



Coastline series
No. 115, 2010, Zhang Xiao

contemporary asian landscape. photography as identity

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Referring to the important exhibition New Topographics (1975), William Jenkins wrote “the pictures were stripped of any artistic frills and reduced to an essentially topographic state, conveying substantial amounts of visual information but eschewing entirely the aspects of beauty, emotion and opinion”. This transformation in photography reflects the deep and quick changes that are happening in the world, focused on the urban transformation. Over half of the world’s population now lives in cities and this change of lifestyles has led to a dramatic transformation in the landscapes that surround us. Particularly from “New Topographics” can be taken the idea of the use of photography like an urban narrative and descriptive tool. The cities, in particular the Asiatic ones, are growing frenetically changing skyline and the perception of the public space. Contemporary landscapes are changing: urbanization caused a strong impact on the relationship between man and nature, and like the development of our cities to follow specific urban planning, we try to control our human experience with nature. These new developments are connected not only to the way that the physical landscape is changing but, perhaps more importantly, to the way that we are dealing with these changing environments. The new “documentary” photography reveals not only the impact of the man on the landscape, but the way it occurs and contracts the interaction between the two. Through a selection of eastern photographers that use the image as critical reading of contemporary Asian landscape, this research highlights the role of photography as a needed document to reflect on the extent of the landscape changes and the antithetical relationship between permanence and change in urban and extra urban contexts.

keywords Asian, Photography, Landscape, Cities, Identity

introduction: photography and the legacy of the documentary style

The use of documentary photography to survey the city and countryside is a method that many photographers have been experimenting with since the late 1980s. Photography as *document* has its origins in Europe with August Sander, and then in America where, through his own photography, Walker Evans occupied a precise position by proposing and consolidating a documentary style¹. Thanks to an assignment from the Farm Security Administration, a government institution that wanted to document the conditions of the United States during the Great Depression, Evans realized a visual survey gathered together in his first personal exhibit at MoMa and in the catalog *American Photographs* (1938), producing a corpus of images that would go on to influence American and European photography. "A single trait, even if purely rhetorical, seems to bind the various meanings: the basic need to photograph 'things as they are' –according to an expression that is repeated in numerous writings of the time by people like August Sander, Walker Evans, Albert Renger-Patzsch, and Dorothea Lange –the desire to accept the world as it is, without altering the subject in front of the camera. After decades of artistic photography, studio work creating a distance from reality –staging for professional portraits, retouching by pictorialists, or cutting-edge experimentation– the documentary style presumes to return to dealing directly with naked, raw reality². In its anti-rhetorical "inventory" of everyday architectures and objects, paradoxically it represents the most realistic and unrealistic of myths: America. "It was at this moment that sophisticated photographers discovered the poetic uses of bare-faced facts, facts presented with such fastidious reserve that the quality of the picture seemed identical to that of the subject.

The new style came to be called documentary. This approach to photography was most clearly defined in the work of Walker Evans. Evans's work seemed at first almost the antithesis of art: It was puritanically economical, precisely measured, frontal, unemotional, dryly textured, insistently factual, qualities that seemed more appropriate to a bookkeeper's ledger than to art³.

The *slow* and *detached* view of European and American authors that took up the mantle of Walker Evans –simply consider the photographers selected for the exhibit "New Topographics" curated by William Jenkins and presented in Rochester in 1975⁴– modernized American photography favoring the growth of a documentary language that developed different paths of inquiry in different countries. As early as 1967, with the "New Documents" exhibition, John Szarkowski presented "a generation of photographers who directed the documentary approach to more personal ends. Their aim was not to reform life, but to know it"⁵.

In the introduction to the "New Topographics" exhibition catalog, William Jenkins, mentioning Edward Ruscha as one of the main sources of inspiration for the exhibit, speaks of an "absence of style", or better "stylistic anonymity", a style common to all the photographers present. A quote from Jorge Luis Borges opens the introduction, reaffirming once again this concept: "I should try to tell, in a straightforward way, plain stories, so that I will try to get away from mazes, from mirrors, from daggers, from tigers, because all of those things now grow a bit of a bore to me. So that I will try to write a book, a book so good that nobody will think I have written it. I would write a book –I won't say in somebody else's style– but in the style of anybody else"⁶.

