



Ardeth

A magazine on the power of the project

15 | 2024
Fragility

“Places Journal”, Field Notes on Repair

Mariacristina D’Oria



Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/ardeth/6398>

ISSN: 2611-934X

Publisher

Rosenberg & Sellier

Printed version

Date of publication: December 1, 2024

Number of pages: 201-203

ISSN: 2532-6457

Electronic reference

Mariacristina D’Oria, ““Places Journal”, Field Notes on Repair”, *Ardeth* [Online], 15 | 2024, Online since 01 January 2026, connection on 24 February 2026. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/ardeth/6398>

This text was automatically generated on February 24, 2026.



The text only may be used under licence CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. All other elements (illustrations, imported files) may be subject to specific use terms.

“Places Journal”, Field Notes on Repair

Mariacristina D’Oria

REFERENCES

“Places Journal”, *Field Notes on Repair*, n. 1-8, December 2024

- 1 “There is a space between us. We could say it has a shape. This shape keeps changing. Between us, a mending project.” (Futurefarmers, #8)
- 2 These closing words from *Field Notes on Repair* (2024) encapsulate the spirit of the series – a nuanced exploration of repair that progressively transcends its conception as a purely material act, to acknowledge its value as a complex cultural, philosophical, and political project. Deepening a discussion at first introduced in *Repair Manual* (January 2024), this eight-installment collection resists reductive interpretations of repair as merely technical, practical, or aesthetic. Over the last few decades, terms like reuse, recycling, recovery, and repair have invaded the architectural debate, wherein, too often, they have been interpreted mainly as superficial material practices – mostly to construct ambitious rhetorics or perpetuating aesthetic researches – rarely interrogating their deeper meanings and potentials. *Field Notes on Repair* marks a critical shift, moving away from this narrow understanding and instead, positioning repair as a philosophical, pedagogical, and cultural act pushing further the conviction that: “such practices are vitally important to our cultures and economies, our ecosystems and ecologies” (*Field Notes on Repair*, Introduction, Editorial Board). This re-positioning, this shift, is achieved by observing the “space between” – between objects, between structures, between people. This “between” becomes both a method and an object of inquiry: a contested terrain through and across which contributors explore the potential of repair as a deeply situated and responsive act. By exploring in-between conditions, the collected essays move beyond pre-conceptualized assumptions, avoiding mainstream strategies, and digging into the specificities of each

situation, of each detected fragment of realities to repair. This approach converts the practice of repair from a static act of restoration into a dynamic field of experimentation – an opportunity, as well as a responsibility, to challenge and reconfigure dominant narratives, to critically mend projects in-between established hierarchies. The relevance of this operation emerges by observing the very historical moment within which this narrative interdisciplinary survey has been nourished and developed: stemming not only from the contemporary mounting planetary crises – ecological, political, economic, and humanitarian – but, importantly, within the turbulent months leading to the 2024 U.S. presidential election: indeed all issues have been released together in November 2024. This critical condition not only permeates the content but also informs the structure of the publication itself: a fast paced and resonant succession of contributions that feel like a collective reflection-in-process. In fact, each issue brings together the contributions of a dozen authors, who combine a selection of images with a short positioning statement: designers, scholars, artists, planners, activists, engage in an interwoven dialogue, where their voices quote, overlap, deepen, critic, and review constantly each other, speech after speech, within an operation that radically confronts, dismantles, and deconstructs any pro-constituted conception of repair, making space for new visions. In this sense, reading through the various installments of this series means encountering a heterogeneous yet shared system of reasonings striving to operate a radical reestablishment of the very meaning of repairing practices in our contemporary multi-damaged world. It constructs and collects a stimulating counter-definition of the practice of repair, in an operation of “repairing repair” which emerges from questioning its very functioning, thus shifting the focus from the *what* to repair to specifically investigating the *why*, *how* and *for whom*.

- 3 Interrogating the *why* implies refusing the conception of repair as a passive acceptance of a forced reestablishment of continuity with the past, and to pursue, instead, the critical acknowledgment of the histories of extraction, colonialism, racial capitalism, environmental degradation, and epistemic violence that these pasts embody. Interrogating the *why* means to problematize the very agency of this practice, outlining simultaneously –as numerous authors such as Rosten Woo, Huda Toyob, Brandi T. Summer, Nicholas Anthony Brown, Simon Sadler, Isabelle Doucet, Curry J. Hackett, Karla Cavarra Britton, Anna Livia Brand, Tania Gutierrez– a sort of warning: repair needs to be observed as a suspected word, even as a dangerous one. Indeed, very often, for many, the past was always broken and, thus, a simplified and superficial interpretation would lead to a perpetuation of injustice conditions. Echoing these positions, Samia Henni, Ozayr Saloojee, and Curry Hackett, to name a few, firmly reject the idea that repair can be simply restorative, instead, arguing that it should serve as a vehicle for political imagination – capable of deconstructing dominant narratives and opening spaces for new geographies, new narrations, and new futures. Repair cannot mean a return point but rather a departing one to build, or at least imagine, something entirely other.
- 4 During the 2024 election season in the US, the political debate has been saturated with authoritarian rhetoric promises of restoration, calling for “restoring unity” and “returning to normalcy” – masking deep structural violence. In contrast with this climate, *Field Notes on Repair* marks a decisive rupture with these ideas, demanding unsettling and reorientation, aiming to embody not a reassuring practice rather a civic and moral battleground. Here emerges another critical stance: repair is not neutral, it

