# THE SPIRIT OF THE PLACE IN RUINS: DISASTER PHOTOGRAPHY AS A PROSTHESIS OF COLLECTIVE MEMORY

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**Resumo | Abstract**

This paper proposes a reflection on photojournalistic images of catastrophe as a mechanism for safeguarding and reconfiguring the memory of places. It analyzes how press photography transitions from an ephemeral informative record to the status of a heritage object, playing a central role in the preservation of fragile territorial identities.

Drawing from ongoing doctoral research, this study examines how the visual coverage of catastrophic events documents the fracture of the *Genius Loci*. Drawing on Susan Sontag's perspective (2003), it questions how these images mediate our relationship with suffering and territorial destruction, preventing desensitization through the construction of a historical consciousness that resists oblivion.

Building upon Pierre Nora's concept of «places of memory» (lieux de mémoire, 1984), it is argued that when the physical referent is altered or destroyed by disaster, press photography assumes the function of a «prosthesis» for collective memory. This transition from «document to monument, » as theorized by Jacques Le Goff (1988), allows the photojournalistic record to be read as a form of archaeology of the present, fixing the morphology and identity of spaces at risk.

In dialogue with the mission of expanding transdisciplinary dialogues, this approach crosses Art History and Museology, discussing the integration of these images into exhibition and archival contexts. The study concludes that photography, by capturing the traumatic punctum—as defined by Roland Barthes (1980)—not only reports the disaster but also preserves the symbolic continuity of communities and their territories in worlds of transition.

**Palavras-chave | Keywords**

Press photography; visual archive; catastrophe; Collective Memory; *Genius Loci*.

**Resumo biográfico | Short biography**

Cláudia Maria Gomes Pimentel is a PhD candidate at University of Porto, in Portugal, currently researching in Photography and Catastrophe.

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With double bachelor degree in Medicine and in History of Art, she decided to proceed her studies, aiming to contribute for the bridge between Arts and Medicine. Postgraduate in Chinese Medicine and in Integrative Medicine, also attended the Master's degree in Public Health and bachelor's degree in Language Sciences. She recently concluded the professional certificate in Infectious Diseases (RCPI) and the postgrad in Narrative Medicine (FLUL).

She was an invited lecturer at FPCEUP (4th year Psychology students) and Academia Espregueira Mendes (Acupuncture/pain courses). She was a Family Physician at Instituto CUF Porto from 2007 until 2024.

She lived in Saudi Arabia, an extraordinary opportunity to consolidate and expand her knowledge.

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