The legacy left by the Topographics is still alive (in fact numerous publications have been dedicated to the subject even in recent years) and continues to influence the generations of authors that followed, continuing to call into question the photographic medium, starting from the idea of photography as document, or better *photography in documentary style*. If "New Topographics" has a central purpose it is simply to postulate, at least for the time being, what it means to make a documentary photograph⁷.

moving east

Renewing the experience of pioneers who in the 19th century traveled to the Orient⁸ to use photography to illustrate the multiple cultural aspects that are as distant as they are exotic, in recent decades some European and American photographers have made extended visits and repeated trips to Asia to document the great changes taking place in these lands. These slow, precise photographers almost always use large formats, preferring to spend a long time in places, using a language that echoes the stylistic lessons so dear to Evans, leaning on the richness of photographic series and sequence rather than the truth of a single photograph, not suited to narrating the complexity of the modern world. Their photographs constitute a precious witness of our times, images as documents that describe cities and rural regions that are gradually disappearing, making space for the "new" that inexorably takes its place, altering urban dreamscapes and consolidated territories. It is not our intent to examine the economic and political aspects that are the source of these territorial transformations. Instead we will survey the consequences of global processes with respect to the search for possible identities in the new Asian landscapes. And India and China⁹ are among the principal countries involved in a process of metamorphosis determined by global economic rules (**f1**). "They are three and a half billion.... They are China and India and vicinity. Chindia not only indicates the aggregate of the two most populous countries on the planet, it is the new center of the world, where the future of humanity will be decided.... The hopes for progress, as the risks of catastrophe, liberation from misery, and war on pollution, liberty or repression, salvation or horror: the 21st century will be played out here"¹⁰. The photographic surveys aimed at gathering *documents as images* represent, especially for these countries, a useful tool for reflecting on the entity of changes to the current landscape and to recognize in the future evocative traces of places that had a memory, definitively erased by radical works of demolition. Photographers who have gone in this direction include the German Peter Bialobrzeski¹¹, who over the course of multiple trips has explored the spaces of the new Asian metropolises and their suburbs; the English native Nadav Kander¹² has documented the profound transformations of the territories along the Yangtze; the American Sze Tsung Leong has immortalized the building sites of the new Beijing as the historical city disappeared while he watched¹³; since the late 1980s the Canadian Edward Burtynsky¹⁴ has documented the process of intense industrialization and its consequences on the environment; the Italian Olivo Barbieri¹⁵ has represented architecture as a transitory installation in the city; the French Frédéric Delangle and Stéphane Couturier traveled to India, the former examining the *Pol*, labyrinthine historical quarter of the city of Ahmedabad, symbol of an urban memory, and the latter an interpretation of Chandigarh, place in which photography becomes metaphor for the allusive dialectic relation in the processes of construction-destruction of modern metropolises.

Worthy of note is the photography project of the German Michael Wolf, who focuses on the typological matrix of architecture to denounce critical aspects of present-day cities. *Hong Kong Inside/Outside* gathers in a single volume two series of images taken in more than 10 years of living in China, two opposite faces of a place "where East meets West". Here the many-colored facades of vast residential buildings are re-proposed as textures of surfaces that are destined to obsessively invade the pages of the *Outside* side. Intentionally removing the sky and the horizon from the photographed architecture, eliminating the skyline and any sign of urban identification, Wolf provides a metaphor of an economy that looked west, filling every livable space and becoming one of the most important financial centers. *Inside*, on the other hand, illustrates the oppressive domestic interiors of high-density buildings. The images depict the status of families living in apartments measuring only 30 square meters, packed in together with their belongings. Photographed from the same point of view, the studio apartments, one next to another,

create an extraordinary way of living, rooms that are all the same reveal how each family takes ownership of the space, personalizing it. The identity denied by anonymous large-scale constructions seems to allow for only the possibility of expressing oneself inside a minimal living space. Forced within narrow, degraded domestic walls, the inhabitants seem to exist only as a function of the number of the apartment assigned to them (f2).



f2_Hong Kong Inside/Outside series

Outside side No. 0057 AoD #4 and Inside side No. 001, 2007, Michael Wolf

new asian photography

The lesson of the international authors has conditioned the new generation of Asian photographers who with greater awareness use documentary photography as a tool to react to the violent change processes that have struck both urban and rural areas, disturbing the balance of uncontaminated territories. The strength of the infrastructure, established by a developing economy, provides a new image of the Asian landscape, raising questions about the ongoing metamorphosis.

