared[27]". It is therefore possibly also a symbolic loss[28] that such tensions impose upon spaces, since what is preserved, willingly or otherwise, and/or "beautified" are buildings rather than human relationships, to the detriment of the intangible culture tied to individuals (Vitor et al., 2018).

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[26] Reference to Christian funerary effigies ("*gisant*" in French); the recumbent figure is stretched out and lying down. The reference is relevant because capitalism was born in Christianity and there is also, culturally in the West, a link between biological death and social death, with horizontality being the guiding element of this association.

[27] From the original in French: "Que de nombreux bâtiments aient traversé les décennies ne change rien : leurs usages ont disparu".

[28] The symbolic loss of the gentrification process is discussed by authors (Vitor et al., 2018) in the city of São Paulo, where this process takes on particular contours with projects to revitalise the city centre, often questioned for their hygienist logic towards the most vulnerable populations in these neighbourhoods, who are also generally racially segregated.

In Porto, urban normalisation seems to have shaped pre-defined routes for tourists, pathways that run alongside neglected, abandoned areas nestled within the historic city centre. While the major modernised avenues channel flows toward key attractions, side streets, with their dilapidated façades and uneven pavements, reveal a more discontinuous urbanity: abandoned buildings stand here, graffiti-covered walls there, alongside shared gardens and oblique pathways that invite less controlled, more intuitive circulation. These spaces, still uncertain of their future, contrast with the traditionally polished image cultivated by a globalised tourist city; they compose an urban landscape moving at multiple speeds. Above all, these interstices offer passersby a stimulating paradox: between the channelled flows of the showcase city and the glimpses of an urbanity in suspense. My walk leads me to write that a certain weightiness prevails: a spatio-temporal density that bears witness to an ongoing transformation and, willingly or not, displays fragments of history, with the marked presence of anthropological places[29] (Augé, 2010), even as they are being erased or vitrified by the unprecedented expansion of circulation, consumption, and communication spaces.

Fig. 10: Screenshot of the video at 3 minutes 54 seconds and Screenshot of the video at 4 minutes 25 seconds. Source: Jordan Fraser Emery, 2025.

When Roberto Peregalli (2012) denounces the dread provoked by contemporary gigantism, he also dwells on the beauty of imperfection and the splendour of ruins. The fabric of forgotten remnants is precisely what delights “urbex” (urban exploration)—those unauthorised visits to abandoned spaces, where a dialectic unfolds between the freedom of wandering[30] through deserted places and the constraints of signposted itineraries in increasingly codified and designed cities (Offenstadt, 2022). It is precisely this fragmentary nature and the absence of fixed meaning that confer upon ruins their profound significance, as well as a tactile encounter with space and materiality (Edensor, 2005). It is also this latent tension that I have explored in my journey, as with the abandoned ceramic factory shown in Figure 10). Through my postproduction, these spaces regain a certain fluidity and are superimposed or intertwined in layers to mark their porosity. Yet, in most of the film, the 360° images at the centre of the video, the double-fisheye projection draws an hourglass, simultaneously evoking the portholes of an aeroplane; a shape that nowadays becomes a perfect metaphor for Porto, a city traversed by flows of heterogeneous intensities and velocities.

At the scale of the instant, I capture the offsets between the pedestrians’ pace, the rapid passage of a tram, the navigation of boats on the Douro, or the distant movement of aeroplanes. On a broader scale, it juxtaposes the pressing rhythm of the real estate market, the brief duration of a tourist visit, the human time of lived experience, and the long temporality of heritage or administrative procedures. The narrow neck of the hourglass, where my face is concentrated, condenses these intersecting velocities. The metaphorical sand flowing through it embodies the tension between temporalities that ignore each other yet intersect, producing visible tensions in space: renovations, suspended wastelands, parallel circulations, and so on. The effect becomes a sensitive operator, rendering perceptible the city’s spatio-temporal density. Moreover, I sequence the images at an inhuman speed to replay the time of capital and the intrinsic transience that drives it. Indifferent to formats and treating supports and their materials as elements of visual play, I contract and dilate the images, stretching them vertically and horizontally, as if responding to a magnetic field that deforms space and intensifies time.

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29 “[...] any space in which one can read inscriptions of social ties [...] and collective history” (Augé, 2010).

30 “In Urbex, you are completely free to explore these abandoned places as you wish” (Offenstadt, 2023).

