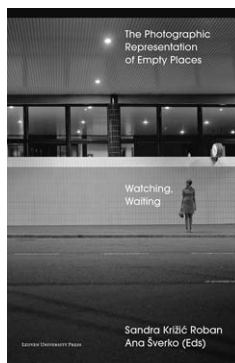


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WATCHING, WAITING: THE PHOTOGRAPHIC REPRESENTATION OF EMPTY PLACES

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Crises are not merely moments of disruption and breakdown, but also catalysts for transformative thinking and action. Embracing the moment of the Covid-19 pandemic crisis as an opportunity for critical reflection and collaboration, the book "Watching, Waiting: The Photographic Representation of Empty Places" emerged as a timely anthology exploring the landscapes of emptiness through the lens of photography.

The title "Watching, Waiting" stands like an invitation to pause amidst urgency and observe the profound issues laid bare by the global crisis. This call for analysis and reflection came at the onset of the pandemic with the announcement of the scientific conference "Watching Waiting – Empty Spaces and the Representation of Emptiness", an annual cycle of the "Discovering Dalmatia" conference series. While the conference title suggests a geographical determination, the successful international and interdisciplinary response to the 2020 thematic call centered on examining empty spaces through the medium of photography surpassed regional boundaries contributing to a multi-faceted interpretation of the global crisis.

Book editors Ana Šverko and Sandra Križić Roban – integrating their scholarly interests and research roles at the Institute of Art History – recognized the critical potential of the topic and curated a book project that stands out for its unique integration of various disciplines. Focused on the theme of emptiness, the book features contributions from authors of diverse professional backgrounds and geographical experiences offering a layered reading of the topic.

During the pandemic, the medium of photography gained heightened significance allowing individuals to document the unprecedented circumstances of life in lockdown and to easily share them with millions forced to isolate in their homes. Emptiness is taken as a focal point of the book's inquiry. However, the book delves into the broader realm of emptiness, exploring both its contemporary and historical manifestations. While the motifs of emptiness are not exclusively tied to the pandemic, its profound impact has offered a new standpoint for reflection.

The essays on the politics of emptiness navigate through pertinent contemporary issues such as the coexistence of life amidst ongoing military conflicts, the Black Lives Matter Movement, exacerbated social divisions in neoliberal society, and the rise of technocratic rule. These discourses are illustrated through various lenses: Stuart Moore and Kayla Parker's static portrayal of the demilitarized buffer zone in Nicosia; Bec Rengel's exploration of the emptiness felt in photographs of the empty plinth where the statue of slave trader Edward Colston once stood in Bristol; Anna Schober's analysis of pandemic-era media broadcasts and their polarizing social effects; and Klaudija Sabo's examination of the formal-aesthetic dimension of space created by the disposition of beds in temporary Covid-19 hospitals. Through these diverse perspectives, the book explores how space transforms under political dynamics, whether neglected, reclaimed by nature or shedding its former identities.

Moving beyond the political, the book delves into the emotional landscapes of emptiness – loneliness, isolation, and longing – that permeate scenes encountered in the wake of the health crisis. Catlin Langford addresses this by examining staged figures in historical and contemporary photographs. Reflecting on images of historical and contemporary ruins, Elke Katharina Wittich analyzes how memories, personal experiences, and media can evoke feelings of loneliness. Jessie Martin explores generic places of transit, like airports and other 'non-spaces' of neoliberalism. Addressing the relationship between space and emotions inevitably leads to the domain of architectural phenomenology. Drawing on Arne Jacobson's iconic National Bank in Copenhagen, Ruth Baumeister considers how emotions intersect with physical spaces discussing empty spaces as a design feature that can empower the contemplative and metaphysical dimension of place.

Memories of places are also preserved and revived through photographic collections. This publication brings two somewhat insufficiently known Croatian collections into focus: the Photographic Archive of Milovan

Gavazzi, examined by Tihana Rubić, and the Photographic Collections of Vladimir Čepulić. The pioneering work of Čepulić in medical photography is highlighted by Stela Fatović-Ferenčić and Martin Kuhar.

When the space of communication and socialization loses its physical dimension, we are challenged to reckon with the complexities of virtual communication and manipulation in an age of information overload. Isabelle Catucci's aerial photographs of excavated graves in Brazil shed light on the manipulation of official data, emphasizing the importance of contextualizing local responses within the global pandemic narrative.

The book also offers insights into the creative process behind photography and filmmaking, elucidating the conceptual underpinnings of visual storytelling in times of uncertainty. Photographer Luca Nostri, for instance, describes his methodology, underscoring the therapeutic nature of artistic expression as a way to navigate the complexities of the pandemic.

Overall, this multidisciplinary exploration into the political, sociological, visual, and aesthetic dimensions of emptiness invites readers to navigate through disciplinary intersections, fostering a deeper engagement with its complexities. As an illustration, while Catlin Langford analyzed photographic staging for its artistic prowess in conveying a sense of isolation, Tihana Rubić provided a pedagogical perspective on the same technique, writing about the role of staging within anthropological research. These engaging overlaps remind us of the generative potential of cross-disciplinary intersections and knowledge exchange.

In conclusion, "Watching Waiting: The Photographic Representation of Empty Places" not only contributes to scholarly research on the theme of emptiness but also encourages a wider audience to explore the topic. With its evocative imagery and insightful analysis, the book invites readers to embrace emptiness – to confront it, to contemplate its depths, and to discover meaning within its silence.