With what eyes can these local photographers witness the disappearance of places and cultural values of which they themselves are a part? For them, what role do the terms memory and tradition play? This consistent act of erasing a past, its signs not corresponding directly with future economic needs, will have what repercussions on the nascent society? In this unstoppable process, how much do the lives of the people and the identity of the places count and what role do they play?

“There is something paradoxical in the way that documentary photographs interact with our notions of reality. To function as documents at all they must first persuade us that they describe their subjects accurately and objectively; in fact, their initial task is to convince their audience that they are truly documents, that the photographer has fully exercised his powers of observation and description and has set aside his imaginings and prejudices. The ideal photographic document would appear to be without author or art. Yet of course photographs, despite their verisimilitude, are abstractions; their information is selective and incomplete. The strength of documentary photography is bound to its ability to inform as well as to reflect our perception of the outside world”¹⁶.

young oriental contemporary photography: the chinese statement

Young oriental authors look to the west as a model to draw from, often making reference to European and American languages. All the same, they are looking at themselves and the story in which they are playing an integral part. They tell stories taken from everyday lives, ordinary scenes, focusing on reading new urban images, recent constructions, productions, objects, portraits. Through the eye of the photographer all is analyzed in the same way: each element is considered as a depiction of reality but also semblance of memory and oblivion. "The two distinct and often separate entities of actual, physical subject matter and conceptual or referential subject matter can be made to coincide. It is this coincidence –the making of a photograph which is primarily about that which is in front of the lens– that is the central factor in the making of a document"¹⁷.

From the intimate space of the darkroom thus emerge introspective black and white images by the Chinese Muge. *Going Home* is a journey through memory, passing through images of the present, a voyage back through time visiting the places of the photographer's childhood.

For Muge "ground" becomes synonymous with "home", a dwelling he is obsessively searching for along the banks of the Yangtze where familiar places have lost their appearance, giving way to new, imposing constructions, and often new settlements. The construction of the Three Gorges Dam¹⁸ has inexorably changed the water's course, altering the natural characteristics of a vast territory. Along the original riverbed today there are unexpected and new ecosystems, abandoned buildings that have nothing to do with the surrounding landscape, platforms of new constructions that dot the design of the dam, reaffirming a sense of suspension.

More than 100 cities and thousands of villages were submerged after the dam was built, numerous archaeological sites definitively erased by the force of the water. Following the demolition of millions of homes the local population was moved to newly built residential areas, so cities and villages arose adapting to the new artificial course of the river to place the inhabitants and guarantee an economy to residents. Based on high-density urban models and potential exploitation of the available territory, impromptu settlements were built without regard for the surrounding landscape. A few years after the completion of the dam, however, the territory demonstrated numerous critical issues due to the fragility¹⁹ of a complex system. Pursuing the idea of an original dwelling, Muge's photographs examine links with sites on the water. The nature of the places is communicated through fragments, whether they be a portion of the region observed from above, like in photos from the 1800s, or the wreckage of an architecture whose history is difficult to understand, or the lost stare of the inhabitants against the background of an uncertain urban setting, each single details becoming an important factor in understanding the history and identity of the region. The subjects portrayed, sole heirs of a territory destined to go through progressive stages of metamorphosis, bear witness of a will to resist an uncertain looming future. As has been written, "China's industries hungry for electricity, also win. However, there are many who must face short-term hardship. For instance, farming families stand to lose much as their ancestral lands disappear, often without sufficient compensation. Farmers relocated to land parcels further uphill face the prospect of poor soil, steep slopes of erosion. Furthermore, schemes aimed at integrating farmers into urban economies have met with very limited success. Environmental degradation, escalating costs and human rights concerns are the main issues entangling the mega dam-project today..."²⁰.

The melancholy stares of the people reveal the malaise of a landscape that leaves no room for the reconciliation of man, nature, and architecture (f3). The fragments of documented ordinary life underline the impossibility of rediscovering points of contact upon

which to reestablish bonds of identity. The subjects wander through old and new landscapes, stopping there, where the water makes it possible to shift the gaze towards infinity.