4 Final, critical and reflexive considerations

In my approach, it is no longer just the city that is seen or/and consumed, but the implication of a body within the city. We move from the observation of the town to the observation of the tense relationship between the city and its spaces, bodies and their participation in flows. In this experimentation with urban spaces through my digital eyes, space ceases to be a fixed frame. It becomes a field of interaction between my body and the world, where both are in a constant reciprocal relationship. The way I use 360° recording and post-production makes technological perception seem to echo the lived experience of the body — as a body-subject traversing specific spaces. In my opinion, for the viewer of the video, there is an impression of being presented *within* or *in front of* a cavity that ceaselessly re/folds and un/folds: interior and exterior merge to the point of becoming, at times, indistinguishable. Perception is then entangled in both, within a space where the laws of gravitation seem elusive. Both on a sensible and theoretical level, this experience finds an analogy with the crossed structure of the “chiasm”, as considered by Merleau-Ponty (1964, p. 318): the boundaries between inside and outside, between subject and object, intertwine, revealing their permeability and reciprocity. Looking at Figure 10, I make this figure of the chiasm particularly manifest in the way space is traversed and interlaced upon itself with my body, and also through the two ornamental hinges that split the visual space and allow the (black) matter supporting this in/visibility to appear by inference. Videographic space de/forms bodies and spaces into a malleable matter, as the very materiality of the video space seems to be glass heated and blown at very high temperatures, then, in the same movement, immediately stabilised and cooled.

While my approach aligns with an archaeology of the present as analysed by Jonathan Tichit (2023)—alongside artists such as Bernd and Hilla Becher, Joel Sternfeld and Amélie Labourdette–it fundamentally distinguishes itself by the operative status assigned to the image. As shown in Figure 11, with a photograph of Labourdette, pictures of ruins or unfinished buildings, tends to freeze the transitory state in an indexical “that-has-been” (*ça-a-été*) or an aesthetic contemplation. Indeed, Tichit explains that these photographs often adopt a painting aesthetic with highly structured compositions, and distance the subject-object to monumentalise it. Yet, I have shown I do not content myself with recording ruins while merely noting entropy or urban tension; I try to visually re/play it by stretching and contracting space-time on the screen, thereby transforming distanced observation into an ordeal of material friction. For this reason, I worked with various frames (circular, rectangular, 3D) to guide the viewer toward a dual seeing instance normally invisible, that which foregrounds history and makes it visible: the video itself and the body producing it. Here, 360° and post-production helped me exchange the logic of meaning and readability for a logic of the sensible: it is a matter of movement and energy rather than signs and symbols. It is the desire to reveal a connection, as both body and citizen, to space and things: to the “flesh of the world” as Merleau-Ponty would say.

Fig. 11: *"Empire of dust #04", Giarre, Sicily.* Source: Amélie Labourdette, 2015.

Through this videographic and digital play, one can understand that it is possible to act upon urban space. Not necessarily in terms of a physical transformation of space, but at least, primarily, of its perceptive dimension. And through the malleability of this perceptive dimension, perhaps be able to act upon its other parts. It is then no longer merely a question of meaning and signification, but of anthropological and morphological stakes. We rediscover, I believe, a depth of the image with a sense that is no longer exhausted in a mere glance, since the affordance of 360° leads me to play with the image's morphology. And by playing with a *formless resemblance*, we are led to grasp that the image is not necessarily equivalent to the object it represents, that it is a modality of re/presentation capable of operating as imagination. Georges Bataille has, in fact, reminded us of this for nearly a century: "the dislocation of forms leads to that of thought" (Bataille, 1929, p. 82, our translation[31]). Establishing post-production as a crucial stage of my research implies (demonstrating) that the image is not an end in itself, but a raw material, used to create visual metaphors. Notably, to sketch a visual archaeology of the present: the images of a space in tension.

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31 From the original in French: "la dislocation des formes entraîne celle de la pensée".

Singularly a reflexive tension, which is also methodological, experienced by my own body as both a tourist and critic. This specific tension is therefore not a problem to be solved, but a research condition that my ethno-graphic praxis seeks to render perceptible here. In doing so, the visual essay establishes a situated interlocution with the city's transforming landscape, engaging in a critical dialogue between the observer and the stratified reality of the urban space. As a final thought, which opens up possibilities for further exploration, I must note that this visual archaeology captures only a fragment of the city's layered reality. Beyond the records my body acted as a receptor for other contrasts, invisible in the image but fundamental to the experience of space. I perceived a sonic tension: the dissonance between the polyglot, festive hubbub of tourist crowds in the main thoroughfares and the everyday music of the inhabitants, or even the heavy, sometimes suspicious silence of the alleys where laundry hangs to dry. There was also a haptic and thermal contrast: the heat of the sun in busy, exposed and renovated places against the damp coolness of ruined buildings that exude a scent of passing time. These sensory differences, which the video can suggest through the atmosphere, but cannot fully convey, constitute the phenomenological off-screen aspect of my experience, reinforcing the feeling that the inhabited city persists in the shadows, textured and local, as the background noise to the polished, noisy and global showcase city.

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