must be rescued from its mobilization in service of nostalgia, preservation, or redevelopment. In this sense, Salooje exhortation to "refuse those forms of repair and resist that form of care" (Saloojee, #3) embodies a declaration of rejection of complicity, a statement of dissent, echoed along the publication, by a sequence of strong re-definitions of repair: removal, unfollow, a practice in the contradictions between past, present, and future, exploration of messiness, negation, a move toward a sense of belonging, affirmative refusal, nonsolutional way.

- 5 These definitions, emerging from problematizing the *why* to repair, delineate an amplified field of action for this practice, an experimental ground that the series further investigates through dismantling the other two interrelated questions: *how* and *to whom*. The collection argues that repair must go beyond surface-level acts of fixing, refusing aesthetic or romanticized notions of restoration, operating, instead, a deeper epistemic reordering through a reevaluation of knowledge, care, value, and temporality. This means to move beyond the mere understanding of what is broken, to record the experiences of those who lived through these breakings. Repair, then, becomes a practice of re-pairing – connecting fragments, histories, and lived experiences – capable not merely of recovering superficial healings, but to displace the recovery process of a radical, long-term, and community-led restoration. In this sense, repair does not aim to operate a clean fix. Still, it becomes a practice of living with the broken, marginalized, exhausted, and even messy: an ethical yet practical method of resistance. As such, repair is always contextual and contingent, requiring an acute sensitivity to the specificities of place, time, and struggle. This attentiveness is embodied in the collection's wide-ranging archive of practices, which not only moves across multiple scales – from the planetary to that of the capillary in-between urban spaces – but also explores a multitude of temporal, geographical, social, and cultural contexts. In this manner, the observation flows from the restoration of tsunami-damaged ceramics in Japan to Indigenous-led dam removals in the U.S., from grassroots urban interventions in Mexico City to climate-responsive parks in underserved neighborhoods of Toronto, from the Freedom Colonies Atlas in Texas to the Black Moms movement in California, from the critic toward the superficial infrastructure reforms in New York to the rise of visionary projects like Renewable Rikers, from the Mumbai's informal repair economies (where improvisation, kinship, and resilience form an alternative infrastructure of care) to the narration of the Otomí community's fight for land and water rights in Mexico City.
- 6 This succession of cases, which echoes the complex geographies of the authors of this series, gives body to a heterogeneous atlas which, although collecting fragmented and apparently non-connected realities – made of *hows* and *whoms* – results as a unique and critical body within which these cases are entangled and in dialogue with one another. It emerges, thus, the aspiration toward a non-reformist repair, towards practices that resist reproducing the *status quo*, overpassing sedimented limits connected with labor – often invisible, feminized, and undervalued – with realities and culture considered minor, with dismissed contexts interpreted as resources instead of domestic spaces, to open paths for reimagining the world. Repair assumes then the power of rendering visible, of giving voice to the other, of re-connecting with our pairs, being them humans, non-humans, abandoned fields, in-between spaces, flea markets, or territorial spaces. In this sense, Jovan Scott Lewis proposes a subtle yet profound shift in language: from "repair" as a verb to "repair to" as a direction: "to repair to implies direction, intimates rest, and speaks to momentum, ultimately offering a notion of

reparation that is more purposeful and place-based than "repair" alone [...] it calls for new analyses, perspectives, and principles, fostering spatial and political configurations" (Lewis, #8), it reframes repair as a social and spatial act of alignment rather than mere intervention, as a process rather than a solution. In this sense, *Field Notes* refuses any closure, instead suggesting to embrace daily acts of maintenance, mutual aid, and care, as in the words of Mariame Kaba to cultivate "hope as a discipline," (Kaba, #7) proposing repair as a method of attentiveness, resistance, and imagination.

- 7 In an era of political retrenchment and environmental collapse, these voices align with a broader push toward democratizing design – making it more accessible, inclusive, and accountable – achievable not through promising wholeness, but rather through enduring presence, through observing the and co-living with that space between us, whose shape is constantly changing, and learning to mending our lives to coexist with the brokenness.

AUTHOR

MARIACRISTINA D'ORIA

Università di Trieste