“During the staccato journeys between his home and the Three Gorges Dam over five years, Muge recorded the changes in landscape and countenance with photography, with an insider’s perspective. The subtle connections and struggles between mankind and the land are given tangible shapes in *Going Home*. Perhaps the hesitant subtext of the series can be summed up in one question: after the intrusion of modern construction, how do we view this new relationship between mankind and nature?”²¹.



f3_Going Home series: Girl II and A woman along the Yangtze River I
2009, Muge

While the *Going Home* project focuses on the urban and rural territories along the Yangtze, Zhang Xiao in *Coastline* uses photography to document life in the cities and coastal areas in the eastern part of the country. The coast is a complex scene²², the first area to feel the influence of foreign cultures, becoming a witness to rapid economic development, a geographic area in which the contradictions of a land that resists classification emerge more strongly. It is a new frontier still subject to an extremely powerful process of urbanization, a region where the impact of the new wiped out the existing, disavowing cultural traditions thousands of years old.

The coastline connects realities that are extremely diverse, cohabiting with a strong desire for affirmation, passing from the densely populated Shanghai to remote rural villages where rare traces of minor architecture survive, and onwards to the ever dynamic Hong Kong.

“After thirty years of economic reform and opening up, tremendous changes are happening in China every day. The cities are like large construction sites speeding up their construction pace to catch up with the rest of the world; this phenomenon is particularly obvious in China’s coastal areas. Chinese traditional living habits are strongly impacted by the radical changes that are taking place in China while many traditional values and customs are also subverted”²³.

Born in the coastal city of Yantai, Zheng Xiao seeks the echo of Chinese traditional culture in the sea, the symbol of a collective memory of which he himself is a part. The subjects encountered describe the many workers forced to migrate, abandoning their

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homelands to pursue new economic opportunities (f4). "The urbanization of the world is a phenomenon that a demographer has compared to the shift to agriculture, i.e., the shift from nomadic hunting to a sedentary lifestyle. The paradox, however, is that this phenomenon does not correspond to a new sedentarization, but rather to new forms of mobility"²⁴. Day after day millions of migrants negotiate new relationships with the city and the sea, becoming an integral part of a fragile landscape living through the conflict of unprecedented rapid progress. "Today Shanghai has 23 million inhabitants and every night thousands of immigrants arrive from the countryside. Shanghai is the symbol of socialist capitalism, and the countryside has now become the symbol of backwardness, and it is for this reason that today in China there are 300 million farmers who have become urbanized.... Temporary settlements and shacks on the city borders, farmers recycling what they find in the dumps in the city outskirts, and they are continuously driven back, but I think the flow is unstoppable"²⁵.



f4_Coastline series

No. 230, 2011 and No. 527, 2013, Zhang Xiao

Besides the dramatic development of residential and manufacturing areas, even the growth in tourism has left a permanent mark, subjecting the coastal regions to intense development and extravagant choices. Objects having no sense often appear isolated in the landscape: it's not rare to find an unexpected Buddha unloaded on the beach. In an attempt to combat the widespread sense of rootlessness, recovering values and places that lend identity, where possible the inhabitants take control of spaces they can personalize to reflect themselves. With respect to the characteristics of a *generic city*²⁶, a deep sense of fragility looms over the present, which seems to have forgotten every connection to tradition, history, memory. Even personal memories that are passed down from generation to generation, reflecting family identities, places, and people, seem to fade. In this loss of values, besides representing a tool of analysis, photography can constitute a tool of reaction because, as Augé maintains, the city can still be "a spatial figure in time uniting present, past, and future. Little by little it is the source of wonderment, memory, and expectations. But as we have always known, when it comes to cities and urbanization, expectations and memory regard the community, the individual, and the relationships that bind them"²⁷.

young oriental contemporary photography: the indian canvas

Even Sarker Protick, like the authors cited above, used the photographic medium to document the violent territorial changes that are altering the backcountry of Dakha, his native city, and that are shaking up the balance of the alluvial regions of Bangladesh. In recent years the rivers that run through the plains have frequently flooded due to the construction of huge dams in China and India. In the district of Ishurdi, a domesticated area along the Padma river that includes a series of villages sustained by a prevalently rural economy, season after season the inhabitants experience extreme instability and watch as their land disappears (f5). *Of River and Lost Land* shows places that “are gone already, they don't exist anymore. Every time I go there the whole geography changes.... So I think, in some ways, I am keeping those places alive in my photographs. I am telling stories”²⁸. Ishurdi means “where God remains”, even though the embankments, the ruins of rural buildings, and the naked foundations of crumbling constructions seem to document the contrary. Thus lands are deserted, provoking the migration of their inhabitants, forced to wander in



f5_Of River and Lost lands series
2011-2014, Sarker Protick

search of new homes or new cities that can welcome them.

