

# WOUNDED SPACES

by Alejandro Gomez de Tuddo

All images by Alejandro Gómez de Tuddo ©



Hospital operating room, Tiruchirappalli, Tamil Nadu, India

Photography by  
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words  
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**ROLAND BARTHES, IN CAMERA LUCIDA,** argues in his philosophical essay that the specific function of photography is simply stating the existence of something: 'that-has-been', an irrefutable proof that the photographer saw what he photographed. Under this light, Alejandro Gomez de Tuddo becomes a testimonial scientist revealing the landmarks that signal the limits of certain territories. These territories tell us that something was; that something had been. Is something to be no more?

Battered bodies, crushed carcasses, maimed minds, and imprisoned inmates: all were captives to spaces that had once been, this through their belonging to spaces which were spaces severed from society, for the unwanted, the detained, the wounded, the destroyable, for the soon to be no more. But this something which was bound to be no more actually becomes something else:

Alejandro Gomez de Tuddo gives these spaces a new lease of non-life by photographing them. In so doing, he transforms their original entropic realities into a new space of visibility and visuality, where the photographer, the viewer and the space enter into a dialogue on the very nature of these all-encompassing new territories. We see it all, not because we see nothing, but because we see no one.

W. Eugene Smith, in his 1958–1959 photo essay on a psychiatric institute in Haiti, created an emotional resonance with his viewer, and brought a certain story to life, through the staging of patients which generated an intensification of something that was absolutely authentic to the place. With Alejandro Gomez de Tuddo, people are absent. These absences enable places to step back, and spaces come to the fore, generating territories of loneliness, which tell much more than what they say. --->



Asylum Hall, Volterra, Italy



Slaughter House Bleeding and Slaughter Area, Laprida, Argentina



Asylum Bathroom, Volterra, Italy



Cemetery Mortuary Chamber, Zacatlán, Puebla, Mexico

Opposite page: Hohenschönhausen Prison Photo Room, Berlin, Germany

---> Indeed, these territories of loneliness which had become territories of solitude are now photographed territories which tell us much more than mere representations of hospitals, asylums, slaughter houses or jails. First, they establish a distance between a time which is no more and their new lease of life, provided by the time of the photography as well as the time of the viewing of these photos. This palimpsest of times allows for a vanishing of the place which, in turn, impacts on the very transformative nature of space. Second, they generate a spatial threshold through which we can enter into the incoherence of humanity.

Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges once remarked that reality would be coherent only if it had a map, a structure. This is why even the canonical Borgesian spatial form, the labyrinth – a construction made to confuse man, according to him – is still an image of hope. As he rendered it, as long as it had ‘an architecture’, the real was not chaos. As long as reality was constructed (or ‘constructible’), it was manageable by the human. Our journey into these photographs are labyrinthic journeys during which we reconstruct a new reality: torn partitions which separate nothing from nothing, broken wheelchairs which came out of nowhere and are bound to go nowhere, disused theatres which operate no more, asylum showers where no one will bathe, stairs leading to a space from which apparently all and nothing can be seen.

This vision of reality as being constructed by the subjects who inhabit it – far from the Positivistic real as objective,

immutable and scientifically decipherable – sums up the relativist Postmodern Zeitgeist to which Borges’ fictions and essays have been doubtless precursors, and which Alejandro Gomez de Tuddo’s photos represent.

These photos remind us that the notion of a constructed real is not so recent: in fact, it can be traced back to the Greek root of the word architect (*arkhitekton*). From the Greek *arkhe* (‘the beginning’ or ‘origin’) and *arkhon* (‘the ruler’), and *tektion* (‘builder’, ‘creator of artifice’), this term suggests how the origin was transformed by the architect into a defined, and thus a habitable, space for the human being. By setting boundaries to the world, the architect constructed a space where man could dwell. The architect in Western civilisation had the power and skill (*tektion*) of manipulating the origin (*arkhe*) into ‘liveable’ space. And what is remarkable from this etymology is that the action of ‘building’ is not only understood as giving material shape to physical space but also as ‘raising’ reality from the origin. Alejandro Gomez de Tuddo becomes an architect of time, as well as space.

Apart from the foundational idea of reality as a human construction, this etymology also asserts the importance of spatiality in human experience. Space – in particular, the articulation of space – is presented as a main tool through which the human being organises the world around him. At the same time, the category of space is also a construction. Our viewing of these photos reorganise space. This is a radical

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## BASED ON SEVERAL THEORIES PUT FORTH BY PLATO. WOUNDS ON THE BODY WERE BELIEVED TO CORRELATE WITH WOUNDS TO THE SOUL AND VICE VERSA; WOUNDS WERE SEEN AS AN OUTWARD SIGN OF AN INWARD ILLNESS OR FLAW

departure from the predominating tradition in Western culture for centuries in which space is regarded as a simple container where the human being dwells; a given, objective and measurable entity, uniquely perceptible in its mathematical dimensions. Space, according to this etymological reading of the word ‘architect’ (and architecture), is constructed by the human for the human, and here, by the photographer, for the viewer, which in turn reconstructs the space he is provided with.

In short, Alejandro Gomez de Tuddo generates a photographic space which transcends its own architecturality, which accounts for the fact that there is the sense in these images of being near something significant. Often, it is just the feeling of discovering a human absence in such isolated geographies. Other times, it is the sense of a possible narration: an action that took place there or premonitions of a future one. And these photographs have the energy of having overcome a last difficulty: the images are not the failures of the photographs Alejandro Gomez de Tuddo wanted to get. They depict landscapes of the end of emptiness.

Yet, they are far from being nihilistic. Even though they deal with the instability of truth and Lyotard could be used to read them, and even though they are fascinating because of the baudrillardian representation of disappearance which they generate, these photographs generate a movement of hope, because of the very architectural work on labyrinthic emptiness they contain. The overall project they belong to is Wounded Space (<http://www.gomezdetuddo.com/2014/07/wounded-spaces/>), indicating that these images are not solely about the wound, and the spaces which carry them.

This title indicates that the photos narrate the wounding processes these spaces are subject to. Historically, the body and the soul, as well as the space and its referential meanings, were believed to be intimately connected, based on several theories put forth by Plato. Wounds on the body were believed to correlate with wounds to the soul and vice versa; wounds were seen as an outward sign of an inward illness or flaw. Transposed into the field of geocriticism, wounds were also seen as writing on the ‘tablet’ of the space.

Alejandro Gomez de Tuddo’s spaces are about spaces for wounded people, where people were further wounded. These spaces were wounded themselves, through their disuse. They are further wounded by the photography, through the aesthetic choices the photographer has to make, which can only happen through an ineluctable synecdochal process, and through our viewing of these photographs. But these latter photographic woundings are generating a positive message: that of the ongoing regeneration of meaning, provided by the aesthetic narrative inherent to the dialogue instaurated by the photographer and the viewers.

These wounds, these spaces, these wounded spaces now belong to all of us, and we can learn from all of them, thanks to aesthetics, thanks to the choice of aesthetics, and thanks to the photographer.