Zubin Pastakia wonders about the destiny of Mumbai, a megalopolis subject to progressive expansions and redevelopment projects in areas previously occupied by slums, which has to deal with continuing flows of people and capital. Writing about contemporary Indian cities, and Mumbai in particular, Rahul Mehrotra maintains that “the 20th century has been one of dramatic change for urban India. Today, a visitor arriving in any Indian city is bombarded with schizophrenic images. In fact, the contemporary Indian city must seem like a twitching organism, constantly inventing, re-inventing, and adjusting itself to its ever-evolving demographics. As a result of this ‘kinetic’ quality, cities in contemporary India totally lack the legibility that they possessed at the turn of the last century, and in the coming decades a greater part of India’s population will be living in urban areas, and therefore cities as physical artifacts will become more critical to our future as a nation than ever before (f6). Urbanization has shown unprecedented rates of growth over the last three decades of this century, devastating the physical form of our cities which have been unable to deal with the swelling numbers. While this compression of people in a limited space symbolizes optimism and is characterized by many positive attributes, it has spelt doom for the urban form of our cities”²⁹.

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f6_The Built Landscape series
2007-2008, Zubin Pastakia

Pastakia's *The Built Landscape* explores the urban and social dimension hidden in the phrase "modern India". His photographs examine the constructed environment and its infrastructure to identify the new relationships created with respect to the changed countryside, and how they reflect on the occupying society. Using a 4x5" format, Pastakia photographs some slum rehabilitation projects, housing colonies, peripheries of new business centers, suburban townships, sites of environmental degradation, and open spaces that are pending development. The choice of using large formats with film pushes the photographer to observe each minimum change with a high level of attention and slowness, but the metamorphoses need to be read in both large and small scale. Each element introduced or removed from the image is a metaphorical revealer of alterations, of new balances between landscape and inhabitants.

But it is above all the juxtaposition of dissonant images realized in the street, in the studio, as well as portraits of people, urban outskirts, and rural contexts, where the true substance of a large and controversial country like India emerges. As stated by Bharat Sikka, author of the images presented in *Matter*, India possesses "an ancient culture slamming up against contemporary realities. The site of rapid change brought on by globalization and breakneck development, India is searching for its identity—trying on new ones, uneasily inhabiting traditional ones, and shedding old ones like masks"³⁰.



f7_Matter series
2011, Bharat Sikka

Urban cross sections, rural expanses, large infrastructure, buildings under construction, abandoned buildings, objects, likenesses of divinity, wandering figures, and animals live together, one next to the other, in the construction of a anti-narrative path. Restoring fragment by fragment the contradictions of a country that never seems to sleep, the images pursuing testimonies of an identity that reaches all the way to the most remote corners of any landscape. In the photographs, places and faces are without name and the city blends with the suburbs in a fog that blurs the borders. Dust covers the surfaces of buildings and objects. The cities, neighborhoods, houses, and gardens show the signs of a time that wears out the elements and dissolves the edges. The corrosion that dominates the images is a metaphor of an identity that is difficult to grasp, an identity that slips away to indulge the process of unstoppable development. The new seems to erase history, burying it under a layer of dust and stacking away any evidence of the past **(f7)**. Today more than ever, underlines Mehrotra, "traditional Indian towns, or even colonial settlements, which were essentially clearly structured with their own integral logic, have now been reduced to incoherent urban entities inundated with waves of distress migration, chaotic growth, and general apathy in their administration. This unchecked growth has produced fragmented, and highly illegible urban structures.... Besides being produced in essentially the same image, they are unfinished entities with no guiding principle at either the micro or macro level"³¹.

conclusions

In the face of unstoppable processes that increasingly disrupt the balance of entire regions, photography possesses the peculiarity of being able to reveal and document the complexity of modern landscapes. The theoretical reflections on the language of images in relation to the tool used, regardless of the geographical origin of the authors and the subject photographed, seem to confirm today the validity of the documentary style. It is a style that is particularly well suited to illustrating the profound transformations of modern lands and places precisely because, as maintained by Evans, it "has purity and a certain severity, rigor, simplicity, directness, clarity"³², making it possible to discover relationships generated by global transformations that would otherwise go unnoticed.

For young Asian photographers, *slow* and *precise* photography represents a way of expressing the complexity of living in places with uncertain identities. Thus, retracing the teachings of Robert Adams, through photography considered to be an "act of reappropriation of the landscape which is also a re-recreation"³³, they find the way to reconcile themselves with a landscape they have trouble recognizing and getting to know again. Photography becomes for them a necessary act for raising new questions about new urban scenes that are alien and indifferent to their locations. As stated by Augé, "in its current form, urbanization entails the multiplication of blind points, or, if you will, blinds the view of the cities' inhabitants. We live in a world of images, where it is the image that ratifies and promotes the reality of the real. The coexistence of the world-city and the city-world has as a first effect that of confusing the images, if for no other reason because where the two meet an undefinable vacuum is created"³⁴.

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endnotes

1. See Olivier Lugon, *Lo stile documentario in fotografia. Da August Sander a Walker Evans (1920-1945)* (Milan: Mondadori Electa, 2008).
2. *Ibidem*, 17.
3. John Szarkowski, *Looking at Photographs. 100 Pictures from the Collection of Museum of Modern Art* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1973), 116.
4. The photographers chosen for the "New Topographics. Photographs of a man-altered landscape", International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House, Rochester, New York, January 1975, were the young Americans Robert Adams, Lewis Baltz, Joe Deal, Frank Gohlke, Nicholas Nixon, John Schott, Stephen Shore, Henry Wessel Jr., as well as Bernd and Hilla Becher, at the time instructors at Kunstakademie in Dusseldorf, the only Europeans invited.
5. John Szarkowski, "New Documents", *The New York Times*, October 28, 2005.
6. Jorge Luis Borges, "A Post-Lecture Discussion of His Own Writing", *Critical Enquiry*, Vol. 1 No. 4 (June 1975): 710.
7. William Jenkins, *New Topographics, Photographs of a Man-altered Landscape*, (Rochester, New York: International Museum of Photography, George Eastman House, 1975), 7.
8. The curiosity for distant worlds, not only for their art and architecture, but also for the exotic nature of the landscapes, had enticed some proto-photographers to travel to the Orient. Around the mid-1800s Felice Beato, with his brother Antonio and brother-in-law James Robertson, traveled to India, China, and Japan; Francis Frith in the 1870s reached India; the Scot John Thomson created a photographic diary journeying from the Mediterranean islands to India and China; Samuel Bourne, together with Charles Shepherd, opened a photographic studio in Calcutta; John Burke, John Murray, and many others, after the discovery of photography, used its presumed fidelity to obtain "realistic" images because, as noted by Flaubert, "nothing like a photograph by Maxime Du Camp could communicate their great emotion at their meeting with the Sphinx", in Italo Zannier, *Le Grand Tour* (Venice: Canal & Stamperia Editrice, 1997), 57.
9. "Starting in 2004 China and India became the destinations favored by investments of multinationals.... With the capital arrive jobs, Chindia is a magnet attracting a great flow of delocalizations from the old rich countries.... The tigers of southeast Asia like Indonesia (240 million), Philippines (88 million), and Malaysia (24 million) participate in the development by supplying energy, raw materials, labor. The nations of the ex-Indochinese peninsula (almost 200 million people from Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia) become satellites rotating around the two colossi, studying and copying the models of Beijing or New Delhi". In Federico Rampini, *L'impero di Cindia* (Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 2006), 4-6.
10. Federico Rampini, *L'impero di Cindia*, 3.
11. The photographic campaigns of Peter Bialobrzeski in the lands of east and southeast Asia are published in the books *Neon Tigers* (2005), *Lost in Transition* (2007), *Paradise Now* (2009), and *The Raw and the Cooked* (2011), examining the new Asian cities and their suburbs, along with the trilogy on living *Case Study Homes* (2009), *Informal Arrangements* (2010), and *Nail Houses or the Destruction of Lower Shanghai* (2014). All volumes are printed by the German publisher Hatje Cantz.
12. See *Yangtze. The long river* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2010).
13. See *History Images* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2007).
14. See *China* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2005).
15. See *Appunti di viaggio in Cina* (San Benedetto Po, Mantua: CLEB, 1989), *Paesaggi in miniatura* (Bolzano: Ar/Ge Kunst, 1991), *India* (Milan: Spazio Erasmus Brera, 2000). *Notsoforeast* (Rome: Donzelli Editore, 2002).
16. Lewis Baltz, *Review of The New West*, by Robert Adams in *Art in America*, vol. 63 No. 2, (March-April 1975), 41.
17. William Jenkins, *New Topographics, Photographs of a Man-altered Landscape*, 5.
18. The Three Gorges Dam is the largest hydroelectric dam in the world. It is located in the middle of the three gorges on the Yangtze River, the third longest in the world, in the Hubei Province of China. The project was approved by the Chinese government in 1992. However, construction didn't begin until 1994. It is scheduled to be completed by 2009. The \$25 billion project is being internationally funded by companies, export credit agencies, and banks from Canada, Switzerland, Germany, France, Sweden, and Brazil. Controversy about the project arises from human rights issues (as many as 1.3-1.9 million people have been forced to relocate) and environmental impact, <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/~lpohara/>
19. During construction of the dam 1.4 million people were moved to other areas in the province because water would flood the places they inhabited. Starting in 2010 it seems that other 100,000 people will have to be moved to reduce the risk of becoming victims to mudslides and increasingly frequent landslides.

20. Edward Burtynsky, *China* (Gottingen: Steidl, 2005), 122.
21. Lian-Pin Tsao, "The Sun Shines Brightly, No Way Home", in *Muge Going Home* (Sham Shui Po, Kln.: Jiazazhi Press, 2013), 105.
22. "China has a long coastline, starting from the mouth of Yalu river in the northern province of Liaoning and running south to the mouth of Beilun river in the Guangxi province. In total, the coast runs continuously for 18,000 kilometers. There are great changes every day in China since it began opening up 30 years ago. The cities are like big construction sites, speeding their building pace to catch up with the rest of the world. This is particularly visible in China's coastal areas. A large number of Chinese inhabitants leave their homes to travel to the coast. Urbanization continually accelerates growth while people's spiritual life remain". In Zhang Xiao, *Coastline*, published 15 November 2014, www.photoint.net, at <http://www.photoint.net/news-1648-1.html>
23. Zheng Xiao, *Coastline*, <http://www.blindspotgallery.com/en/exhibitions/past/coastline/artist-statement-zhang-xiao>
24. Marc Augé, *Per un'antropologia della mobilità* (Milan: Jaca Book, 2010), 19.
25. Franco La Cecla, *Contro l'urbanistica* (Turin: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 2015), 88-90.
26. See Rem Koolhaas, *Junkspace* (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2006).
27. Marc Augé, *Per un'antropologia della mobilità*, 75.
28. <http://proof.nationalgeographic.com/2014/04/17/musings-sarker-proticks-of-river-and-lost-lands>
29. Rahul Mehrotra, "Making Indian Cities: Urban Design in the New Millennium", in *2000: Reflections on the Arts in India*, edited by Pratapaditya Pal in *Marg*, vol. 52 n. 2, Dec. 2000, 109.
30. Bharat Sikka, "Matter", www.bharatsikka.com
31. Rahul Mehrotra, "Making Indian Cities: Urban Design in the New Millennium", 109.
32. Walker Evans, Lyric Documentary, Lecture at Yale, 3 November 1964, in J.T. Hill (editor), *Walker Evans at Work*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992), 238.
33. Paolo Costantini, "Identificazione di un paesaggio" in Paolo Costantini, Silvio Fuso, Sandro Mescola (editors), *Nuovo Paesaggio Americano. Dialectical Landscapes* (Milan: Edizioni Electa, 1997), 14.
34. Marc Augé, *Per un'antropologia della mobilità*, 37-38.

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- _ *Dans la ville chinoise. Regards sue les mutations d'un empire* (Barcelona: Actar 2008).
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contemporary asian landscape. photography as identity

CV

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